Editorial: Summarizing Evidence Based Research and Knowledge Translation; Increasing Graduation Rates; Strengthening Neighbourhoods and Increasing Social Inclusion; Moral Courage in Child Welfare; and Interracial Adoption

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This issue of the *First People Child and Family Review* journal (Volume 6, Number 2, 2011) is comprised of four articles and a book review. The first article deals with knowledge translation and the utilization of evidence-based research portal used by agencies in Ontario that provide services to Aboriginal youth in care. The second article speaks to the creation of an education program in Calgary that was developed specifically to increase graduation rates among Aboriginal students. The third article highlights another initiative in Calgary regarding the Family and Community Support Services Social Sustainability Framework in strengthening neighbourhoods and increasing social inclusion among urban First Peoples. Moral courage is the focus of the final article in this volume and the importance of this value in standing up for what is equitably right when it comes to Aboriginal children and families engaged with the child welfare system. We end this issue with the first of many book reviews that will appear in future issues of the journal. The book review in this issue looks at international and interracial adoption and migration in the Americas. Each of these is briefly summarized below.

Non-Aboriginal child protective service workers' utilization of the Maltreatment and Adolescent Pathway Knowledge Translation (MAP-KT) Portal: A report on the utilization statistics and utilization gaps of Aboriginal best-practice material (pp. 7-13), by Eman Leung, Christine Wekerle, Randy Weachter, Julian Egelstaff and Marlyn Bennett is an evaluation based article on the utilization of Aboriginal data useful for knowledge translation by agency caseworkers responsible for the care of Aboriginal youth. The MAP-KT portal is a web-based tool that was created specifically to share knowledge that might be useful to Ontario agencies needing evidence-based knowledge to assist with practice decision and issues when working with families. Leung and colleagues describe specifically the way non-Aboriginal caseworkers used the Aboriginal child welfare research evidence to inform their decision making for Aboriginal youth in care. The researchers hypothesized that since 10% of youth in the MAP-KT database were Aboriginal then at least 10% of the traffic to the portal would be for the purposes of accessing Aboriginal material to inform practice. This hypothesis turned out not to be the case. The researchers note this finding represents an underutilization potential needed to bridge the gap between knowledge and action in the practice of caring for Aboriginal children and youth involved in the child welfare system.

The MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program of Calgary (pp. 14-19), written by Joanne Pinnow and Shane Gauthier is about a successful pilot project created specifically to increase the graduation rates among Aboriginal youth in the City of Calgary. The McPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program theorized that low graduation rates were as a result of social exclusion.

As the school curriculum in the past did not emphasize Aboriginal culture and history there was a loss of interest in school by Aboriginal students who felt demoralized. The program was created to be developmentally appropriate and pays attention to different age groups. It includes a socio-culturally relevant philosophy that is founded on the application of Aboriginal content in the curriculum, creates greater awareness of Aboriginal culture and history and it includes culturally relevant activities that acknowledge Aboriginal beliefs and practices. It targets children in youth enrolled in kindergarten to grade twelve. The program offers academic support, empowerment and cultural teachings within an inclusive respectful environment. The program reinforces positive cultural identity that is important for creating a sense of belonging and to help students feel valued, connected and engaged within the school community. This tailored approach has seen much success. The authors report that students feel more socially accepted and more importantly, the program demonstrates that graduation has become possible for many Aboriginal students who have benefited from this approach to education.

The following articles focuses on another successful initiative underway in the City of Calgary. Shane Gauthier, Sharon Goulet and Katie Black co-wrote *Calgary's Family and Community Support Services' Social Sustainability Framework and Urban Aboriginal Peoples* (pp. 20-34). The purpose of the paper is to introduce readers to the Family and Community Support Services' Social Sustainability Framework and provides examples of two programs where funding has helped strengthen neighborhoods and increases social inclusion among vulnerable populations like First Peoples – two principles emphasized as important within the framework. Social exclusion (where a person feels a lack of belonging and recognition) and deprivation are part of the underlying factors in the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in various systems (i.e. child welfare, criminal justice system). Strengthening neighborhoods and increasing social inclusion are priority-funding areas chosen because concentrated poverty and social isolation are very serious problems

as they have far reaching consequences for individual, families and the greater community of Calgary. Also it was recognized that concentrated poverty and social isolation are on the rise in Calgary but are easily preventable. Through the Family and Community Support Services Social Sustainability Framework (FCSS-SSF) stakeholders can work together to inform public policy and support research based prevention programs. The authors highlight two specific prevention programs funded by the FCSS-SSF where culture is a common ground among members. The programs Little Dancing Buffalo and Native Network (each is explained in more depth within the article) both embrace Aboriginal culture, traditions, and teachings that are important for eliminating the alienation that First Peoples experience within the city. These programs help to strengthen relationships between Aboriginal children and adults who feel left out by mainstream society. Programs such as these offer celebratory activities (e.g. drumming, singing, pow wows, potlatches, etc.) as a way of revitalizing the spirit and bring divided communities together. The authors also note that these two specific programs help First Peoples transition to urban life, provide support, gives a sense of belonging and produces communities that appreciate Aboriginal traditions.

The second last article by Cindy Blackstock entitled, *Wanted: Moral Courage in Canadian Child Welfare* (pp. 35-46) examines moral courage in the face of neglect within the child welfare field as to the needs of Aboriginal families and the continued underfunding of child welfare services in First Nations communities by the Federal government. Blackstock notes that child welfare has neglected the inequalities facing First Peoples children and their families for too long despite strong evidence and solutions outlined in studies such as the Canadian Incidence Study of Abuse and Neglect (CIS). The CIS highlights factors like poverty, poor housing and substance misuse which have been identified as contributing to the overrepresentation of First Nations children and youth in the child welfare systems across Canada. Social workers rarely receive training to alleviate these issues for families. Coupled with this neglect is the inequitable funding by the

Federal government to adequately deal with the real problems facing Aboriginal families involved with child welfare. Blackstock demonstrates through her own experiences how this neglect and underfunding can be ameliorated. Along with an examination and definition of what is moral courage is Blackstock draws upon her own experiences in working in child welfare to demonstrate where she has learned to exhibit moral courage – that is, doing what is right by families despite that was expected of her as a subordinate and regardless of the consequence to her own wellbeing. As the literature revealed no studies on moral courage Blackstock instead chooses to reflect on an earlier moment in her career as a social worker where she drew upon moral courage to deliberately act insubordinate in order to do the right thing for a family she felt faced an unnecessary child protection investigation. Since that time she has exhibited moral courage in facing the Federal government by filing a joint Human Rights Complaint with the Assembly of First Nations against the Federal government in response to discriminatory funding to First Nations child welfare agencies. Blackstock share examples of other individuals in the past who have exhibited moral courage (i.e. Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce and Judge Kimmelman) as is the notable mention of children and youth who

Blackstock admires for their moral courage to stand up in support of other Aboriginal children and youth (e.g. Jordan River Anderson, Shannon Koostatchin). Blackstock concludes that the consequences of failing to center moral courage in social work discussions and practice as well as among community members involved with the safety and wellbeing of children need to be explored. The systemic nature of the social work professions' failure to do better when they ought to have known and can do better, demands nothing less.

The last article in this volume reviews a book on the narratives emerging from interracial adoptions that are rarely considered in child welfare. The differential treatment of Black children adopted by non-Black families versus the experience of Aboriginal children adopted by non-Aboriginal families resulted in different experiences and reactions. Adoptions involving Black children were characterized as "saving" them while adoptions involving Aboriginal children are equated with colonialism, cultural assimilation and genocide. This book no doubt will be an important addition to the libraries of those interested in adoption issues regarding Aboriginal peoples.

Non-Aboriginal Child Protective Service Workers' Utilization of the Maltreatment and Adolescent Pathway Knowledge Translation (MAP-KT) Portal: A Report on the Utilization Statistics and Utilization Gaps of Aboriginal Best-Practice Material

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Introduction

Aboriginal children are over-represented in child protective services (CPS; Auditor General of Canada Report, 2008, http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_200805_04_3_30700.html; for a discussion, see Blackstock, 2009, http://www.fncfcs.com/docs/ChildWelfareTribunalBriefingNote.pdf). Based on analysis of a number of CPS data sources wherein non-Aboriginal agencies were over-represented, an Ontario report (Wekerle, Waechter, Leung, & Chen, 2009) noted that,

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Abstract

Given the unique history and culture of the Aboriginal heritage, research evidence and evidence-based practice guidelines/recommendation derive from the general population are not sufficient in informing the practices of Child Protective Services' caseworkers who are caring for Aboriginal youth in the child welfare system. Special attention should also be given to best-practice materials developed with special consideration of the Aboriginal context. The current study describes caseworkers' utilization of Aboriginal child welfare best-practice materials hosted at the MAP-KT portal during its pilot testing period between October 1st 2007 and September 31st 2008. The objective of the current study is to assess the knowledge consumption behavior of caseworkers who were not employed by Aboriginal child protective agency but nonetheless had Aboriginal Child Welfare youth under they care. The MAP-KT portal is a web-based knowledge tool that brings to the point of practice (of CPS caseworker) child welfare knowledge distilled through the 'knowledge filter' of the Knowledge to Action framework.

Given the proportion of Aboriginal youth under the care of participating agencies, the utilization statistics of Aboriginal content hosted on the MAP-KT portal indicated that they might be under-utilized compared to other content areas.

According to the Knowledge to Action framework, a number of ways to improve utilization have been proposed. Future research may focus on adapting the MAP-KT portal to user knowledge preferences on format, content and linkage to frequently utilized sites, as well as tailored marketing to users in First Nations child welfare services and those who provide services to children with First Peoples' heritage.

Keywords: Knowledge Translation, Aboriginal, Child Protective Services, Child Welfare, Child Abuse and Neglect, Health Outcomes

in 2006, about 16% of out-of-home care youth sampled from mostly non-Aboriginal agencies in Ontario were Aboriginal children, and most of these youths were noted to be involved in some form of Aboriginal cultural practices.

Because of the impact of residential school experience on family functioning and the multi-generational losses experienced among First Nations people, Mussell, Cardiff and White (2004) suggested that an opportunity for actions could be created only when the cultural determinants of health and well-being of Aboriginal children are recognized. While evidence-based child welfare practices appropriate to the Aboriginal context is still developing, fostered in large part by scholarly journals focused on Aboriginal research and issues, there is already a substantial body of research that may be useful to agencies and caseworkers who provide services to First Peoples' children and youth. This creates a need and an opportunity to translate knowledge from Aboriginal child welfare research into evidence-based practice for caseworkers caring for First Peoples' children and youth in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal agencies.

According to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), knowledge translation (KT) is "the exchange, synthesis and ethically-sound application of knowledge - within a complex system of interactions among researchers and users - to accelerate the capture of the benefits of research for Canadians through improved health, more effective services and products, and a strengthened health care system" (http://www. cihr.ca/e/26574.html). Hence, for knowledge translation to achieve its intended impact in the area of Aboriginal child welfare, it is critical for researchers and Aboriginal child welfare practitioners to engage in knowledge exchange, to synthesize research knowledge into a format accessible to end-users, and to apply them in an ethical, effective and sustainable manner. To this end, we have developed the MAP-KT portal according to the Knowledge To Action Framework to facilitate the exchange, synthesis and application of knowledge within the context of child welfare practices. The MAP-KT portal is a web-based knowledge tool that brings knowledge distilled through the 'knowledge filter" (Graham et al, 2006) to caseworkers at the point of practice.

The Aboriginal Research Context in Canada: Use of Published Knowledge

KT has emerged as a unique area wherein knowledge is implemented and its implementation evaluated (Schryer-Roy, 2005). According to the Knowledge To Action Framework (Graham et al, 2006), the process that moves knowledge to action begins with the process of distilling unrefined scientific studies into knowledge tools, which are then adapted to local context of practice and implemented after identifying and overcoming barriers for knowledge use; finally, the implementation of knowledge is evaluated, monitored and sustained. Within the context of the Aboriginal knowledge tradition, knowledge is already inherently practical (Estey, Smylie & Macaulay, 2009). The authors reminded researchers and policy-makers interested in Aboriginal health to learn from and integrate into their work the unique ethical dimension as well as the different understanding of 'knowledge' and 'translation' specific to the Aboriginal community. CIHR has put into effect guidelines focusing on demonstrable relationship development and engagement that are respectful of cultural practices and values, to which research on First Peoples' populations should adhere (http://www. cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29339.html). The guidelines highlight the 4 R's of research – respect, reciprocity, relevance, and responsibility, and they provide a framework for understanding

and engaging in Aboriginal ethics. Estey, Smylie and Macaulay (2009) also suggest that many sources of knowing is necessary to fill the large gaps in our knowledge concerning Aboriginal health issues, and thus different types and sources of knowledge must be understood and respected by the world of research and policy. Finally, the authors caution practitioners of KT that the translation of knowledge into action within the Aboriginal context necessarily requires community input and support at the onset, which entails the involvement of Aboriginal Peoples in all research and implementation activities (see CIHR's definition of Integrated KT: http://www.cihr.ca/e/39033.html). Hence, due to the unique culture and history of the First Peoples, evidence-based practices in Aboriginal child welfare are best informed by knowledge specific to the Aboriginal context in addition to knowledge developed from the general population. The current study describes the utilization statistics of Aboriginal child welfare research evidence and evidence-based guidelines / recommendations among caseworkers who cared for Aboriginal child welfare youth but were not employed under the First Nations Child Welfare Authorities.

To disseminate child welfare research evidence to the caseworkers of Ontario Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth, evidence-based guidelines and recommendations of child welfare practices are hosted on the Maltreatment and Adolescent Pathways Project Knowledge Translation (MAP-KT) portal for open access. The MAP-KT portal was designed to provide the broader Ontario child welfare community with a wide access to research on adolescent development and special interest areas, and a quick access to outcome statistics and evidence-based practice guideline/recommendation across areas such as mental health, substance use, dating violence and risky sexual behaviors.

Here, we report the utilization of a KT tool and the gap its utilization statistics reveals. We recognize the existence of several child welfare resources and platforms for exchanging knowledge, and the MAP-KT portal is only one example within this category. And while many means of disseminating knowledge are available, we decided to provide relevant best-

available evidence through the Internet to facilitate easy access to high quality information, furnishing opportunities for communication with tool developers to support and sustain evidence-based practice (for a systematic review on the validity and efficacy of online knowledge tools in one health area, see Yu, Bhaniwal, Laupacis, Leung, Orr and Straus, in press).

