

**Leadership Development Forums in  
Aboriginal Child Welfare: Making our Hearts Sing in Alberta**

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**The most promising survival path for humans is to merge existing technology with the knowledge, wisdom, and ecologically sound practice of indigenous and traditional peoples (Sahtouris,1992, p.1).**

“Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves [even if all individuals within the dissolved group physically survive]. The objectives of such a plan would be a disintegration of political and social institutions, of language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of individuals belonging to such groups. Genocide is directed at the national group as an entity, and the actions involved are directed at individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of the national group.”

-From Raphael Lemkin, “Axis Rule in Occupied Europe”, 1944, p. 79

“I want to get rid of the Indian problem...Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department...”

-Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy-Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, 1920

“The Canadian problem in Indian education is not primarily one of schooling Indian children the same way other Canadian children are schooled, but of changing the preserving Indian community into a Canadian community. When Indian children will not help but grow-up to be culturally Canadian, then the average Canadian school will meet their educational needs.”

-From “Residential Education for Indian Acculturation,” 1958

“Does no one here recognize that crimes have been committed?”

-From Chrisjohn, Young & Maraun, 1994, p. 15

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## ON THE IMPORTANCE OF STORIES FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

We have our stories but they've been marginalized. One of our students came up with was this notion of storycide, you know like genocide; storycide. Our stories are very, very important and you have to look at the Blackfoot word that captures it, as it means a lot more than saying story in English) because in that language it has a negative connotation. It's *just* a story. But for us, they're not just stories. Those stories contain so much and we need to get back to them. Those stories serve us in so many different ways. How do we remember these stories? . . . [Because] the art of storytelling was so much a part of us. Some of the best storytellers are so animated and a good storyteller has the ability for you to experience the story, to see the story. Our way of learning is to use all the five senses and that's why they become experienced. I guess the closest thing to that would be a good novel. If it's really well written that novel stays with you but for us it's our oral tradition. So that's why, when this tradition is marginalized, this student came up with the term storycide. Stories are very, very important in that they play so many different roles including healing when we're grieving. Stories give us the capacity to be intimate with people. When you go on a journey, you want to visit. When you haven't seen somebody else for a long time, you want to visit. You want to remember somebody, you visit and part of the socializing was that aspect. That's why our ways were very, very oral. That's why I'm saying that language becomes very important.

Narcisse Blood – Blood Tribe, Alberta

## DEDICATION

We dedicated this report to the hundreds of aboriginal people, especially the precious elders who have taken the time to share their wisdom and insights with this team of researchers. It seems clear that many indigenous people seek a return to more traditional ways of life and that they wish to incorporate these in the manner in which services are delivered to them. It also seems clear that a shift is beginning to take place in terms of a heightened sensitivity to the ecology of our planet, partially in response to warnings about issues such as the imminent crisis of global warming by eminent western scientists who stress the interconnectedness of all aspects of life. This is not a new phenomenon to indigenous people who have relatively recently been exposed to the Western scientific and philosophical paradigm that stressed separation and domination. Many of the elders have continued their traditional beliefs in spite of colonization and oppression. Many indigenous communities continue to seek their advice in spite of mounting pressures to adopt solely technological solutions to human problems. There has been increasing recognition of indigenous perspectives on caring for the ecological health of our planet. Aboriginal elders from around the world have been sounding the alarm for some time, and have been joined by hundreds of esteemed scientists in warning us that our callous disregard for Mother Earth must cease if we are not to destroy ourselves.

We suggest importance of relationship and connection to each other, human ecology, is equally important in an era that pits so many people against each other on the basis of ethnicity, religion and ideology. Is it just as important to bring about enhanced communication and mutual respect between “mainstream” and aboriginal communities by creating a common language based on concepts that unite more than divide? One can only imagine: a human services world where spirituality is imbued in day to day practice; where kinship and human connection are valued more than instrumental relationships and interactions; where respect for each other takes

precedence in our actions rather than rigid practice standards; where each can take pride in their unique culture, tradition, and language rather than discarding them within one or two generations; where parenting is assumed to be a community responsibility rather than that of the nuclear family or a struggling single parent.

Perhaps by reflecting on these fundamental issues we can begin to make a difference, one child at a time, one family at a time, one community at a time. Finally, it seems to us that the hopes and aspirations of Aboriginal people in our communities are much the same as those of people everywhere: a harmonious connection to each other, families to love and support, a spiritual connection of some kind, the opportunity to contribute and to learn new skills, a sense of self grounded in ones origins.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A recent forum in Niagara Falls, Canada demonstrated that indigenous people from around the world are united in a common vision of serving their people in ways that are true to themselves. Although there is a need to create new knowledge to fill existing service gaps, it is also clear that there are few described notions of how to achieve this. Aboriginal communities are however, clear about the essential values and philosophy that must guide the development of programs and services.

In this regard, Little Bear (2000) speaks of the collision of “jagged worldviews”, aiding our understanding of the differences between Aboriginal and Eurocentric worldviews. In contrast to First Nations, Eurocentric philosophies are more linear than holistic; hierarchical and specialized rather than generalized; more materialistic and self-interested than sharing; less concerned about relationships and kindness than competitiveness; more aggressive than respectful; and more focussed on external sources of control and authority than on the development of internal controls. The complex historical interaction of these two approaches has left a heritage of jagged worldviews among Indigenous people who no longer have a clear grasp on either worldview. This leads to a jigsaw puzzle type of consciousness that each person has to piece together alone.

Yet, as demonstrated by community members’ commentary, the fundamentals are still very much alive in Aboriginal communities. What made a difference in the lives of those who shared their stories resided in their relationships – some as permanent as that of a grandparent – some as transitory as a chance encounter as a young man with an elder. All these stories contained a common thread: the importance of being respected and acknowledged by another

person. All reflected a sense of being viewed as a person with inherent dignity and worth. All recounted being left with a major impression of being a person with potential and hope for the future because someone believed in them, whether it was a student who had demonstrated a talent in school or someone who had a grandfather who showed her how to properly care for her new baby. In short, these stories related fundamentally human experiences that made an important difference in individual lives.

We will need to structure our services in ways that reflect what we are learning from communities themselves. Many community members have a clear vision of what this will look like. The following summarizes some key notions of community members that flow from their stories. While space does not allow to fully express the diversity and richness of the perspectives that we gleaned from our encounters, we hope that the will provide a brief overview of some excellent ideas. Some of these ideas have been derived from community gatherings at Sturgeon Lake, Saskatchewan and the Blood Reserve, Alberta. Others have come from social work students at Blue Quill College (an Aboriginal college in Northern Alberta), in response to a question about how we might best address the community issues and concerns that had arisen.

### **Kinship and Connection to Each Other**

A synopsis of conversations in all three communities underscored the importance of listening to community stories so that members can feel validated, encouraging Aboriginal communities to take the initiative amongst themselves in such settings as elder and youth gatherings. It would be important to deal with isolation from family and community by creating settings and community resources where people can meet to reconnect with each other. Where

serious conflict exists, it was recommended that mediation services be provided to deal with long standing hostility and resentment, re-uniting the community by sharing of common history and helping to reconnect estranged families.

A Métis Settlement member said

I really needed to get a sense of family, and something drew me back here - it must have been my grandparents because when I lived with them, they really gave me a lot love. So when I came here and when I met my husband I thought he was stable, he was everything I wanted - he was opposite of the things, I had previously [wanted] in a relationship. And I thought, "Wow this is the person I am going to marry," and I did. So he has been a rock in my life, very, very stable.

### **Spirituality and Respect for Nature**

Blackfoot scientists from the Blood Reserve in Alberta have expressed the following thoughts about spirituality and respect to guide us:

When we ask the elders for their wisdom or to guide us...they always ask us is for respect. The Blackfoot interpretation of respect and what it means and how we conduct ourselves is very different from...the Western way...it comes from a very spiritual and sacred connection to life and how we maintain that balance in terms of the sacredness of life.

...in English, respect really doesn't speak to spirituality or the sacredness of life so the understanding is very different. Sometimes when the Elders speak to us...there's a disconnect in our understanding of what the Elders are saying and we can carry that lack of understanding in our day to day activities or our programming. We may even say, "Well the Elders said respect", but we haven't really understood what they meant.

Every child should have a Blackfoot name and I think it's very important because that places us in the universe and it places us in connection with all our relatives. So it's a powerful strength that we have is to have our names, our Blackfoot names. But it does not have any meaning if you don't know what those connections are or if you don't know how to be in relationship with those connections or with those alliances. An Elder will give a name and so when you give your name, you say "this is who I am and this is the Elder who gave me my name" so there's a connection to an Elder and this is the story of why they gave you that name and a lot of it is tied to it. This gives us strength as every time you say your name you have all these connections and all these alliances that place you, who you are and where you came from and where are you going.

An Aboriginal social worker in Child Welfare from Northern Alberta stated that:

My vision is that these teachings should they be available to everyone; teachings from our elders about our spirituality. I would like us to return to some of those teachings and have them incorporated in the way we live our lives. We have strengths and we are making a contribution so why don't we incorporate where those strengths come from.

Incorporate that into the way we live our lives and the way we try to help children. Have spirituality available for our children, our families in need. We're sending one of our kids to a sweat for treatment instead of sending the kid to wherever they send psychotics in Edmonton or Grande Prairie. Why can't we try Sweat Ceremonies or Pipe Ceremonies as ways of healing for our children and our families?

### **Sharing and Respect for Each Other**

Social work students from Blue Quill College proposed the provision of opportunities for safe expression of affection, and open discussion around feelings, emotions, and inadequacies. Students emphasized people's need to heal, to tell their stories, to learn to trust, to find out who they are as individuals. Communities and the individuals living within them also need to learn to relate to one another and to those in other societies. It is very important for people to learn that they are not what the oppressors said or say they are:

- They are not a thing devalued.
- They are valued as individuals and as a people.
- There is a place for them within this world.
- They can contribute.

These students also proposed that:

Healing groups are needed that allow for group healing and the sharing of stories that embrace the reality that they were the victims and they were wronged. It was not their fault.

We need to find traditions, customs and activities that will draw families and communities together. While this can be done in a traditional context, allowing families to partake in new traditions together, it is the time spent together that counts.

From a Métis Settlement member:

I see hope in my own interaction with people in the community, whenever some thing really negative happens within the community, or someone berates you or belittles you, I have experienced that they'll come around, it doesn't take them much, and then they come around to the other side, and they will phone you or talk to you and will say I really appreciated that, and to me that is hope. I will think well that person was really at an extreme last week, so maybe we are just all human. I see hope in people, it makes me think that people are just kind of waiting for some great leader to come by and then they will follow, and in the meantime we are all just doing are own thing.

### **Knowledge of History, Culture, and Language**

Social work students at Blue Quill College also offered the following suggestions based upon their experiences:

We need to encourage the resurgence of old traditions and native language, and allow and provide Aboriginal children to have the opportunity to re-connect with their heritage.

Knowledge of one's history is one of the keys to begin to get grounded with self. People that have lost their roots are "lost." The lost need to see that the Aboriginal people were once a proud nation and can again become a proud nation. It is important to create hope and a belief in ourselves.

Being a survivor of physical and sexual abuse, all I wanted was to be heard, really heard and validated. I wanted someone to listen to my story. It is about sharing of stories that starts the healing. My journey began being heard (not just a statistic) and feeling real and not a number. Picking the strengths, qualities and positive aspects, I later looked at one step at a time. Culture plays an important component for Aboriginal people that teach the men and women role through culture or respect for self and others, gaining back self-esteem. No longer do I feel like I am a victim, but a survivor through sharing, knowledge, respect, humour, tears, and laughter, spirituality, and Creator.

I tend to connect with the residential school experience because these same principles of colonization happened when I was taken from my home and put in a “white” foster family who happened to be prejudiced against “Indians”, spoke French, and called me a “savage.” I was denied my culture, history, language, family, and home. For these reasons, I can say that to help our residential school survivors and maybe even abused foster children, and the next generations of residential school survivor’s children, we need to begin to love ourselves and take pride in which we are as First Nations. We need to learn about the history of Aboriginals before, during, and after colonization. These concepts must be learned before we can heal, not only for the residential school survivors but for their families as well; so everyone connects and stays unified as a family unit.

### **Development of Traditional Skills**

Members of the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation explained:



We make the Cree language and culture a part of every curriculum available to all students. It was also important that we have cultural camps where youth can learn ancient arts of canoeing, trapping, hunting, fishing, smoking meat and fish, herbal healing, drum making and drumming, and traditional dances.

Members of the Blood Tribe recommended that:

We carry forward the oral tradition and provide opportunities for the elders to convey their knowledge while they are still with us and that the community continue its efforts to live the traditional Kainai (Blood Tribe) way of life.

### **Shared Parenting and Community Responsibility for Children**

Members of various communities emphasised the following with regards to community parenting:

We should providing opportunities for parents to address the pain of not being loved or shown love and listen to what they need to heal from this. We could address the loss of affection that has been experienced by establishing programs that educate families on how to reconnect with one another and how to love one another again.

We can allow the community to gather and exchange information, ideas, and struggles around parenting. As a community we need to support one another with all our family systems. We must recognize that parenting is a community commitment and a child is not raised by one person. Child Welfare systems and Aboriginal people need to understand

the differences and similarity of parental skills of our respective systems. To discuss the positive or accepted practices within Aboriginal families may enlighten child welfare and re-ignite traditional values that existed before colonization. Mainstream values concerning parenting within Aboriginal family's conflict with collective community and spiritual well-being of our people.

We must learn and honour the traditional parental role. We must seek guidance from elders about what the parental role used to be and talk to the community about healing and reclaiming parenthood.

### **Systemic Recommendations**

The following are critical if substantive change is to take occur:

- We must collectively support a legislative framework that provides a higher degree of self-determination for aboriginal people who wish to serve their own families and children.
- Program funding must be on a par with any other community in similar social, economic, educational and health circumstances and provide a full range of services needed to address the numerous issues that has evolved over the past 500 hundred years.
- We must understand how traditional ways have sustained aboriginal families for thousands of years without white intervention and build them upon to create a new society.

- We must co-create new knowledge in the search for answers to can replace the increasingly complex responses created to serve families and children.
- We must fully implement the Convention on Indigenous People's Rights of 1948 which, taken seriously, would have made a dramatic in the lives of aboriginal people over the past half century.
- We must recognize indigenous people as a people with a living history and with ideas, thought and imaginations and caring. There is a need to place confidence in them and to assist them where we can in the development of approaches that will better serve their communities and their families.
- We must create a political will at the federal and provincial levels that will sustain and support aboriginal aspirations and finally remove them from the shackles that they are imposed a collective and fundamental racism that leaves them disrespected and with few reasonable alternatives.
- We must develop approaches that are the stress interconnectedness, self-determination and equity with others. All communities stressed the importance of human connection as a fundamental requirement for creating a new vision for the future. All communities stressed the importance of self-determination and freedom to experiment and to do things as they see fit just like any other community.

- We can no longer tolerate attitudes that constrain equity and fair treatment and combat the view that aboriginal people are somehow less worthy, less intelligent, and less moral as some assumed in our society.

These recommendations demand a major paradigm shift. They call on us to face the most difficult challenge of all – and that is to change our beliefs and our very ways of thinking. This requires commitment, goodwill, mutual respect and trust. This will not come easily in light of our prior experiences, but it is nevertheless of critical importance.

We hope that this selected sample of ideas from many sources in Alberta will entice to reader to delve more deeply into this report. We think it worthwhile and hope you will agree.

## INTRODUCTION

The child welfare system in Canada shows a dramatic over-representation of Aboriginal children and youth in care. It is estimated that 30 to 40% of children in care in Canada are Aboriginal (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002; Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003). In fact, the number of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system is about four times greater than non-Aboriginal children (Berry & Brink, 2004). Statistics from the Prairie Provinces reveal even greater proportions of Aboriginal children in care. In Alberta, about 38% of children in care are Aboriginal, and in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, the number of Aboriginal children in care is estimated to be up to 70% (Blackstock & Trocme, in press; Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003). These numbers represent an increase in Aboriginal youth in care over past years. According to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (2004) the number of on-reserve registered Aboriginal children in care increased by over 150% between 1995 and 2003.

Clearly, existing interventions, programs, and ways of work in the child welfare system are not working, since the number of Aboriginal children in care continues to increase. Coupled with this reality is considerable concern 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. The impact for those who have experienced either or both systems is evident in the alarming statistics of Aboriginal people's continued trauma as reflected by high rates of suicide, poverty, substance abuse, family violence, family breakdown, school drop out, and escalating child welfare caseloads in Aboriginal communities.

*"a major requirement for undoing what has been done is full recognition of what has been done"*  
Page 110, (Chrisjohn et al., 1994)

While many Aboriginal child welfare agencies are seeking models of practice that are more consistent with their worldviews, there is a dearth of “new” models that incorporate “old” ways to respond to our increased understanding of the impact of colonization, residential school experiences and the 60s scoop on Aboriginal communities and families. Indeed, there is a need for new approaches to child welfare intervention and prevention that are founded on a framework of analysis that provides an understanding of the history and current reality of Aboriginal people and culture. Such a framework is a necessary foundation and context for new approaches to child welfare that may facilitate Aboriginal ownership and leadership in child welfare.

The challenge is to learn from joint efforts with Aboriginal communities that will not only create new insights, but results in knowledge that is readily applied to real world situations. The current project took up this challenge by aiming to build collaboration among child welfare stakeholders and Aboriginal communities to examine issues relating to child welfare in their communities and create innovative, effective and practical approaches to child welfare that are more in keeping with traditional Aboriginal worldviews and may contribute to reconciliation, healing and increased community capacity. To this end, the research represented a partnership between the Alberta Ministry of Children’s Services, the University Of Calgary Faculty Of Social Work, the Blood Reserve, the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, the PCWC?, and Region 10 (Métis Settlements) Child and Family Services Authority.

The general research questions guiding the study were:

1. What have been the historical effects of the residential school experience on the identity of Aboriginal children, families, and communities? How does this compare to the current effects of placement in child welfare services on the identity of Aboriginal children, families, and communities?

2. How can key stakeholders who have an interest in these questions collaborate to create effective and innovative program responses that are consistent with Aboriginal worldviews? How can we create respectful working relationships that can lead to reconciliation and enhanced collaboration?

The current report summarizes much of the work, insight, and learning from this collaborative endeavor. It starts with a literature review that establishes a context and a framework for understanding the current state of Aboriginal people and culture in Canada – namely, colonization and genocide. This exploration includes a review of residential schools and the emergence of child welfare as it relates to Aboriginal people and their impacts today. Following the literature review, the methods employed in the study are discussed. This discussion on methods includes a description of appreciative inquiry methodology and the data collection procedures in each community. The results of the research are then presented for each of the communities involved and discussed in the context of the guiding framework. Finally, recommendations for policy, practice, and future research are outlined. Two appendices then provide greater detail in terms of applying this learning to child welfare systems.

As Chrisjohn et al. (1994, p. 110) state, “a major requirement for undoing what has been done is full recognition of what has been done.” Thus, recognizing and acknowledging the colonization and genocide of Aboriginal people is a critical foundation for reconciliation and healing (Chrisjohn et al., 1994). It is in this spirit and with a hope for positive change that the current research was carried out.

The creation of a new vision is not without its challenges. On the one hand, there is a strong and continuing desire among many Aboriginal people and their allies to build upon traditional Aboriginal strengths and values such as courage, respect for each other and for nature,

the oral tradition and the wisdom of the elders, a deep connection with each other and mother earth, and a consistent application of spirituality to all of life. Cultural camps and some models of practice provide concrete examples of the power of these concepts to improve daily life.

*The ultimate objective of the "Making our Hearts Sing" initiative is to provide an opportunity for conversation and understanding.*

On the other hand, the loss of culture and tradition that has resulted from colonisation continues to affect the lives of Aboriginal people, and "Western" people are often unaware of the oppressive impact of their assumptions, beliefs and attitudes toward Aboriginal people. While policy has changed to counter these experiences, historian Lise Noel (2000) reminds us that systemic colonization is grounded in intolerance. This intolerance comes from unconscious assumptions that underlie "normal institutional rules and collective reactions." In systemic colonization, Noel suggests these rules and reactions are imbedded in the consciousness of all and so engrained in our lives that the oppressed cannot point to any single form of oppression, - and the oppressor becomes invisible. Often the consequence is that the responsibility for colonization and assimilation is assigned to the oppressed – and, when that process does not meet institutional rules and expectations, it is seen as further evidence of the inability of the oppressed to determine their own directions. Nowhere is this process more evident than in health, education, and services to children.

The ultimate objective of the "Making our Hearts Sing" initiative is to provide an opportunity for conversation and understanding. Sahtouris (1992) a planet biologist, tells of an ancient prophesy that illustrates more fully the nature of the conversation:

Within the ancient Hopi Indian Prophecy is told the history of the Red and White brothers, sons of the Earth Mother and the Great Spirit who gave them different missions. The Red Brother was to stay at home and keep the land in sacred trust while the White Brother went abroad to record things and make inventions. One



day the White Brother was to return and share his inventions in a spirit of respect for the wisdom his Red Brother had gained. It was told that his inventions would include cobwebs through which people could speak to each other from house to house across mountains, even with all doors and windows closed; there would be carriages crossing the sky on invisible roads, and eventually a gourd of ashes that when dropped would scorch the earth and even the fishes in the sea. If the White Brother's ego grew so large in making these inventions that he would not listen to the wisdom of the Red Brother, he would bring this world to an end in the Great purification of nature. Only a few would survive to bring forth the next world in which there would again be abundance and harmony.

Indigenous elders are telling us that the time for this to happen is near, and many eminent western scientists have been joining them in warning the world about the consequences for our planet of ignoring the impact of abusing planetary ecology. We are suggesting that similar messages are necessary in terms of human ecology at the level healthy connections and relationships with each other as spiritual beings entitled to respect and dignity. In some ways our prevailing models of practice seem to have lost sight of these fundamental values.

The adoption of an overly bureaucratic and legalistic paradigm in Child Welfare has greatly rigidified practice by the introduction of overly specialized roles, top down and fiscally driven policies, increasing disconnection from community, overly prescriptive standards and other trappings of technologically-based approaches that create increasing distance between child welfare practitioners and those they serve. Regrettably, these are the very models provided to Aboriginal community service providers, that combined with the legacy of oppression discussed earlier, can create services that exacerbate the dysfunction inherent in some mainstream child welfare services.

The communities involved in this initiative are clear about the essential values and philosophy that must guide the development of programs and services. They stress the importance of shared parenting and community responsibility for children, the importance of language as a source of renewed culture, knowledge of history and tradition as an essential

element of identity, the importance of kinship and connection to each other and a respectful approach to the planet.