The Maltreatment and Adolescent Pathways-Knowledge Translation (MAP-KT) Portal

As a KT spin-off of the Maltreatment Adolescent Pathways (MAP) project (Waechter et al, 2009; Wekerle, Leung, MacMillan, Boyle, Trocmé, & Waechter 2009; Waechter, Leung, Wekerle et al., 2011), the MAP-KT portal was developed with the primary objective of bringing relevant research evidence to Child Welfare agency employees, policymakers, and partners in a facilitated way in order to inform decision-making. The secondary objective was to maintain an open access to research and provide tangible opportunities for partnership between frontline practitioners and university academics. The MAP-KT is, therefore, available to all the members (50,000+) of the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) website, which is the prime communication vehicle for practice and policy for the 53 CPS agencies in the province of Ontario.

In alignment with the two objective stated above, the MAP-KT is consisted of five sections: 1) a running web-log where practice-relevant evidence is reviewed in brief by content experts in the area; 2) a scholarly article search function that is designed to source high impact and highly relevant articles, with searches pre-restricted to child welfare-relevant areas; 3) a best-practice search function that provides portable digital files of evidence-based clinical guidelines, screenings tools and recommendations on child welfare practices pre-vetted by the investigators of the MAP study according to the latest evidence in child welfare research; 4) an automatized outcomes statistics section that compares child welfare youth to population-based samples of youth across a number of areas [based on the

epidemiological data collected from the MAP project and other published statistics from national databases such as the OSDUHS (Adlaf and Paglia-Boak, 2007)]; 5) a researcher-on-call service, providing OACAS members with a personalized response to their specific child welfare inquiries that are evidence-based and expert-driven. As the research emerges in the field along specified priority content areas, the MAP-KT portal is updated, providing the opportunity for child welfare practitioners to access research trends. Users' knowledge consumption behavior is tracked automatically on the MAP-KT portal.

In the current study, we report the MAP-KT portal utilization statistics with respect to access of Aboriginal materials, and the nature and frequency of search and query in relation to Aboriginal-related keywords or topics. Only utilization statistics from non-Aboriginal CPS agencies will be reported. Since the end-users of the MAP-KT portal came from the same population of caseworkers who participated in the MAP project (no Aboriginal agency was participated), and since 10% of all youth in the MAP project reported an Aboriginal heritage (Waechter, Leung, Wekerle et al., 2011), it is expected that at least 10% of all traffic captured by the MAP-KT portal should be accessing Aboriginal materials. A key advantage of accessing the MAP-KT portal is that the posted research information is pre-vetted to include only evidence that have already gone through the peer-reviewed processes to ensure a level of critical review that conforms to the current scholarship standards. While searches for scholarly work on sites such as Google Scholar prioritize academic articles according to their citation indices, often these are only available commercially. Also, while the search for content via general search engines may link to useful information, it is not peer-reviewed, and as such the quality and accuracy of the information are unknown and the information presented may be substantially biased (with biases undeclared). The goal of the MAP-KT portal is to adhere to a high scientific standard in the quality of information provide while addressing the practical needs through its method of delivery, such as blogs, search engine of theme-specific research evidence and evidence-based practice guidelines/recommendations, and the researcher-on-call service.

Method

The MAP-KT usage had ethics approval from the University of Western Ontario and received input from the child welfare representatives on the MAP Advisory Board. User data during this pilot period (Oct 1st 2007 to Sept 31st 2008) was used to examine the usage of the MAP-KT portal, and the nature of the content searched or requested. When members logged onto the site with their agency-specific e-mail address, the usage of each service by each account was tracked. All member agencies of the OACAS received e-alerts about the MAP-KT portal resource. Access to the MAP-KT portal was hosted on the homepage of the OACAS member website, and was a visible presence with each homepage loading. Finally, banners about the MAP-KT website ran across the OACAS homepage consistently during the pilot testing period.

The MAP-KT portal, being in a developmental phase, was not actively promoted (with the exception of agencies involved with the MAP project), so as to capture a natural flow of site traffic and the level of usage of available resources. It was introduced to an Ontario network of child welfare quality assurance, actively marketed to the child welfare agencies involved in the MAP project and presented at the First Nations Child and Family Caring Societies (FNC&FCS) conference "Bridging the Gap" (http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca/documents/Res_MP14.pdf).

Due to ethical and privacy concerns, we did not capture any demographic information or professional profile from caseworkers who accessed the MAP-KT portal. Only utilization statistics from non-Aboriginal CPS agencies is reported below. Since the end-users of the MAP-KT portal came from the same population of caseworkers who participated in the MAP project (no Aboriginal agency has participated),

and since 10% of all youth in the MAP project reported an Aboriginal heritage (Waechter, Leung, Wekerle et al., 2011), it is expected that at least 10% of all traffic captured by the MAP-KT portal should be accessing Aboriginal materials

Results

Between the period of October 1st 2007 and Sept 31st 2008, usage statistics of each section in the MAP-KT portal was as follows: the homepage that contains RSS feeds of child welfare research news and high interest materials, including the banner of the FNC&FCS and articles from the FNC&FCS, was visited 3,045 times. Theme-specific annotated journal articles posted on the homepage were accessed 928 times. Best-practice materials (including pre-vetted clinical guidelines, screenings tools and recommendations on child welfare practices across areas such as mental health, substance abuse, Aboriginal child welfare) were accessed 1,400 times. Outcome-statistics (based on the epidemiological data collected from the MAP project and other published statistics from national databases such as the OSDUHS) was accessed 1,157 times. Finally, the researcher-on-call service, which allowed for a specific matching between an inquiry about a program, policy area, or clinical issue, with samples from the research literature, was used 58 times.

Of the 3,045 visits to the homepage, 56 visits (2%) involved clicking on the banner of the FNC&FCS website and articles from the FNC&FCS. In terms of theme-based search for best-practice material, less than 1% of all who conducted theme-based search on child welfare best-practice guidelines requested materials pertaining to the Aboriginal populations. In terms of specific keywords used in the Google Scholar search engine (pre-set by the MAP-KT team to select child welfare or maltreatment publications): 10% was associated with pregnancy and parenting, 7% with education, 6% with homelessness, 3% with sexual orientation, and 2% with youth justice, with only less than 1% of searches contained "Aboriginal" or "First Nations" as keywords. In terms of the personalized query where users submitted directly to the researcher-on-call tool,

28% of all queries submitted in this interactive format were associated with behavioral outcomes and mental health, 48% with child welfare-specific activities. Again, the content specific areas for the researcher-on-call services were: 12% were associated with parenting, 5% with education, 5% with youth justice, and only 2% were associated with Aboriginal/First Nations issues.

Discussion

Given the over-representation of Aboriginal children in child welfare, and the finding that 10% of youth randomly sampled from non-Aboriginal child welfare agencies reported having at least 1 Aboriginal birth parent (Waechter, Leung, Wekerle et al., 2011), caseworkers may have under-utilized Aboriginal content on the MAP-KT portal as compared to other contents. As a result, the MAP-KT portal was under-utilized as a potential tool to bridge between knowledge and action in the practice of caring for Aboriginal children and youths in the child welfare system.

According to the Knowledge-to-Action framework (Graham et al, 2006), a knowledge tool (such as the MAP-KT portal) is the end point of a distillation process where unrefined knowledge is turned into usable form. According to Graham et al. (2006), the knowledge-to-action cycle requires: 1) adapting the tool to local practice context, 2) identifying barriers to knowledge use, and 3) selecting, tailoring and implementing intervention according to the barriers identified. Hence, the utilization of the MAP-KT portal in Aboriginal child welfare practices could be improved by reviewing the format and selection of information on the MAP-KT portal, and ensuring that the information is adapted to the needs and preferences of end-users who are responsible for the well-being of Aboriginal children involved in CPS.. Harrison, Graham, and Fervers (2009) suggest that customizing a knowledge tool for a particular organization or culture may help improve the acceptance of and adherence to tool use. A customized knowledge tool also helps to overcome challenges such as the lack of expertise among service providers in implementing recommended actions, the lack of

mandatory equipment or staff time to deliver a guideline's recommendations, or the rejection of recommendations by the local patient population or by the providers due to culture or other factors (Harrison, Graham, & Fervers, 2009). The authors recommend using the ADAPTE process (The AGREE Collaboration, 2004; see also Fervers et al, 2006) to adapt a knowledge tool to its local context. The ADAPTE process was developed to facilitate the creation of high-quality knowledge tools with a higher likelihood of being successfully implemented. The process engages end-users in the adaptation of the knowledge tool to address specific questions relevant to its use. The goal is to establish a transparent, rigorous, and replicable standard based on the following core principles: 1) respect for evidence-based principles in knowledge tool development; 2) use of reliable and consistent methods to ensure the quality of the adapted knowledge tool; 3) participation of key stakeholders to foster acceptance and ownership of the adapted knowledge tool, and ultimately to promote its use; 4) consideration of context during adaptation to ensure relevance for local practice and policy; 5) transparent reporting to promote confidence in the recommendations of the adapted guideline; 6) use of a flexible format to accommodate specific needs and circumstances; and 7) respect for and acknowledgment of source guideline materials (The AGREE Collaboration, 2004). Such adaptation process could be the next phase of development for the MAP-KT portal.

The activity to overcome barriers to the successful implementation of a knowledge tool is called knowledge translation intervention (Wensing, Bosch, & Grol, 2009). According to the authors, knowledge translation interventions need to be tailored to specific barriers for change, similar to a clinical treatment tailored to a diagnosed health problem. One of the most often cited conceptual frameworks regarding barriers to knowledge use in health care is the Clinical Practice Guidelines Framework for Improvement (Cabana et al, 1999). This framework was based on an extensive search of the literature of barriers to physician adherence to clinical practice guidelines (an example of

a knowledge tool). Three main categories of barriers were identified: knowledge, attitudes, or behavior of the practitioners. Based on a systematic approach to evidence, knowledge tools such as clinical practice guidelines, are defined as systematically developed statements to assist practitioners and clients in making decisions about appropriate health and social services under specific circumstances (for a detailed description of different board categories of barriers to knowledge tool implementation and their corresponding interventions, refer to Wensing, Bosch, & Grol, 2009). To clearly identify barriers and facilitators to knowledge use in health care and social service practice, there is a need to assess them in a valid and reliable fashion. In this context, considerable interest is generated in instruments for valid and reliable assessment of barriers and facilitators to knowledge use that can be employed by various end-users who are trying to implement knowledge (Légaré, 2009).

The current study demonstrates that the caseworkers may have under-utilized Aboriginal content as compared to other contents hosted on the MAP-KT portal, suggesting that there is a gap in using the MAP-KT portal to bridge between knowledge and action in the practice of caring for Aboriginal children and youths in the child welfare system. Recommendations to increase the utilization of MAP-KT portal in the context of Aboriginal care include systematic adaptation of the knowledge tool to the local context, comprehensive assessment of barriers to tool use, and tailored intervention to promote tool use according to the barriers identified.

It is important to note that the results reported here are based on data collected within a limited time frame (under one year), during which no formal marketing of the MAP-KT site occurred. Thus, this report captures the "natural" information-seeking activities of OACAS members across the province of Ontario and is best viewed within a pilot-study context. With increasing scholarship in the area of Aboriginal child welfare, further research into the broader usage of such knowledge is warranted. It is clear that evidence-based or evidence-informed practice needs to build on a good fit between the

knowledge users and the evidence. The ultimate aim is to ensure that the well-being of Aboriginal children is fully supported by the best available knowledge. Child welfare practitioners require the time and impetus to identify the most useful scholarship, and to feed back to the research field the practice-relevant questions that need to be answered. More knowledge tends to lead to more questions, questions that are increasingly more tailored to the population being served.

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The MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program of Calgary*

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Introduction

Urban Aboriginal Peoples are considered to be part of a vulnerable population. Vulnerable Aboriginal peoples include:

> *Individuals and communities that have been affected by the multigenerational impacts of colonialism, such as the effects of residential schools. These effects may include systemic racism and discrimination, resulting in chronic low income, high mobility, loss of culture, and other negative social indicators. Aboriginal peoples include First Nations (status, non-status and Bill C-31 individuals), Métis, and Inuit people.* (City of Calgary, 2010)

Since 1997, certain schools within Calgary have adopted the MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program. This pilot program intends "to

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Abstract

Since 1997, certain schools within Calgary have adopted the MacPhail Aboriginal Pride Program. This pilot program intends "to increase graduation rates among Aboriginal students, which historically have been lower than that of their non-Aboriginal peers. Its approach is based on the premise that students who bond and relate to their school environment are more likely to stay in school and succeed academically" (Calgary United Way, 2010). The Aboriginal population has been growing quickly, and Aboriginal children account for a growing proportion of all of the children in Canada (O'Donnel, 2006, p. 65). However, despite growing numbers, many Aboriginal children who live off reserve are being raised in communities where Aboriginal people represent only a small minority. In these communities, it is difficult to maintain ties to Aboriginal traditions and cultures. The MacPhail Aboriginal Pride Program attempts to help Aboriginal children and youth maintain these cultural ties and helps by infusing Aboriginal history and culture in the curriculum and by encouraging activities such as field trips and presentations. The MacPhail Aboriginal Pride Programs in Calgary strive to "achieve higher graduation rates, have consistent attendance rates, and experience a sense of pride in their culture and a willingness to share their culture with non-aboriginal peers and families."

Key words: Pilot program, Aboriginal Students, education, academic success, Calgary, cultural curriculum, graduation rates.

increase graduation rates among Aboriginal students, which historically have been lower than that of their non-Aboriginal peers. Its approach is based on the premise that students who bond and relate to their school environment are more likely to stay in school and succeed academically" (Calgary United Way, 2010). The Aboriginal population has been growing quickly, and Aboriginal children account for a growing proportion of all of the children in Canada (O'Donnel, 2006, p. 65). However, despite growing numbers, many Aboriginal children who

live off reserve are being raised in communities where Aboriginal people represent only a small minority. In these communities, it is difficult to maintain ties to Aboriginal traditions and cultures (p. 67). The MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program attempts to help Aboriginal children and youth maintain these cultural ties.

Introducing and focusing on Aboriginal culture in the schools is important; it allows Aboriginal students to feel included, gives them a feeling of self-worth, and increases their interest in education. Research reveals that a strong cultural identity increases the likelihood that Aboriginal students will achieve success in the school system: "there is a direct relationship between students' understanding of their culture and role in society and their ability to function comfortably in society and to achieve academic success" (Indian Nations at Risk Task Force, 1991, cited in UWCA, 2007, p. 3).

Throughout the years there have been relatively high drop-out rates and low graduation rates for Aboriginal youth. In fact, in 2003, the "Canada West Foundation report documents a 75% drop-out rate" (United Way of Calgary and Area [UWCA], 2007, p. 1). 49.87% of the Aboriginal population in Western Canada who were over 15 and not attending school did not have a high school diploma compared to 31.3% of the general population (Brunnen, 2003, p. 2). Furthermore, "because of the low high school graduation rates, Aboriginal youth are at higher risk of having lower educational levels, lower income levels, poorer health status, and higher rates of homelessness and substandard housing" (UWCA, 2007, p. 1).

The MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program

The MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program was first implemented in one school in Calgary in 1997. It was then expanded to eight pilot schools within the public and Catholic school systems. The primary target population is Aboriginal children and youth between kindergarten to grade 12. The specific goals of the program:

1. To develop a network of academic support for Aboriginal students, parents/guardians/families, and school staff

2. To involve Aboriginal students and their families in school events

3. To engage Aboriginal students in cultural, recreational, and social activities

4. To enhance the creativity and artistic abilities of Aboriginal students

5. To develop and sustain stability in the lives of Aboriginal students in and out of school by working with parents/guardians/families and community resources

6. To create environments which encourage Aboriginal students to work alongside all peers for social and emotional support

7. To increase class attendance among Aboriginal students

8. To provide support and resources for school staff (UWCA, 2007, p. 4)

The MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program strives to assist students to "achieve higher graduation rates, have consistent attendance rates, and experience a sense of pride in their culture and a willingness to share their culture with non-aboriginal peers and families" (Tenove, 2010, p. 18). It offers academic support, empowerment, and cultural teachings within an inclusive respectful environment.

The Cultural Enrichment Model

The basic theory behind the MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program, as explained by Gray and Pritchard (2010), is that First Nation, Metis and Inuit (FNMI) students receive cultural and academic supports as a way (1) "to reinforce a positive cultural identity," (2) "create a sense of belonging," and (3) "impress feelings of value, connectedness and engagement within the school community," which is intended to produce the ultimate outcome of greater academic success and higher graduation rates (p. 1). In other words, there appears to be a three-step process (see diagram 1).

Diagram 1.

(Step 1)	(Step 2)	(Step 3)
Cultural & Academic Academic Supports	(1) Postiive cultural identity (2) Sense of belonging (3) Feeling valued / connected / engaged	+ Academic Success + Graduation Rates
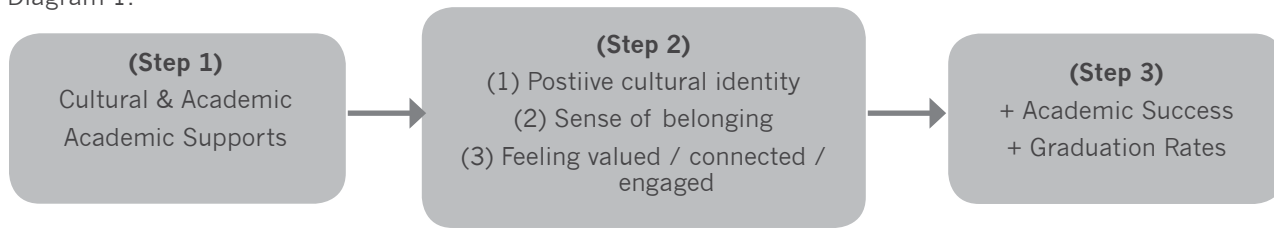
According to this model, we need to have measures of (1), (2), and (3), since this is the critical intermediate objective toward achieving the ultimate outcome. Through accounts of activities, we have strong evidence that cultural and academic support is being given and we can also assess the ultimate outcome by looking at performance indicators such as grades in school and Provincial Achievement Tests (PAT).

The cultural enrichment model of the MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program represents a change in direction from traditional approaches both in its emphasis on the cultural aspects of education and in its recognition that Aboriginal students are only one part of a larger picture that includes parents, teachers, administrators, policy makers, and the community.

Program Theory

The most effective prevention programs guide program development, assessment, and improvement using theory (Small, Cooney, & O'Connor, 2009, p. 4). Theory-based programs "have a well thought-out and logical program theory that describes how the program's activities are related to clear, identified, and achievable outcomes" (p. 4). The MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program strives to compliment the school system in order to make it more inclusive and accepting of Aboriginal culture, allowing Aboriginal students to gain a strong sense of identity. It honours Aboriginal knowledge by including traditional Aboriginal activities and by teaching students about Aboriginal history. Nation et al. (2005) argue that "[p]reventative strategies should have a scientific justification or logical rationale" (p. 6). The MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program is a researched based program that theorizes low graduation rates,

poor performance, and high drop-out rates could be due to Aboriginal social exclusion; lack of Aboriginal culture and history in the school curriculum, resulting in loss of interest in school subjects; and demoralization. UWCA (2007a) states that research has shown that there is a correlation between cultural inclusion and academic performance (p. 6).

Program's Active Learning Techniques

Meaningful programs are "more effective when they use active and varied teaching methods that engage participants and enable them to learn and practice new skills" (Small, Cooney, & O'Connor, 2009, p. 5). Because people tend to learn best when they have opportunities to learn and practice new skills and when they are actively engaged, programs that use various active teaching methods are able to keep participants interested and are more likely to be successful (Small & Huser, 2010, p. 5). The program engages Aboriginal students by offering various activities and using multiple teaching methods. In addition, "[e]ffective programs have hands-on experiences for participants. Rather than depending solely on sharing information and discussion, effective programs facilitate activities (e.g., role plays, verbal and written practice) that [allow] participants to develop and practice their new skills" (Nation et al., 2005, p. 4).

The MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program's curriculum uses a holistic approach that provides students with different kinds of hands on culturally meaningful experiences. There is a large variety of active instruction including presentations; peer tutoring; Aboriginal pow-wows; afterschool programming; performers; field trips and field experiences; traditional dance, drumming, rolling sage, and beading; and mentoring (UWCA, 2010,

p. 12-13). The students realize the benefits of the program and recognize that they can do and are doing well in school. They receive help with their school work and many of them actually grew to like school: "They help me with my work: math, science, art, all of them. I like the field trips. My favorite was Head Smashed in Buffalo Jump. In less than a year, the program has changed me. I hated school before. Now I like school and school is more fun. It's a great program!" (Harold, personal communication, May 27, 2010).

Chantel also explains that the MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program has made a huge impact on her life. The program makes a difference:

> [B]efore I had a really bad attendance problem. Teachers didn't have time for me. They didn't spend any time with me, but Miss Harper has time for me. She goes to watch my shows/ performances. To her, I can tell this isn't just a job. Because of the program, I miss less school and I don't have a temper any more. In grade 11, people told me that I had a bad temper, but this year I have no temper issues. The biggest thing is that I have someone to talk to. I feel supported when I feel bad. (personal communication, May 27, 2010)

Chantel also won the Chief David Crowchild Aboriginal Youth Achievement Award. Many of the program participants love the program and have changed their attitudes toward school and learning because of it.

Commitment to Evaluation and Refinement

The program documents many of its goals, achievements, and strategies. However, "beyond simply documenting their programs, *effective programs have staff and administrators who are committed to program monitoring and evaluation*" (Small, Cooney, and O'Connor, 2009, p. 8). In order to learn how well a program is being implemented, if it has any effects on its participants, and how it produces those effects, evaluation is necessary (p. 8).

Within the MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program, there is a commitment to evaluating and refining the program so that it will continue to improve the lives of Aboriginal children in the future. UWCA (2010) states that "[e]valuation of the program needs to be ongoing" (p. 35). In fact, program participants have identified some challenges, including the difficulty in getting parents involved; teachers' concerns about being culturally insensitive; and lack of role clarity for support coordinators. (p. 14). Knowing all of the relevant issues, the program staff are able to make modifications and improve the program. Furthermore, "[a]part from establishing important baseline data to evaluate the success of the program in the future, the program has taken many concrete steps to fulfill the program goals established by the United Way and the Calgary Board of Education" (p. 29).

Developmentally Appropriate & Socioculturally Relevant

In order for the program to be effective, it needs to be developmentally appropriate. In other words, it should avoid being too general, and rather respond to specific differences that characterize children/youth of even slightly different ages (Small, Cooney, and O'Connor, 2009, p. 5). It is important that the program is not administered too early or too late in an individual's development (p. 6). Programs that intervene too early or too late "have greater obstacles to their effectiveness" (p. 6).

The program targets children and youth from kindergarten to grade 12. Although this is a broad target group, there are different activities geared toward different age groups. Small & Huser (2010) state, "Tailoring programs and their activities to the particular age or developmental stage of the participants can greatly enhance an intervention's success" (p. 5). By including culturally relevant and age appropriate activities for the children and youth, the MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program is tailored for the participants and has higher rates of success.

Nation et al. (2005) argue that, in order to be socioculturally relevant, programs need to make

deep structure modifications (p. 9). The MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program is tailored to fit within the socioculturally relevant philosophy of Aboriginal families'. The program is founded on thoughtful research based application that goes deeper by including Aboriginal content in the curriculum, creating a greater awareness of Aboriginal culture and history, and by including culturally relevant activities that acknowledge Aboriginal beliefs and practices. It concentrates on the social and cultural realities that impact the learning of Aboriginal children and youth. Program coordinators are able to devote significant attention to individual student needs.

Implementing the MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program

Staff

The quality of the staff that runs a program is one of the most important factors in determining whether a program is effective. "[P]rogram effectiveness is related to the staff's experience, confidence, training, and commitment…Staff members of the most effective programs are able to establish rapport with participants, gain trust, relate well to others, and remain nonjudgmental" (Small, Cooney, and O'Connor, 2009, p. 7). Programs obtain higher retention rates and greater impacts among participants when high staff retention rates are maintained. To that end, staff effectiveness is frequently dependent on receiving support, supervision, ongoing training, and recognition from administrators (Small & Huser, 2010, p. 7).

Apart from academic credentials, coordinators must have an authentic appreciation of Aboriginal world view. A coordinator at Father Lacombe High School in Calgary, revealed that "[e]xperience working with Aboriginal communities, families, and youth" is essential to become a effective coordinator (personal communication, December 9, 2010). Substantive knowledge of Aboriginal spirituality, urban Aboriginal issues, and the impact of colonization including the profound residential school experience, is key to the program's success.

Minimizing turnover is essential when implementing an effective program. Additionally, Small & Huser (2010) note that "[b]ehavior change most often happens in the context of positive, supportive relationships where individuals feel safe and trust one another. Effective programs are structured to foster trusting relationships over time among participants, staff, and volunteers" (p. 6). Indeed, "[e]ffective group-based programs pay attention to relationships among participants…good relationships among participants are important for retention because people value the sense of community" (Small, Cooney, and O'Connor, 2009, p. 7). The MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program affords the necessary time to build and strengthen meaningful relationships.

Conclusion

The MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program's successes demonstrate that it is not only effective but purposeful. Significant improvements in attendance and graduation rates demonstrate it is actualizing the goals set out by the Aboriginal Youth and Education Strategy (UWCA, 2010, p. 32). By integrating Aboriginal culture in the curriculum of Aboriginal learners, they are propelled toward feeling socially accepted and proud of their cultural identities.

"[T]he Aboriginal Pride Program represents a change in direction from traditional linear academic approach both in its emphasis on the cultural aspects of education and in its recognition that Aboriginal students are one part of a larger picture that includes parents, teachers, administrators, policy makers, and the community" (UWCA, 2010, p. 32). The program has had a large amount of success since it has been implemented and the impact of the MacPhail Family Aboriginal Pride Program on Aboriginal students' lives is remarkable. As one of the program participants exclaimed, "This program helped my brother graduate; it's kept me on track-to stay in school and try hard. It makes graduation possible!" (personal communication, June 9, 2011).

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Calgary's Family and Community Support Services' Social Sustainability Framework and Urban Aboriginal Peoples

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c Manager, City of Calgary. Katie is responsible for the development and implementation of the Social Sustainability Framework across 80 partner agencies including those that deliver services from an Aboriginal worldview. A social worker for the past 25 years, Katie is not Aboriginal but seeks to practice cultural humility and to learn from wise people around her. She is mother to teens Claudia and Adrian, and spouse to pianist/composer Gordon Rumson.

Family & Community Support Services Calgary

Family & Community Support Services (FCSS) in Calgary is a joint municipal and provincial funding program. The Family & Community Support Services Act and Regulation governs the program and was enacted in 1981, replacing the Preventative Social Services Act (1966). The program is designed to develop, support, and fund

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Abstract

Family & Community Support Services (FCSS) in Calgary is a joint municipal and provincial funding program. The program is designed to develop, support, and fund preventive social services. FCSS Calgary has a number of benefits and truly makes a difference in the community. At-risk youth and vulnerable senior citizens have avenues for positive community involvement, family violence victims are safer, newcomers are welcomed and can feel at home in Calgary, citizens have access to information about the community and crisis services, and urban Aboriginal people are able to develop leadership skills within the community. FCSS programs and agencies align with at least one of the funding priorities (Strengthening Neighbourhoods and Increasing Social Inclusion, outlined in the Social Sustainability Framework). Increasing Social Inclusion concentrates on five populations: families, children and youth, seniors, immigrants, and Aboriginal people (City of Calgary, Social Sustainability, 2010).

The new Social Sustainability Framework helps the community in a number of ways. It guides funding decisions by providing FCSS Calgary with clear and consistent principles. By aligning funded programs with identified objectives and outcomes, it helps FCSS account for and communicate its impact on the community. There is an abundance of statistics that support the need for culturally appropriate programs for urban Aboriginal peoples. Research demonstrates urgency for these programs and the current social landscape of urban Aboriginal children, youth, and families. For example, between 1996 and 2006, the Aboriginal population across Canada grew by 45% to reach close to 1.2 million persons, representing 3.8% of the Canadian population. (Statistics Canada, 2008, Canadian Demographics at a Glance, p. 34).

Two examples of urban Aboriginal programs from Metis Calgary Family Services (MCFS) is presented within FCSS's Sustainability Framework; Native Network, and Little Dancing Buffalo.

Key words: At risk youth, vulnerable senior citizens, urban Aboriginal people, Calgary, social inclusion, Social Sustainability Framework.

preventive social services. Generally, the program concentrates on prevention, voluntarism, an 80-20 cost sharing partnership between the Province and municipal partners, and enhanced local

autonomy. However, FCSS Calgary has decided to contribute 25% of the cost to the program, instead of the minimum 20%. Calgary has had a partnership with the Province for 44 years, since the launch of the PSS Act in 1966 ("FCSS Fact Sheet," 2010). The purpose of this paper is to introduce FCSS and its new social sustainability framework while providing examples of how urban Aboriginal programs like Little Dancing Buffalo and Native Network use its principles.