The problem is that there is an enormous chasm between the vision of Aboriginal communities and the realities of funding and policy restrictions. We are less naïve than we may have been a year ago.. yet we continue to be hopeful of finding new ways to serve families and children as envisioned by the First Nations communities. Little Bear (2000) speaks to the collision of jagged worldviews and helps us to understand the hazards of understanding each other when our western worldview is more linear than holistic, more hierarchical and specialised rather than generalised, more materialistic and self-interested than sharing, less concerned about relationships and kindness than competitiveness, more aggressive than respectful, more focussed on external sources of control and authority than on the development of internal controls.

Our work thus far has, however, carried us further along in our journey as we dialogue with communities, planners, practitioners, leaders and elders in our search for understanding, but we have much to learn. Community meetings have revealed that:

- There is a clear understanding of the current and past issues and their impact on community and family life.
- To address these issues will call forth the strength of the people based on the continuity of their culture, kinship systems and tribal responsibilities.
- It is essential to institute a structure that supports kinship relational roles and responsibilities, as the continuity of kinship is the key to well-being and survival, and the basis of their identity.

The communities' views of services that would help them can be far removed from current models of practice. The following illustrate some of the themes that arose in community

meetings. It is important to recognize the extent to which they are different and the power that is inherent in them for positive change. It is just as important to recognize how distant they are from most of what we do today, yet how they offer fundamentally human approaches that may surpass our reliance on technocratic solutions. They are listed below in the order in which they were recorded in the community gatherings;

Michelle, I am wondering if these might be more effectively be interspersed in the report.. just a thought

Seeking direction from the elders

Involve elders in decision making and teaching

Learn about our history

Know your relatives and keep in contact with them

Maintain family ties

Give lots of hugs to your children and grandchildren

Ensure each family member has a nature name and call them by that name

Live our traditional way of life and our values

Know who we are

Take pride in who we are

Importance of language and cultural history

Help one another

Make our religious leaders be true to their roles

Help our elected leaders be true to themselves and to their people

Listen with a healing heart

Share your hurts and let them go, grow from the experience

Deal with problems

Live with respect, integrity and honor

Have youth and elders be part of each other's lives

Create elder mentor program in the community

Teach spirituality as the foundation of life

Learn Indian prayers and traditional smudging

Pray to recognize and acknowledge our purpose in this lifetime

Help our young people to enhance their Aboriginal knowledge and way of life

Develop a cross cultural program between native and white people.

Lay our own foundation and stop being dictated to by INAC

Take a traditional holistic approach to child welfare

Train our front line worker regarding our culture, spirituality and language

Incorporate our own methods of research and not let ourselves be driven by western ideology

Do not reduce our people to mere numbers

Be sure our children have someone they can trust

Make our children feel they belong

Create patience so that conflict can be minimized

Instill in all children that they are special and unique

Teach our children about native pride and to be proud of who they are

Children need to hear old stories and history

Teach our children what their duties are to become positive contributors to a well community

Teach our children about their future road and to take what will benefit them from both worlds

Teach our children our language, spirituality, about prayer and purpose

All children are the responsibility of the community, not just the immediate family

Teach our children about their ancestors

Integrate Blood Tribe ways in our everyday lives and teach these ways to our children

Record and preserve traditional knowledge, history, stories, songs, and traditions

We are convinced that the perspectives gathered in these meetings form a solid foundation for the creation of child welfare systems that are not only more consistent with

Aboriginal ways, but that are more humane and effective for the rest of our society. The key is for us to collaborate with the community in the implementation their ideas in a spirit of humility.

## **BACKGROUND**

History tells us that many wrongs were inflicted upon Indigenous people in many parts of the world. When the word atonement is broken down into its component parts “at-one-ment,” it literally means “being of one mind.” This is close to what the Prairie Child Welfare Consortium in Alberta is seeking in its initiative entitled “Making Our Hearts Sing” which is intended to create a meeting of minds between dominant child welfare systems and Aboriginal culture, tradition and spirituality. A common theme is that of bringing people together. The logical next question is why we need to bring Aboriginal people and the dominant society in Canada together to address child welfare issues.

While there is considerable evidence that the European arrivals did form long term alliances for the purposes of trade and war that were advantageous to both parties in some respects, by the late 1800s, these alliances were no longer considered to be useful and the thirst for land by settlers overcame other considerations. It was then that new mechanisms of domination and colonization were implemented in the form of residential schools that lasted for much of the next century. When this system was in the throes of its death rattle, it was succeeded by provincial child welfare systems that failed to understand the extent to which Aboriginal families and communities had been decimated by this experience and the stage was set for another disastrous effort to “protect” Aboriginal children. This report deals with both of these events and examines new ways to counter their negative impacts by acting in ways that could defeat the attitudes and beliefs that created the systems they engendered.

Duncan Campbell Scott, poet, essayist, and Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, encapsulates the prevailing attitude of his day in 1920, during a House of Commons discussion on proposed changes to the Indian Act. "Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian department. That is the whole object of this bill" (Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, p. 6.) According to Scott and government policy, it was imperative to kill the Indian in the child in order to save the man, and many shared the view that the young were the hope for substantial change, as the adults were considered to be irredeemable and a hindrance to the civilizing process. Similarly, in a speech given on January 6, 1909 by the Archdeacon Tims in Edmonton, Alberta at the First Convention of Indian Workers, in reference to boarding schools (residential schools) Tims stated;

For the next generation or so it is my firm conviction that the reserve boarding school will best serve the needs of the Indians in Alberta - at any rate in the North and South....boarding schools are in existence for the simple reasons that the Indians are too widely scattered for a school in any one position on a reserve to get a sufficient number of pupils, and that the irregular attendance and the baneful influence of camp life would more than counterbalance the good done in the school. The bad influence of home life is recognized by Mr. Pedley who in his report in 1903 said: "As a civilizing factor the advantages of the removal of the pupils from the retrogressive influence of home life is shared pretty equally by the Industrial and Boarding Schools."

One of the few dissenting voices of the era was that of Frank Oliver, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, who demurred in 1908, after the foundations of the residential school system had been laid in place that:

I hope you will excuse me for so speaking but some of the most important commandments laid upon the human by the divine is love and respect by children for parents. It seems strange that in the name of religion, a system of education should have been instituted, the foundation principle of which, not only ignored but contradicted this command.

In spite of this caution, the residential school system was implemented. It failed to meet the prevailing standards of the day in almost every respect, and contravened standards of care in ways that that fell short of the most basic humanitarian expectations including those of the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The creation of a “total institution” to destroy a people was a deliberate and planned effort by its architects, delivered seemingly with little regard for a people who were nearly destroyed in the process and who are now trying to rebuild their societies and their very lives.

This era was characterized a tendency that continues to this day; inadequate funding on the part of Canada, a lack of accountability for the quality of services being purchased, and a tendency to turn over responsibility for the delivery of services to other entities that have included religious organizations, provincial governments and, currently, Indian Bands themselves, all the while disclaiming any responsibility for the critical link between fiscal needs and program standards. The Federal Government continues to hold the purse strings for services

to Aboriginal people, and has consistently arranged for other entities to provide needed services, but imposed funding limitations that continue to constrain such services in ways that have been fundamentally harmful to Aboriginal communities. This cycle began when the residential schools were established and in the early

1900s, the government soon realized that they were pursuing the wrong path by re-creating a model of serving children that childcare professionals knew was damaging to children. This did not deter Canada from expanding this model of childcare in spite of the evidence that the

*This often creates a situation whereby delegated authorities are hampered in their efforts by overly stringent and irrelevant standards of practice that do not reflect their reality or their worldview.*

children were poorly served and ill prepared for life in contemporary society as well as in their communities of origin.

It was not until the early 1940s that Canada began to press provincial authorities to assume responsibility and provide alternate care for Aboriginal children in need of protection. It took until the early 1960s for provinces to assume this role, on the condition that the Federal government would reimburse them for such care. Tragically, neither level of government ensured that needed community and familial supports were available to keep families together. These led to the so-called 60's scoop and the admission of thousands of children to white institutions and foster homes; often well outside of the community and, in some cases, outside of Canada. The pattern continues today. Even though many First Nation's communities have been delegated authority for child welfare services, that authority is for the most part accompanied by funds that support the removal and alternate care of Aboriginal children, often away from their families and communities. The failure to provide for prevention and early intervention programs that would help to keep families together continues and the ultimate outcome for Aboriginal children and families has been ever-increasing numbers of children lost to their communities.

In light of these undeniable historical events a fundamental policy and attitudinal shift is necessary. The policy was very clear in the late 1800s, and has been formally changed in provincial legislation as these authorities acknowledge to some extent Aboriginal aspirations for autonomy and self-determination. Provincial child welfare authorities are still responsible in law for the protection of all children. This can create a situation whereby delegated authorities are hampered in their efforts by overly stringent and irrelevant standards of practice that do not reflect their reality or their worldview. We believe that this situation is exacerbated by prevailing assumptions and beliefs about Aboriginal people that are entrenched in society. While new and



more progressive policy has been promulgated in all provincial legislations to guide practice, it does not seem to have yet succeeded in changing deeply entrenched and often unconscious attitudes and beliefs that underlie policy and practice standards. While each province struggles with these issues, the federal government continues to inadequately fund programs and to treat program issues as beyond its jurisdiction, leaving First Nations' in a jurisdictional quagmire.

It is important to note that when this all began, child rearing by several persons was a traditional custom honored and practiced by all North American Indian tribes. During periods of hunting and gathering, most nomadic tribes naturally assumed this standard of protecting children. Children were continually under the watchful eyes of tribal elders, siblings, cousins, aunts, or grandparents. As a result of this nurturing and security, the Aboriginal child's self-concept was strongly tied to his family, clan, and tribe. Further, the extended family provided support for families because the responsibility for raising children was shared by members of the community, and thus no single person was overloaded with the care of the children.

Parenting skills and child-rearing patterns are terms that are reflected differently in each culture. The term parenting is problematic for Aboriginal cultures. For Euro-Canadians, a parent is generally a father or a mother, and the parenting role includes child-rearing; in Aboriginal cultures, several members of the extended family and the community are involved in child-rearing, in spheres of activity that, in Euro-Canadian society, are parental. The broader term of "child rearing" is thus a better term to describe the things that in Euro-Canadian culture come under the rubric of parenting, and the latter term may infer the more inclusive child-rearing patterns. Thus, the removal of Aboriginal children from parents to be

*...we may be repeating past patterns because we have not searched our hearts to better understand how deeply held beliefs... may perpetuate similar outcomes for Aboriginal children and families today*

raised in residential schools deprived those children of a cultural legacy. The experience missed is the tightly-knit community of extended family and relatives who share the task of child rearing by providing nurturing and security. This deliberate assault on Aboriginal culture, tradition, language, and spirituality resulted in following outcomes for Aboriginal people:

Low self-esteem; dysfunctional families and interpersonal relationships; parenting issues such as emotional coldness and rigidity; widespread depression; widespread rage and anger; chronic physical illness related to spiritual and emotional states; unresolved grief and loss; fear of personal growth, transformation and healing; unconscious internalization of residential school behaviors such as false politeness, not speaking out, passive compliance; patterns of paternalistic authority linked to passive dependency; patterns of misuse of power to control others, and community social patterns that foster whispering in the dark, but refusing to support and stand with those who speak out or challenge the status quo; the breakdown of the social glue that holds families and communities together, such as trust, common ground, shared purpose and direction, a vibrant ceremonial and civic life, co-operative networks and associations working for the common good, etc.; disunity and conflict between individuals, families and factions within the community; spiritual confusion; involving alienation from one's own spiritual life and growth process, as well as conflicts and confusion over religion; internalized sense of inferiority or aversion in relation to whites and especially whites in power; toxic communication - backbiting, gossip, criticism, put downs, personal attacks, sarcasm, secrets, etc.; becoming oppressors and abusers of others as a result of what was done to one in residential schools; cultural identity issues--the loss of language and cultural foundations has led to denial (by some) of the validity of one's own cultural identity (assimilation), a resulting cultural confusion and dislocation; destruction of social support networks (the cultural safety net) that individuals and families in trouble could rely upon; disconnection from the natural world (i.e. the sea, the forest, the earth, living things) as an important dimension of daily life and hence spiritual dislocation; acceptance of powerlessness within community life (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 1999.)

The abuse and neglect suffered in residential schools not only affected their lives as adults, but those of their descendants whose families have been characterized by further abuse and neglect. According to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation:

Intergenerational or multi-generational trauma happens when the effects of trauma are not resolved in one generation. When trauma is ignored and there is no support for dealing with it, the trauma will be passed from one generation to the next. What we learn to see as "normal" when we are children, we pass on to our own children. Children who learn that ... or [sic] sexual abuse is "normal," and who have never dealt with the feelings that come from this, may inflict physical

and sexual abuse on their own children. The unhealthy ways of behaving that people use to protect themselves can be passed on to children, without them even knowing they are doing so. This is the legacy of physical and sexual abuse in residential schools (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 1999:A5).

Despite the publicity generated by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People and the creation of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, many still do not understand what happened in the residential schools or how unresolved trauma from residential school abuse continues to impact individuals, families, communities and nations. Nor can we expect that this understanding will improve until this experience can be expressed, validated and released in healthy ways. A better understanding of the historical and current impacts of this experience may not only improve our knowledge of the past and its implications for the present. It may also help us to realize how our deeply held beliefs and assumptions may influence current practice and perpetuate similar outcomes for Aboriginal children and families today, as Aboriginal children enter government care in much higher numbers than those of either the residential schools or the so-called 60s scoop.

#### **RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS: AN EXPERIENCE COMMON TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN WESTERN CANADA**

This section examines experiences shared by many Aboriginal people in the Prairie Provinces. It does not pretend to be comprehensive in nature, but rather it attempts to paint a picture of how some of our historical connections with the lives of Aboriginal people have contributed to the current situation. The Residential School was a fundamental tool in the planned assimilation of Aboriginal people from the late 1800s until the early 1970s. We collectively need to examine what the Residential School Experience was like for the people who attended them. Many Aboriginal communities are undertaking a healing experience with funds from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and are in the process of "Telling their Stories." It is

important that these stories be heard by helping professionals, academics and interested others so that we might better understand what occurred in these settings, and learn how these experiences have affected Aboriginal individuals, families and communities. It is especially important to reflect upon how learning from these might influence our policy and professional practice, not only with the survivors of residential schools, but also with their descendants who continue to experience their effects. This may serve to help us reflect upon potential future directions and possibilities.

### **Residential Schools and Aboriginal Parenting: Voices of Parents**

Between the late 1800s to the early 1970s, Aboriginal children from age 3 to 16 were removed from their homes, many forcibly, and placed in residential schools, where they stayed from September until June each year. During this annual ten-month period, they were isolated from their parents and from the rest of Canadian society. Breaking up Aboriginal families by placing young children in residential schools was encouraged from an early date by government legislators and enforced by representatives of the church and by federal government Indian agents. According to Hayter Reed, a senior Department of Indian Affairs official, the total separation and isolation of Aboriginal children from their families was important to 'socialize' the children. In his words, "The more remote from the institution and distant from each other are the points from which the pupils are collected, the better for their success" (Milloy, 1999). This practice removed the traditional role for childcare from the Aboriginal culture and entrusted it to a government whose stated policy was the assimilation of

Aboriginal people into the dominant society, a policy that could only be implemented by completely removing the

*All Aboriginal people are affected in some way whether they attended these schools or not. Even those Aboriginal people who never attended residential schools have relatives or friends who still feel the effects (MacDonald, 1985).*

children from the influence of their parents and communities.

Aboriginal children were therefore not only educated separately from the dominant society, they were also educated away from their own culture. In this setting, isolated culturally and geographically, the task of systematically transmitting the dominant society's values, skills, culture, religion, and language was ensured. To ensure English language acquisition, speaking an Aboriginal language was forbidden and punished by corporal punishment. All aspects of the Aboriginal child's life were regulated and monitored from morning to night by their caretakers to ensure compliance to this rule. In the words of a former resident:

First thing in the morning, you had to jump out of bed and kneel on the cold floor to pray. It seems like we prayed a lot. We prayed, and then we got up and washed our faces. Then we went downstairs, went to church, and prayed some more then went back and had breakfast. We prayed before breakfast we prayed after breakfast. We prayed before school--we prayed all day!

All Aboriginal people are affected in some way whether they attended these schools or not. Even those Aboriginal people who never attended residential schools have relatives or friends who still feel the effects (MacDonald, 1985). Many of those who attended residential schools have found it extremely painful and avoid speaking of this emotionally burdensome and damaging experience; while those who did not attend are indirectly affected because they cannot understand why an educational experience should leave such bitter emotional scars. The practice of separating children from their parents and their way of life has had an impact on almost all Aboriginal families. Structure, cohesion and quality of family life have suffered, parenting skills have been diminished as succeeding generations became more and more institutionalized and experienced little nurturing. Low self-esteem and self-concept problems arose as children were taught that their culture was inferior and uncivilized, even 'savage' (Martens et al, 1988). Taking

small children from their parents and keeping them away from their influence caused parents and children to become strangers to each other (Unger, 1977).

This was especially damaging for Aboriginal communities that were structured around the unique inter-relationships that exist among family, extended family, clan, band, and tribe (Lucas, 1989). In addressing this unique family pattern, Lewis (1970) described the kinship structure, embodying a network of valued relationships, as one of the important keystones of the culture. The actual structure of the society included large extended families and children, who were highly valued, occupied a central place within the society as maternal and paternal grandfathers, uncles, aunts, and cousins all actively participated in child-rearing (Fischler, 1985; Cross, 1986). In the words of one grandmother:

I'm granny. Long ago, as far as I know, our people had their way of raising their families. Like we had the grandparents, we had the aunts and uncles and then we had the parents themselves. Our grandparents were there to teach us. They were our teachers. If we wanted to know something we approached our grandparents and they taught us what they knew and our aunts and uncles were the people that told us when we did something wrong. When we did something wrong it wasn't our parents that scolded us or told us what we did was wrong. It was up to the aunts and uncles. They were the ones that disciplined their nephews and nieces and I still see that sometimes today. Sometimes one of my sons when his nephews do wrong, he tells them they did wrong. He doesn't wait for the parents to tell them. He tells them. That's the way it was long ago and the parents were there just to love their kids. You gave love to your kids and your kids loved you in return. the children didn't have to be taken out of homes and when they were orphaned or the parents were sick, the rest of the family was there to just take them in and look after them. There was no such thing as who is going to take care of this child, somebody just said you can come home and live with me. I'll raise you and take care of you and that was it.

Children were continually under the watchful eyes of tribal elders, siblings, cousins, aunts, or grandparents. As a result of this nurturing and security the Aboriginal "child's self-concept is strongly tied to his family, clan, and tribe...and bonds formed early within this structure"(Blanchard & Barsh, 1980, p.350). Furthermore, the extended "family structure

provided support for families to live in a wholesome, non-threatening way" (Lucas, 1989, p. 9) because "child-rearing responsibilities were divided among many members of the community, and no single individual was overburdened with the care, discipline, or feeding of a child." (Cross, 1986, p. 284) Thus, the removal of Aboriginal children deprived them of a tightly knit community of extended family and relatives who shared the task of child rearing by providing nurturing and security.

This practice of separating children from parents and the parenting role model is singularly responsible for many of the problems related to childcare now found among Aboriginal parents (McKenzie & Hudson, 1985). We know that children learn parenting skills by the way they are parented, and that Aboriginal children who spent many years in residential schools had limited experience as family members (Haig-Brown, 1988). Atteneave (1977, p. 30) recalls that "Neither they nor their own parents had ever known life in a family from the age they first entered school. The parents had no memories and no patterns to follow in rearing children except for the regimentation of mass sleeping and impersonal schedules." This lack of positive role modeling has taken its toll in the Aboriginal family in Canada today. According to one mother:

Being at residential school...parents of residential schools didn't have the parenting skills that they had like raising their own families at home.

In addition, communities found their children changed in terms of values. Children became confused instead of fully acquiring the values, skills, language, culture, and religion of the dominant society. This created conflicts between parents and children, and

*The residential schools also introduced new and dysfunctional behaviors, such as the use of severe punishment in child rearing. Parents who had been spanked and hit while attending residential school responded similarly to their own children.*

over time some graduates of residential schools began to display the effects of their education and demonstrated a lack of confidence and awareness in child rearing as they assumed their role as parents (Ing, 1990). By the 1960s, a generation of Aboriginal parents who were not given the choice of raising their children began to show signs of "abrogating their responsibility as parents" (Caldwell, 1979, p. 21) The research indicated that a pattern of expectation had developed among some Indian parents that the residential school system provided a carefree way of living without children (Metcalf, 1975; Caldwell, 1979). One community member recalled it this way:

It's what we lost but it's what let us in the zoo when they gave us the drink. Because we didn't look after our kids, we would rather go and drink to the bars and buy our own liquor and everything. That's when we really lost it because we didn't know how to control it. Even I wanted to send my kids to a group home . . . I wanted mine to go so I could have time to drink but they wouldn't take them because I don't know, I was a good parent.

I think after a while families got used to not having their children and they didn't take full responsibility and the bonding was not really there so that took a lot of responsibility from parents and they were used to not having their children. But that is why they are suffering because there was no bonding.

It has become clear that some Aboriginal children were subjected to starvation, incarceration, physical and sexual abuse, and prolonged separation from families (BraveHeart, 1999). In a 1992 study, many respondents described negative boarding school experiences that included physical abuse (58.1%), being punished for speaking Lakota (37.9%), and sexual abuse by boarding school staff (22.6%) (BraveHeart-Jordan, 1995). In the words of one person:

I've heard some of those stories from older men. How they were treated. And one example was like when they went to bed or something, they were yanked out of bed in the middle of the night and dipped into ice cold water and forced to stand in the corner bare naked in front of everybody like for a day and it was just horrible. This older fellow was telling me that it happened to him. It think he was at an Alberta mission and he said he ran into one of the nuns who used to teach in



there. She was in the old folk's home in Northern Alberta. This was years and years later. He was already in his 50s by then and this nun saw him come into the old folks home and she said, oh, my son and she was trying to be all sweet and nice and thought he would be happy to see her and he said he looked at her and he just froze and she came up to him and he said he slapped her face. He couldn't help himself. He had all that hate and anger in him for so many years he just couldn't control it. It's just awful things to cause a person to do that to a nun. When he was a little boy in the convent he was raped every night. As a result of that how would you expect that man to even be a good father – he'd have so much hate?