The Province's budget for FCSS in 2010/2011 is $75.2M and the total amount of funding that is allocated to Calgary for 2010 is $21.9M. Calgary has contributed $7.4M in 2010 ("FCSS Fact Sheet," 2010). The City of Calgary FCSS Division manages the FCSS funding program and works with the community and agencies. The FCSS Division's two primary functions are service planning and funding allocations. FCSS funds programs and services that are consistent with the FCSS Act; are consistent with City Council's funding priorities, which are strengthening neighbourhoods and increasing social inclusion; are collaborative and not duplicate existing programs; involve volunteers; utilize evidence-based best practice; state objectives in measurable terms; and demonstrate good administration and governance (City of Calgary, FCSS Overview, 2010).

All of the FCSS-funded programs and agencies are supported in order to ensure that their work reflects evidence-based practices in prevention. Furthermore, an investment of $1 in preventative social services produces a social return on investment of $6-$13 in other costs ("FCSS Fact Sheet," 2010). These costs include addictions treatment, justice, and policing and such an investment also increases contributions to society and productivity in employment.

FCSS Calgary's vision statement is "Calgarians working together to create and sustain a viable, safe, and caring community" (City of Calgary, FCSS Overview, 2010). Their mission is to partner with municipal agencies, other city businesses, and other funders to fund preventative social services that enhance and support the lives of Calgarians. By funding community organizations to strengthen neighbourhoods and increase

social inclusion, FCSS Calgary minimizes and prevents the impact of social problems.

FCSS Calgary has a number of benefits and truly makes a difference in the community. At-risk youth and vulnerable senior citizens have avenues for positive community involvement, family violence victims are safer, newcomers are welcomed and can feel at home in Calgary, citizens have access to information about the community and crisis services, and urban Aboriginal people are able to develop leadership skills within the community. FCSS programs and agencies align with at least one of the funding priorities (Strengthening Neighbourhoods and Increasing Social Inclusion, outlined in the Social Sustainability Framework). Increasing Social Inclusion concentrates on five populations: families, children and youth, seniors, immigrants, and Aboriginal people (City of Calgary, Social Sustainability, 2010).

The following section will discuss FCSS's new social sustainability framework.

The New Social Sustainability Framework

The focus of this section is to outline the new social sustainability framework and describe how it helps the community. In September 2007, FCSS Calgary started a three phase process to develop a new funding framework. The goal was to develop a long-term, multi-year framework for community investment in order to ensure preventive and comprehensive impact in the community and sustainability for FCSS. In 2008, the new Social Sustainability Framework was approved. 2009 was a planning year for the implementation of the framework and funding priorities and the new funding priorities started to be applied in 2010. The Social Sustainability Framework is the blueprint for FCSS investment decisions, funding practices, and social planning. For all aspects of its business, the City of Calgary has also adopted a Triple Bottom Line policy that includes economic, social, and environmental characteristics. The Social Sustainability Framework aligns with this policy, but also

focuses on social sustainability for FCSS (City of Calgary, Social Sustainability, 2010).

The Social Sustainability Framework was developed to help FCSS Calgary maximize the impact of its investments in the community. This new framework is required because of changing social conditions, increased demand for services, and the state of the non-profit sector. The framework creates the opportunity to make differences in the community by preventing the development of serious social problems, particularly concentrated poverty and social isolation (City of Calgary, Social Sustainability, 2010).

Under the Social Sustainability Framework, FCSS has identified two investment priorities for the next ten years. The first funding priority is to strengthen neighbourhoods. Within ten years, FCSS Calgary hopes to see a decrease in the spatial concentration of poverty in the community and increased community capacity and capital in focus neighbourhoods (City of Calgary, Social Sustainability, 2010).

The second funding priority is to increase social inclusion. Ideally, within ten years, vulnerable Calgarians who participate in FCSS-funded programs will experience increased social inclusion and the focus will turn to vulnerable populations that are at risk of social exclusion. Vulnerable populations include immigrants, Aboriginal people, families, children and youth, and seniors (City of Calgary, Social Sustainability, 2010).

FCSS has chosen these two priorities for a few reasons. First, because "[c]oncentrated poverty and social isolation are very serious problems with far-reaching consequences for individuals, families, communities, and the city as a whole" (Cooper and Bartlett, 2008, p. 4). These problems include neighbourhood decline, isolation, social disorder, crime, negative child/youth development, cultural and religious tensions, and lack of community participation, low capital, poor health, poverty, and social exclusion. Second, the two funding priorities were chosen because "both concentrated poverty and social isolation are on the rise in Calgary" (p. 4). Third, extensive spatially-concentrated poverty and isolation in Calgary can be prevented. Finally,

"FCSS is ideally positioned to make a difference" (p. 5). No other social service funder has the connections to influence change at a municipal level. Although FCSS will not completely prevent social isolation and concentrated poverty, it can make a difference by working with other stakeholders, committing to the long-term plan, informing public policy, and supporting research-based prevention programs (p. 5).

The new Social Sustainability Framework helps the community in a number of ways. It guides funding decisions by providing FCSS Calgary with clear and consistent principles. By aligning funded programs with identified objectives and outcomes, it helps FCSS account for and communicate its impact on the community. To ensure that programs continue to improve people's lives, it incorporates recent advances in prevention science. It directs funding toward supporting partnerships, collaboration, coordination, and integration. Finally, it aligns with related Calgary planning and policy initiatives. These funding priorities will be reviewed every three years in order to monitor and evaluate the impact of this new funding framework. Although adjustments may be implemented as needed, it is anticipated that the funding priorities will remain the same until 2018 (City of Calgary, Social Sustainability, 2010).

Calgary urban Aboriginal peoples, members of the vulnerable population, are the focus of the next section.

Calgary Urban Aboriginal Peoples

As stated earlier, one of the vulnerable populations that the Social Sustainability Framework focuses on is Aboriginal peoples. This section demonstrates the importance of offering programs and initiatives that help this vulnerable population. Increasing social inclusion for Calgary urban Aboriginal families is important. This population includes "individuals and communities that have been affected by the multigenerational impacts of colonialism, such as the effects of residential schools. These effects may include systemic racism and

discrimination, resulting in chronic low income, high mobility, loss of culture, and other negative social indicators. Aboriginal peoples include First Nations (status, non-status and Bill C-31 individuals), Métis, and Inuit people" (City of Calgary, Social Sustainability, 2010).

For public policy, the issue has to do with choices between programs and institutions that are concentrated in or spatially targeted toward particular neighbourhoods, and initiatives that have a wider urban focus. There are a number of advantages associated with spatially targeted initiatives. Neighbourhood institutions may be more responsive to local needs, and they can be more accessible. They can serve to anchor an identity for a particular community, contribute to empowerment of local residents who participate in these institutions, and help to create a feeling of collective belonging (Peters, 2004, p. 7). However, it is important to note that "Aboriginal poverty is a factor of everyday life for many Aboriginal people in urban areas. Many urban Aboriginal residents do not possess the financial resources to support institutional development" (Peters, 2005, p. 381).

There is an abundance of statistics that support the need for culturally appropriate programs for urban Aboriginal peoples. Research demonstrates urgency for these programs and the current social landscape of urban Aboriginal children, youth, and families. For example, between 1996 and 2006, the Aboriginal population across Canada grew by 45% to reach close to 1.2 million persons, representing 3.8% of the Canadian population. (Statistics Canada, 2008, Canadian Demographics at a Glance, p. 34). Furthermore, in 1901, only 5.1% of Aboriginal people lived in urban areas, and that percentage had increased to only 6.7% by 1951 (Kalbach, 1987, p. 102, cited in Peters, 2004, p. 2). More specifically, in Calgary, as of 2001 the Aboriginal identity population totalled 22,110, which translates to 2.3% of urban population with Aboriginal identity, which is a 57.1% increase from 1991 to 2001 (Peters, 2004, p. 4). These trends indicate that the Aboriginal population is growing at a faster rate than the rest of the Canadian population.

Furthermore, the urban Aboriginal population has grown much faster than the overall Aboriginal population: "Between 2001 and 2006, the population of people identifying as Aboriginal in Edmonton and Calgary increased by 25.2%, compared to a 20.6% increase of the total Aboriginal population (Table 2). This trend will increase demand on municipalities for programs and services that address Aboriginal issues. To develop targeted programs and services, Aboriginal organizations will need to interact with municipal governments more frequently" (Aboriginal Relations, 2011, p. 4).

Many young First Nations children living off-reserve are growing up in communities where Aboriginal people represent a small minority among a diversity of cultures. In many of these communities, it is likely more difficult to maintain ties to traditional Aboriginal cultures than in communities where Aboriginal people represent the majority of the population. Almost half (46%) of young First Nations children living off-reserve had participated in or attended traditional Aboriginal activities. Children in rural areas were more likely to have taken part in these traditional and cultural activities than children living in urban areas (Statistics Canada, 2008, Canadian Social Trends, p. 67). Furthermore, less than half (45%) of off-reserve First Nations children had someone who helped them to understand First Nations history and culture (Statistics Canada, 2008, Canadian Social Trends, p. 67). If these national statistics are any indication of urban Aboriginal children in Calgary, Aboriginal programs in Calgary need to offer cultural activities and they need to provide children with access to people who can help them understand their history and culture.

Urban life is difficult for Aboriginal cultures because they are not transplanted intact into a new environment (Peters, 2004, p. 11). One of the implications for public policy is the importance of support for Aboriginal cultural activities in urban areas. The Royal Commission recommended that all levels of government initiate programs to increase opportunities to promote Aboriginal cultures in urban areas (Peters, p. 11). In the 2006 Aboriginal children's survey, a survey that studies Aboriginal children's family and community lives,

only 28% of young Métis children had participated in or attended "traditional" First Nations, Métis, or Inuit activities such as singing, drum dancing, fiddling, gatherings, or ceremonies. About one third (31%) of Métis children had someone who helped them to understand Aboriginal history and culture (Statistics Canada, November 2008, p. 3). Ideas about the incompatibility of urban and Aboriginal cultures have a long history. Presenters to the Urban Roundtable of the Royal Commission talked about the challenges Aboriginal people face in urban areas because cities represented "an environment that is usually indifferent and often hostile to Aboriginal cultures" (Peters, 2004, p. 8).

From the Aboriginal perspective, community goes beyond the neighbourhood they live in spatially. Cultural community is extremely important, allowing urban Aboriginal people to align through their culture. In fact, "many Aboriginal people who live in urban areas retain ties with their non-urban communities of origin, and these ties represent an important component of their cultural identities" (Peters, 2005, p. 382). Furthermore, strengthening an individual's identities and awareness of the urban Aboriginal community is one of the most effective ways to solve problems that Aboriginal people face in the city (p. 384). Finally, Peters (2005) summarizes the importance of a cultural community for Aboriginal people:

> *The poverty of Aboriginal peoples in Canadian cities is high, and the colonial legacy means that they face additional challenges to building community in urban areas. While there is a paucity of research on urban Aboriginal people's sense of community in urban areas, the materials that are available suggest that, while urban Aboriginal people on reserves feel more of a sense of belonging to their community, Aboriginal people in cities feel as much as a sense of belonging to their group in the city as ethnic residents do. Moreover, there is a culture of mutual assistance through shared accommodation that appears to persist*

in contemporary urban Aboriginal households (p. 391).

Cultural communities allow for Aboriginal people to feel more accepted and included in society, rather than isolated. They gain a sense of belonging. Even if Aboriginal people live in neighbourhoods where there are few or no other Aboriginal people, they are willing to travel to different organisations or community areas where they can interact and communicate with other Aboriginal people (e.g. Sacred Heart). Therefore, urban Aboriginal programs are important because they allow urban Aboriginals to form a cultural community and align with one another. Furthermore, these communities prevent social exclusion.

When looking at the need for urban Aboriginal programs, one must look at the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada:

> *Historic inequalities have left First Nations children, youth, and families without much-needed supports and services. Aboriginal people in Canada were deprived of their land, their cultural traditions, and their unique way of life. Children were removed from their families and sent away to residential schools—where many were abused—with well-documented inter-generational effects. Societal prejudices and discrimination against Aboriginals have created additional challenges.* (Canadian Council on Social Development [CCSD], n.d., p. 1)

In fact, "[t]he rapid change associated with urban living and loss of traditional supports have compounded feelings of isolation and dislocation among Aboriginal people, further disadvantaging their families and communities, and placing them at increased risk for involvement in the criminal justice system" (CCSD, n.d., p. 1).

Social exclusion means a lack of belonging, acceptance, and recognition. People who are socially excluded are more economically and socially vulnerable, and hence they tend to have diminished life experiences. The 2001 census data showed that certain groups were at

particularly high risk of being socially excluded—in particular, new immigrants, young workers, and Aboriginal people (CCSD, n.d., p. 1). Social exclusion and deprivation consistently emerge as underlying factors in the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system. For example, incarceration rates of Aboriginal people are five to six times higher than the national average. Statistics from Correctional Service Canada show that while Aboriginal people represent only 2.8% of the Canadian population, they account for 18% of those who are incarcerated in federal institutions. In the Prairie Provinces, 50% of prisoners are Aboriginal people (CCSD, n.d., p. 1).

All the above statistical and narrative information clearly articulates the need for meaningful urban programs that strengthen Aboriginal cultural traditions.

The next section discusses urban Aboriginal programs and the importance of offering programs and initiatives that embrace Aboriginal culture and traditions.

Urban Aboriginal Programs

Urban Aboriginal programs need to focus on building and protecting Aboriginal cultural communities because cultural traditions are a large part of Aboriginal people's lives. In regard to Aboriginal people building culture and community in urban areas, David Chartrand, President of the National Association of Friendship Centres, states:

> *Aboriginal culture in the cities is threatened in much the same way as Canadian culture is threatened by American culture, and it therefore requires a similar commitment to its protection. Our culture is at the heart of our people, and without awareness of Aboriginal history, traditions and ceremonies, we are not whole people, and our communities lose their strength… Cultural education also works against the alienation that the cities hold for our people. Social activities bring us*

> *together and strengthen the relationship between people in areas where those relationships are an important safety net for people who feel left out by mainstream.* (Cited in Peters, 2004, p. 9)

Chartrand's words exemplify the need for urban Aboriginal programs like Métis Calgary Family Services (MCFS), Native Network, and Little Dancing Buffalo. MCFS was originally established in 1992. They are "a registered, Non-profit, Charitable Aboriginal organization that practices a culturally appropriate approach to service delivery for Aboriginal families and communities (Métis Calgary Family Services Society [MCFS], 2008). Their vision is the healthy development of Native children and families and their mission is to "provide a balanced wholistic spectrum of services to Aboriginal Children and Families" (MCFS, 2008). MCFS offers a variety of programs for urban Aboriginals like Positive Indian Parenting Workshops, Crazy By Design Workshop (a two part workshop about understanding adolescents), Pow-wow Lessons, Cultural Crafts, Métis Dancing, Collective Kitchen, Grocery Bingo, and Aboriginal Students Program (ASP) Tutoring. These programs create more opportunities for Aboriginal people and they create an awareness of Aboriginal culture, history, and traditions. Furthermore, there are social and cultural activities within these programs that will help build culture and cultural community in urban areas.