This generation of young Aboriginal people is the first generation that did not attend residential schools; but because their parents and grandparents attended, they are deeply affected by the wounds and bitter memories of early childhood experiences. The breaking up of Aboriginal families has severely undermined the role of the extended family and kinship networks, causing that structure to break down, or in most cases, to be destroyed (Ing, 1990). Descendants of boarding school attendees also report a history of neglect and abuse in their own childhoods along with feelings of inadequacy as parents and confusion about how to raise children in a healthy way. This historical trauma has not only resulted in the impairment of culturally normative parenting styles, but in a high risk for developing alcohol and drug abuse problems associated with ineffective and injurious parenting (Brave Heart, 1999).

The residential schools also introduced new and dysfunctional behaviors, such as the use of severe punishment in child rearing. Parents who had been spanked and hit while attending residential school responded similarly to their own children. Before the residential school era, the use of physical discipline was uncommon in most tribes (Horejsi et al, 1992).

*Many Aboriginal people who left the residential school system feared to speak their language and so failed to teach the language and traditional ways to their children.*

The nuns were so mean to little kids, when they should have just loved them, but they didn't. I remember when my mother died; they didn't comfort me.

It was the punishment that was really bad. They punished for everything: when you were lined up, you couldn't talk . . . We were made to go to church, even if you were sick, you were still made to go sometimes. Some people would faint in church, and they would just take them out--it would add a bit of excitement, anyway.

Before residential schools, in Aboriginal families, a general loving attitude toward all children prevailed, not just for one's own children, but love for all the children of the tribe. An orphan or an adopted child was not in any way mistreated or set apart by the family, but was gratefully taken in and cherished. Aboriginal people have been noted to accord unquestioned acceptance of, and respect for, all individuals, irrespective of age or sex, not only for their abilities but also with considerable tolerance as well for their weaknesses (Bull, 1991). Many mothers in our talking circles spoke of the difficulty of demonstrating their affection for their children.

If you go and hug someone, you can just feel the tenseness, we hardly ever had that, and that began from the residential school, I think, because we never loved on another that way.

They (our children) don't realize how hard we had it and they think we are just neglecting them. We just don't know how to show our affection to them. We don't know how and that's hard.

Another mother described her efforts at demonstrating a capacity for affection and love with the following anecdote:

I feel the need to teach the young people today. They don't understand the love that we have for them and I think that they need to know that we love them. Our children have been affected by our not knowing how to show our love for them. They need the hugs and to hear that we love them because we don't know how. As soon as you try to hug somebody well you feel bad. Our parents did not show it to us because they were not there and it makes children think that they are not loved but they are but it is we who don't know how to show it. We need to put that love back. I helped my daughter with a group of people about 3 or 4 days ago and one of my nieces asked me what kind of soup it was and I said love soup. I

made it with love. The parents are suffering too because they were raised without the love that they should have had. . . I think sometimes we feel that if we tell our children that they might say well, what are you talking about? You never showed it. . . That's one thing that the convent took away from us. They were never parents and they never gave birth to a kid.

Many Aboriginal people who left the residential school system feared to speak their language and so failed to teach the language and traditional ways to their children. Haig-Brown (1988:286) states, "As adults many consciously did not teach their children an Aboriginal language so that they might avoid the punishments incurred through its use at school." One of the tragedies of this fear of speaking one's Aboriginal language is the failure to take advantage of what a culture offers to help ease the hardship of parenting. In former times an intricate network of relatives could be depended on to help in child rearing. There has been a breakdown to traditional and cultural child-rearing patterns. Near loss or loss of language and the fear of speaking it has affected these belief systems and child-rearing values. In the words of one community member:

As an Aboriginal nation and Canadians we should be proud who we are and teach our children to know who they are and I think once they know that who they are . . . they will make progress and they will be proud of themselves and there wouldn't be so much low self-esteem. Before the white man came we survived. We need to teach our children to be proud of who they are and to identify themselves as Aboriginal people so they can be proud people.

Dakota Elder Eva McKay of Sioux Valley states, "It's true that the residential school life has altered the traditional way of our people and was the beginning of the breaking up of traditional family life. We came out confused...and the hurt that we did not bring out but hid within us became a reality later in life (Assembly of First Nations, 1989).

Some prefer to leave such memories in the dustbin of history, but they are very much alive today and exhibited in the intergenerational transmission of trauma that has been

recognized over the past decade. The issues spawned by this era created a new assault on families and communities weakened by generations of institutional life, leading to what came to be known as the 60's scoop.

### **The 60's Scoop**

It seems reasonable to assume that these assaults on Aboriginal families and communities would presage we now call the 60's scoop, which replicated the Residential School Experience, albeit in a different form but with similar negative outcomes for Aboriginal people. Space does not allow for full treatment of this segment of our joint history that shocked the nation when Patrick Johnson (1983) revealed statistics of child welfare involvement with Aboriginal communities, but it seems clear that the residential school experience must have laid the groundwork by weakening the fabric of Aboriginal family and community life. While we cannot lose sight of this black mark on our history, those of us who are involved with Aboriginal people today cannot risk becoming overly complacent. We would be wise to reflect upon how current child welfare systems may be inadvertently replicating oppressive practices upon Aboriginal people. In one of our talking circles, a highly respected professional member of the community who had practiced child welfare work spontaneously exclaimed in response to the stories "Oh my God, I became the Indian Agent for my people."

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people continue to be concerned about the continued hemorrhage of Aboriginal children to child welfare systems. What are the reasons for this? Is it possible that the Delegation of Child Welfare Authority to First Nations communities might be inadvertently repeating past mistakes? If so, why? It is clear is that such systems disavow the historical government objective of removing

*A community can be affected by institutional child abuse in profound and subtle ways, directly and indirectly.*

Aboriginal children from the influence of their families and communities, and labour valiantly to counter this trend. So what forces exert a stronger influence on the fracturing of Aboriginal families and communities than those that support them in their healing and development? One of the objectives of this study is to examine what community members and elders have to say about these and other questions that are important to communities and leaders in child welfare systems.

Are those of us who serve Aboriginal children in mainstream child welfare systems respecting Aboriginal culture and tradition? Are we ensuring the child's ongoing intimate relationship with extended family and community? Are we perpetuating yet another generation of Aboriginal children who will fail to learn how to parent and how to love? As academic researchers, policy makers and helping professionals, do we have not have an obligation to avoid a repetition of past mistakes to improve the outcomes for Aboriginal families and communities?

There is greater understanding today about some factors that are a regrettable consequence of their experiences with foreign systems. We know that children physically and sexually abused while away from home frequently brought the effects of that abuse back to their families. Some abused children have become abusers themselves, directing their behaviors at parents, siblings, partners, and even their own children. Family members may suffer without even being aware of the abuser's own previous abuse in residential institutions. In addition to experiencing the effects of physical and sexual abuse, the families of Aboriginal survivors also suffered the alienation of children who lost their language and their cultural heritage at residential schools. For these reasons, survivors and their family members share many of the same needs. Because they have lived first-hand the legacy of abuse, members of survivors' families are especially sensitive to the need for preventive measures and increased awareness on the part of Aboriginal communities to address these issues.

The damage caused by institutional child abuse, particularly abuse that has continued over a period of years or through more than one generation, extends beyond the individual survivors and their families: it affects entire communities. A community can be affected by institutional child abuse in profound and subtle ways, directly and indirectly. In a community where almost everyone has passed through the same institution, and where many were seriously abused, it is hard to know where to begin an effective healing process. Small or tightly knit communities are especially vulnerable to the ripple effects of institutional child abuse. They must integrate victims back into a community that may already contain victim-offenders.

*...many Aboriginal people are searching for a return to traditional ways that emphasize holistic values at the interpersonal and ecological level, values that stand in direct contrast to prevailing mainstream values.*

Even when the survivor's destructive behavior is turned inward, communities have to cope with the consequences. They must rebuild a sense of confidence in the community as a safe place for disclosure and healing. The rifts caused by recriminations among community members where some survivors have themselves become perpetrators of abuse must also be healed. The community may have to replace institutions where the abuse took place, because the educational function performed by those institutions remains necessary and important. A population prone to substance abuse and exhibiting suicidal tendencies puts enormous pressure on the healing resources of small, close-knit or isolated communities. Because many survivors simply do not have the education or life skills to become self-sufficient, this, in turn, places additional economic stress on the community. This may help us to understand some of the complexities of the situation.

While we recognize the importance of these factors, we focus here on explanations of an organizational nature that we hope will help us to better understand why it can be so difficult to change child welfare systems.

The following section describes some of the special challenges to Aboriginal families and communities that flow from the residential school experiences and the 60s scoop, and that continue to challenge Aboriginal families and communities today.

### **Why is it so hard to change Aboriginal child welfare practice?**

We would suggest that beyond explanatory discussions of oppression, colonialism, Eurocentrism, domination and exploitation, there are programmatic aspects to be explored that are related to the uncritical acceptance of current paradigms by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal child welfare experts. Such prevailing paradigms seem to exist in direct opposition to traditional Aboriginal ways of thinking. This point is particularly noteworthy at a time when many Aboriginal people are searching for a return to traditional ways that emphasize holistic values at the interpersonal and ecological level, values that stand in direct contrast to prevailing mainstream values.

European thought has been influenced by the Cartesian dichotomy of mind and body, which led man to view himself as an isolated ego within a material body, which he was to control. Descartes fundamentally affected the western world by dividing nature into two separate and independent realms: that of mind, and that of matter. This allowed scientists to treat matter as dead and totally separate from themselves, and to see the material world as a multitude of objects assembled into a huge machine. This mechanistic view was held by Newton, who constructed his theory of mechanics on this basis and made it the foundation of classical physics.

While the Cartesian division and Newton's mechanistic worldview may have been beneficial in the development of technology, it has not been as applicable to the world of human relationships and services. Existential philosopher, Gabriel Marcel (1949), goes so far as to propose that our faith in such techniques have led us to 'pantechnicism' - an abuse of the methods of science, by extending it into areas in which they do not apply, such as those of interpersonal relations, philosophy and ethics.

Taylor (1911) established the School of Scientific Management in the early 1900s, which advocated the scientific method as the most efficient way to work. It consisted in shifting all responsibility for the organization of work from the worker to the manager, selecting the most competent person to do the work, training the person to do the work efficiently, and then monitoring his performance to ensure that the work was done correctly. This formed the basis for the creation of assembly line production, and in spite of its dehumanizing tendencies, contributed greatly to economic prosperity in the Western world. Taylor ended up being a hated man and eventually went mad as people responded to what they perceived as a dehumanizing work environment. Yet his influence continues to this day and extends to the human services system with its complex system of fragmented and difficult to access programs.

Weber (1947) was the first to study and describe the characteristics of bureaucracy. Most remembered for his study of the positive aspects of bureaucratic arrangements, Weber also studied this phenomenon partly out of concern for the negative implications that he foresaw. He was concerned even then about the inability of such systems to respond to changing circumstances; the dangers of a mindless and unquestioning bureaucracy and the potentially dehumanizing effects on staff, especially those who worked at the lowest levels of the organization. The human service agencies formed in the twentieth century could not help but



reflect these schools of thought. The scientific method was accepted as the most efficient way to organize work, launching an inevitable societal movement toward increased mechanization, specialization and bureaucratization (Morgan, 1986)

This influence has created great benefits and persists to this day, but few would deny that it has had some down sides. The undue pursuit of scientific and professional solutions to the problems of people can estrange helpers from the communities and the people they serve. There is no question that scientific and rational approaches important gains have been achieved important result of to the complex social conditions that we encounter, but we may have lost the balance that is necessary between community systems and the bureaucratic systems that have evolved. While there is no empirical evidence to support our contentions, it has been our observation that, in the absence of any other familiar models and because of funding and policy constraints many Aboriginal agencies have embraced mainstream approaches, including some of their dysfunctional elements. Many are asking if the adoption of a bureaucratic paradigm with its recurrent themes of domination and rationality has led Aboriginal astray from their traditional approaches.

For example, we have observed in many jurisdictions the vain hope that by creating the right procedures for staff, the kinds of errors that call public attention to child welfare deficiencies will not re-occur. Every review conducted in response to public outrage about a child welfare tragedy seems to spawn a legacy of increased paperwork reporting and information requirements, to the point where the time spent on casework with clients is less than the time needed to feed the system's requirements for documentation. Tragic events such as the death of children in care keep adding new procedures, safeguards, protocols, and training and information requirements.

*An alternative perspective is needed that builds greater understanding of the Aboriginal worldview that has not been recognized since initial contact with Aboriginal people.*

Does this guarantee quality children's service? We think not. Yet we often ignore the concerns of front line staff and clients, who become viewed as the means to realize institutional ends,

leading to the creation of a reified world that estranges staff from clients as they increasingly assume the role of gatekeepers to scarce resources. This tendency seems to validate Weber's fear that growing areas of life would be subjected to decision-making according to technical rules. In some situations it validates the concerns of John Stuart Mill, a 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher who feared that bureaucracy, left unchecked, could diminish creative thinking and self-direction on the part of its members. He worried that key dimensions of routine and hierarchical decision-making might eventually replace discretion, spontaneity, and personal moral choice. Research with client and staff experiences with child protection services suggests that at least some of his fears have become reality in our child protection services (Lafrance, 2001).

We are suggesting that what is needed is the exercise of that most important and distinctive of all human characteristics, the capacity for self-renewal generated by reflection. Our modern models of helping

*There are signs of hope all around us: Aboriginal communities are engaged in a healing process and in a return to tradition...*

are often hierarchical, specialized, un-receptive to community, and procedurally bound. We too often go into a community on our own terms, with a primary allegiance to the system that employs us instead of the families and communities that we serve. This can create service models that search for pathology rather than strength, educational models that focus on the banking model of education, health care that focuses on illness and pathology rather than on wellness and health, justice models that seek to punish and ostracize rather than reconcile and helping models that maintain the status quo rather than to seek structural change. John Ralston Saul (1995) provides some early alerts to the parade of ideology to which the human services have been subjected: assertions are made as truth; there is contempt for considered reflection and a fear of debate.

Yet we have found signs of hope in Aboriginal communities who have engaged in a healing process and in a return to tradition that will undoubtedly result in greater numbers of people who can successfully function in both societies. Many youth want to contribute to their community and to help other youth; more people are listening to clients and front line social workers. This tells us that a shift is taking place in our communities. We are at the beginning of a new path that elders, aboriginal scientists, child welfare practitioners and community leaders are in the process of creating based on ancient and valued knowledge that has stood the test of time for many thousands of years.

## **Worldviews**

If the cycles of destructive practices towards Aboriginal communities, families and their children that have nearly decimated their culture and their way of life are to be broken, it seems important to reflect on Indigenous peoples' experiences with oppression and colonization over the past 500 years. This calls upon western society to examine deeply held assumptions, values, and attitudes that can have an unconscious, but powerful, impact on our behaviors. We need an alternative perspective to generate a greater understanding of the Aboriginal worldview that we have failed to fully appreciate since contact. The importance of reflection on this matter becomes even more apparent as we begin a new discourse. It seems relevant at this early stage to revisit the issue of prevailing paradigms in which world-views are expressed.

Henderson (2000, p.12 ) compares the development of scientific paradigms with those that take place in the social sciences as "context." As a paradigm reflects current scientific thought about the natural world, "context" reflects current social, political, and legal thought about human social order. He cites Roberto Unger, a Brazilian legal scholar who asserts, "that if context allows the people in it to discover everything about the world that they can discover, then it is a natural context. If the context does not allow such movement then it is an artificial context derived from selected assumptions."

Many Aboriginal people have concluded that their survival lies in rediscovering the natural context that sustained them for many thousands of years before being replaced with an artificial context. Unger's central thesis is that human empowerment depends on our ability to reduce the distance between what he calls context preserving routines (laws) and context transforming conflict. Human empowerment relies on the ability to (re)invent institutions and practices that manifest context revising freedoms. An improved understanding of the artificial

context that has governed much of Aboriginal life since contact may help inspire the creation of an alternative context and reduce the residue of colonialism, domination, and oppression.

Ultimately, this may to construct a more just society and more equitable human relationships for all of society. The challenges in so doing are based on deeply engrained beliefs and attitudes.

Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist Frantz Fanon touches upon a key element when he defines colonized people as:

. . . every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death . . . of its local cultural originality . . . which finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation that is with the culture of the mother country. The colonized person is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes white as he renounces his blackness, his jungle. The tensions between cultures and languages, inferiority complex, the assimilative choice are all elements of the brutal, subtle brutality of colonization.

This is illustrated in a letter from a Joint-Church Delegation of the Indian and Eskimo Residential School Commission presented to the Minister of Mines and Resources in 1930 (RG 10, volume 6730, file 169-62, pt. 2). The following described one assumption about the perspective of Aboriginal people on the superiority of European culture vis-à-vis the forces of nature.

. . . so far as the Indian himself is concerned, he has already seen with his own eyes that many of the white man's ways are superior to his own. He has seen, for instance, that the white man's methods and education have given him control over many of the forces of nature and over many of these circumstances of life.

On the other hand, the committee recognized that:

The Indians successfully occupied this continent for 12,000 or possibly, 20,000 years. They . . . have displayed unsurpassed human qualities of loyalty to unseen powers and adaptability to the practical; have a living past capable of energizing their present and "any system of education which destroys all their faith in their own institutions and traditions will create in them, a sense of permanent inferiority and an unfortunate belief

that everything which is peculiarly your own is not only worthless but an obstacle to progress.

It seemed clear that some understood the traditional qualities of Aboriginal people that church societies considered worth preserving. These included:

1. "The quality of loyalty to family and friends which is capable of expansion into loyalty to a wider circle.
2. The deep love of children from which can be developed the strong desire to help the children of the race to be well-born.
3. The generosity and hospitality which are outstanding characteristics of the Indian races which may be developed as some of the finer elements of social living.
4. The traditional quality of courage and admiration of brave leadership and which can be used to spur the young Indian on in the face of discouragement and the hard grind of monotonous routine.
5. The engrafted dignity and serenity of the leaders of the race and which should be preserved as a help in restoring to the hectic world in which we live, the poise and calm of which we have been robbed by our numerous mechanical inventions."

Regrettably, such insights did little to change prevailing assumptions and beliefs that held the Aboriginal people to be in need of civilizing and Christianizing. In the end, the discussion was about the means by which Aboriginal people could be transformed into white (European) people, as this was the *ideal* objective.

Young poses a conundrum for those who belong to the dominant groups of society, stating that

The oppressor has no apparent existence. Not only does he not identify himself as such, but he is not even supposed to have his own reality. His presence is so immediate and dense and his universe coincides so fully with the Universe that he becomes invisible. Rarely seen, rarely named, he is unique nonetheless and having a full existence as the keeper of the word. He is the supreme programmer who confers various degrees of existence on those who are different from himself...as the embodiment of the universal,

the dominator is also the only Subject, the Individual, who never being considered to belong to a particular group can study those impersonal categories of the population who pose a “problem”, represent a “question”, constitute a “case” or simply have a condition”.

The complexities involved in reconciliation with Aboriginal people by members of the dominant group is no simple matter, no matter how sincere the desire to support Aboriginal self determination in the development of policies and practices that are in keeping with Aboriginal traditions, beliefs, history and traditions. This is further complicated by the reality that most Aboriginal professionals have been educated and socialized in mainstream systems for practice in child welfare systems. While many have a developing understanding of their heritage, their lives cannot but be influenced by the educational and socialization system to which they have been exposed for most of their lives.

*Perhaps one answer lies in finally accepting the wisdom of Aboriginal colleagues and elders to guide us in this journey through unknown lands*

Paolo Freire cautioned that people who have been oppressed could assume the behaviors of their oppressors when they take on similar roles. This is not to offend our Aboriginal colleagues who must

overcome such great challenges to their practice, but rather to acknowledge that we are all entering what the early explorers described on ancient maps as “terra incognita,” an unknown land. The warning “here be dragons” often followed this. We are realizing as we continue our exploration that our journey calls for uncommon wisdom and guidance. We are also learning that while these were unknown lands for the early explorers, this was not true for the original people who served as their guides.

The question then becomes whether those we who are or have been part of oppressive systems that have or have had such a negative impact upon Aboriginal people have a legitimate role to play. This question calls upon the best of our collective wisdom. Perhaps one answer lies

in finally accepting the wisdom of Aboriginal colleagues and elders to guide us in this journey through unknown lands and to join forces in the slaying of the “dragons” that lie in wait. In conversation with Anita Levin about the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of *Case Critical: Social Justice and Social Services in Canada*, Ben Carniol (2005) describes how the approaches of Aboriginal social work practitioners and tradition teachers have influenced him as a teacher and practitioner. Carniol says;

BC: They have influenced me in a very profound way. One of my teachers in this area is an Anishnabe Elder. Her Aboriginal name is Waubauno Kwe. Her English name is Barbara Riley. I first met her at a workshop and as I heard her speak and saw the way she interacted with the workshop participants, I found myself being very open to the kind of teachings that she was providing. I discovered that Aboriginal cultures are very sophisticated and intricate. I was amazed at the extent to which I had internalized the privilege of mainstream culture that has devalued and created false images of Aboriginal culture. I am very grateful to her for her willingness to become one of my mentors. She is responsible for my traveling along a road where I learned much more about Aboriginal world views, and realized that when it comes to helping people, there is a whole area of wisdom that Aboriginal culture can offer us.

The complexity of assuming a different perspective is fearsome when the dominant society prevails to the extent that we are mostly unaware of our contribution to the oppression of Aboriginal people. We are learning that, in the words of Sturgeon Lake to Jean. “You can drive the bus at times when you come here. But remember that it is our bus, and we will tell you when you can drive, where you can turn, and when you can get off.” This means we must behave at all times with respect, humility, and a realistic appraisal of our capabilities.

The “Making Our Hearts Sing” initiative in Alberta has told us that community perceptions about possible solutions rarely coincide with typical child welfare responses. The discourse about new directions and policy recommendations conflicts with prevalent approaches

*Social work has begun to incorporate spirituality as part of its knowledge base and practice foundation.*



to the delivery of child welfare services that are top down, segmented and increasingly rigid approaches instead of the holistic and flexible models favored by families and communities. The gap between current responses and the issues identified in recent work on intergenerational trauma is significant and calls for urgent action. While the collective ignorance demonstrated by provincial authorities in the 60s and 70s might *perhaps* be somewhat understood in the context of the times, in light of the knowledge gained since then, there can be no excuse for failing to address those issues that contribute the ongoing decimation of Aboriginal families and communities. Those of us who are professional social worker have a special responsibility in serving families and children. This responsibility perhaps calls upon us to explore and deepen our own spiritual roots, regardless of the tradition we follow, as Aboriginal people seek to renew and invigorate their own spirituality. This can be a challenge, but it can also be invigorating.