According to a 2001 survey, children who participate in organized extra-curricular activities (sports, art, music, clubs, etc.) are more likely to possess greater self-esteem, to enjoy better social interactions with their friends, and to achieve relatively higher scholastic results (Statistics Canada, 2004, p. 11). Furthermore, the 2001 survey found significant differences in school performance between Aboriginal children in non-reserve areas who engaged frequently in extra-curricular activities, compared with those who rarely or never did so. Some of the most popular activities among Aboriginal children between ages 6 and 14 were time spent with Elders (34%), art and music (31%), and clubs or youth, drum, and dance groups (30%) (Statistics Canada, 2004, p. 15).

The Aboriginal language and oral tradition components of the Native Network and Little Dancing Buffalo programs support the fact that language is often considered both an instrument and an essential part of culture. In many Aboriginal societies, "the fundamental teachings are preserved in sacred stories, ceremonies and symbols," which are "the symbols of the ideas, concepts, and beliefs of a society which has an oral tradition" (Statistics Canada, 2004, p. 17). The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) identified several factors contributing to the decline of Aboriginal languages in Canada. Just like other minority languages in the world, Aboriginal languages are constantly being "eclipsed" or overwhelmed by more dominant languages (RCAP, 1996, p. 609). In Canada, historical factors such as residential schools have also ruptured the transmission of Aboriginal languages from one generation to the next (RCAP, p. 603).

The intent of both the Little Dancing Buffalo and Native Network programs is to increase social inclusion for a vulnerable population, since "people who are socially isolated…. are at high risk of health problems, poverty, and social exclusion" (Family and Community Support Services [FCSS], 2009b, p. 1). As FCSS (2009b) notes, "engaging vulnerable families in their communities… helps to build positive social ties" (p. 7). The programs demonstrate positive social ties, since "the research emphasizes the need for 'positive' social ties, not simply social ties in general" (FCSS, 2009b, p. 7).

Because the groups targeted by the programs are low income, they are good candidates for social inclusion interventions. After all, "[l]ow income families tend to be socially isolated, and reduced social support restricts the ability of family and community to buffer the direct effects of poverty" (FCSS, 2009b, p. 5). The benefits of increasing social support and social ties is well documented in the literature:

> *Extensive research reveals that social support networks can act as a significant buffer to the debilitating effects of poverty…. Scores of studies have investigated the ways*

> *in which socially isolated families can benefit from positive social ties and strengthened social support systems, and a great deal of research documents the benefits of both informal and community supports…. All parents (and all individuals) benefit from positive social support systems but, for low-income, isolated families, high-quality support systems can dramatically improve positive parenting skills, family functioning, and child outcomes.* (FCSS, 2009b, p. 6)

Studies also suggest that increasing social support has a positive effect on parenting practices:

> *Many studies have shown that strong parenting skills and positive relationships between parents and children require both secure attachment and sufficient positive social support…. Studies indicate that social support may also influence attachment style, where parents who feel more supported tend to feel less anxious or ambivalent about their relationships with their children and become more attached to and engage in better parenting with their children. This is consistent with earlier research showing that the links between social support and better parenting include increased parental self-confidence.* (FCSS, 2009b, p. 6)

The cultural elements of both programs is highly beneficial, since Pinnow (2009) states that a key principle is to "build a solid foundation in Aboriginal culture, language and spirituality through community development process" (p. 2). Both programs provide opportunities for the use of oral traditions and mentoring in a way that is consistent with Pinnow's recommendations. She advocates the use of "oral traditions, including storytelling – for many purposes, within program contexts" because it "produces many benefits and can even be combined with modern approaches if desired" (p. 2).

As FCSS (2009b) notes, "engaging vulnerable families in their communities… helps to build positive social ties" (p. 7). The MCFS, Little Dancing Buffalo, and Native Network programs explicitly demonstrate positive social ties; culture is a common ground among members, as opposed to bringing out divisive elements or areas of controversy. In fact, "the research emphasizes the need for 'positive' social ties, not simply social ties in general" (FCSS, 2009b, p. 7). Krech, for example, notes that celebratory activities (e.g. drumming, singing, powwow, potlatch, etc.) can revitalize the spirit and bring divided communities together (cited in Pinnow, 2009, p. 13).

The Little Dancing Buffalo program, which is offered by MCFS, is the focus of the next section.

Little Dancing Buffalo

The Little Dancing Buffalo program "provides aboriginal and Métis children and youth with instruction in traditional dance and in the culture and ceremonial significance of traditional dance both for the communities for which it is performed and for the performers who produce it" (MCFS, 2010, p. 25). In this program, Aboriginal participants are given the opportunity to learn from Aboriginal adults and Elders through various activities and cultural teachings. It offers group mentoring, cultural traditions and activities, oral traditions and teachings, and networking. So far, the program has served 171 people (98% are Aboriginal and there were 120 females). The majority of participants were between the ages of 7 and 12 (76%) (p. 25).

The program gives Aboriginal children a chance to develop positive social ties with peers and with other adults. These ties have been found to be important for the development of children and youth: "Extensive research documents the importance of positive social ties to the developmental outcomes of children and youth. In short, positive ties are protective factors and negative ties are risk factors for healthy development. The most important ties are with parents, peer, and other adults in the young person's life" (FCSS, 2009b, p. 9).

Since a lack of a sense of belonging and a lack of interpersonal and social skills are linked with vulnerability (FCSS, 2009b, p. 9), addressing these deficits may serve to reduce vulnerability. Furthermore, the Little Dancing Buffalo program gives children the opportunity to make new friends with other children in the same program. This connection is important because "[h]aving close friends is connected to positive emotional health and social adjustment. 'Playing together,' 'hanging out,' and 'doing things together' are among the most important features of youth friendship" (FCSS, 2009b, p. 10). Friendships have positive effects:

> *Youth with close friends demonstrate better academic performance, lower rates of criminal involvement, and lower school drop-out rates as compared to those who do not have friends as sources of intimacy and social support. Young people who are not socially well-integrated or who have negative peer influences report that they are less satisfied with their lives, less happy with their home lives, less likely to enjoy school and to feel that they belong at school, and more likely to feel lonely and left out.* (FCSS, 2009b, p. 10)

Moreover, "youth development programs… help isolated children and youth to improve their social skills, make friends, and make connections with caring adult positive role models and mentors" (p. 11). Since the Little Dancing Buffalo program incorporates Aboriginal dance, cultural teachings, the Elders' oral tradition and teachings, Aboriginal ceremony, and Aboriginal language, the cultural elements of the program, both on a literal and symbolic level, stand to reverse some of the cultural losses Aboriginal people have experienced.

The following section goes into detail about the Native Network, another one of MCFS' programs.

Native Network

The Native Network program "works to connect with members of Calgary's urban Aboriginal

population in need of services and support but who are cut off from… access to such services by virtue of their marginalization, isolation… [and/or] living circumstances" (MCFS, 2010, p. 31). Through the program, Aboriginal families and individuals gain awareness of and access to available services and supports; establish a sense of community with the Native Network Centre; and are able to participate in cultural activities and traditions. Furthermore, parents learn more about and gain confidence in their role as parents. There have been 1,843 people served in the program and 85% of them are Aboriginal. The majority of the participants were aged 26-35 (432). The program has 287 volunteers with 3,950 volunteer hours. Sixty percent of clients were female (p. 31).

Parental isolation has been identified as a risk factor for family instability and poor parenting (FCSS, 2009a, p. 3). "Socially isolated parents are more likely to use poor parenting practices…. isolated parents, without supportive networks of relatives and friends, are more likely to maltreat and neglect their children" (FCSS, 2009a, p. 5). Moreover, "many low-income families demonstrate weak communication skills with either avoidance or difficulty talking about their problems" (FCSS, 2009a, p. 4). Hence, the program could provide low-income family members with opportunities to communicate and talk about their problems.

The Native Network program also gives parents the opportunity to take part in social engagement and may also produce positive emotions, both of which have been found to have positive effects on parenting. In fact, "parents who experience frequent positive emotions and enjoy social engagement tend to be emotionally sensitive, responsive, and stimulating in their parenting" (FCSS, 2009a, p. 2).

The Native Network program also offers opportunities to enhance social networks and social support for families. It has been found that "strong and supportive interpersonal relationships… can help offset the negative consequences of low income, along with other developmental risks" (FCSS, 2009a, p. 4). Simply taking part in the program will involve individuals

in their community, for, as Pinnow (2009) notes, "through the process of community members identifying their own issues, having input into program creation and implementation and even participating in the evaluation, the Aboriginal program participants become the central actors (or at least increase) in the control of the social and political environments that impact their lives" (p.1). This program also has the advantage of being family based.

Little Dancing Buffalo and Native Network: Making a Difference

Both the Little Dancing Buffalo and Native Network programs clearly address two intended areas of investment. One of these areas is in culturally-based programs to support individual development and to help re-establish linkages to families and/or Aboriginal communities. The second is community engagement and development initiatives/programs that are culturally based and appropriate. These programs also cross over into a third area of investment, which is Aboriginal mentoring and role-modeling programs to support individual development.

Both programs are culturally based and thus of high interest to the participants. Therefore, they can be compared to Lafrance's Sturgeon Lake child welfare initiative in which "he engaged the participants in a community development (perhaps community empowerment) process as a means of involving them in an issue relevant to them" (Pinnow, 2009, p. 7). Furthermore,

> the research suggests that "increasing the numbers of Aboriginal community members with the skills and self-confidence to engage in community development is the first step in a process that will put everyone on a more equal footing to begin to work together" (Pinnow, p. 19).

Both the Little Dancing Buffalo and Native Network programs make extensive use of the five best/promising practices identified by Pinnow (2009), particularly the first three best/promising practices. These three practices involve

connecting the community's men; mentoring for and by community members; and using the oral tradition. There are also opportunities to draw upon the fourth and fifth best/promising practices, which involve examining reasons for isolation and addressing them and information provision compatible with Aboriginal values.

Both programs provide ample opportunities for men to connect with their community (Pinnow's first best practices recommendation) through the traditional male roles as mentors, musicians, craftsmen, storytellers, and spiritual leaders, although women will also be involved in these roles. As Pinnow (2009, p. 12) argues:

> *If the strength of a community is seen as inherent in the strength of its families, the well-being of men needs to be assured. Duran and Duran (1995) do an excellent job in analyzing how one of colonization's most detrimental impacts on the Aboriginal family structure has been the alienation of men from their families and their communities. Men's traditional roles of protector and provider of their families and communities were usurped by the European institutions and systems such as welfare, and their communities fragmented and destabilized by assimilative practices. It is not surprising that many Aboriginal men feel disconnected lost and dishonoured. Duran and Duran argue that the psyche of men have been especially damaged in the process of assimilation. As a result, some have taken a destruction path in their lives in which their human need for connection and nurturance has taken on destructive expression or been denied and suppressed.* (Krech, 2002)

The cultural elements of the Little Dancing Buffalo and Native Network programs are highly beneficial, since Pinnow (2009) states that a key principle is to "build a solid foundation in Aboriginal culture, language and spirituality through community development process" (p. 2). This principle is based on best practices

developed from Krech's work on the relationship between community development and mentoring opportunities for Aboriginal men: "the process of… undertaking and sharing in specific cultural activities can bond community members and in the process, promote healing. [Krech] recommends embedding these activities into specific programs and activities that he believes have seen success" (Pinnow, p. 12).

The Native Network program has the advantage of being family based, "which generally [is] seen as more culturally appropriate by ensuring that all family members are included, particularly men (Pinnow, 20009, p. 2). Involving men in community programming centred on cultural activities and involving them in the activities for the whole family, can act as a first step toward involving them in subsequent program developments such as father support groups and other Aboriginal fatherhood projects mentioned by Pinnow (2009, p. 13). Indeed, the mentorship roles involved in the programs could be said to model positive parenting practices, giving men an "indication of the importance of the father role or [helping] them believe in their own abilities to be good fathers" and giving other program participants an "opportunity to watch a positive father role model in a positive environment" (Pinnow, p. 13).

The Little Dancing Buffalo and Native Network programs also make use of mentoring as advocated in Pinnow's second best/promising practices recommendation. Both programs are also consistent with Pinnow's conclusion that mentoring should take place "from an Aboriginal perspective, seen as more organic and incorporating more culturally based practices and approaches" (p. 2).

Both the Little Dancing Buffalo and Native Network programs create mentoring relationships between adults and children. In fact, "[n]umerous resiliency studies have demonstrated that one key factor in a youth's life is a supportive, mentoring relationship with a person who is not a parent such as a volunteer from a volunteer development program" (FCSS, 2009b, p. 11). Research demonstrates:

that many mentoring programs are associated with a wide range of positive developmental outcomes in several areas, including (but not limited to) social skills, pro-social behaviour (helping others), and emotional well-being. In other words, in addition to addressing all children and youth's need for a supportive relationship with at least one supportive adult who is not a parent, mentorship programs can help young people to establish positive peer friendships. (FCSS, 2009b, p. 12).

Pinnow (2009) notes that mentoring "has long been seen as an effective approach for… positive development in youth" (p. 15), making it suitable for application in the Little Dancing Buffalo and Native Network programs. Even though "mentoring programs designed for Aboriginal youth and children are fairly rare," the Native tradition in which adults provide "friendship, guidance and support to children and youth outside of their own immediate families… was an established practice prior to European contact" (Pinnow, p. 15). It should be noted, however, that thorough evaluations of intergenerational programs have not yet been carried out (FCSS, 2009b, p. 12).

Elders will provide the mentoring in both the Little Dancing Buffalo and Native Network programs and will be working with groups (mainly of children). The mentoring that they deliver in these programs is consistent with the recommendations of researchers. Researchers recommend that mentoring present "the Indigenous worldview of education, which is more holistic rather than individualistic" and argue that group mentoring is more profitable in an informal setting that "is not only compatible with cultural traditions of learning but also will model positive relationships and interactions" (Pinnow, 2009, p. 15). The use of Aboriginal Elders as mentors is also in line with the research, which suggests that "Aboriginal mentors would be most beneficial to teach Aboriginal values and common experiences," thus providing mentoring that is in support of "community values and activities" (Pinnow, p. 16).