One Aboriginal agency in Edmonton, the Bent Arrow Healing Society, is hosting a Child Welfare Protection Unit. The workers are experiencing a spiritually inviting environment based upon Aboriginal traditions such as prayer, smudging and a profound respect for those they serve and each other. The work atmosphere makes clients and workers alike feel at home, and those who work there prefer it to the often sterile and bureaucratic work environment of government offices. Zapf (2003) suggests that as a profession seeking to improve its status as an evidence-based discipline, social work may have avoided spiritual issues that could be perceived as unscientific. This pattern is changing as social workers express a renewed interest in spirituality. He cites Drouin (2002) who attributes this renewal to "a longing for profound and meaningful connections to each other, to ourselves, and to something greater than ourselves" (p. 34) that has arisen because the Western mindset of individualism and materialism has ruined the environment

and destroyed community. He sees evidence of "growing spiritual longing" in social work practitioners, in clients, and in Western society as a whole (p. 36).

Some authors have attempted to include traditional knowledge or "Aboriginal theory" as part of the knowledge base for mainstream social work practice (Chappell, 1997; Turner, 1999), but any assumption of traditional knowledge as just another theory base disguises a fundamental difference in world view (Zapf, 1999a). Morrissette, McKenzie, & Morrissette (1993) expressed the essence of this difference:

While Aboriginal people do not embrace a single philosophy, there are fundamental differences between the dominant Euro-Canadian and traditional Aboriginal societies, and these have their roots in differing perceptions of one's relationship with the universe and the Creator. (p. 93)

Hart (1996) compares Western and Aboriginal approaches as follows:

Western models of healing separate and detach individuals from their social, physical, and spiritual environments, isolating "patients" for treatment purposes and then re-introducing them into the world. Traditional healers are concerned with balancing emotional, physical, mental, spiritual, aspects of people, the environment, and the spirit world. (p. 63)

Social work has begun to incorporate spirituality as part of its knowledge base and practice foundation. Zapf (2003) warns of the danger in limiting our understanding of spirituality to a component of the person, pointing to Aboriginal social work and traditional healing as founded on a spiritual sense of interconnectedness. He asks if spirituality might not be a key to expanding our understanding of the person/environment relationship and the profound connections between ourselves and with the world around us.

Lest it appear that we can easily change our perspectives in this journey through uncharted land, an ancient Amazonian legend provides a further source of wisdom. According to the legend, the blue-black Rio Negro and the creamy, caramel-colored Rio Solimões, run side by side, without mixing at the mouth of the Amazon River. The waters of the two rivers differ in

temperature, clarity, density, and acidity, and continue side by side for miles before becoming the Amazon. Both rivers converge at one point but each retains its essential quality and characteristics. The resulting foam is new knowledge that would not exist if the rivers had not met. Our hope is that the new knowledge generated by coming together will allow Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal to retain their essential qualities, while creating new solutions that will better serve all children and families. The journey of exploration could not be complete without considering more closely the elements of colonization and genocide on Aboriginal people. This research has selected a close examination of this experience as the fundamental underpinning and theoretical and explanatory framework through which to view our learning.

## **FROM COLONIZATION AND GENOCIDE TO HEALING AND RECONCILIATION: A NEW FRAMEWORK**

### **Cultural Genocide**

“Civilizing the Indian race...implies the full transformation and development of the nature of the individual, the complete overthrow of religious, political and social customs, and very many changes in the domestic relations of the people.”

-Methodist Missionary John Maclean, 19<sup>th</sup> century

The term “genocide” is commonly linked to the mass killings of Jews and other minorities during the Holocaust. However, while some narrow definitions of the term relate to the physical annihilation of a group, other definitions are much broader (Churchill, 1998). The term was first coined by Lemkin in 1944 (see p. 1 for Lemkin’s definition), during the Second World War, to encompass a range of acts meant to persecute and destroy a particular group. Lemkin discussed different types of genocide. One type was related to wars and physical extermination, while another pointed to the

Colonialism is the deliberate and systematic application of power and implementation of activities designed to make a group of people forcefully dependant.

destruction of a culture without the physical extinction of the group. A third type of genocide combined the annihilation of some of the people and the assimilation of others (Churchill, 1998). In short, Lemkin was clear that genocide does not require killing (Chrisjohn et al., 1994).

Genocide that does not involve physical extermination has also been called cultural genocide and ordinary genocide. Cultural genocide can be defined as the destruction of a culture of people which does not necessarily include the taking of actual lives (Neu & Therrien, 2003). Tinker (1993) states that cultural genocide is:

“The effective destruction of a people by systematically...destroying, eroding, or undermining the integrity of the culture and system of values that defines a people and gives them life. First of all, it involves the destruction of those cultural structures of existence that give a people a sense of holistic and communal integrity. It does this by limiting a people’s freedom to practice their culture and to live out their lives in culturally appropriate patterns. It effectively destroys a people by eroding both their self-esteem and the interrelationships that bind them together as a community...Finally; it erodes people’s self-image as a whole people by attacking or belittling every aspect of [their] culture” (p. 6).

Cultural genocide is thus the systematic destruction of a culture, including the weakening of the will of the people to live (Davis & Zannies, 1973). The history of Aboriginal people in Canada, much like in other parts of the Americas, has been conceptualized as colonization and assimilation resulting from the settlement of Europeans in the land. However, it has also been suggested that, “Canada’s treatment of Aboriginal peoples in general, and its creation and operation of Residential Schools in particular, was and continues to be nothing short of genocide” (Chrisjohn et al., 1994, p. 41). Neu & Therrien (2003 p. 16) add that genocide “is an excellent starting point for thinking about the consequences of government initiatives directed at Indigenous people.”

Davis and Zannis (1973 p. 30) discuss the link between colonialism and genocide, and propose that “genocide is the means by which colonialism creates, sustains and extends its

control to enrich itself.” Colonialism is the deliberate and systematic application of power and implementation of activities designed to make a group of people (racial, political or cultural groups) forcefully dependant. Since the native people do not voluntarily surrender their independence, they must be overwhelmed and controlled by brutal force (genocide) to secure their dependency (Davis & Zannis, 1973). Thus, genocide is the method or process through which colonization occurs, as “colonization cannot take place without systematically liquidating all characteristics of the native society” (Davis & Zannis, 1973, p. 32). Neu and Therrien (2003) refer to this type of genocide, which is undertaken or allowed as part of achieving a goal of colonization or developing territory belonging to Indigenous people, as genocide in the course of colonization. In Canada, the assimilation or genocide of Aboriginal people “by forcing them into colonial institutional structures and norms has been the most persistent objective of Canada’s long-term Indian policy.” (Boldt, 1993, p. 169). However, it is important to note that genocide is not new or exclusive to the Aboriginal peoples in Canada or the Americas. Genocide still exists today and is expected to continue to be part of colonization and “conflict resolution” policies and practices around the world and in the future (Churchill, 1998, 1999).

#### **Political, Economic, Religious, and Social Genocide**

The objectives of systematic destruction of the culture of Aboriginal people in Canada can be explored in more depth in the context of four major and interrelated types of cultural genocide: political, economic, religious and social genocide (Davis & Zannis, 1973; Tinker, 1993). First, political genocide includes using government, military or police power to control or subdue a culture. Examples of political genocide in relation to the Aboriginal people of Canada include expropriating the land from Aboriginal people through treaties and relocating them to reserves (Chrisjohn et al., 1994; Tinker, 1993). Indeed, the Dominion of Canada “purchased”

Northwest Canada, including Alberta, in 1870. Between 1871 and 1921, eleven treaties were signed with the Aboriginal people (Berry & Brink, 2004). Through these treaties, the government took control of the land, moved First Nations people to Indian reserves and a new political system of band chiefs and councils was implemented. Today, less than 0.2% of Canada's total land area is reserved for Aboriginal people, and reserves are legally owned and controlled by the government – although Aboriginal people are allowed to “use” the land (York, 1990). In addition, bylaws and spending decisions of elected chiefs and councilors can still be vetoed by the federal government if they are deemed inappropriate (York, 1990). Furthermore, Aboriginal people were not permitted to vote in federal elections until 1960, thus taking away their political voice (York, 1990). In short, the rights and land of the Aboriginal people were robbed through new laws, thus firmly establishing the roots of genocide.

Economic genocide is the usage of economic systems to exploit the culture, including pillaging of natural economic resources that results in a people unable to sustain themselves (Tinker, 1993). In Canada, this included the eradication of the buffalo and the conversion of Aboriginal people into farmers; as well as bans on trading outside of reservations. Economic genocide is often closely tied to political genocide, for example, in government policies that are economic in nature. In the case of the creation of reserves, economic manipulations were used to “purchase” the land, determine reserve size, and relocate Aboriginal people (Neu & Therrien, 2003). Today, government still has control over cash flow to reserves, thus influencing economic decisions in Aboriginal communities (York, 1990).

Religious genocide involves overt attempts to destroy the spirituality of a culture (Tinker, 1993). Religious genocide included an attack on the spiritual foundations of the Aboriginal people, for example, by denying spiritual ceremonies and forcing Christianity on children,

families and communities (Tinker, 1993). For example, amendments to the Indian Act in 1884 and 1895 outlawed many traditional dances and ceremonies, such as sun dances, thirst dances and potlatches. These ceremonies were raided and shut down by police, and those taking part incarcerated (York, 1990). Thus, traditional Aboriginal spiritual practices were made illegal and missionaries promoted new religions (Berry & Brink, 2004). Recently, the Catholic church has acknowledged that the cumulative result of missionary efforts (including residential schools, discussed below) was “the weakening of the spirit of the Aboriginal peoples” (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1994, p. 84).

Finally, social genocide includes a range of social changes imposed on the culture for the purpose of annihilating it. In Canada, the traditional social and belief systems of Aboriginal people were destroyed (Bastien, 2004; Boldt, 1993). For example, the Indian Act was drafted to deal with the Aboriginal people until they were assimilated into mainstream Euro-Canadian culture. In addition, the extended kinship system which was a crucial part of their identity was displaced and the new ideal of a nuclear family imposed (Tinker, 1993; York, 1990). Bastien (2004, p. 27) adds that government policies attempted to “destroy a holistic way of relating to the world by disrupting the process of maintaining the alliances central to the Niitsitapi [Aboriginal] way of life and identity through ceremony, language, and traditional instruction”. In short, Aboriginal people were disconnected from their kinship alliances and tribal ways, and their identity, sense of self and consciousness was altered (Bastien, 2004).

*Residential schools represented various forms of cultural genocide, including political, religious, and social genocide.*

The establishment of residential schools in the late 1800s was a crucial element of Canada’s Indian policy and the genocide of Aboriginal people (Chrisjohn et al., 1994). These schools, which were

established on reserves across the country, were controlled by Protestant and Catholic churches until they were closed in the 1960s and 1970s (York, 1990). Residential schools aimed to assimilate Aboriginal children into Canadian society by removing and isolating them from their families and communities while indoctrinating them with “the religion and culture of the white man” (Berry & Brink, 2004; Neu & Therrien, 2003; York, 1990, p. 22). York (1990) adds that, like churches, government believed Aboriginal people were “barbaric” and “savage,” and therefore aimed to transform Aboriginal children into faithful Christians.

Children were thus “subjected to aggressive religious proselytizing; where they were taught to devalue their traditional spirituality, values and norms; and where they were prohibited from speaking their indigenous languages” (Boldt, 1993, p. 168). In short, residential schools aimed to destroy Aboriginal children’s link to their own culture and assimilate them into the dominant society (Chrisjohn et al., 1994). At the end of the 1800s, there were about 290 residential schools operating across Canada (Neu & Therrien, 2003). By 1931, 75% of Aboriginal children between the ages of 7 and 15 were enrolled in residential schools (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002; Stout & Kipling, 2003). The number of residential schools was particularly high in the prairie provinces, where enrolment rates soared up to 98% in Alberta (Armitage, 1993). Residential schools thus represented various forms of cultural genocide, including political, religious, and social genocide.

The relocation of the Sayisi Dene of Northern Manitoba provides another example of the interactive impacts of genocide on Aboriginal people. In 1956, as part of political efforts to assimilate Aboriginal people into mainstream society, the federal government abruptly relocated the Sayisi Dene from their land to “settle” them into the outskirts of Churchill Manitoba. For a thousand years before then, the Dene had lived a traditional way of life – hunting caribou,



fishing, and being completely independent and self-sufficient. This displacement from the land had a quick and tragic impact on the economic self-sufficiency, social structure, way of life and self-esteem of the Sayisi Dene. Left in a strange land and with no way to support themselves, the Sayisi Dene fell into a cycle of poverty, alcoholism, discrimination, and violence. Between 1956 and 1973, about one third of the Sayisi Dene died. Today, the community is in the process of reclaiming their land, coming to terms with their past, and healing (Bussidor & Bilgen-Reinart, 1997).

### **Ordinary Genocide**

In addition to cultural genocide, the term ordinary genocide has been used to refer to the annihilation of a community or group. Chrisjohn et al. (1994, quoting Zygmunt Bauman) states that:

“‘Ordinary’ genocide is rarely, if at all, aimed at the total annihilation of the group; the purpose of the violence (if the violence is purposeful and planned) is to destroy the marked category (a nation, a tribe, a religious sect) as a viable community capable of self-perpetuation and defense of its own self-identity. If this is the case, the objective of the genocide is met once: (1) the volume of violence has been large enough to undermine the will and resilience of the sufferers, and to terrorize them into surrender to the superior power and into acceptance of the order it imposed; and (2) the marked group has been deprived of resources necessary for the continuation of the struggle. With these two conditions fulfilled, the victims are at the mercy of their tormentors. They may be forced into protracted slavery, or offered a place in the new order on terms set by the victors... Whichever option has been selected, the perpetrators of the genocide benefit. They extend and solidify their power, and eradicate the roots of the opposition” (p. 45-46).

As evident in the discussion above on cultural genocide, the violence used by the oppressors can take many forms. Neu and Therrien (2003) conclude that in the case of Aboriginal people in Canada, violence includes: 1) the deliberate introduction of diseases (e.g. smallpox, tuberculosis); 2) the removal of children from their homes and placement into

residential schools; 3) forced acculturation; and 4) punishment for using one's native tongue or spirituality. These forms of violence were adapted, enforced and perpetuated by genocidal government policies and economic, political and bureaucratic mechanisms explicitly and/or implicitly aimed to destroy Aboriginal culture (Chrisjohn et al., 1994; Neu & Therrien, 2003).

### **Canada and the United Nations**

In 1948, the United Nations proposed and later ratified genocide as an international and punishable crime. Based on Lemkin's work, the United Nations defined genocide as follows:

Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- a. Killing members of the group;
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group" (United Nations, 2004).

Chrisjohn et al. (1994) state that the colonization of Aboriginal people in Canada constitutes genocide through: the forcible assimilation of Aboriginal people; inflicting of psychological, emotional and physical harm on Aboriginal people and children; removing children from Aboriginal homes into residential schools; and in general inflicting conditions to bring about the destruction of Aboriginal people and culture. For example, policies such those mandating residential school for Aboriginal children can be considered genocidal in nature (Churchill, 1999).

Canada signed the above United Nations convention in 1949 and adopted it in Parliament in 1952. However, Canada's statute implementing the genocide convention was drafted in such a way that the conditions of inflicting harm (section b) and transferring children (section e) were omitted (Churchill, 1999). The Canadian criminal code (section 318) still defines genocide as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy in whole or in part any identifiable

group, namely, (a) killing members of the group; or (b) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction” (Department of Justice Canada, 2004). Given, for example, that residential schools were still active for about twenty years after the signing of the United Nations convention, it is perhaps not surprising that the government of Canada has adopted a definition of genocide that is limited in scope to the physical extermination of a group.

The definition of genocide in Canada may raise the question of the intentionality of the genocide on Aboriginal people. Indeed, the treatment of Aboriginal people in Canada is often conceptualized as non-intentional, a mistake, an inadvertent, misguided and unfortunate part of building the nation of Canada (Chrisjohn et al., 1994). However, the failure of the Canadian government to adopt the UN definition of genocide may challenge the idea that the annihilation of Aboriginal culture was unintentional. In addition, as discussed before, colonialism itself is not unintentional, arbitrary, or haphazard but is rather a purposeful and systematic application of power designed to control and overwhelm a group of people and make them forcefully dependant (Davis & Zannis, 1973).

With that in mind, Tinker (1993) states that cultural genocide may be so systemic that it is largely subliminal, and so hidden behind “good intentions” and unrecognized systemic structures, that some of those involved may be unaware of the devastating results of their good intentions. Davis & Zannis (1973, p. 181) conclude that “the most heinous crimes may result from the most altruistic motives” and that “cultural genocide must take its place as a most serious genocidal crime” (p. 179). Tinker (1993), similarly states that regardless of whether it is intentional or not, cultural genocide is as effective in exterminating a culture of people as overt

physical extermination. Without a doubt, the impact of efforts to destroy the Aboriginal culture has been overwhelming and long-term. These impacts are discussed below.

### **Impacts on Aboriginal People**

“Residential schools have had a devastatingly negative impact on the lives of individuals.”  
(Chrisjohn et al., 1994, p. 61)

The colonization and assimilation, or genocide, of Aboriginal people in Canada resulted in a loss of both lives and culture. It is estimated that prior to European settlement, 18.5 million Aboriginal people lived in North America - 2 million of these in Canada (Churchill, 1998). By the turn of the twentieth century, it is thought that up to 99% of the continent’s Aboriginal people had been wiped out (Churchill, 1998). For example, by 1911, Aboriginal people made up less than 5% of Alberta’s population (Berry & Brink, 2004). Today, Aboriginal people still make up only 5% of Alberta’s population and 3% of Canada’s population (Statistics Canada, 2004a).

In addition, the individual and cultural impacts on Aboriginal people were devastating. The short and long-term impacts of residential schools on Aboriginal children, communities, and culture are well documented. In addition to the trauma of being removed from their families and communities, children suffered numerous abuses in residential schools, including physical, sexual, psychological and emotional abuse (e.g. verbal abuse, forbidding Aboriginal languages or spiritual practices), as well as unsuitable living conditions, such as inadequate nutrition, overcrowding, poor ventilation, and buildings ill equipped for the harsh climate (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, as cited in Chrisjohn et al., 1994). Among the most detrimental effects of residential schools reported in the literature are a sense of alienation, loss of identity and self-esteem, lack of parenting skills, family breakdown, intergenerational trauma and violence, and loss of language, culture, spirituality and pride (Horejsi & Craig, 1992; Ing,

1991; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1994; Spicer, 1998; Stout & Kipling, 2003; Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004). The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1994, p.83) concluded that “these effects have carried over to several generations and may well be the basis for the dysfunction we see in individuals, families and entire Native communities.”

*A direct link can also be made between residential schools and the child welfare system.*

Indeed, the trauma Aboriginal people experienced through their history of genocide, including residential schools, has been passed on from generation to generation and continues to impact the lives and perpetuate many of the problems manifested in Aboriginal communities (Milloy, 1999; Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004). Residential schools have also impeded the transference of parenting skills from one generation to the next, which has led to troubled family relationships and difficulties raising children (Milloy, 1999; York, 1990). Milloy (1999, p. 299) adds that “In residential schools, [children] learned that adults often exert power and control through abuse. The lessons learned in childhood are often repeated in adulthood with the result that many survivors of the residential school system often inflict abuse on their own children,” and so on in subsequent generations. Other well-documented impacts linked to residential schools include suicide, post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol and drug abuse, gambling, somatic disorders, domestic violence, crime and child abuse ( Bennett & Blackstock, 2002; Berry & Brink, 2004; Horejsi & Craig, 1992; Stout & Kipling, 2003; Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004).

Aboriginal people and communities continue to deal with many of these and other problems today. Indeed, the number of children in care is only one of a range of issues facing Aboriginal children, families, and communities. Aboriginal youth are more likely to live in

single parent homes, drop out of school, be homeless, abuse alcohol and drugs (including solvents), commit suicide and live in poverty than non-Aboriginal youth in Canada (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2004; Richard, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2004b; Trocme, Knoke, & Blackstock, 2004). Aboriginal people in general are disproportionately impacted by a range of social economic and health issues such as poverty, unemployment, crime, violence, alcohol and drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, sexually transmitted infections, tuberculosis and suicide (Health Canada, 2000; Lee, 2000; Moore, 2003). Suicide is the leading cause of death for youth and adults up to 44 years old, and urban Aboriginals are more than twice as likely to live in poverty as non-Aboriginal people (Health Canada, 2000; Lee, 2000). Indian and Northern Affairs Canada further reported that 16% of homes on reserves were in need of major repairs, and 5% were unsafe or inhabitable (Health Canada, 2000). A study by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (1996, as cited in Bennett & Blackstock, 2002), concluded that Aboriginal people living on reserves would rank 80<sup>th</sup> in the world if measured by the United Nations Human Development Index. As a country, Canada ranks second in the world.

#### **The Evolution of Genocide: From Residential Schools to Child Welfare**

“Residential schools were replaced by...child welfare...in a second attempt to ensure that the next generation of Indian children was different from their parents.”  
(Armitage, 1993, p. 131)

Although it may seem at this point that the discussion has digressed significantly from the issue of child welfare, genocide provides a crucial context for understanding child welfare problems facing Aboriginal communities in Canada today. First, the above discussion points to the issues facing Aboriginal individuals and families, such as lack of parenting skills and violence, as being part of the impact of residential schools and genocide. It also recognizes the systemic factors involved in the genocide of Aboriginal

people and that the child welfare system may be perpetuating. In this way, child welfare could be a legacy of the genocide of Aboriginal people and residential schools, and perpetuate intergenerational trauma and individual, family and community problems.

A direct link exists between residential schools and the child welfare system. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, residential schools increasingly became part of caring for the welfare of children. At this time, some children were being placed in residential schools because of concerns about the inability of parents to care for them, such as abuse and neglect (Milloy, 1999). However, Milloy (1999) makes the point that:

“Beyond social factors (alcoholism, illegitimacy, excessive procreation), neglectful ‘home circumstances’ were often economic, the product not of some flaw in the character of Aboriginal parents but of the marginalization of Aboriginal communities...it was more likely to be unemployment, a general lack of opportunity and access to resources, marking the poverty of families, that undercut the material quality of care that parents afforded their children” (p. 213).

By 1966, up to 75% of children in residential schools were “from homes which by reasons of overcrowding and parental neglect or indifference [were] considered unfit for school children” (Milloy, 1999, p. 214). In the 1960s and 1970s, the federal government made legislative arrangements with provincial governments to take over the “protection” of Aboriginal children. Thus, child welfare took over this protective function of residential schools, and played an important role in the closing of residential schools (Milloy, 1999). In fact, some kids were directly transferred from residential schools to the child welfare system (e.g. foster care) (Milloy, 1999).