Elders mentoring youth is of critical significance in order to preserve the traditional culture, some of which has been lost in moving to new urban environments (Pinnow, 2009, p. 18). In fact, through this mentoring, elements of the culture are not lost with the passing of the Elders. "Children must be taught about their ancestors, their history, and their alliances through story, ceremony, and language" (Lafrance & Bastien, 2007, p. 120).

Nevertheless, children and youth can also, within both programs, mentor each other to some extent, since peers and friends are often identified as having the most influence on the behaviour of children and youth (Pinnow, p. 19). As Lafrance and Bastien (2007) report, one positive outcome of the Making Our Hearts Sing initiative in Alberta was that youth "are being asked to contribute to their community and to help other youth," even though "Elders are increasingly recognized as an important source of wisdom and experience" (p. 108).

In addition, mentoring occurs within a family context in the Native Network program, which is consistent with research findings that family should be "an essential partner in any mentoring program" (Pinnow, p. 15), since the family is viewed as the primary network in Native communities. Furthermore, the "gathering" that is involved in the Native Network program can help community members to think about how they can help one another and adopt mentorship roles with others: "[Krech] believes that such gatherings help community members focus on helping each other to begin the healing journey. He sees the proceedings of these gatherings and activities as an opportunity for individuals of all ages to be called upon to become mentors" (Pinnow, 2009, p. 13).

Storytelling and other cultural activities drawing on the wisdom and knowledge of the Elders can be part of "helping each member feel valued for the unique gifts they had," enabling the community "to look inwards to identify and use its own resources and strengths" (Pinnow, p. 8). Reflecting on the success of storytelling activities at Sturgeon Lake, Lafrance writes:

This phase of the journey aimed for empowerment through the sharing of stories in a safe, supportive environment that called forth the collective power and support of community members. The intent was to develop a community based 'wellness vision' through the sharing of personal stories recounting past experiences and their subsequent impact on individuals and their community… to promote healing of the community. (cited in Pinnow, 2009, p. 8)

In fact, storytelling activities were a crucial part of the highly successful appreciative inquiry approach used in the Alberta Making Our Hearts Sing (MOHS) initiative:

… storytelling is the primary data collection approach of Appreciative Inquiry, a practice that is congruent with the Aboriginal oral tradition. Storytelling has been conceptualized as a consciousness raising type of activity that allows people to relate to each other, develop greater self-awareness, break the silence, and contextualize their experiences from their own worldview (Abosolon & Willett, 2004). In summary, the Appreciate Inquiry approach provides a holistic and participatory approach that values multiple ways of knowing and working collaboratively from a strengths perspective toward a shared vision. (Lafrance & Bastien, 2007, pp. 114–115)

Although the Native Network program does not explicitly call for a discussion "examining reasons for isolation and addressing these" (Pinnow's fourth best/promising practice), the very experience of coming together with community members and interacting with them as part of the program will no doubt spur reflection and lead participants to think about their current and future level of community involvement. After all, the Native Network program includes a gathering as well as the components of family inclusiveness, community engagement, socializing, role modelling, and storytelling, all of which may allow possibilities for participants to air their thoughts on the empowerment of community involvement versus the powerlessness of isolation. "Gatherings revitalize traditional ways for strengthening the affinity of collective and family ties, affirming and utilizing knowledge building, decreasing external dependencies, developing indigenous leadership and practices, and creating new sources of knowledge for recovery" (Lafrance & Bastien, 2007, p. 120).

As in Winnipeg's Spence Neighbourhood community development program, it should be possible within both the Little Dancing Buffalo and Native Network programs, to gather information from the participants (for example, through program evaluation materials) on factors influencing their degree of involvement in the community and their view of community development (Pinnow, 2009, p. 17). Furthermore, the program participants will tend to informally discuss amongst themselves their own involvement in the community and its programs. It is important to discover "what aspects of community are important to [the] Aboriginal community" (Pinnow, p. 21).

By including spiritual elements and smudging in the Native Network project, this encourages the participants to reflect on their lives and the deeper significance of their lives. Similarly, the Little Dancing Buffalo project encourages spiritual practices through incorporating spiritual elements in Aboriginal ceremonies and, to some extent, in other program components as Aboriginal dance, cultural teachings, and Elder's oral teachings. Thus, both programs are consistent with the efforts of Aboriginal people "to renew and invigorate their own spirituality as a source of strength" (Lafrance & Bastien, 2007, p. 113).

Further, developing spirituality in youth and families can help create the desired outcome of increased social inclusion because "Aboriginal social work and traditional healing… are founded on a spiritual sense of interconnectedness" (Lafrance & Bastien, 2007, p. 114). Indeed, the Making Our Hearts Sing initiative identified "the importance of kinship and connection to each

other and a respectful approach to the planet" (Lafrance & Bastien, p. 117), both of which can be said to reflect "a consistent application of spirituality to all of life" (p. 116).

In the case of the Sturgeon Lake initiative, the spiritual vision of the future that the participants had in mind led them toward the outcome desired:

> *The community's vision of a safe place for children and, ultimately, a healthy community led them to initiate an important process of reflecting upon that experience to identify what contributed to and what mitigated against the achievement of their vision. The participants began with a vision of an improved and friendlier child welfare system. Their journey has led to a broader vision; one of child, family and community wellness; a vision that is informed by the stories of the people of Sturgeon Lake. As these stories were told and heard, healing began to occur and the people were increasingly empowered. As they became empowered, they were able to give more fully of themselves and to contribute to the development of health among their brothers and sisters in the community.* (Lafrance, 2003, p. 119)

The information provided by the programs is compatible with Aboriginal values because it is delivered to a significant extent by Elders and through such traditional mediums as storytelling. Thus, a strong point of the programs, from the point of view of the research, is their "cultural appropriateness" and "respect for Indigenous knowledge," both of which are mentioned by Pinnow (2009, p. 20) as important factors in the provision of information. Including Aboriginal language within the Little Dancing Buffalo program is also of significance because Pinnow identifies that, in terms of knowledge exchange in Native communities, the capacity "to communicate in Aboriginal dialects is a tremendous asset" (p. 20). Participants in the Making Our Hearts Sing initiative further identified "the importance of language as a source of renewed culture, [and] knowledge of history and tradition as an essential

element of identity" (Lafrance & Bastien, 2007, p. 117). Indeed, "language guides the epistemology and pedagogical practices of the Tribe; it is instrumental in creating knowledge and creating reality" (Lafrance & Bastien, p. 119).

There is also the possibility that these programs could lead to further programs, as have occurred in other cities, in which cultural teachings are recorded or videotaped for posterity or in which stories or information gathered could be made available to the community through electronic means such as the Internet (Pinnow, 2009, p. 20). Also, both programs will provide an opportunity for social services personnel to familiarize themselves with the language and terminology used by the program participants and vice versa. In this way, those carrying out the program will, over time, gain "information on Aboriginal perspectives on the meaning and/or use of various terms" (Pinnow, 2009, p. 4), thus allowing for the necessary adjustments over time so as to help "establish information provision compatible with Aboriginal values" (Pinnow's fifth best practice recommendation). As Lafrance and Bastien (2007) state:

> *As we reflect upon the seemingly inexorable flow of Aboriginal children into non-Aboriginal care, it is imperative to reflect upon our professional beliefs and assumptions in the delivery of child welfare services. It seems evident that current services and programmatic paradigms exist in direct opposition to traditional Aboriginal ways of thinking…. It seems timely to reflect upon the foundations of such programs as Aboriginal people seek return to traditional worldviews and values to replace what they view as unworkable program models that only worsen their current situation.* (p. 106)

Pinnow points out that some terminology used in the creation and implementation of programs "may have very different meanings from an Aboriginal perspective" (p. 5). For example, Pinnow reports that Blackstock, a child and family services expert from the Gitxsan Nation, conceptualized her work not in terms of social

inclusion but in terms of reconciliation and social justice (p. 5). By having Elders involved in delivery of the programs, participants may thus see any social issues in their own terms and from their own perspective. For example, they may see social welfare issues as resulting from structural violence as opposed to deficiencies on their part in terms of community participation. "Many are concerned that the child welfare experience may inadvertently parallel the colonial experience of residential schools and may have similar long-term negative ramifications for Aboriginal communities" (Lafrance & Bastien, 2007, p. 115).

Providing information in a way that is compatible with Aboriginal values and coming to a greater understanding of the Aboriginal worldview will ultimately enable child welfare providers to develop better programs that reflect Aboriginal needs:

> *We are finding that to support Aboriginal self-determination in the development of policies and practices that are in keeping with Aboriginal traditions and beliefs calls for an uncommon degree of humility and a high degree of receptivity to different ways of thinking…. For those who wish to support community efforts perhaps the answer lies in finally accepting the wisdom of Aboriginal colleagues and elders as our guides in this journey.* (Lafrance & Bastien, 2007, pp. 111–112)

The Little Dancing Buffalo and Native Network programs also offer child welfare providers the opportunity to "develop a framework of analysis that provides an understanding of the history and current reality of Aboriginal people and culture," thus facilitating "Aboriginal ownership and leadership in child welfare" (Lafrance & Bastien, 2007, p. 116).

Conclusion

Through its new social sustainability framework, FCSS is able to fund Aboriginal programs that have a preventive and comprehensive impact on the community and sustainability for FCSS. By using the framework to maximize the impact of FCSS's investments in the community, programs are able to create positive changes for Aboriginal people. These programs help Aboriginal people with their transitions to urban life, providing support, a sense of belonging, and a community that appreciates Aboriginal traditions and values. Programs like Little Dancing Buffalo and the Native Network incorporate FCSS's principles and embrace Aboriginal culture.

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Wanted: Moral Courage in Canadian Child Welfare

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Introduction

Child welfare stifles change and innovation in a system that desperately needs it by promoting conformity and awarding subordination to bad ideas (Blackstock, 2009). If neglect means not doing the right thing for children even when you know better and can do better, and have the resources to do it, then too often child protection neglects First Nations children and their families. For over a decade leading studies such as the Canadian Incidence Study on Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS) have suggested that culturally based services targeted at poverty, poor housing and substance misuse would reduce the over-representation of First Nations children in child welfare care (Trocmé, Fallon, MacLaurin, Daciuk, Felstiner, Black, Tonmyr, Blackstock, Barter, Turcotte, 2006; Trocmé, MacLaurin, Fallon, Knoke, Pitman & McCormack, 2006). Systemic changes to address these factors have been negligible (Blackstock, 2011). The problem for First Nations families is further aggravated by longstanding inequities in Federal

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Abstract

Child welfare stifles change and innovation in a system that desperately needs it by promoting conformity and awarding subordination to bad ideas (Blackstock, 2009). If neglect means not doing the right thing for children even when you know better and can do better, and have the resources to do it, then too often child protection neglects First Nations children and their families. This essay explores whether emancipating moral courage in child protection is the key to ensuring good research translates into real benefits for First Nations families. This paper begins with a description of moral courage in child protection across the decades before drawing on my own experiences with moral courage in the child welfare field. It concludes with stories of how moral cowardice diminishes children and how moral courage uplifts them. Implications for research, policy and practice are discussed.

Key words: First Nations children, youth, families; child welfare; child protection; moral courage; implications for research, policy and practice.

Government funding for child welfare services on reserves (McDonald & Ladd, 2000; Auditor General of Canada, 2008; Standing Committee on Public Accounts, 2009; Auditor General of Canada, 2011). First Nations child and family service agencies broadly acknowledge the importance of these factors, but inequities in federal government funding regimes fetter the development of holistic services to deal with the problems (Auditor General of Canada, 2008; Blackstock, 2011). While the numbers of First Nations children in child welfare care continues to grow, provincial / territorial and federal governments point fingers at each other for a failure to provide relevant, culturally based and equitable services while the children and their families suffer (Auditor General of Canada, 2008; Blackstock, 2011). It has gone on for decades and it needs to stop – but how?

Some suggest that improved knowledge translation strategies are required. While I agree that making research accessible and relevant to child protection policy makers and practitioners is important, it is not enough. In the case of the CIS, the findings are very accessible, broadly known and yet child welfare has done little to re-tool the system to address the factors undermining child safety and wellbeing. For example, very few child protection workers get any serious training on poverty reduction or substance misuse assessment and response even though the CIS has repeatedly found that these are key factors related to the over-representation of First Nations children. This paper explores whether emancipating moral courage in child welfare is the key to ensuring good research and ethical standards translates into real benefits for First Nations families. It begins with a description of moral courage in child protection across the decades before drawing on my own experiences with moral courage in the child welfare field. The paper concludes with stories of how moral cowardice diminishes children and how moral courage uplifts them. Implications for research, policy and practice are discussed.

What is Moral Courage?

Moral courage is the ability to stand up for the "right thing", or do the "right thing" when some negative repercussion for the right-doer is anticipated (Kidder, 2003). Moral courage happens in all aspects of social work life. It is needed to blow the whistle on longstanding rights violations perpetrated by powerful institutions and individuals. It is needed when pressing for better services for clients requires rocking the boat with colleagues or the employer. It involves what I call "getting into trouble for doing the right thing" and what Bird and Waters (1989) call "courageous conversations." Courageous conversations involve the public expression of personal or professional principles and/or values in situations where such expression is likely to be challenged. This is often a difficult step. People are often willing to mull over courage in the privacy of their own thoughts or in confidential conversations but giving public voice to morally courageous stances often makes them more

real, irrevocable and risky (Bird & Waters, 1989). The degree of moral courage required increases as the risks for the right-doer become more personal and intense (Bauman 1989; Kidder, 2003). Kidder (2003) argues that people are more apt to be morally courageous when personal benefit is on offer than to stand up for the rights of strangers. Leading philosophers such as Joseph Needleman (2007) argue that people are by nature self–interested and only become altruistic through life-long practice of moral coherence and courage.

Determining right versus wrong is a question preoccupying leading philosophers through the ages (Campbell & Moyers, 1991; Needleman, 2007). It invokes questions of values, of whose good is being promoted and at what expense to others. For the purposes of this paper, "the moral right" is based on multiple sources of good evidence, activation of social work values, communal interests, and a weighing of the implications beyond the beneficiaries. On a practical level, it is measured by whether social work does the right thing for people beyond close circles of self-interest and relationships when it knows better and can do better. It is one thing to stand up for yourself or for those you love, but it takes an uncommon level of courage to stand up for people you do not know and that is exactly the type of moral courage that child welfare needs in abundance. A caution is necessary here before I begin enthusiastically suggesting that child welfare workers and others begin challenging the system. A warning label if you like. Standing up can be misguided if based on self-interest, ambition, unresolved personal issues, and weak research. These same perils are associated with not speaking up and taking action when it is clearly necessary but for some reason it rarely invokes the same moral deliberation that taking action does (Needleman, 2007). In many settings it seems that doing nothing or doing just a little to relieve the social worker's moral burden, without truly addressing the situation is an accepted practice reinforced by bureaucratic systems that reward conformity (Milloy, 2005; Blackstock, 2009). I believe that we should not give a moral hall pass to the social work by-stander who allows injustice to exist or

embolden in silence (Bauman, 1989; Campbell & Moyers, 1991; Needleman, 2007; Blackstock, 2009; Blackstock, 2011).