Starting in the 1960s until the early 1980s in Canada, large numbers of Aboriginal children were taken by the child welfare system and adopted or placed into foster care or other forms of substitute care (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002). This period of mass removal became

known as the 60's Scoop. By the end of the 1960s, Aboriginal children represented 30 to 40 percent of all children in the child welfare system in Canada, and even higher numbers in the prairie provinces (e.g. 50% in Alberta) (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002). These children were often placed in non-Aboriginal foster or adoptive homes, continuing the process of Aboriginal assimilation into Canadian mainstream society (Blackstock, Trocme, & Bennett, 2004; Hudson, 1997; Sinclair, 2004).

Although the child welfare system purported to be acting in the best interests of the child, this second mass removal of children from their homes and communities paralleled the residential school experience and perpetuated the genocide of Aboriginal people. The impact on Aboriginal children, families and communities was equally grave as the 60s scoop contributed to the loss of culture, connection, identity, and relationships; the development of a new generation of Aboriginal people without parenting skills; the further disempowerment of Aboriginal people; and the continuation of problems such as alcoholism, poverty and violence (Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, Stevenato and Associates, & Budgell, 1999).

A number of studies have examined the long-term impacts of the child welfare system on Aboriginal children (e.g. Armitage, 1993; Baden, 2002; Bennett & Blackstock, 2002; McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, & Anderson, 1982; Native Child and Family Services of Toronto et al., 1999; Richard, 2004; Spicer, 1998). For example, several studies have examined the effects of non-Aboriginal foster and adoptive homes on children. These studies have found that some children raised in non-Aboriginal homes experienced racism as well as physical, emotional and sexual abuse by foster or adoptive parents (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002; Timpson, 1995). In addition, many children experienced identity issues as they tried to understand their Aboriginal racial and cultural identity in a non-Aboriginal environment (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002;



Richard, 2004). To exacerbate children's identity issues, several adoption agencies that placed Aboriginal children into homes did not keep records for children to find their biological families (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002). Further studies have suggested a range of negative long-term outcomes for Aboriginal children raised in the child welfare system, such as poverty, unemployment, incarceration, alcohol and drug addiction, family violence, and an increased risk of having their own children placed in care (e.g. Bennett & Blackstock, 2002; Spicer, 1998).

In short, the Sixties scoop continued to oppress Aboriginal communities who were already suffering from the effects of residential schools and genocide, and served to exacerbate a range of individual, family and community problems. These problems, in turn, have led the removal of more children from Aboriginal communities, perpetuating a cycle of loss and grief for Aboriginal people – and the continuation of children placed in the child welfare system. As discussed in the introduction, the number of children in the child welfare system remains very high and is a significant problem today.

*...the eradication of Aboriginal culture has resulted in "unprecedented conditions of dependency by virtue of the destruction of kinship alliances and the emergence of isolated, individualistic...and dissociated [selves]" (p. 27, 29) Bastien, 2004*

### **Cultural Crisis**

The massive forces of forced assimilation, loss of traditional means of subsistence, and isolation have reduced Indian cultures into patchworks of remnants and voids. The result is a cultural crisis manifested by a breakdown of social order in Indian communities (Boldt, 1993, p. 176).

Beyond individual impacts, the continued experience of genocide, "the systematic destruction of cultural patterns, beliefs, and social and normative systems and structures...has had a devastating impact on Indian culture" and has resulted in a cultural crisis (Boldt, 1993, p. 169). York (1990) adds that government policies and societal attitudes of colonization and

genocide, including the child welfare experience, have left Aboriginal people “dispossessed of their culture, their language, their children... their power of self-determination” and their land (p. 269). For instance, currently, it is estimated that fifty of fifty-three of Canada’s Aboriginal language are in danger of extinction, and that only one quarter of Aboriginal people know enough of an Aboriginal language to carry on a conversation (Statistics Canada, 2004b; York, 1990). In short, the crisis of Aboriginal culture is evidenced the loss of identity and sense of self, loss of connections to community and family, loss of a sense of belonging, loss of language and culture, and loss of tradition and a sense of history.

The cultural crisis in Aboriginal communities is also evidenced by the development of a culture of dependence as well as cultural degeneration or de-culturation (Boldt, 1993). For example, Canada’s policy of isolating Aboriginal people on reserves has denied them the opportunity to “adapt and develop their traditional cultures as effective designs for living and surviving in the changing world around them” (Boldt, 1993, p. 171). These policies were essentially racist in nature, as they were based on notions that Aboriginal people were primitive and lazy, thus justifying the destruction of their tribal ways and practices (Bastien, 2004). Government policies led to a loss of economic self-sufficiency and a transition from independence to dependence on government assistance, both as individuals and communities. The result of these changes has been a new culture of dependence and the transmission of that culture (Boldt, 1993).

Bastien (2004) adds that the eradication of Aboriginal culture has resulted in “unprecedented conditions of dependency by virtue of the destruction of kinship alliances and the emergence of isolated, individualistic...and dissociated [selves]” (p. 27, 29). Other factors that have contributed to the culture of dependence include Aboriginal people’s experience with

colonial oppression, ethnocentrism, residential schools, injustice and imprisonment (Boldt, 1993). Boldt (1993) concludes that today, the culture of dependence is more central to Aboriginal identity than traditional culture.

The genocide of Aboriginal culture has also led to deculturation or cultural degeneration. This means that traditional social systems, patterns, and practices have disappeared or become progressively irrelevant as a direct or indirect result of government interference. Thus, many traditional values and ways have stopped being part of Aboriginal culture in a meaningful sense and have undermined Aboriginal people's capacity to thrive (Boldt, 1993). Boldt (1993) concludes that the current cultural crisis in Aboriginal communities is "so grave that Indians will not survive as Indians unless they initiate immediate and intensive measures to revitalize their traditional cultural philosophies, principles, social and normative systems, and languages" (p. 167). This healing, reconciliation, and revitalization of Aboriginal culture are discussed further in the next section.

### **Towards Healing and Reconciliation**

Those communities who have had the most success in dealing with the psychological legacy of colonialism are those that have found a way to operate within their cultural context and drawing on...the spiritual and other strengths that are present in their culture(From a speaker at the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1994, p. 48).

In recent years, Aboriginal people have resolved to overcome the pain and loss that were the legacy of colonization through healing, reconciliation and self-determination (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005; Berry & Brink, 2004). A major part of healing and reconciliation is building on the strengths and resiliency of Aboriginal people and reclaiming Aboriginal culture, identity and pride (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005; Berry & Brink, 2004). Indeed, Aboriginal people are mobilizing to recover from the trauma and oppression of residential

schools and genocide, and revitalizing their language, customs, spirituality, traditions, values and beliefs (York, 1990). York (1990) concludes that today, “evidence of a cultural revival can be seen across Canada...[it] is just one step toward regaining what has been lost” (p. 264, 269).

The promotion and preservation of Aboriginal languages is a crucial part of the healing, renewal and rebirth of Aboriginal people (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1994). Language is an expression of the culture and a reflection of the identity of the people deriving from shared experiences, values, feelings, ideas and worldviews (Boldt, 1993; York, 1990). Language is particularly important in Aboriginal culture because of the role of oral tradition in the transmission of cultural values, ways and philosophies (Boldt, 1993). Similarly, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) has also articulated that language is the cornerstone of Aboriginal people, emphasizing its importance in Aboriginal culture, spirituality and traditions and in the survival of the people (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1994, p. 45). Boldt (1993) concludes that “when a language dies, the world-view is lost...Only through their indigenous languages can today’s Indians fully access the knowledge, wisdom, sentiments, and meanings offered by their cultural heritage” (p. 187). In short, the survival of indigenous languages is critical to the healing and revitalization of Aboriginal people and culture.

### **Aboriginal Worldview**

From a broader perspective, the healing of Aboriginal people may be facilitated through cultural approaches based on Aboriginal worldviews. The colonization of Aboriginal people introduced an Anglo European ideology, which is based on values of individualism, power, control and efficiency (Cajete, 2000). These are radically different from Aboriginal worldviews and philosophy, which are based on an “organic, holistic concept of the world; spiritual and

harmonious relationships to the land and all life forms; communalism; personal duties and responsibilities to the band/tribe; social and economic justice, equality, and sharing; [and] universal and consensual participation in decision making..." (Boldt, 1993, p. 183). An Aboriginal worldview can also be conceptualized as an eco-philosophy which values the interconnectedness of people to the universe and to each other, co-operation, creativity, connectedness, balance and ritual and ceremony (Cajete, 2000). Cajete (2000 p. 58) concludes that Aboriginal philosophy or science is "in every sense an expression of the evolutionary interrelationship of Native people with nature." Aboriginal philosophy has much to offer the rest of the world, for example, in ecological knowledge such as living in equilibrium with the land (Boldt, 1993).

Boldt (1993) further emphasizes that in order for Aboriginal people to thrive, Aboriginal culture must be adapted and developed to be relevant, practical and successful for the modern world. This adaptation "speaks to the need to bridge the past and present in such a way as to allow Indians to be part of the twentieth century without betraying the fundamental philosophies and principles of the ancient covenants" (p. 183). Such a bridge demands ongoing planning, collaboration and cooperation between elders and youth, as elders transmit the philosophies and principles of the culture, and youth help to make these relevant to today's economic, political and social environment (Boldt, 1993). However, in order for Aboriginal people to develop their culture that will allow them to thrive in a contemporary world while still identifying with their heritage, they must first break out of the culture of dependence that has been created (Boldt, 1993). Breaking this cycle of dependency represents a significant challenge for Aboriginal communities in Canada today.

## **Reconciliation**

In recent years, the Canadian government has started to recognize the damaging effects of residential schools, and to take responsibility for their part in the residential school system. For example, the Dispute Resolution plan, launched in November 2003 by the Government of Canada, allowed compensation for residential school survivors who suffered abuse at the hands of residential school staff (Assembly on First Nations, n.d.). Several religious organizations have also stepped forward to apologize for their role in the schools, and some churches have acknowledged the part they have to play in the healing process related to residential schools (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1994, p. 88). As stated in a consultation of churches to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1994(p. 89)), "healing takes place when we are able to deal with the truth, the truth about the past and the reality of the present...Reconciliation requires repentance and redress." Social workers and other child welfare authorities must also take responsibility for the mistakes made in earlier years.

Indeed, acknowledging the truth of the past and telling the story is an important part of healing and reconciliation. Davis & Zanis (1973, p. 36) state that, "If we are to salvage our lives from the madness of...genocide...we must look deeply and unflinchingly into the mirror...exploring our ugliness and worth. But more than idle curiosity requires us...to look back into the hell from which we may be emerging. It is necessary to finding the way."

Similarly, Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski (2004) propose that:

The story must be told and told so loud that everybody will listen: Aboriginal people who were silenced and forgot how to remember; non-Aboriginal people who often know the Aboriginal world only from biased western movies and textbooks; and government institutions who still have the power to decide on the fate of the Indigenous people (p. 82).

As described above, Aboriginal communities are starting to speak out about their experiences and working towards increased awareness, understanding, and healing. With

that in mind, it is clear that Canada as a whole has a role to play in recognizing the genocide of Aboriginal people and promoting healing, reconciliation, respect, and equality.

Self-determination, self-sufficiency and self-government are other critical parts of healing and a successful future for Aboriginal people and communities (York, 1990). This includes regaining control over areas such as education, justice, health, social services and economic development (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1994; York, 1990). As an Inuit leader stated, “we can not be self-sufficient again without re-asserting some control of our own resources” (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1994, p. 53). There has been a call for the transfer of control, administration and responsibility for Aboriginal affairs back to the Aboriginal people, and Alberta First Nations have successfully secured increasing responsibility for the administration of such programs in their communities in recent years (Berry & Brink, 2004; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1994). The local control of these programs is a critical step towards a successful future, as it allows Aboriginal people to address community needs in ways that are culturally sensitive and appropriate, and promote healing and pride (Berry & Brink, 2004). As the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) stated, “self-determination... means we will take control over our lives to ensure that our rights, languages, cultures, traditions and people are sustained and flourish in the future... We want to ensure that our nations survive even in the light of the great tide of assimilation we have experienced in Canada” (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1994, p. 54).

## **Implications for the Future of Child Welfare**

Among many professionals, there is emerging consensus that the shift toward the control of Aboriginal child welfare to Aboriginal communities holds more promise than the status quo (Richard, 2004, p. 103).

The ability for Aboriginal communities to have control over the fate of their own children is an important step in healing the wounds of the past and building towards a new future (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002). In the 1980s, agreements signed with the federal government allowed Aboriginal communities to establish their own child and family service agencies (Hudson, 1997). Currently, there are over 125 Aboriginal-run child welfare agencies in Canada (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002). Beyond self-determination, control over child welfare is allowing Aboriginal communities to explore new approaches to child welfare that are based on paradigms more consistent with Aboriginal culture and ways of knowing.

An Aboriginal approach to child welfare is important because mainstream child welfare reflects Anglo European ideology and values. For example, the mainstream child welfare system aims to make decisions that are in the best interest of the child, as determined by an individualistic framework. Thus, key considerations include the child's bond with caretakers and the continuity of care provided, both of which aim to provide stability and security for the child (Kline, 1992). This ethnocentric ideology provides a rationale for removing children from their homes and their communities, even making it seem natural, necessary and legitimate (Kline, 1992). However, from an Aboriginal perspective, the best interests of the child also include maintaining the child's Aboriginal identity, culture, and connection to family and community. In addition, the Aboriginal construct of family is much broader than the nuclear family, and includes the child's nuclear and extended family, as well as members of the larger community



(Bennett & Blackstock, 2002). As such, an Aboriginal child could be in the care of several different caretakers at different points in his or her life – this type of structure is considered desirable by Aboriginal people in order for a child to embody an entire community and its culture (Richard, 2004). Thus, what the Canadian child welfare system might see as problematic in terms of continuity of care might be viewed differently from an Aboriginal perspective. In this way, Aboriginal child welfare has begun to explore different options for Aboriginal children needing placements, including Kinship Care (extended family care) (Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003). These ideas are consistent with current research, which suggests that positive long-term outcomes are related to the presence of Aboriginal culture for Aboriginal children (e.g. Richard, 2004).

Aboriginal child welfare agencies value the importance of revitalizing Aboriginal culture in healing from the past. For example, many Aboriginal child welfare agencies incorporate traditional values and practices such as healing and sharing circles, the medicine wheel, and Elders who are respected and involved in all aspects of services (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002). Healing includes an understanding and acknowledgement of the colonization of Aboriginal people and its current impacts on Aboriginal children, families, and communities. As one Aboriginal Child Welfare agency stated, their theoretical base is:

...grounded in the understanding of child welfare problems as the result of the colonial nature of relations between the Aboriginal people and the Euro-Canadian majority. We understand our practice, which flows from this theory, as a process of decolonization. We see this as a conscious process through which we regain control over our lives and resources (Ma Mawi, 1985, as cited in Armitage, 1993, p. 159).

In short, by regaining control over their own matters, including child welfare, Aboriginal communities are working towards healing and building healthy and proud families and communities.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Appreciative inquiry was the guiding methodology for the study, as it provided a good fit with the research goals and Aboriginal culture. First, Appreciative inquiry moves away from a problem focus to a participatory, strengths perspective. Through this approach, people collectively celebrate their accomplishments, build on their successes and act upon their dreams and wishes for the future (Elliot, 1999; Hammond, 1996). This strengths approach is consistent with calls to move away from deficit approaches to understanding Aboriginal communities towards approaches that highlight the competence and resiliency of Aboriginal people and can help to design new and culturally-meaningful approaches to community needs (McShane & Hastings, 2004).

Second, the Appreciative Inquiry process is a participatory approach that provides a voice to Aboriginal perspectives, which have traditionally been silenced (Sinclair, 2003). Third, storytelling is the primary data collection approach of Appreciative Inquiry, a practice that is congruent with the Aboriginal oral tradition. Storytelling has also 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 Appreciative Inquiry approach provides a holistic and participatory approach that values multiple ways of knowing and working collaboratively from a strengths perspective towards a shared vision. It was hoped that this approach would help generate community-empowered approaches to child welfare that could serve as exemplars for other Aboriginal communities.

## **Data Collection**

Storytelling or unstructured interviews in the form of gatherings or sharing circles were used to collect data from the project. Simply put, a sharing circle begins with an open-ended question, in this case the research questions and gathering objectives. Then, each participant in the circle has the opportunity to share his or her perspective on the question or issue in a round robin format. The gatherings focused on the implications of the legacy of residential schools for child welfare, developing community and youth leadership, and sharing and learning from the gatherings. The specific focus of the gatherings in each community varied according to community needs and interests. Over 400 community members, leaders, professionals, and elders were involved as participants in a total of seven gatherings in the three communities. The gatherings and stories were audio-recorded and transcribed, and, in many cases, filmed.

## **Community Collaboration**

Three Alberta Aboriginal communities collaborated in the project: the Blood Reserve in the south, and the Sturgeon Lake First Nation and the Métis Settlements (Region 10 Child and Family Services) in the north. The project steering committee arranged meetings with appropriate community leaders, including elders, for open discussion about the research and partnership potential. Thus, appropriate protocols for collaboration and community involvement were established with each community.

On the Blood Reserve, the Kainai Legislative Initiative, Blood Tribe became a major community partner in the project. The Initiative's mandate is to have jurisdiction and law-making authority with respect to Child, Youth, and Family Services in their community. The project provided an opportunity for collaboration and the advancement of their work in establishing

relevant and culturally appropriate services to their community. Building on their earlier work, this research project focused on the question, “to improve the utilization of traditional knowledge in service delivery, we need to...” Three gatherings were conducted using an open spaces facilitation approach, which engages participants for the collection of ideas and promotes a creative thinking process. The first two gatherings focused on data gathering in implementing traditional knowledge in the child welfare services and the last session celebrated and received recommendations primarily from the elders. The gatherings were extremely successful and approximately 170 people participated.

The Sturgeon Lake community hosted a gathering entitled Creating Hope for the Future, which invited three generations served by white caregivers: residential schools during the 40s and 50s, foster care in the 60s and 70s and more recent “graduates.” The community also used community theatre to help address relevant issues. Through this process, youth scripted, produced, and acted in a play that outlined some of their observations in their community. The community was then invited to respond and revise the play to reflect their wishes for the future. The play proved to be a very powerful tool which was positively received and helped to bring people together to discuss what is happening in their own community and start building together their hopes and dreams for the future. This type of community theatre or theatre of the oppressed approach has been successfully used to engage community members (including youth), provide a voice, bring people together, raise awareness, stimulate discussion, inform policy makers, empower communities, cultivate leadership, promote social action and ultimately, support and nurture the development of healthy communities (Boehm & Boehm, 2003; Houston, Magill, McCollum, & Spratt, 2001).

Finally, gatherings were held at five northern Alberta Métis settlements, collecting stories about the Métis experience of residential schools, the intergenerational impacts of residential school experiences, current experiences with child welfare systems, and hopes for the future. While some stories were collected, it was hypothesized that participation may have been low due to poor road conditions and the group nature of the gatherings. Perhaps these communities were not ready to share of their experiences in this type of setting. Thus, it is acknowledged that for each of the stories heard, there exist many more people who could not tell their stories at that time.

## **RESULTS**

The results of this initiative are reported for each community or set of communities individually, in light of the richness and diversity of information provided. Where there are overriding themes they will be reported as such. It is important, however, to report respectfully the views of our Kainai (Blood), Cree, and Métis communities.

### **Summary of findings**

The experiences of all three communities that participated in this initiative conveyed several overarching themes that call for special consideration and that can serve as a foundation for future planning.

A common theme in the narrative was their experience of marginalization and disrespect as a people in residential schools and child welfare systems underscored by racist attitudes continue to shape practice. A second major theme was a powerful and dignified call for acknowledgement as aboriginal people and a redress by a claim for self-determination in the care

and protection of the Aboriginal children. This is at the core of the relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who are involved in child welfare programs.

It is clear that many aspects of today's helping systems that serve aboriginal people as governed federal and provincial authorities fail to meet these fundamental requirements. It is also clear that aboriginal people know what they need to counter these influences. What is less clear is how to develop models of practice and teaching that can fulfill Aboriginal aspirations.

### **Experience of Aboriginal People**

Few would deny that the past 500 years have left many aboriginal people in the state of confusion, despair, loneliness, isolation and with increasing dependence on various substances to alleviate the painful and traumatic legacy of these years. Some have said that "In the beginning, the black coats came to save our souls; then the Red Coats came to establish law and order according to a foreign government, now the white coats provide medications to dull our pain and still the suffering of our spirit."

Many expressed a profound sense of loss and disconnection from their people and culture because of their separation from family and community, all the while not really belonging to the societal institutions charged with their formative years. There is a pervasive sense among many of not truly belonging anywhere, creating a state of perpetual anomie that can only be countered by a profound reconnection with who they are as aboriginal people. This is confirmed by the elders who have been observing this phenomenon for many generations and who call for a return to traditional values.

Broken relationships with families and communities of origin are a recurring theme described by community participants removed from their families and raised in white institutions and foster care settings. From a cultural perspective, this is tantamount to familial suicide for a

people whose tradition relies on “all our relations” and the ancestors for guidance and support in this lifetime and kinship support to make ones way through life. It was clear that the alternative care systems developed by government failed many of the children and betrayed the communities, leaving the people at sea in their personal relationships, and struggling to find ways of sustaining themselves emotionally.

Many spoke of their ongoing struggle to establish marital and other forms of intimate connection to others. The legacy created by separation, abuse, mistreatment and rejection left many people emotionally maimed and fearful of sustainable and healthy relationships.

It is clear that many aboriginal children had their way of life, their spirituality, traditions, and their perception of parents and grandparents denigrated in residential schools and in white foster care, leaving them with a diminished ability to contemplate a hopeful future. Many feel that they have become westernized, or in the words of some “I may look Indian, but I am really white on the inside.” Littlebear (2001) refers to a form of “jagged colonialism” that leaves people without a way of considering their future and solving problems and upon which they can draw to live their lives. Every new situation then calls for the development of an entirely new approach to problem solving and decision-making, leaving one paralyzed by the decision-making challenges and trapped in lives without meaning.

There are also many signs of hope as people return to learn their traditional aboriginal language and reconnect with elders to re-capture the stories and their traditions to guide their lives and to reestablish culturally appropriate ways that can the gaps in their lives. Spirituality was a major source of hope that every community gathering expressed. While this experience has been traumatic and often transmitted from one generation to another, many have sought meaning and consolation in Christian or Traditional forms of spirituality. Community members

described their traditional beliefs as pervading all aspects of life including oneself, relationships with family, other people, plants, animals, and ultimately the entire cosmos. Some are returning to such traditional beliefs and have left the Christianity imposed on their parents, while others cling to Christian beliefs and still others are confused and ambivalent. This can create community conflicts as the struggle for survival extends to the spiritual level, with some fearing the eternal damnation taught by their white caretakers.

For those communities attempting to develop new programs and services based on their traditional values and beliefs the challenge is immense. While there is a desire for models of practice that meet community aspirations within an Aboriginal worldview, Federal and Provincial government constraints limit this possibility. The Federal government provides minimal funding for programs that support and sustain family life and fully fund programs that promote the breakdown of families and outplacement of children. Provincial authorities can fail to understand and fully support First Nations aspirations for autonomy and self-determination in looking after their children as they impose elaborate standards and structures that are incompatible with aboriginal values. This complex situation is exacerbated by jagged colonialism, as all of the parties attempt to reconcile their own limited understanding of Aboriginal traditions and absorb the lessons of the Elders before they die.

People spoke at great length about the importance of healing from their legacy of oppression and grief. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation has made a good beginning, but has limited funds and suffers from the illusion that a people can heal from hundreds of years of oppression in so little time. We have much to learn about the healing experience required by aboriginal people; yet it is a fundamental requirement without which many aboriginal people will be able to progress no further and without which the intergenerational transmission of trauma will



continue unabated. There is fundamental need to recommit to this healing experience as many of the recommendations contained in this report have more to do with recovery from this trauma than with models of child welfare. Without healing the people cannot advance in spite of the best of child welfare models. The following sections provide more detailed findings based on the experiences of our three sets of communities; Kainaiwa Children's Services (Blood Tribe), the Sturgeon Lake First Nation, and the Métis Settlements.

## MAKING OUR HEARTS SING – THE BLOOD TRIBE)

### **Introduction**

A framework of colonialism and genocide explains the systemic assault on First Nations families since the inception of the reservations system and residential schools. The legacy of mass removal of Aboriginal children in Canada must be examined from several points of view. First, the epistemologies of the mainstream academy reaffirm and reproduce the cultural assumptions of the 'reality of dominant group.' Recent studies have confirmed that children are most often apprehended for reasons of poverty and absence of parental influence. There is a major tendency to deal with the marginalization and oppression of First Nation people through child apprehensions and foster care instead of addressing the structural issues that contribute to their reality. These practices continue the assault on the family, re-traumatizing communities with oppressive legislation and negating Aboriginal participation in substantial reform.

It has been argued that knowledge and research shapes the world in particular ways for particular interests. The legacy of removing children from First Nation families and their communities has served the child welfare system and its stakeholders through economic and political control over these children. The construction of knowledge can also be found in this type of social power relationship (Rigney, 2004, p.15). It seems evident that the social construction of "race" which has been inherent in policies of civilizing and Christianizing First Nation people was the legitimizing ideology for the mass removal of children to residential schools and subsequently child welfare. The ideology and practices in our historical and contemporary context places First Nations at the bottom the human hierarchy. Aboriginal people for over a century have been denied the inherent human and social responsibility of raising their

children within their cultural, heritage and social milieu. Instead, a social Darwinist approach underlies Aboriginal policy and legitimizes the apprehension of Aboriginal children in child welfare.

Our analysis of Aboriginal child welfare systems that are inclusive of Indigenous cultures reveals that few program and service changes support the social determinants of health for First Nation's people. The trauma created by structural oppression, inadequate and over crowded housing, a lack of clean drinking water, poor nutrition, poor educational services, racism, external community control, unemployment, and poor health services are largely unattended. The life experiences of most First Nations communities are shaped by these environmental and structural factors and are sources of continued human stress and crisis. The stress on community is revealed in the alarming statistics that include high rates of youth suicide and a much higher rate of injury and death than the general population (SAYHN, 2004, p. 2- 3). Child Welfare policy stresses that the child's safety must be a primary consideration, but this policy only cloaks an absolute control over families and diminishes the human development and parenting responsibilities of First Nations. These responsibilities for sustainable human functioning have essentially been denied to First nations, making it difficult to create an alternative approach to the healthy human and social functioning of First Nation people, who are left with the conditions that have created the structural violence that perpetuates and recreates high risk factors for First Nation children and youth. This is evident in the allocation of far greater resources for the removal of Aboriginal children from their homes than to keep them in their homes and communities (First Nation Child & Family, 2005, p.19).

First Nations children are far more likely to be in foster care than non- Aboriginal children (First Nation Child & Family, 2005, p.15). Of the forms of neglect most reported,

physical neglect as related to clothing, nutrition, hygiene, and living conditions and failure to supervise were the most common reasons for entering care. In addition, First Nation children are more likely to be suffer from depression, anxiety, negative peer involvement, misuse of substances, irregular school attendance, and to experience learning disabilities in comparison with off-reserve First nation members and non-Aboriginal children. On the positive side, they were less likely to experience ADD, ADHA a positive toxicology at birth and less young offender involvement (First Nation Child & Family, 2005, p. 14).

It is clear that Aboriginal children enter care and remain longer in care because of the structural issues of housing and poverty (First Nation Child & Family, 2005 p.15). Services at best are fragmented and the existing funding formula works against a comprehensive prevention agenda (First Nation Child & Family, 2005. p.19). Ultimately, families are left without the resources needed to address the conditions from which their children were apprehended (First Nation Child & Family, 2005, p.21).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methods used for data collection was “Open Spaces Facilitation” a tool that engages participants for the gathering of ideas and promotes a creative thinking process. The three gatherings were extremely successful given road conditions for the first two that were for the purpose of data gathering on implementing traditional knowledge in child welfare services. The last session was a celebration and received recommendations from the elders. Approximately 170 people participated. The gatherings focused on several groups including; elders, off reserve members, on reserve members, youth, professionals, families, and foster parents. Each session began with the elder’s prayer, followed by speakers from the research team to provide context, overview of the issue and propose questions for dialogue.

Open Space facilitation is a four-part process; 1. An agenda is constructed by introducing themes to the participants. The themes are pasted on the “market wall.” 2. The agenda is complete when there are 16-18 issues in each of the three sections, A, B, and C under the market wall. Each participant then shops in one of the three sections and picks a section in which to participate. 3. Dialogue sessions are established and participants meet in the groups that they have chosen to discuss their topic and record their thoughts on “stickies” that are placed on the market wall. 4. Plenary Session: Participants return to the large group.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The two major themes that arose from the gatherings were concerned with incorporating cultural practices that support essential relationships and issues of identity that will create a process of recovery. It is clear that community members are fully cognizant of the impact of colonial violence on family connections. Two major challenges were identified. The first is for Canada to understand the impact of colonial policies on Aboriginal communities, families, and children. The second is for Indigenous communities themselves to understand the depth of colonization and its impact on them and especially their children who remain at high risk. Unless we confront these, we will only perpetuate the disconnection from Aboriginal beliefs and values and the resulting devaluing of their child rearing and human development practices.

A new approach to child-care would focus on the family and collective human relationships. It would strengthen a cultural approach to child-care responsibilities that encompasses the cultural continuity of a people. Socialization and educational theories and practices are fundamental to the survival of parenting practices for any cultural and societal group. In fact, they are essential to the group’s meaning of life and the purpose of their existence.

If these essential elements not recognized and supported, it results in such lethal outcomes as First Nations suicide as an expression of the impact of colonial violence.

## **THEMES**

The clusters of themes that emerged from these gatherings express the cultural and societal crisis of the community and a keen desire for recovery. The two major clusters are: (1) the recovery and affirmation of the traditional way of life in the Blood community (Kainaisiyinni) and (2) the importance of addressing the structural violence of colonial policies and practices. The first cluster of themes focused on identity, relationships, the connection of language with a way of life supported by the teachings of the elders, the passing on of stories which are their knowledge system (education), and the importance of kinship systems which are an important component of taking responsibility for child care and socialization. The second cluster of themes reflected the realities of their lived experience of colonial violence, the structural violence of poverty and marginalization, unemployment and racism, resulting in substance abuse and lateral violence.

The analysis is presented in three parts: first, the need for a healthy child care policy, second, the implementation of a culturally based and collective approach to recovery, and third, a consideration of the impact of structural violence on the care of First Nation children and on the capacity of family and community.

### **1. Making a path for our children so that they can live - the recovery and affirmation of the traditional way of life (Kainaisiyinni)**

The cultural Identity of the tribe is the most significant component in revitalizing and affirming traditional methods of child care. Tribal identity is based upon a common worldview of the nature of human beings, and their relationship to nature. These primary relationships shape

the nature of relationships within family and community. The incorporation of the physical and metaphysical world, family, and ancestors is fundamental to kinship relations. The separation and disconnection from the essence of their existence has been the most profound violation perpetrated by residential schools and child welfare systems, as the unity and wholeness of an all inclusive universe is at the heart of Aboriginal peoples' connection to their cultural identity.

The community told us that the teachings and stories must re-told to the children, and that "our children must know who they are." The children must be given their nature names; this is what connects them with the universe, the land, their community, and their family. Most importantly, this provides them with a place from which they securely participate in the world, as they draw on the alliances from which their names are derived. Reuniting and affirming these relational connections and the responsibilities imbued in these relationships is the essential function of our cultural identity.

The stories must be told in the original language. Language reflects the philosophical system of the people and evokes a relational perspective which mirrors their sacred world (Bastien, 2004, p.127). It reflects the meanings ascribed to existence, the purpose of relationships, and the responsibilities inherent in these connections. It provides a way of interpreting the world in which they live (Bastien, 2004, p. 129). Language guides the epistemology and pedagogical practices of the Tribe; it is instrumental in creating knowledge and creating reality (Bastien, 2004, p.130-131). It is the medium for incorporating knowledge systems and creating identity. New responsibilities, organizational structures, programs, and services can flow from this connection to the traditional knowledge and responsibilities of the collective. Inclusion and connection are integral to the way of life and identity of indigenous people and can serve to inform revitalized programs and services.

More specifically, participants stressed the importance of revisiting education in the following ways by:

- Incorporating our own indigenous methods of research
- Recording and documenting our traditional knowledge
- Rethinking our educational programs
- Involving the community in changing our social environment
- Making the learning of our Blackfoot language mandatory
- Educating young parents

## **2. Collective recovery through participating in Kainaisiyinni**

The disruption to Aboriginal family and community life is evident the fragmentation of the way of life and the worldview of community. Affirming attachment to family and community life, parental bonding, kindness, and nurturing our children as essential components of service and program delivery should reflect the principles of Kainaisiyinni. Recent scientific findings about the nature of reality reveal that everything is intimately present to everything else in the universe. In other words, material objects are no longer perceived as independent entities but as concentration of energy of the quantum field. The universe is more accurately described as a quantum field that is present everywhere in space and yet in its particles its aspect has a discontinuous, granular structure (Atleo, 2004. pp. xiii- xiv).

This is not new knowledge to indigenous people who have always understood the universe to be the indivisible whole that quantum physics now understands. It is this indivisible wholeness of universe that is the source of Aboriginal spirituality. Kainaisiyinni is a way of life



based on spirituality as the source of all relationships, and as a collective, our people have a responsibility to these relationships.

The Tribe's human development approach must guide the development of a philosophy, and program and service development for families and children. It must begin with those who are most vulnerable and for whom we hold the greatest hope in the promise of a new era for Aboriginal people. The participants were adamant that language is mandatory and that our stories form the foundation of our knowledge systems, of inclusiveness and harmony, and of the knowledge of the state of our existence by which to guide our interpretation of experience. Language lets speakers know who they are and how to conduct themselves from their place in the universal social system of the Tribe. This social system of affinity to all of life and to each other is the foundation of the kinship systems.

Striving for peace and good relations with the ancestors, alliances, and life is referred to as praying or ceremony. Being mindful and responsible of the wellness and health of all is inherently prayer and ceremony. Communal well being is a sacred collective responsibility and is the essence of our purpose for living. Children must be taught about their ancestors, their history, and their alliances through story, ceremony, and community. Kainaisiyinni is integrating tribal ways into everyday life, and it is in this experience that Blackfoot people can begin to understand who there are.

The participants valued coming together in feast and gatherings to renew and revitalize communal values and the affinity of kinship systems. Such gatherings are traditional methods for gathering and promoting collective knowledge and wisdom. They expand the possibility of collective action to address the issues of the day. They revitalize traditional ways of strengthening the affinity of collective and family ties, affirming and utilizing knowledge

building, decreasing external dependencies, developing indigenous style leadership and practices, and creating new sources of knowledge for recovery.

Spirituality is fundamental to strengthening family and kinship alliances to create a more sustainable and thriving community, especially for the elders and youth. It is based upon traditional teaching and learning, with each person taking responsibility for the various roles of family and community. It is a method of forging new alliances, becoming aware of kinship and coming to know your relatives. Spirituality implies having respectful care for family, elders, children, parents, and grandparents. Respect is striving to preserve the sacred nature of all relationships that life holds for every one and everything and between every one and everything. It is the “all my relatives” of the Tribe. Living Kainayssini is the source of our strength, integrity, the continuity as we assume responsibility as a people.

Spirituality, Kainayssini is our way of life. The following exemplify some aspects to this way that the community generated:

- Spirituality that calls for sacred ways of prayer,
- Smudging as an expression of prayer
- Traditional teachings that are passed on by the elders
- Generating positive attitudes among the people
- Celebrations in feasts and gatherings
- Involving men whose roles have been diminished in a healing
- Taking responsibility for ourselves
- Improved educational opportunities for all as the key to our future
- Knowing and living our values
- Ceremony as a core tradition
- Knowing our relatives and forming positive relationships with them
- Creating harmony among each other by engaging in traditional activities
- Generate employment to create greater self-reliance

### **3 - Living Kainayssini demonstrates traditional knowledge and teaching.**

The Blood Tribe values Kainayssini as the guiding principle for everyday living that will have a transformational impact on community life and social organization, and will improve

the quality of life for all members, especially the children. The hope is that families and community will have stronger connections because of a more culturally based approach and the increased use of indigenous language. This approach is based on coming together as a nation around traditional teachings led by the elders (grandparents) in a process governed by communal values. Kainaiyinni will address many of the hurdles and challenges facing the tribe as a colonized people, because it is premised on the traditional teaching of the Blood Tribe, as apposed to a bi-cultural model. Implementing an affirming cultural approach and reconstructing social systems and community collective responsibilities will form the context for education, research, and the creation of more culturally appropriate policies and services.

Kainayssini will form the cornerstone of a comprehensive community development approach. Community awareness, education and training for Tribal entities are essential for the implementation of policy and program changes. The participants stressed the urgency of developing programs where elders can pass on their knowledge to youth, as they are aging rapidly. It is said that one Elder is dying every week, and they are the sole repository an oral tradition that has sustained Aboriginal people for many thousands of years. They are also a critical resource for educating social workers and other professionals in the Kainayssini way of life as the community seeks long-term solutions for child welfare and youth at risk. This ultimately calls for Aatsimihkasin- living in a sacred manner – which the community has advised focus on the following critical areas:

- Creating long term foster care solutions for children who must be in care
- Creating laws to protect community children who have been adopted
- Ensuring adequate housing for all families
- Facing the reality of alcohol and drug abuse as a community

- Bringing together youth and elders to carry on the traditions and knowledge that have sustained them for thousands of years
- Building a sustainable and vibrant community that supports families
- Promoting men's wellness and healing in response to their diminishing roles and pain
- Loving each other

#### **4 - Structural Impact of Colonization - collective trauma**

The belief that power and control are central to mastery over other men and nature has guided the evolution of progress throughout the world. Colonialism has made Indigenous nations dependent by stripping them of their resources, means of economic sustainability and ways of knowledge production, leaving a legacy of abuse and violence that rendered them powerlessness and demoralized. This continues in policies of apartheid, marginalization, economic dependency, stigmatization and stereotyping; the very fabric of politics that initiated the process of genocide. The violence that continues on reserves in Canada includes overt physical violence, structural violence and psycho-spiritual violence. This violence terrorizes and re-traumatizes communities with programs structured on the very tenets of genocide; hierarchy, paternalism, patriarchy, power, control, rationality and empiricism. These tenets continue to fragment and isolate individuals, creating community despair and hopelessness that places on-reserve First Nations in 70<sup>th</sup> place in the world on the quality of life index compared with most Canadians who enjoy 1<sup>st</sup> place in the world (First Nation Child & Family, 2005). Poverty, inadequate housing and substance abuse are the leading factors for child welfare involvement ((First Nation Child & Family, 2005, p. 13). These factors have their roots in the structural violence of genocide and

underlay the fallacy of those who only promote assimilation, adaptation, rehabilitation, reconciliation, accommodation and advocacy in response to there structural issues.

Interestingly, community members thought that these are the very issues that called for urgent action. They included:

- Poverty
- Housing
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Lateral and domestic violence

In response to these fundamental issues, the wish to emphasize the importance of:

- Healing
- Self-respect
- Accountability
- Parental involvement
- Attending to the health and well-being of elders
- Involving elders in planning and delivering programs and services

## **IMPLICATIONS**

- The participants that attended these gatherings have a clear understanding of the destruction of their way of life, and the issues currently them and their children.
- They also know that countering genocidal impacts and becoming a thriving community depends on the continuity of their cultural ways, kinship systems and fulfillment of their tribal responsibilities.
- It is important to reinstitute social programs and structures that support kinship relational roles and responsibilities, as the continuity of kinship is critical to the well –being and survival of the community and the foundation of their members’ identities as Aboriginal people.

- The challenge now is to continue the collaboration and take steps to implement their recommendations

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Anti- colonial epistemologies, methodologies and pedagogies are required to affirm, rediscover and reconstruct the knowledge systems and social organizations of First Nation people. The epistemologies reaffirm cultural assumptions, the required validity for their lived experience. The context, reality and aspirations of First Nation People must become part of the academy as opposed the continued reconstruction of power relationships in constructing knowledge and the colonial assumptions that have maintained the oppression.
- Social work education and practice must develop curricula that support structural change and reflect anti oppressive practice by transforming their conceptual framework in ways that support Aboriginal aspirations and rights to self-determination.

## **NEXT STEPS**

- Work with Elders and ceremonialists in the construction knowledge systems, conceptual frameworks and pedagogy for social work practice based on Kainayssini.
- Develop new program models based on community guidance that will be in harmony with Kainayssini and inform the new legislative framework.

- Where appropriate evaluate existing models that offer promise for broader application
- Where needed establish demonstration projects to test out and validate new thinking
- Develop curriculum for First Nation social work leadership and organizational change.
- Develop training programs for human services workers working with First Nation communities in Kainayssini.

## **MAKING OUR HEARTS SING –THE METIS SETTLEMENT COMMUNITY**

### **Introduction**

Recent research projects are acknowledging that new understandings may be situated within the complexity and interconnectedness of context as opposed to a process of scientific reduction, regression, and the exclusion of supposedly random factors. For example, in two recent projects, connections were discovered that were, at first glance, less than obvious and somewhat unexpected. In a project in British Columbia, it was determined that a connection between spawning salmon and hungry bears allowed the spectacular growth of trees that had no apparent reason to be growing along those rivers. In a different project in a northwestern state, the connection between the killing of wolves and the decline of local fish populations was traced through shoreline willow growth and the grazing patterns of elk.

It would seem that an argument could be made that a research process that emphasizes, honors, and explores complexity, dialogue, interconnectedness, and interpretation may work very well when employed in the appropriate context. In fact, in some research contexts, only a full exploration of the complexity may uncover a true holistic understanding of the issues at hand. Unlike the majority of the research that has focused on one specific issue in an aboriginal context, (for example, substance abuse or trauma) the “Making Our Hearts Sing” project intends to explore and further understand the complex relationships and interconnections of the social issues and community concerns in a Métis settlement. We believe that it is only through an exploration of the connections between such issues as the long-term effects of residential schools, the loss of traditional culture, abuse and violence, substance abuse, parenting, elder



wisdom, and the loss of language that we can experience new and increased understanding of the concerns, and possible responses to, the issues existing in these communities.

### **General Framework of the Research**

It was essential that this project make a commitment to follow, at all stages from inception to conclusion, a process congruent with First Nations and Métis worldviews. It was not the purpose of the project to determine a single final answer, the one clear truth, or the one most important issue in the context of this research. Rather, it is the purpose of this project to facilitate the creation of new understanding that is based within the contextual complexity, the interrelationships, and the historical and contemporary experiences of the Métis community and residential schools. To meet these commitments, concepts of searching and understanding must be emphasized. The research process must:

- Be conceptualized as a process of exploration and discovery that will support the creation of a new understanding of the interconnections and the complexities of concerns and issues expressed within the context of the Metis community.
- Include the creation and maintenance of an appropriate team that will guide the process of the project.

In addition, the project will endeavor to live within the context of an Appreciative Inquiry research process. Appreciative Inquiry closely resembles the process of hermeneutic research and many of the basic concepts in hermeneutic research will be employed in this research process. These concepts include:

- We can best understand an issue in the context of the whole within the context of the parts. Understanding then becomes a constant dialectical movement

between the parts and the whole and this interaction must be a continuously reflected process throughout the project.

- The act of dialogue - defined as the interaction of questions and answers - will play an integral role throughout this project in the collection, interpretation, and understanding of stories. We enter the dialogue eager to have our own preconceptions challenged and perhaps changed. We seek, through the exchange of dialogue, to challenge and to change our own understandings.
- It is understood that each person involved with the project comes with their own life experiences and understanding. It is also acknowledged that it is only through these experiences that we make sense of our world around us. As when we use a flashlight to see, we do not concentrate on the light itself, but on what the light illuminates. It is a necessary part of the process that we encourage the challenging of these experiences, for it is only through that challenge that we will experience change.
- As we travel through the project, our understanding must change - each time we encounter the other (either in person, in conversation, or in text) we encounter it differently. Our goal is not to determine a single elemental truth or an answer to a problem – our goal is to create a context for new understanding and to allow distant voices to be heard - and to be heard more clearly.
- Self-understanding only occurs when we encounter something other than the self and, in seeing the other, we alter our self-understanding. Hermeneutics strives to rejoin the historical severance of object and subject – to connect ourselves to our research. Hermeneutics demands that we be truthful. While we

are engaged in uncovering the meaning of our topic, the topic is equally engaged in uncovering our meaning. Thomas Merton said “If I give you my truth but do not receive your truth in return, then there can be no truth between us”.