Moral courage invokes important discussions about what values guide morally courageous stances and how social workers can ensure they are not morally acting in value oppressing ways. There is no doubt that the expression of values is culturally laden, however, Kidder (2003) argues that five universal human values provide a common foundation for expressions of moral courage. The universal values are: honesty, respect, responsibility, fairness and compassion. Courage is not a value on its own but rather an activating agent for the universal values (Kidder, 2003). I believe this model is highly consistent with First Nations traditional values and worldviews. The universal values are also embedded in Canadian social work codes of ethics (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005) meaning that morally courageous social work can be morally coherent with the universal values whilst respecting diverse cultural manifestations.

Child welfare requires an uncommon level of moral courage. To begin with, child welfare bureaucracies are, by nature, structured for conformity not innovation. Standing up against the child welfare bureaucracy, even for the right thing, can mean risking your job (Bauman, 1989; Milloy, 2005; Blackstock, 2009). Second, the risks arising from conformity are usually borne by clients rather than workers or child welfare bureaucrats suggesting that there is little personal harm for employees and managers associated with not rocking the boat (Milloy, 2005). Thirdly, in the case of First Nations child welfare on reserve, multiple government bureaucracies may need to be challenged with multiple consequences such as agency funding cuts, increased regulation or blacklisting (Blackstock, 2011). Fourth, child death reviews and critical incidence continue to drive policy and practice despite impressive evidence that these cases are atypical and non-representative of the vast majority of families served by child welfare (Trocmé, MacLaurin, Fallon, Daciuk, Billingsley, Tourigny, Mayer, Wright, Barter, Burford, Hornick, Sullivan, & McKenzie, 2001; Trocmé, MacLaurin, Fallon,

Knoke, Pitman, & McCormack, 2006). The tragic nature of child deaths and the lack of knowledge among child death review report authors about the atypical nature of these cases often results in a misapplication of recommendations across the entire system. Moreover, the high public profile of child death reviews creates fertile ground for fear based decision-making, and thus moral inertia throughout the child welfare system (Blackstock, in press).

Despite these barriers, I have routinely seen courageous line workers and supervisors bend the rules to do the right thing for children and then hope no one in management finds out. Policy making in child welfare is largely a top down affair. I was a line child protection worker for over a decade in a provincial child welfare system and I cannot recall a single time when policy wonks or management asked me, or any of my colleagues, what policies we thought should be changed or developed. Today, my informal straw polls of child protection workers in Canada and abroad suggest that little has changed. Research on the incidence of child protection policy rule breaking and the factors contributing to it should be investigated – not as an enforcement measure but rather to make alive the innovations workers are doing to improve the lives of children and families despite the system.

To be fair to the child protection bureaucracy, I was "consulted" on two Ministry child protection policies when I was a child protection worker but these were already pretty much decided on. One of my earliest experiences with child welfare policy consultation came shortly after I was hired. A person in a business suit that I never saw around the office before came in and said that after careful review the Ministry had decided that future hires needed to have a Bachelor of Social Work degree. Being naive enough to believe that child welfare policy must be based on evidence – I asked what evidence supported the idea that people with Bachelor in Social Work degrees were more effective child protection workers than those of us who had other types of degrees. The man in the suit became defensive. He suggested I would understand when I got older and became more experienced. He never answered my question and the requirement

was imposed anyway. We never saw him again. Twenty-five years and two graduate degrees later I am still waiting for definitive evidence that people with Bachelor of Social Work degrees make better child protection workers.

The next consultation happened years later. The Ministry was over-hauling the child welfare act. A group of policy managers arrived and gave a spiel on the proposed changes to approximately 100 child protection workers in the room and provided less than 30 minutes for us to "provide feedback." Then they showed us the completed copy of the report – already in print. Not surprisingly, my colleagues and I had little confidence that the few ideas we were able to share would be seriously considered. My conversations with child protection workers coupled with my observations of child welfare policy development today suggests that child protection workers are rarely looked to as a primary idea source for policy change.

This top down structure in child welfare suggests that one of the important moral courageous steps is for policy-making to include line workers, children and families and other stakeholders.

There is no meaningful discussion on moral courage at different levels of child welfare practice but there are important historical examples that serve as important examples of the importance of moral courage and should inspire research on the role of moral courage in social work today.

Moral Courage: Is it important for the child welfare system to do better?

In 1907, a doctor said what child protection social workers did not. First Nations children in residential schools were dying from maltreatment and preventable causes of disease. Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce went public with the shocking revelation that over a third of children placed in government funded and church operated residential schools were dying there. Bryce said, "medical science knows just what to do" to prevent the children from dying and yet Canada failed to implement the reforms necessary to

save countless lives (Bryce, 1922; Milloy, 1999). Bryce stepped up his advocacy reaching out to leading human rights lawyers such as S.H. Blake who famously said: "in that Canada fails to obviate the preventable causes of death, it brings itself into unpleasant nearness to manslaughter" (Milloy, 1999 p. 77). Bryce spent his entire life advocating with the Canadian Government to stop the needless deaths of First Nations children but Canada continued its wayward policies and children died. Bryce, however, did not fail. He succeeded in acting with moral and professional coherence supported by good evidence. He never gave up despite Canada's efforts to dismiss or discredit him or his concerns. He is a true Canadian hero who acted with moral coherence and yet the Canadian public and many social workers know little of him and thus do not have a chance to learn from his example.

We keep repeating the same mistakes. Sixty years after Bryce raised the alarm about government policies toward First Nations children not being evidence based or morally just, social workers were responsible for placing as many as 80 percent of all children in residential schools as child welfare placements (Caldwell, 1967). There was no meaningful activism from child protection to address the ongoing abuse and mistreatment (Caldwell, 1967; Milloy, 1999). Eighty years later, Justice Edwin Kimmelman (1985) said that the en mass removals of Aboriginal children by the child welfare system and their placement in non-Aboriginal homes in the 1960's and 1970's amounted to cultural genocide. Although social workers in Canada widely admonish this poor practice, the real question is what have we learned and do we have the moral fortitude to put those lessons learned into practice?

One hundred and four years after Bryce first raised the alarm, there are more First Nations children in child welfare today than at any time in history with placement rates 6-8 times higher than for non-Aboriginal children (Auditor General of Canada, 2008). Data collected in 1998 by the Canadian Incidence Study on Reported Child Abuse and Neglect [CIS] (Trocmé, MacLaurin, Fallon, Daciuk, Billingsley, Tourigny, Mayer, Wright, Barter, Burford, Hornick, Sullivan, & McKenzie, 2001) found that poverty, poor

housing and substance misuse substantially accounted for the over-representation of First Nations children in child welfare. Results were later replicated in the 2003 cycle of the CIS (Trocmé, MacLaurin, Fallon, Knoke, Pitman, & McCormack, 2006). In 2000, the Canadian Government and the Assembly of First Nations commissioned a national study. This study confirmed the 1998 CIS findings and found that Canada was providing about 22 percent less funding for First Nations child welfare on reserves than the provinces provided to all other Canadians (McDonald & Ladd, 2000). This under funding threatened the basic operation of First Nations child welfare agencies and fettered their ability to address the factors driving the over-representation in culturally based ways (McDonald & Ladd, 2000). The need to redress the Federal Government funding inequities in on reserve child welfare were later confirmed in a detailed expert report commissioned by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and the Assembly of First Nations in 2005 (Loxley, De Riviere, Prakash, Blackstock, Wien, & Thomas Prokop, 2005) and then again by the Auditor General of Canada (2008, 2011).

Despite this evidence, child welfare authorities across Canada bemoan the growing over-representation of First Nations children in care whilst continuing to view child welfare funding inequities, poverty, poor housing and substance misuse as tangential concerns versus the central work of child welfare. Even the most modest reforms such as providing increased training to social workers on poverty and substance misuse have largely been ignored (Blackstock, 2011).

Research is necessary to inform good public policy especially with regard to children but can also be used as an excuse to put off acting on what we know. Policy makers too often say more research is needed even when there is good evidence to take significant steps. These policy makers often use phrase such as the "situations is complex" to justify inaction even in when immediate action is needed to remediate rights violations for First Nations children. Studies pile up and nothing really changes for kids. Thinking back to Kidder's (2003) universal values, research is a truth-telling mission and

thus a good proxy for the value of honesty but honesty on its own has no effect unless activated by moral courage. Just as in Bryce's time, child protection often knows "what to do" but does not have the moral courage to do it.

I am proud of the First Nations child welfare agencies doing grass roots driven work that uplifts families and children despite the constraints imposed by federal and provincial governments. I am also encouraged to see some provincial governments working with First Nations to innovate and create morally courageous approaches to child welfare such as the Touchstones of Hope program in Northern British Columbia (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2011). Morally courageous policy environments in child protection bureaucracies and schools of social work would help these positive examples become the rule instead of the exception.

Moral courage requires an individual to understand their moral values and, through practice and reflection. A review of the literature revealed no studies on moral courage in child protection so I share my own personal experience to show how moral courage has become foundational to my social work practice.

Moral Courage in Child Protection: On a Personal Note

My own experience suggests that moral courage in child welfare can be a messy and dangerous undertaking. I have won many national and international awards but the one that I am now most proud of, and had the greatest influence on me, is the letter of insubordination I received when I was a young child protection worker.

I was just 21 when I was hired as a child protection worker. Too young to be doing a job where life experience was more valuable than what I learned in university and too young to know it. I still have the posting for this child protection job. It says "[S]ocial Work, You can make a difference" and reading it now I can see conformity woven into the text. Phrases like "interpreting Ministry policy" or "within Ministry policy" suggest that the employer has already deemed policy as benevolent and

good – undeserving of questioning by those who implement it (Ministry of Social Services and Housing, 1986). Yet, the 21-year-old version of me read the posting and thought the government wanted young hard working leaders. That is what I wanted the posting to say, but in truth the words "young "and "leadership" appeared nowhere in the text.

I went to child protection training where the safety and well being of children were identified as primary considerations in child welfare practice. I believed it. I was too young and inexperienced to understand that safety and well being of the institution, and in some cases the political figures that headed it, sometimes usurped the safety and well-being of the children. What continues to amaze me is how easy it is for people to clearly act in self-interest or institutional interests and reframe that as not betraying the interests of the child and family. People would blame "the system" say we need to do "what is possible" which was often code for what was "politically possible", make trade-offs, encourage "patience" when it is not warranted, or simply ignore the facts. The ability of good people to rationalize immoral behavior is just as Bauman (1989) suggests – possible even in the most egregious moral situations. It is scary when immoral behavior becomes possible for everyone and especially scary for those working in helping fields. It lies in contradiction to social work professional identifications as the good guys (Blackstock, 2009). There should be high degrees of systemic moral vigilance in helping professions but in my experience there rarely is. Social workers lose sleep over a family but the system itself usually rests pretty easily. Child welfare organizations seem more comfortable proclaiming morality and acting as if everything they do is fundamentally benevolent than to be alive to the possibility that their best intentions can "pave the way to hell."

The pressure to conform was driven from the top, strengthened by middle management and was most acutely felt by those of us at the bottom of the bureaucracy and pay scale who had the most direct contact with clients. The pressure to conform intensified when management lacked confidence and/or came under pressure from media or political forces particularly when a child died or there was a critical incident reported in the press. Fear was a key tool in the bureaucratic arsenal to keep questioning employees in line. I still remember middle managers saying that if we stepped out of line there would be at least ten other people happy to get our jobs. I was afraid for a while. I wanted to do well for myself and for my family but then I realized something. No one ever got fired, prospective employees were not lined up outside our door and I had no ambition to rise through the ranks. I, therefore, decided to do my work based on values, consultation with respected colleagues and community members and as much common sense as I could muster.

For years, I was largely ignored at the bottom of the bureaucracy until one day I did something that got me noticed. I refused a direct order by middle management to investigate a child protection complaint filed by a politically powerful member of the community on a young family. I knew all too well how difficult child protection investigations are for families and in my view, and that of my supervisor and colleagues, there was no reason to investigate. The decision to investigate is not a decision to be taken lightly or for political reasons. Middle management quickly issued letters of reprimand for insubordination to my supervisor and I. We posted these letters on the staff bulletin board instead of keeping it secret. The posting on the bulletin board made management even more uncomfortable because we were prepared to be publically accountable for our decision. On second thought, maybe management was even more worried that insubordination could be contagious. Long story short – the letter of reprimand for insubordination was over-turned after the union intervened and as far as I know the family was never subjected to the unnecessary child protection investigation.

As I write this incident, I sound much more courageous and determined than I actually felt at the time. When I decided to say "no" to management I knew the consequences could include being fired or hitting the glass ceiling. I was worried about the former as I had rent to pay but not the latter as I had already figured out that I was not cut out for the conformity demanded in bureaucratic child welfare organizations. I was

too much of a troublemaker to rise through the ranks. Even though I was willing to take the risk of saying "no" for what I believed to be good reasons, it did not make enduring the risk an enjoyable experience nor was I always as eloquent as I would have liked to have been in making my protest. Still, I am glad I took this stand on values. It was the one of the most emancipating experiences of my life. Bureaucracies rely on holding something you value in order to get people to conform (Bauman, 1989). In my case, they used words like "loyalty," while suggesting that superiors knew best and when that failed to get me to conform they resorted to the tried and true threat of "we pay your paycheck." When I allowed my values to usurp these concerns, I set myself free.

Thankfully, I had historical and contemporary role models like P.H. Bryce, my mom, Hennie Kerstiens, Joan Glode of Mik'maw Family and Children's Services and children like Shannen Koostachin and Jordan River Anderson who mentored me on moral courage. Their examples gave me the fortitude to tackle the worry that I may not have the strength to try to live a morally courageous life. The struggle to live in morally courageous ways can be depleting and I sometimes worried that the energy needed to "do right" had an expiration date. I sometimes tire of that tightness in my stomach, the unproductive rambling thoughts before sleep and that tug between "smoothing things over" and doing the right thing. Others would tell me that "smoothing things over" or compromising so the wrongdoer "saves face" was the right thing to do – I always found that impossible when it meant a compromise of fundamental values. My mentors 'guidance was particularly useful at these times. They would always say do what you know in your heart is the right thing to do.