### **Brief description of the project**

In the initial phase of the project, a team will begin to collect stories from members of the Metis community – concentrating, whenever possible, on the stories of children, youth and elders. Once the stories have been collected, it will be the responsibility of each member of the team to engage with each story in order to become fully aware of the theme or themes contained within the story from the perspective of that team members own historical and contextual perspective. The entire team will come together in a collective process to share their individual perspectives (and the process and experiences that contributed to those perspectives) and to engage in the hermeneutical process of interpretation and the creation of a collective understanding of significant themes contained within the stories. These themes will be collected, documented, and returned to the team, the participants and the community.

### **Six Themes**

In the final analysis, we collected stories reflect six different themes including:

- 1) Métis involvement with residential schools.
- 2) Trans-generational effects of residential schools.
- 3) Frustrating experiences with the child-care system
- 4) When foster-kids leave the foster-home.
- 5) What gives you hope?
- 6) What made it different for you?

The stories have been transcribed as related to us and are presented as such for the reader to draw their own conclusions. Implications and recommendations are discussed at the end of this section.

## NARRATIVES

*"Take [this] story. Do with it what you will. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now."*  
Thomas King,  
"The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative"  
(House of Anansi Press, 2003)

### 1) Métis involvement with residential schools

They started from grade one, then went to about six or seven, that's all they had there. There were about three grades in one class, like two, three, four all those kids in one class things like that. Grades one and two in one class, because there were only two schools, one big school on that side and one little one on this side that's for the younger kids, that's where I was going at first in the younger grade.

They used to have a ruler, that long and this thick, and that's what you would get hit with, on the head, or on the hands, maybe that's why I got bad arthritis now is because I got beaten too much on my hands.

When you wanted to play outside, first you had to do everything, like wash the nun's panties or whatever, little kids like us, they send you to their rooms, and then sometimes there was nothing there but one big tub of - you know. You would rinse them then go hang them out, in the summer time you hang them up in their rooms. When you were done all that, then you go clean up, there was a bare floor, there was no linoleum. You had to clean that up, mop that up with your hands or a scrub brush, then you were done, then they would send you to bed. In the morning you would get up and help out, cook or something, even little kids like that.

(Site #5)

I had a younger brother in there, we were both in there. We were having dinner one time, and there was a pool table there, and your not supposed to play pool at dinner hour, so he started playing, and the nun who was watching us, (where ever we were there was always a nun watching us) came over and grabbed him by the hair and started banging his head on the brick wall. I called out in Cree [name] bang on her head, and he hit her down the stairs. I laughed, so they took us to the priests then, and these nuns there could talk Cree, I don't know why they didn't talk Cree to us, because they understood Cree, lots of them could talk as good as us. So they took us to the priests and I started laughing - that was the end of our stay in residential

*Sometimes I think back, and think I should have fought back, but there were just rulers and more rulers and that's all you would get.*  
(Site #4)

school, we got kicked out. But boy, did those nuns give us a rough time from him hitting that nun. It carried on till we left that school, getting a rough time from them and we weren't learning nothing - all we were learning was to kneel down and pray that's about all we were learning. That's when we left there and came here to school, never went back to that school there, we were there about one year - a year and a half. Well, that was my residential school days.

(Site #4)

I didn't stay there long enough... like I said we were always fighting them all the time, we didn't really care how we were treated, all we had in our minds was get out of there somehow, and we found out if we were really ornery and bad we would get out sooner. So when we found that out we got worse, so we finally did.

(Site #4)

Interviewer: I wasn't aware that you could get kicked out from residential school.

We did because we weren't Treaties, our dad had to pay for us to stay there and we were Métis. Only the Treaties got money from the government, and they were gold to them. Us Métis weren't worth nothing to them.

(Site #4)

Interviewer: had you been Treaty you would have been worth money to them?

Answer: We wouldn't have got out.

(Site #4)

*That no Half-breed child shall be admitted to the said school unless Indian children cannot be obtained to complete the number authorized...but the Superintendent General will not pay any grant for any such Half-breed pupil... nor any part of the cost of its maintenance or education whatever.  
Clause 4(B) "Agreement to Run a Boarding School"*

I kind of felt sorry for the kids that was in there, I didn't stay that long, we were really bad kids, we weren't going to be pushed around, we fought back, we wouldn't take it, it didn't matter what they did to us, we were stubborn, we just kept on and on, no matter what they did to us, sometimes they wouldn't feed us for a whole day, in the end it didn't really matter because the food was not worth eating. It didn't bother us very much. They used to tell us we were crazy natives and we could survive on nothing for days and weeks they used to tell us, because we were born that way. We were never fed right or

never fed at all - fish and porridge. Sometimes I guess it [fish] was frozen on the inside, and not cooked, and the bread too, when they would cook it, it would turn sour and it didn't matter, they wouldn't give you no butter, nothing, just a piece of bread, that's it.

(Site #4)

So when they would feed you, that porridge was like slop and if you didn't eat it up you get a ruler again, or if you don't they would cut your hair off - on the girls. You had to do right to keep your hair, but nothing was ever right, ever. They feed you, like I don't know some kind of rubber bread, that's why I just can't stand fish now, I don't eat fish anymore.

When we go out to play, they're there and if you would start to speak in Cree they would beat you. So when we would want to play marbles and because we would play marbles all the time we would do this (a shushing motion) to each other so we don't talk Cree. Then we would go outside to play marbles, and then they [the nun's] would come out and step on our marbles, so we don't own those marbles. We would try and go hide to play marbles but we just couldn't do it.

The settlement couldn't afford teachers, it was all old people who would teach us, they were very ornery, but we learned more here than at residential school.

A lot of elders told us they were beaten if they spoke Cree. In that mission, they gave you a warning, and the next time they twisted your ear, the nuns were good at that, next thing you knew you were walking on your toes.

(Site #4)

Finally in school I got beaten real bad when I was in grade three. One of my cousins was in school then with me, she finally got up - she was way bigger than me - when the nun was beating me up, she knocked her down and kicked her and said, "Don't I ever see you again touch her or I will come and kill you". And she got suspended, couldn't come back to school, so she was kicked out, so the same thing started again. [Long silence]

Site #4)

## 2) Trans-generational effects of residential school.

I know [from] talking to my aunt [that] I am still finding things about her that I didn't know, the effects of her family being separated. One of the things we have always teased her about is her adult children living at home, one of them is into their thirties and still lives at home, and she is trying to get her adult daughter who was married and now divorced to move back home.

We were teasing her last year and she only just told us it was because of her family being separated when she was six years old, and never knowing her mother, never being able to see her mother till twenty five years after, and never meeting her brother and sisters till about five years ago when she got to meet them for the first time and meeting them was very traumatic.

Being separated so much, so she is very strong into her kids are never going to leave her, and in fact she has said it still affects her personal relationship with my uncle - he wants them to move out, he wants them get independence, and she doesn't want them to ever leave her, because its so traumatic for her losing her whole family - when they went to residential school they had to be flown out of the community.

I think for those reasons its so emotional still, and I know she has never really talked to anyone about some of these issues, not even my uncle, she has made comments many times there are a lot of things she has inside of her that she just can't deal

*I would go to friend's houses for supper, and it would amaze me when they would have a father there. It would feel so strange and uncomfortable and I would whisper to them, "Why is your dad here?" it really was that strange for me.*  
(Site #2)

with. So, and like I said I know it's really affected her life as well.

Sometimes, when you are collecting stories, you come across someone who seems to capture everything in their one story. It is a serendipitous and humbling experience, and what follows is one such interview. Many of the trans-generational impacts of residential school are captured within this story – a story covering four generations. Told from a daughter's viewpoint, she examines her relationship to her father (who was taken into residential school at the age of six), her relationship to her father's parents, and how her family experiences have affected her relationship with her own children.

Interviewer: I know earlier you mentioned your father was in residential school?

Yes, my father is now deceased, he died when I was sixteen, and I think he was forty two years old. I don't know the exact age he went in there; when he went in he was quite young I think - six years old.

He had real trauma situations happen to him - he had a glass eye. He and another student got into a fight, and the other child poked him in the eye, and they had to take him out - he was at \_\_\_\_\_ which was a "fly-out" community. The nuns didn't see it as a medical emergency, so it just kind of healed on its own; needless to say he lost his eye. That was one of the many things he was really resentful of in his adult life.

With the stories I hear it really puts an understanding as to how I was raised. He was never around, he was always out, he left my mother with all the [child] – raising. When he died they were actually separated, they were legally divorced when I was seven, but he was never able to settle down, he was never close to his family. His whole family was in residential schools, he was never close to his mother, and he was just never there to parent us. So he was never really there.

I remember there being lots of shouting with my mother, lots of violence and, of course, him telling us stories of when he was in [the residential school]. I only started eating fish a couple of years ago - my mother would never feed us fish because my dad would never eat fish. When he was in the school they never cooked the fish, they would just throw it at the kids half cooked with all the guts and stuff in it and they never cleaned it or anything.

I went to \_\_\_\_\_ for the first time this past summer. I was curious to see what the residential school was really like; getting a sense of what my history was like. I spoke to some of the elders up there, and they said it was a really rough place up there, a really rough place for kids.

I asked about that fish thing, because I couldn't believe that anyone would do that to kids, and they said that was quite common. They lived on fish up there and basically that's all they got to eat - fish and porridge.

[Residential school] really affected my father, I don't remember ever being hugged, I always felt that I was adopted, from some other family. Fathers are supposed to be kind and loving, not that he wasn't loving when he was there, he really tried to be a father in the best way he could. It was almost like he had something that he couldn't settle down. It was like he was always roaming, he couldn't stay in one relationship, he went from one to another. He lost his sense of belonging to anything; he had poor relationships with women, my mother, and all the other women in his life.

That definitely affected the way we were, I see it in our second generation. I really strive now to fight some of those things I grew up with because there was such a lack of positive parenting. We had no sense of what a father is like, this is what a mother is like, they had no sense of normalcy, there was no sense of a calm environment, there was always chaos or crisis going on. It really has affected my life. I didn't have kids till I was 41 and 37, because I was not going to bring kids up in the world I was living in, I absolutely was not.

Now I have different kinds [of] problems to deal with, the thing I realize now is that the issues don't go away. I know now that it wouldn't have mattered if I had kids young or now, I hope I am equipped to deal with them, but sometimes I realize I am not. There are issues that have to be dealt with from not having a father.

When I talked about my aunt not being able to leave her kids, I [also] see how [the impacts of residential school] have affected my life. I have a real problem with letting my kids go, people all over the community know me because I don't leave my kids anywhere. I know it's not healthy because when I am not with them, I worry so much about them, sometimes I can't sleep if they are away from me. If it have to take the baby somewhere and leave the older kids, I worry they are in a car accident, or someone took a gun to school. I think these horrible, horrible thoughts, sometimes to the point I can't function but I haven't developed that boundary, I haven't and I know it's not healthy. I see myself slipping back into that cycle that you're trying to separate yourself from, by going to the opposite side, and I don't know what to do.

My grandmother, [my dad's] mother, is still alive; she is ninety-two years old. I went and saw her and I find it really hard not to be resentful as I blame her for allowing [my dad] to be taken away. I have a half brother in \_\_\_\_\_ and I asked him why and he said that it had to do with the fact that my grandparents lived on a trap line, so they were told that they couldn't keep their kids, you don't have a choice. Then they turned into really bad alcoholics, because once their children were gone they drank a lot.

I guess I never understood how, as a mother, letting someone take your children away. I guess if someone tried to take your child away you would fight to the death as a mother, and I guess it's hard for me to understand how Aboriginal people could let that happen, and to people in my own family, it's beyond my understanding. I don't know how to deal with her abandoning my father which I think is what she did. These are some issues I struggle with still.



...and then my father died when I was so young. I was just at the age where I going to seek him out and get some answers and get to know him as a person, then he up and died on me. I really felt abandoned. I remember feeling so angry at his funeral, I was really angry at him for dying - there is still a lot of anger that is not resolved. I think that's what my father did also - he learned not to feel anything very deeply or emotionally.

I never knew what the man's place was. I wish that I didn't have all this anger - it's like I can't dissolve this anger from being abandoned from my father, but realizing that it wasn't his fault, that's the way life is. I think it comes from being abandoned and feeling that nobody cares about you, so you are constantly striving to get that approval somewhere, and I can't get it from my dad because he is gone now....

I guess that's why I went to \_\_\_\_\_ last year. I found my father's half brother, who looked so much like my father. It was really nice to go there, I didn't find my father but I found someone who looked just like him, a really nice man, a very nice person. I feel like I am still searching, I am searching for something or someone, some father. I know I'll never find it....  
(Site #2)

These people that were in there for a long time, I think they kind of treat their kids the same way they were treated [in residential school], I think that's there where the impact comes from is the people who grew up there, and it kind of rubs off on their family, they treat their kids the same way they were treated, that's where I see the impact.  
(Site #4)

*So I kind of mistreated my kids when they were small, it just kept coming on, I tried to lose it, I tried to tell myself it never happened.  
(Site #4)*

I still think about it, I used to treat my kids badly, I used to spank them, trying to influence them - even now they still don't say no to me and my youngest is thirty-three. So there is still this thing, the way I treated them - I didn't hit them with sticks or anything like that, but I was mean to them, yelling at them.  
(Site #4)

### 3) Frustrating experiences with the child welfare system.

[Social services called and they] were desperate, the homes are all full, these [two] kids really need a home - we'll call you back. [Social services] called me back and I said I had to talk to my children after school and [my kids] they said, take those children!

*Sometimes I feel like the welfare system has failed those kids  
(Site #2)*

So, those little girls came to me, one was full of lice, four years old and she couldn't talk, she couldn't go to the bathroom by herself, she was still going in her pants.

They brought this huge box of clothes and I thought, “Oh my god finally kids with clothes”, and we went through those clothes, those kids were eighteen months and four years old, those clothes were for baby clothes and size sixteen! Through the goodness of people I knew in town, they had a supply of clothes in one day.

After a little while the four year old was talking, because she was learning from everybody else, and getting potty-trained, my neighbour was a hairdresser and gave her a style to help get rid of the lice, she had beautiful long hair, but it was full of lice, there was nothing we could do but cut it – so we did.

One day [social services] phoned me, “The mother wants them back, and we’re coming tomorrow,” and I said “No, I am not going to be home tomorrow.” They came anyways and took the kids home.

Those little girls went back to their mother and within a couple of months, one of the little girls died. (Crying)

He was my youngest then, was only a year older than that girl so they always played together. So that night we all sat down and talked about the funeral, and we went with him and we bought flowers and we get there and could not find where [the funeral] was, so we went to a store and they said the funeral was yesterday. So we went to the graveyard. It was horrible, my son was there, he wasn’t mad or anything, he gets out of the vehicle with the flowers (crying)

(Site #1)

We had a different case worker for every kid we had [fostered]; I don’t think we ever had a same worker for the same kids. I always saw a different [social worker] when they would come in there would be a different person. I think my foster kids had a lot of different case workers; they even changed workers for the same kids during their term with us.

(Site #1)

#### 4) When foster kids leave the foster home.

They came and took the kids home. To me they could have given more time, given me more warning, and then all of a sudden they went.

(Site #1)

...(crying) [it’s] a piece of you , its like the abuse, these kids are your brothers and your sisters, you feel like a part of you was missing when they were being taken away, I used to hate those social workers when they would come for these kids because you knew they going.

(Site #1)

My mom was fostering and you knew why these kids came to you , and you knew why they were brought to your house, and your thinking, “Are they going back to that?” and your hurting for them, you really are. I think to know it you have to live it, to understand it , they live in your house, they are part of your family, they

*These people that are taught to be social workers, are they taught to be mean?*  
(Site #2)

are part of you, the kids and you play together every day.....and its hard to see them go

(Site #1)

### **5) What gives you hope?**

What I have noticed with all the teens that I work with and all the younger kids that I work is that they come with their families, and when I take my family into the school or something, the teens will come out and play with my kids, they are always hugging my baby and carrying him. I have found that this has made me really feel accepted with the kids and that makes a big difference for me, that make's me feel like somehow if I am not there, my kids will [still] be taken care of.

I really needed to get a sense of family, and something drew me back here - it must have been my grandparents because when I lived with them, they really gave me a lot love. So when I came here and when I met my husband I thought he was really stable, he was everything I wanted - he was opposite of the things, I had previously [wanted] in a relationship. And I thought, "Wow this is the person I am going to marry," and I did. So he has been a rock in my life, very, very stable.

I think it is seeing that there is compassion and caring in these kids. I hear other parents, talk about some of the behaviours that they experience with these kids [that] can be very violent and abusive , and then I'll be around these same kids and we have a different reaction and that's where I see hope, there is hope because I have seen another side to them, and maybe we need to touch them another way, and we need to try and work together to see if we can get to them, and see if we can get that behaviour that we expect them to be, socially acceptable behaviour if we can just reach them maybe then we can get that all the time instead of just glimpses of it.

So yes, I see hope in that, I know it sounds facetious to say I always see positive in every kid. Where I see hope is when you are driving down the road, and the kids flag you done and say 'we really miss you, we want you to come out' when they reach you on a personal level that's where I see hope.

Ok, so where else do I see hope? I see hope in my own interaction with people in the community, whenever some thing really negative happens within the community, or someone berates you or belittles you, I have experienced that they'll come around, it doesn't take them much, and then they come around to the other side, and they will phone you or talk to you and will say I really appreciated that, and to me that is hope. I will think well that person was really at an extreme last week, so maybe we are just all human. I see hope in people, it makes me think that people are just kind of waiting for some great leader to come by

And then they will follow, and in the meantime we are all just doing are own thing.

(Site #2)

### **6) What made it different for you?**

I went to Africa when I was twenty-six, to live there, and I remember feeling that in Zimbabwe this was the first time in my life I felt completely accepted by a whole race of people and they wanted me, they loved me, I actually thought that I was reincarnated! I felt the sense of being so

completely accepted. Unconditional love, I had never experienced that before, not from anyone, not my parents, nobody, never and, in fact, I really went away thinking [about] the whole reincarnation.

When I came back I realized there is unconditional love out there, I didn't know that before. Even with my children, I don't even think, it's sad to say. But unconditional love, that's something I say to my husband all the time, we are going to live in Africa sometime, so he can experience that.

What was it, what was this the life defining moment? I realize now [that as] a child I was always searching for somewhere to call home, I never really felt accepted. After I came back from Africa and I realized that there really was unconditional love that we can feel for each another, that really set me on the route to changing my life.

(Site #2)

## **DISCUSSION**

Although difficult within the financial and time constraints of this project, future projects collecting the same type of information may want to concentrate on connecting to specific individuals in the community who can facilitate the collection of stories appropriately.

At this point, an attempt to seek further interpretation of these shared experiences runs the risk of moving from the evocative to the banal – a move that could weaken the tapestry woven so far. Instead, this may be a time to explore the universe behind the voices.

By far, the stories as shared speak to the experience of the depth and meaning of relationships – relationships made, relationships destroyed, and, perhaps, relationships restored. For the most part, however, the stories speak to the severance of what was once whole – leaving parts with ripped and jagged edges with little chance of healing.

Residential school, similar to many processes of colonization and assimilation, was a consequence of the ability to successfully separate subject and object – wherein I (as the subject)

can perceive you (as the object) as an “other” to myself. The success of my ability to do so will determine the success of my ability to treat you (the other) as a commodity. As a consequence of our dualistic worldview, we have developed the ability to see things – and others – as separate from ourselves. This process allows us to stand in relation to others in the context of a severed relationship.

A severed relationship is an exploitive relationship, where the objective of the relationship is to master something, to learn it’s secrets and once we – as the subject – learn the secrets of the object, we seek to transform the object of our curiosity, to investigate, analyze, research and then to predict – to control.

Conversely, if we were to stand in the context of a restored relationship, we ask no questions, rather we engage in a process of recognition and acknowledgement. We – as subject – meet the other as subject and the objective is not to master, harness or profit from the meeting. Rather than learn the other’s secrets, the other becomes more mysterious. To know someone in the stance of relationship changes us. How much we understand and acknowledge that change determines how well we know the other.

The restored relationship involves the willingness to open ourselves to the place of another in such a way that we genuinely let the voice of another speak to us, and in such a way that we are willing to be changed when we hear that voice and experience the perspective of another.

These stories are about severed relationships and the ongoing (and seemingly endless) damage that has resulted from the severance of that which was once one. Is it possible to restore these relationships? Sadly, in the ongoing context of providing services to Aboriginal communities and to Aboriginal children, it does not seem possible. We have moved from Residential Schools that separated children from their families, communities, beliefs, and culture – to foster placements and adoptions that continue to separate children – and we have now moved to placing children in care in communities outside and still separate – further replicating the destruction and severing of that which was once whole.

What is next?

## MAKING OUR HEARTS SING – STURGEON LAKE FIRST NATION

This chapter describes what has been learned thus far in the search for new ways of providing child welfare services that are more in keeping with both traditional aboriginal worldviews and modern theories of youth resilience. The framework for this dialogue will, therefore, take place within traditional Aboriginal knowledge and resilience theory. This is in keeping with advice from Sahtouris (1992), who argues that “the most promising survival path for humans is to merge existing technology with the knowledge, wisdom, and ecologically sound practice of indigenous and traditional peoples” (p.1).

Our goal in this chapter is to recognize that indigenous people have for millennia had a very different cosmology and epistemology that, in spite of a recent history of colonization and oppression, continues to permeate their total being. Many communities have endeavoured to develop programs and practices that are more consistent with their worldview. There have, however, been significant challenges to these efforts, not the least of which is a fundamental lack of understanding and respect on the part of funding sources and policy makers who wield the power to constrain efforts. The historical and current factors that contribute to this situation will be described, as well as contemporary thinking in Aboriginal communities in Canada as they chart their own course in the development of child welfare services that better meet their needs. Community recommendations for change are outlined and compared to broad categories of protective factors that contribute to resilience. It is suggested that this preliminary examination is promising as a means of reconciling Aboriginal and Western knowledge for the purpose of creating more relevant and creative programs for all communities.

Resilience

One of the most easily understood descriptions of resilience is the “capacity to be bent without breaking and the capacity, once bent, to spring back” (Vaillant, 1993, p. 284). A resilient person is usually seen as someone who lives a successful life as defined by such factors as steady employment, a stable marriage, and overall well-being in spite of having been exposed to high levels of emotional, mental, or physical distress (Rutter, 2001). Resilience is the result of interaction between a variety of risk and protective factors. Risk factors such as poverty, parental alcoholism, and early childhood neglect can increase the likelihood of negative outcomes, while protective factors such as a positive relationship with an adult, church involvement, or positive school experiences can help to counteract risk factors.

Gilligan (2003) believes that:

resilience in children and young people grows out of a strong sense of belonging, out of good self esteem, and out of a sense of self efficacy or being able to achieve things and make a difference. Fundamentally these qualities grow out of supportive relationships with parents, relatives, teachers or other adults (or sometimes peers) who offer in-depth commitment, encouragement, and support (p. 3).