These moral tests, big and small, were moral courage practice sessions that eventually set the stage for filing a human rights complaint, in 2007, against Canada alleging racial discrimination against First Nations children by under-funding child welfare on reserves (Blackstock, 2011). There is significant evidence of the funding inequity and its connection with the rising numbers of First Nations children in child welfare

care (Auditor General of Canada, 2008; Standing Committee on Public Accounts, 2009, Blackstock, 2011). Within weeks of filing the human rights case, the Canadian government began its efforts to derail the case using legal technicalities in an apparent effort to avoid a hearing on the merits. There were also personal and professional implications to filing this case. As one of the complainants, my organization no longer gets any funding from the federal government. There is no direct evidence to suggest the filing of the case is linked to the funding cuts but it is worth remarking that we are, to my knowledge, the only national Aboriginal organization to receive no money from the federal government. Canada has assigned the same lawyers who fought against residential school survivors to fight this landmark case testing whether Canada can be held accountable for discrimination arising from its policies and funding regimes (Blackstock, 2011). When I testified under oath during one of Canada's many attempts to dismiss the case on legal technicalities, Canada's lawyer asked me if I believed in God and whether I was in child welfare care as a child (Blackstock, 2011). Canada told First Nations leaders that government officials would not meet with them if I attended the meeting. Access to information documents suggest that the Government of Canada monitors postings on my personal Facebook page, has inexplicably pulled information on my family and has spent thousands of dollars sending government employees to report on my presentations and meetings (INAC, 2010; Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, 2011; CBC, 2011). The Government of Canada is undertaking an internal investigation of the matter. While I am pleased to see the investigation, I would prefer a more independent review process particularly as the person charged with the investigation is copied on the documents in question. Although these activities are deeply unsettling, they are not enough to dissuade me from speaking out for the children. I will not give up.

The pressure to conform and let the Canadian Government continue its inequitable policies for First Nations children is immense but instead of feeling weighted, I feel free. It is easier I have learned to live with moral courage than it

is to live with fear. I am also emboldened by the outpouring of public support. I believe that publicity is an effective inoculation to poor government policy and behavior. The idea of inviting the public to watch Canada's policy and behavior is what inspired the "I am a witness" campaign for the human rights case on child welfare. The "I am a witness" campaign invites Canadians to follow the legal case on a resource rich website that posts all legal documents, including testimony, for everyone to read. Instead of requiring witnesses to take one side of the case or another, people are invited to use their own good judgment to decide if Canada is treating First Nations fairly. Over 8600 Canadians and organizations have responded making the First Nations child welfare tribunal the most formally watched legal proceeding in Canadian history (Blackstock, 2011). Oppression, I have learned, does not like a witness.

In my mind, there is a direct developmental line between my letter of insubordination and the ability to withstand the significant pressures that the Canadian Government is employing to quash the human rights complaint. The letter of reprimand was a practice session for the main challenge currently before me. Despite what I view as unbecoming conduct by the Canadian government and some government officials, I am not afraid. I know their power – it is just their power does not reach to the core of what I truly value. I consciously try to live by values and judge the quality of my life by my ability to do so. I have come to understand that the easy wrong is not the stuff of a satisfying life. The easy wrong stifles personhood, it strips us of who we are, it cages. Living by values liberates. Whatever comes next, I now feel ready – not arrogant and not unafraid – just ready to accept the challenge.

A critical reader is now asking whether or not my experience is typical of those in child welfare. It is a legitimate question requiring further research. Such research would help us better understand if moral courage is a useful lens for understanding why adults sometimes fail to protect children even when they have the knowledge and resources to do so.

Moral Cowardice Diminishes; Moral Courage Uplifts

A sexual abuse cover-up scandal has just broken at Pennsylvania State University (Penn. State). A popular assistant football coach has been indicted for sexually abusing young boys in university football facilities for over a decade (Daily, 2011). Although evidence is still emerging, it seems clear that many adults in the organization knew the sexual abuse was happening and failed to take meaningful measures to intervene. The University Board of Directors has now fired many of the senior administrators for failing to protect the children. While most people are concerned with the wellbeing of the young boys who were victimized, a sizeable number are trying to protect the rights of those who through inaction or inadequate action allowed the abuse to continue. Arguably, the most morally courageous in this case were the children who had the strength to report their abuse by a very powerful community member. It is the adults in this case, both those who did not protect the children when they knew of the abuse and those who rose to defend them, who embody moral cowardice (Daily, 2011). There is an important question as to whether the moral cowardice of adults and systems involved in this case are unique or are they characteristic of what many other adults would do in similar situations? Further research is needed to properly answer this question. However, other cases of child abuse cover-ups in residential schools, churches and military operations seem to indicate that it is possible that adults are more likely to act with moral cowardice than with courage when it comes to protecting children.

Moral cowardice and courage happens in many settings where the interests of children and adults interface. The Pennsylvania State University example shows how moral cowardice can occur in settings where physical courage is lauded. Moral cowardice can also infuse organizations that prioritize child rights and laud morality and justice such as social work organizations and child welfare. For example, we need to critically reflect on whether moral courage/ cowardice helps us better understand why child

welfare systems are not meaningfully changing their policy and practice when good evidence suggests addressing poverty, poor housing and substance misuse could substantially improve outcomes for children. Moral cowardice may also be at the root of the Federal Government's ongoing discriminatory policies and funding regimes affecting First Nations children and their families.

First Nations Elders acting on the basis of traditional values teach by role modeling (Blackstock, 2008). They act in ways that link values with behavior creating integrity. Dr. Laura Markham (2011) suggests that parents have a direct impact on the development of moral courage of their children not by what they say but rather by acting in morally courageous ways themselves. Markham (2011) says that parents can role model moral courage in every day events such as letting the cash register clerk know that they gave you too much change and acknowledging their own mistakes and taking action to correct them. I think this should be true of child welfare too. If social workers want parents to act in morally courageous ways then we need to be good role models.

There are also examples where the moral courage of children is instructive. For example, five year old Jordan River Anderson died after having spent two and a half years unnecessarily in hospital because provincial and federal governments could not agree on who should pay for the at-home services for this First Nations boy. If he were non-Aboriginal, he would have gone home when doctors were ready to discharge him just after his second birthday. Instead of suing the governments, his parents simply asked that this not happen to another child. Jordan's Principle is a child first principle to resolving jurisdictional disputes that fetter First Nations children from getting the same quality and quantity of government services as all other children (MacDonald & Attaran, 2007). In December of 2007, the Canadian House of Commons unanimously passed a private members motion in support of Jordan's Principle, yet four years later the Federal Governments has failed to develop systemic procedures to identify and respond to, Jordan's Principle cases. No

province or territory has fully implemented it either, meaning many First Nations children are denied government services, or provided the service at a lesser quantity or quality, than is available to all other children. Advocates continue to press government to fully honor Jordan's Principle and properly implement it to ensure non-discrimination in public service access for First Nation children (Blackstock, 2011). With over 5300 supporters including the Assembly of First Nations, Canadian Medical Association, Canadian Teachers Federation, Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions and UNICEF, Jordan's Principle is now one of the most broadly supported children's policies in Canadian history (Blackstock, 2011).

Thirteen year old Shannen Koostachin of Attawapiskat First Nation spoke truth to power when she told the Canadian Government that she did not believe them when they said they had no money to build a new school to replace the broken down portables sitting next to a toxic waste dump that passed for a "school" in her community. She could not rationalize the fact that all First Nations children get less funding for education because of their race. She did not make it comfortable or polite for others to rationalize it either (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2011). She was scared but she was determined to live in the way her parents raised her – pledging allegiance to the 7 grandfather teachings and the Creator. She did not give up when the Minister of Indian Affairs told her she would not get a new school. Shannen said that the activism she and the other children had undertaken is "just the beginning." Using You Tube and Facebook, Shannen asked children across Canada to join what was then called the "Attawapiskat School Campaign." Letters from thousands of children, young people and supporting adults arrived in Canada's mailbox demanding safe and comfy schools and equitable education. Shannen sadly passed away at the age of 15 before seeing her dream of proper schools and equitable education for all First Nations children realized. Her spirit has inspired thousands of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children to get the

Canadian Government to do the hard right (own up to the discrimination and put an end to it) versus the easy wrong (looking the other way or minimizing the problem). The Shannen's Dream campaign, named in her memory, embodies her moral strength and is supported by thousands of children and adult allies. This campaign involves children writing letters to the Prime Minister and other political officials demanding culturally based equity in First Nations education. First Nations and other children have written hundreds of letters, raised awareness about Shannen's Dream in their schools and communities and marched onto Parliament Hill with Shannen's Dream signs in hand. In 2011, First Nations children fulfilled a promise that Shannen made to the Canadian Government by writing a report to the United Nations called *Our Dreams Matter Too* (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2011). The children who wrote this report ask the United Nations to send a representative to speak with children across Canada about the importance of ensuring all First Nations children have equitable and culturally based education and other services (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2011). Shannen's Dream is currently supported by over 6000 caring Canadians and the movement continues to grow.

Jordan, Shannen, their families, communities and the thousands of children they have inspired show how moral courage liberates and uplifts while moral cowardice diminishes.

Conclusion

Looking back on my personal experiences and the literature, a multi-level research and critical reflection approach is needed to explore the role of moral courage in social work and more specifically in child welfare work. Research is needed to identify moral courage incidence rates in social work and the personal and organization factors contributing to it. Impacts of moral courage for the right doers, clients and child welfare organizations and systems also require further research. Rule breaking in

child protection needs to be critically analyzed to determine whether it is the breaking of the rule or the rule itself that is unjust. Differentiating between just and unjust policy and rules must be informed by good evidence, the universal values advanced by Kidder (2003), policy results and meaningful consultation with those involved in, and affected by, social work interventions.

As social workers we need to explore our own values and the alignment of those values with the universal moral values that Kidder (2003) identifies. Schools of social work and social work professional organizations need to reflect on courage as an activation tool for social work codes of ethics. Efforts must be made to reward morally courageous social work in research, policy and practice. Moral courage is not an endowment rather it is something requiring life-long dialogue, learning and practice.

The consequences of failing to center moral courage in social work discussions and practice as well as among community members involved with the safety and wellbeing of children need to be explored. The systemic nature of our failure to do better when we know better and can do better demands nothing less.

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BOOK REVIEW: Dubinsky, K. (2010). Babies without Borders: Adoption and Migration Across the Americas. Toronto: University of Toronto Press

Reviewed by Ferzana Chaze[a]

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In *Babies without Borders: Adoption and Migration across the Americas*, historian Karen Dubinsky uses archival data to weave together a narrative that complicates common understandings of international and interracial adoption as either "imperialist kidnap" of children from vulnerable, poor or hapless parents, or humanitarian efforts at "rescue" of innocent children for the sake of their survival, development or spiritual salvation. By sharing her own experiences of adopting a child from Guatemala, she demonstrates how popular discourses of rescue and kidnap do not adequately describe the lived experiences of those involved. Her book discusses the manner in which the bodies of children become conduits through which a society's fears operate and the manner in which children become emblems of the nation. Adopted children become symbols on the basis of which nations and its citizens are seen to be fighting communism, imperialism, racism or lack of social progress. The book explores history through the representation of three sets of symbolic children— the "National Baby" (Cuban children during the cold war), the "Hybrid Baby" (Interracial adoptions in Canada)

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and the "Missing Baby" (transnational adoption of children from Guatemala).

Of interest to the readers of this journal is the paradox that Dubinsky highlights between interracial adoptions of two sets of "Hybrid babies"—Black and Aboriginal children in Canada adopted by white middle class families in the 1950s-60s. She bases her analysis on adoption case records of such children from agencies in Montreal and Winnipeg respectively. Her book informs us that in the 1950's a group in Montreal began to push interracial adoptions as a symbol of Canada's racial liberalism. The adoption of hundreds of Black babies by White families that followed this advocacy effort led to a movement by which Canada began to be recognised internationally as being on the forefront of progressive interracial adoption, reinforcing commonly held notions within and outside the nation that Canada was a land of racial tolerance and civil liberty, and thus very distinct from the its Southern neighbour. Within Canada itself, these adoptions challenged previously held notions about the family and of the racial identity of children as distinct from that of its parents. Adoption of Black children by White families in Montreal came to be recognised as signifying a progressive attempt of the adoptive parents at racial integration. These Hybrid Babies became "symbolic of hope, optimism and good" (p. 66). Dubinsky contrasts the adoption of these Hybrid children with that of another group of transracially adopted children in Canada— Aboriginal children adopted into

White families during the infamous "60's scoop." The adoption of these children has been equated with colonialism, cultural assimilation and even genocide. Dubinsky questions how and why the transracial adoptions of the two groups of Hybrid babies got such diverse reactions. She attempts to unravel possible reasons for this paradox and suggests that there could be number of explanations for the differences between the two adoption scenarios, including, the number of children placed into adoption in case of each group; the orientation and motives of the adoptive families; and, the manner in which race and racial hierarchies were understood and negotiated in the cases of the black and Aboriginal adoptees.

Dubinsky's central thesis is that that the use of grand narratives of kidnap and rescue are not useful, they allow for some voices to be heard while erasing other valid ones. Her book provides strong arguments in support of this thesis, though less persuasively in the telling of the Aboriginal children's story. Here, her attempts to complicate the kidnap narrative (commonly voiced while recounting the adoptions associated with the 60's scoop) by discussing the socio-economic factors that forced children into the adoption system, are not as effective in light of the historic repercussions faced by the Aboriginal community till this day. Many of the socio-economic factors that led to the apprehension of these children could in turn be viewed as the result of the historical oppression and marginalisation of Aboriginal communities in Canada. The strength of the book is that it allows us to view adoption, not in terms of totalising narratives, but through an accounting of history that throws light on the interrelationships between race, class and gender at one level and the individual, the state and between states at another.

Though Dubinsky is focussed on North America, there are lessons to be learned, particularly for social work practitioners in other developing countries. In countries like India, for example, where children languish in poorly funded state and private orphanages for a variety of reasons —abject poverty, abandonment, patriarchal norms that give preference to male children and/ or severe penalties to the mother of children born out of the marriage union— it might become difficult to view adoption, especially transnational adoptions as anything other than rescue. Social workers in these countries might zealously promote adoption as the only way for these abandoned/orphaned children to acquire a better future. However, Dubinsky's book allows us to question the rescue narrative even in these seemingly obvious situations. It throws light on the need to emphasise social work intervention at the preventive and developmental level. What obligation does the social work profession have to work towards ameliorating the conditions that allow for large numbers of children to be available for adoption in the first place? Should the profession be focussing more on poverty alleviation, community development, and gender equality education? Should transnational and transracial adoption be viewed as the best option or the last choice? These are some important questions for the social work profession that come to mind after reading this highly recommended book.