He warns against looking for a “magic bullet” with which to inoculate children against social adversity and social inequality, focussing instead on supporting and complementing the efforts of parents, schools, and neighbourhoods. Such support moves beyond the narrow confines of child protection to working with the “natural allies” of the children where they live, collaborating with the natural supports and resources that they have around them.

It is suggested that Aboriginal children and their communities have been subjected to far more risk factors than the general population in Canada, as have many indigenous people in all parts of the world. One of the more significant set of risk factors has been a result of the planned genocide of Aboriginal people in Canada, as was discussed in the introduction.



This chapter describes part of what has been learned thus far from the Sturgeon Lake community in the search for new ways of providing child welfare services that are more relevant to traditional aboriginal worldviews and modern theories of youth resilience. The framework for this dialogue will, therefore, take place within traditional Aboriginal knowledge and resilience theory. This is in keeping with advice from Sahtouris (1992), who argues that “the most promising survival path for humans is to merge existing technology with the knowledge, wisdom, and ecologically sound practice of indigenous and traditional peoples” (p.1).

Our goal in this chapter is to recognize that indigenous people have for millennia had a very different cosmology and epistemology that, in spite of a recent history of colonization and oppression, continues to permeate their total being. Many communities have endeavoured to develop programs and practices that are more consistent with their worldview. There have, however, been significant challenges to these efforts, not the least of which is a fundamental lack of understanding and respect on the part of funding sources and policy makers who wield the power to constrain efforts. Community recommendations for change are outlined and compared to broad categories of protective factors that contribute to resilience. It is suggested that this preliminary examination is promising as a means of reconciling Aboriginal and Western knowledge for the purpose of creating more relevant and creative programs for all communities.

In the fall of 2005, participants in the “Creating Hope for the Future” gathering shared what had given them hope for the future. The following are excerpts of these conversations. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they told stories about relationships with people who touched their lives in ways that demonstrated respect and belief in their capacity as people. Some were brief and others permanent and ongoing. All were memorable. In hindsight, the stories form a remarkable

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link to tenets of childhood resiliency theory, many of which make intuitive sense, but which still lack empirical proof of effectiveness. While space does not allow for a full account of the Sturgeon Lake community activities in this document, the perceived linkages between resiliency theory and the stories on participants in the “Creating Hope” gathering of October, 2005 are presented to illustrate some fundamental connections between the life experiences of truly resilient individuals and these theoretical principles.

Aboriginal communities are clear about the essential values and philosophy that must guide the development of programs and services. They include: shared parenting and community responsibility for children, the importance of language as a source of renewed culture, knowledge of history and tradition as an essential element of identity, the importance of kinship and connection to each other and a respectful approach to all of life. Aboriginal people hold a holistic view of the universe and seek to balance the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual elements of life. Sharing and respect has been essential to survival for millennia.

Resiliency theory describes protective factors that include; having one person in life that values and respects the child (mentor/elder); a connection to community (history/tradition); a connection to a church (spirituality); healthy peer relationships (identity); development of at least one talent or skill (traditional skills such as drumming/dancing); contribution to ones community/school (being seen as part of the solution for one’s people).

Both of these concepts have been described; one as part of the Aboriginal oral tradition and the other in theoretical literature. Both suffer from a lack of application in child welfare systems. Our hypothesis is that a more systematic application of both perspectives can enrich communication between aboriginal and non aboriginal practitioners, and improve the quality and relevance of services. Such applications to service development and their potential for the cross

cultural communication of important concepts between Aboriginal and Western society will be explored. We will initiate a process that compares and contrasts what we have been told is important by Aboriginal people who have survived difficult life experiences with principles that youth resilience theory has been advancing for many years. We hope that this will enhance the application of protective factors in day to day practice. Our hope is that we can begin to develop a common language that resonates with all people in the development of innovative practice models.

The following compares the perspectives of aboriginal people as they were described in a sharing circle at a conference entitled “Creating Hope for the Future.” It will be left to the reader to determine to what extent the quotations reflect what we know about the resiliency theory, as it has been briefly described. It is assumed that this is already known by the reader or readily available knowledge that can be gained from this book.

<b>Aboriginal Worldview</b>	<b>Resiliency Concepts</b>
Kinship and connection to each other	Connection to a community
Spirituality and respect for nature	Church and religious connections
Sharing and respect for each other	Contributing to the community/school
Knowledge of history, culture and language	Sense of identity
Development of traditional skills i.e. drumming - dancing	Sense of competence
Shared parenting and community responsibility for children	Healthy parenting

### **Kinship and connection to each other - Connection to a community**

One of the things I would like to see is a big healing center and where everybody can go in anytime and just be there to have all our culture and language in there. I think what I want is our culture, language back and everything in there like we would have our elders, the youth children like families to be in there like together just to go in and do all kinds of things. I'm thinking about is just getting back to the way I was raised by my grandparents. It is hard to talk about because they are not here anymore. I want to see my grand kids being there with me like I was with my grandparents, because they were really into the culture and my grandmother actually taught me a lot of things. We used to go berry picking, and making dry meat and stuff like that and that is what I would like to see for myself and other families. I want to see the closeness back the way it was. Just to be a teacher for the young children in the way it was done. One of the main things is learning to respect themselves, respect people, respect the community; well actually all mother earth.

It was good to just sit with your grandma or grandpa and say 'oh look at that bird'. Some days certain ones [will be singing] 'oh it is going to rain 'and we would ask and how they knew? It was just by a certain little bird that is singing at an odd time. They call that a little rain bird in Cree. If a dog or horse acts in a certain way by gallivanting and playing [they can predict] what the weather is going to be. I used to just sit there and listen to my grandparents, and to me it was just an animal playing or looking at the trees at 6:00 in the morning. But you didn't have to listen to the radio to find out what the weather or the [next] season was going to be like. Even my father by looking at the stars can pretty well [foretell] a hot or cold winter. Those are some of things that I would like to see happen. I would tell little children not to be afraid to go sit with an elder .That is what I would like to see

### **Spirituality and respect for nature - Church and religious connections**

I took up believing and trusting in God because I couldn't trust anything else, that's what I had. And he was always there and he never left me, my creator was there all the time and that's my inspiration. I've learned to forgive and to start trusting, little children, people, and adults, I try to help them in every way I can today.

This elder chose me as I was standing there beside the fire. I didn't know what was supposed to be done. Everybody had their own little groups. Everybody knew everybody from the pow-wow trail or had done the sweats before so I was by myself. I didn't know what was expected of me. I stood there and this elder came and talked to me. Apparently we stood there for an hour and a half, it just seemed as though I stood there for fifteen minutes and he started talking to me about the creator and about the grandfathers and the grandmothers, relatives that had passed on. He explained to me about there is no such thing as hell. He explained to me the four principles of life, the four directions. Anyway

he said to me, that old man... he's passed on now. Who's Jesus?" I could not answer him because I learned all about Jesus through the residential school. Then he said "Jesus was never here, the man in the black robe...he said this in Cree...he brought him over in a big ship". He said your grandfather and your grandmother never knew who Jesus was. And that day, that word stuck in my mind and ever since then, I have followed the traditional way of life and now today.

### **Sharing and respect for each other - Contributing to the community/school**

I want to be able to see our community that's unified, that can discuss things together, and that can work together as opposed to fighting against each other. If we could take our negative energy and turn it into positive energy the thing we can accomplish are phenomenal. . . but we have to believe in ourselves. I would like to see people taking responsibility for themselves . . . but a lot of times we are so busy blaming everybody else [that] we forget to look at ourselves and [realize] that we have choices. We choose how we live, if we choose drugs and alcohol then of course the negativity is going to come with it and we are not going to have the lives that we want but if we choose a more positive lifestyle and take the responsibility for ourselves and say 'yes were a part of it and we want to make things happen', then things can change.

I had some trouble in my own life and ended up in some counseling and this counselor, as it turned out, happened to be a social worker. I remember describing to her a bit about how I was feeling and I saw her start to tear up and that profoundly impacted me because I felt like she really understood and that, from that point on, I decided I needed to be a social worker too. And then I started to hang out with kids, teenagers. I've always been very interested in teenagers, I think 'because I found being a teenager very difficult. I'll never forget one of the first kids I had a chance to hang out with, a young lady who was spending a lot of time in the downtown area and was on the brink of prostitution. She was living in this residential program and I was very eager and very naïve. I remember asking her you know, "like why do you do this, why do you go run away, why do you go downtown and hang out down there and get yourself into all kinds of trouble?" and she said "because the people down there are my friends and they understand me." I said "really". She said "yeah, they watch my back for me" and that was so profound for me that she was so connected with people who, in lots of ways, unhealthy for her, that I stopped and really had to think about that, what she might have experienced in her life that the safest people for her were people who were selling her drugs, who were buying her body, who were, in some ways, hurting her and what that taught me was that I had to listen and really try to understand what it's like for the other person.

I would like to see people not being afraid of people. There is [so much] fear, they are scared to talk to people. The trust is lacking [and people] are scared to even share their pain. I can remember people would come to the road and say 'hi, what's your name, where are you from, come in have coffee, come in rest up' even [if you were] just

walking a little ways. I would like to see that happen again, just feeling free with no fear of anything. Just saying how you feel or “Hey! I need to talk to somebody” and if you could just take that time to sit down and have some coffee. ‘Lets talk about it and I’m willing to listen to you . . . just feeling that what ever you do there is somebody out there and none of this competition where somebody always trying out do you or trying to be better than you . . . [I would like the] good feeling that there is no tension and that is what I would like to see happen,

### **Knowledge of history, culture and Language - Sense of identity**

I went to a couple of culture camps this year and the things that I saw at the culture camp were good. It was almost as if the people acted differently, not like here in everyday life. In the culture camp they were just laughing and having a good time. I don’t know if I was the only one guy who saw this, but you know that would be something I would like to see more of.

We have our own culture camp at Goose Lake. We have some really good places where we can make a great big camp and like in Vy’s dream where people can get together and have a big learning multiplex if you will. But my dream is a little simpler. All we need is tents or teepees and go back there and live there {for a bit of time} and these things can happen. We can learn from each other [as] there was a lot of good learning in those culture camps. I guess that is what I would like to see.

I expect to see a school were they are going to be teaching about our traditional beliefs, culture, spiritual; all those traditional values

### **Development of traditional skills - Sense of competence**

I went to Onion Lake a little while ago and you should have seen the young people dance around; just the young people, even the little kids were playing drums. That’s what they should teach. People here should teach the young people to play drums and dance; all the dances [such as] round dances. When I go to dances here I don’t see young people get up to dance.

I think I did one good thing this weekend you know everyone was having a party after that tournament and I had no booze to buy so I couldn’t give a drinking party. These people wanted to go somewhere so I brought them home, no booze no nothing, and they sat around on the floor and on the chairs in my dining room and living room, and I just put a bag of dry meat there and that was our party. The next day they called it our dry meat party. So I feel proud of myself doing that I didn’t have lots of dry meat but I just put it there and they went home about 1:30 and that was that, so I felt good about myself. I don’t have lots but I was willing and the next day some people come there to ask for dry meat. They were trying to buy some but I don’t sell

Then there is the camping yes I was able to go and take in the campout. I had never tried making dry meat but I did some of that and it was good practice and I enjoyed it. Like Lena was saying I wouldn't mind having some moose meat and getting a meat rack and making dry meat, because now I have a little bit of skills on that too, and I am not afraid to try things and to learn so it will help me. There is a lot of crafts stuff I don't know how also but I would be willing to learn. In the past my mother used to make moccasins and I wouldn't mind learning how to do that. There are some peoples out there that know how to make moccasins, but it's up to me to ask if they are willing to come and show me how and I have to take the initiative of going out there. So with that that's all I can say.

There was another lady that was talking about having campouts, making dry meat, picking berries, and drying fish, and that was one of the things that was supposed to start today. We postponed it for 2 weeks and that will put us right into the moose ruts. So elders such as the gentleman sitting over here can take part in the things he loved to do when he was a young man like calling moose. I seen him do that and he was one of the better callers.

We were going to try and teach the young kids those things and have the ladies make the dry meat and dry the fish for themselves and even go as far as making the hides, but we couldn't find a lady to do that even though we were going to pay her to do it. When I was a young lad I used to see my mother do those things. It is a labor intensive job, with all the work you put into this hide and it requires a lot of care. I guess it could still be done because there are ladies here that want to start arts and crafts.

I encourage some of traditional values [even if] I know we can't go back in time and survive the way they use to along time ago. The trapline is different and the fur just is not there and the prices are not there either; but then we still have to survive. This individual here that was talking before me knows a lot about the drum and has talked to me about the drum. At one point when he was a young man that there was no such a thing as a radio. The old timers would entertain themselves by picking up the drum and just singing; to me that is a lost art, and they would have fun and tell stories and different things. I have sat and listened to some old timers that passed on. They told me different things and it was a good way of life where there was always humor no matter what. To me in any kind of healing humor is a big part of it because when I'm hurt have a big pain and when somebody cracks a joke, for that instant or maybe for a minute I would feel better.

### **Shared parenting and community responsibility for children - Healthy parenting**

I'm granny. Long ago, as far as I know, our people had their way of raising their families. Like we had the grandparents, we had the aunts and uncles and then we had the parents themselves. Our grandparents were there to teach us. They were our teachers. If

we wanted to know something we approached our grandparents and they taught us what they knew and our aunts and uncles were the people that told us when we did something wrong. When we did something wrong it wasn't our parents that scolded us or told us what we did was wrong. It was up to the aunts and uncles. They were the ones that disciplined their nephews and nieces and I still see that sometimes today. Sometimes one of my sons when his nephews do wrong, he tells them they did wrong. He doesn't wait for the parents to tell them. He tells them. That's the way it was long ago and the parents were there just to love their kids. You gave love to your kids and your kids loved you in return. The children didn't have to be taken out of homes and when they were orphaned or the parents were sick, the rest of the family was there to just take them in and look after them. There was no such thing as who is going to take care of this child, somebody just said you can come home and live with me. I'll raise you and take care of you and that was it.

My father wasn't around all the time but I did not have a lack of a father figure, I had my grandpa and I had my uncles. I had people in the community that I looked up to. My heroes lived right in my house; my role models were right in. What I'm saying is that in an extended family situation, if your immediate parents don't work out, you've got your grandparents, you've got your uncles, you've got your aunts, you've got relations, you've got extended families and when we started moving away from that into a more nuclear family set up, then sort of the issues start coming up, you know. We start copying what's out there. If you don't make it with both parents then you're really in trouble but for me, my uncles to this day still mean so much to me. The influence and impact of my grandfather, I still use today and there are people in our community that I still look up to but they're people I have access to, you know. So in that regard, when you know that there's responsibilities that go with that and I think that's what we run away from and that's scary so for me to be a role model, it becomes very, very important.

[I would like to see] less alcohol and drugs, and for children to feel safe. I want to have the trust with everyone without wondering if my child is going to be okay with that one. [I would like to see us] actually sitting down with the child and pass on a teaching like used to happen with my grandparents when they gave us some needle and a thread and a button to sew up or telling us things about parenting that you're going to have to do when you're older. I was only 6 or 7 years old and I did not want to be married because I [would] have to sew, but [they were] teaching me and preparing me to be an adult, so those skills were good as I was growing up and those are what I would like to see out there again. I want to see a child come to me and ask a question and take to talk to you instead of saying "get out of here [because] I don't have time for you."

I would say one of the customs was that you know the oldest would go to the...and live with the grandparents. But other than that, I think now and then they, from what I understand, you had a favorite uncle or a favorite aunt who kind of took over and was also almost like another parent so that gave support to the raising of children so people had their favorite nieces or nephews and I know I had a favorite aunt and who I always went to on weekends or during holidays but I think overall the assumption has always



been that First Nation or Aboriginal people cannot take care of their children. You know we don't have either the capability or the ability and these are basically the two main reasons the children are apprehended. The unwillingness or unable to take care of children and I think when you look at the, you know the policy of colonization, it started off with "Let's remove the children, let's take the children away from their homes because the parents cannot take care of them. We'll Christianize them, we'll civilize them" and I think today, when I say it's a constructed reality, we come from that place. Many institutions that are based on a dominant ideology and social policy, come from "we can't take care of our children" we we're, we've just perpetuated that initial policy about removing children.

I feel the need to teach the young people today. They don't understand the love that we have for them and I think that they need to know that we love them. Our children have been affected by our not knowing how to show our love for them. They need the hugs and to hear that we love them because we don't know how. As soon as you try to hug somebody well you feel bad. Our parents did not show it to us because they were not there and it makes children think that they are not loved but they are but it is we who don't know how to show it. We need to put that love back. I helped my daughter with a group of people about 3 or 4 days ago and one of my nieces asked me what kind of soup it was and I said love soup. I made it with love. The parents are suffering too because they were raised without the love that they should have had. . . I think sometimes we feel that if we tell our children that they might say well, what are you talking about? You never showed it. . . that's one thing that the convent took away from us. They were never parents and they never gave birth to a kid.

At age sixteen I got pregnant and when my son was born he was white. I thought "oh my god, my mom and dad will probably hate me" and I brought him home, well he actually sent my mom to come and tell me, 'cause I was going to give him up for adoption and he sent my mom to come and see me at the hospital and he told her to tell me that I better not give up my own flesh and blood, to bring him home and that everything was going to be okay. So I brought my little white guy home, he was bald and just pale. I got out of the cab 'cause we didn't have a vehicle and my dad walks out of the house. He took my son and he was crying 'cause that was his first grandchild that was white. He told me "now that you have a child, you go back to school; you finish your schooling and be someone.

I have a couple of key people and then I meet people along the way. The key people are women, actually, they're my mother and my wife and the other ones are my grandfathers. They taught me how to hunt, fish and all that stuff and my mother and my wife taught me how to care about people and how care about yourself and how to believe in yourself and that inspired me and the way I think of things now. If someone tells me that it can't be done that's a real good challenge for me, I try and go get it done. Those are the people that inspire me and of course kids come along, there are four kids and two grandkids and then you start, you find inspiration all over the place.

A comparative analysis of these stories with community recommendations from this and other communities reveals a pragmatic perspective and tantalizing insights into how these notions might be implemented programmatically. While many of these are contained in Appendix 'A' and 'B', a selected sample of ideas is offered in the context of childhood resiliency theory to illustrate how they also reflect a high level of congruence between Aboriginal aspirations and this theoretical framework.

#### **Kinship and connection to each other – Connection to a community**

- Listen to community stories so that community members can feel validated
- Encourage Aboriginal communities to start opening up more amongst themselves, i.e. elder and youth gatherings
  - Ceate settings and community resources where people can meet to reconnect with each other.
  - 
  - Reconnect people in the community by:
    - Providing mediation services to deal with long standing hostility and resentment.
    - Re-uniting by sharing of common history
    - Reconnecting estranged families

#### **Spirituality and respect for nature – Church and religious connections**

- My vision is that these teachings should they be available to everyone; teachings from our elders

about our spirituality. I would like us to return to some of those teachings and have them incorporated in the way we live our lives and the way we try to help children.

- Have spirituality available for our children, our families in need. We're sending one of our kids to a sweat for treatment instead of sending the kid to wherever they send psychotics in Edmonton or Grande Prairie. Why can't we try Sweat Ceremonies or Pipe Ceremonies as ways of healing for our children and our families?

### **Sharing and respect for each other – Contributing to the community**

- Provide opportunities for safe expression of affection, and open discussion on feelings, emotions, and inadequacies
- Provide opportunities for people to heal, to tell their stories, to learn to trust, to find out who they are as individuals
- Opportunities to learn that we are not what the oppressors said/say we are; that we are valued as individuals and as a people; that there is a place for all of us in this world and that we can all contribute.

### **Knowledge of history, culture and language – Sense of Identity**

- I connect with the residential school experience because these same principles of colonization happened when I was taken from my home and put in a 'white' foster family who happened to be prejudiced against 'Indians', spoke French and called me a 'savage'. I was denied my culture, history, language, family and home. To help our residential school survivors and maybe even abused foster children, and the next generations of residential school survivor's children, we must begin to love ourselves and take pride in which we are as First Nations. We need to learn about the history of Aboriginals before, during and after colonization. These concepts must be learned before we can heal, not only for the residential school survivors but for their family as well so that everyone can connect and be unified as a family unit.
- Provide Aboriginal children with the opportunity to re-connect with their heritage .
- Knowledge of history is one of the keys to get grounded with self. People that have lost their roots are lost. The 'lost' need to see that the Aboriginal people were once a proud nation and can become a proud nation again.
- Culture can be an important component for Aboriginal people that teaches male and female that promote respect for self and others. No longer do I feel like I am a victim, but a survivor through sharing, knowledge, respect, humor, tears and laughter, spirituality and Creator.

- Help those with knowledge teach and lead others into that way of life. Help them to act in a healthy manner within the culture so that they can embrace what is left and develop the community that they now have.

#### **Development of traditional skills – Sense of competence**

- Make Cree language and culture a part of every curriculum available to all students
- Cultural camps where youth can learn ancient arts of canoeing, trapping, hunting, fishing, smoking meat and fish, herbal healing, drum making and drumming, traditional dances
- Carry forward the oral tradition and provide opportunities for the elders to convey their knowledge while they are still with us

#### **Shared parenting and community responsibility for children – Healthy parenting**

- Provide opportunities for parents to address the pain of not having been loved and listen to what they need to heal from this. Then provide education about child development and how it applies to their paradigm and how they can begin to express love to one another.
- Support families on their journey to learning to love one another by patiently allowing it to unfold naturally.
- Deal with intergenerational trauma by allowing those who have experienced/survived the residential schools to express their pain in counseling, social work sessions, and group talks.
- Address the loss of affection that has been experienced by establishing programs that educate families on how to reconnect with one another and how to love one another again
- “I taught Traditional Parenting Skills to Aboriginal adult students which they found very interesting. Not only did they become knowledgeable but took home many skills to work with their children. I believe that we require more educated Aboriginal Facilitators or Liaison Workers to teach and pass on the stories to workers in the child welfare system, education and court systems. It should be made mandatory for all public service workers”.
- Allow the community to gather and exchange information/ideas/struggles around parenting. As a community support one another with all their family systems.
- Recognize that parenting is a community commitment and a child is not raised by one person.
- I would teach a Parenting Program, but not named “parenting”. It is too judgmental and makes a

parent look like they do not know anything about parenting. It is very demeaning. A program by any other name is more inviting. It has to be fun and not so scary. My clients would hate to go to parenting skills because it could make them feel like they were not a good mother.

- Redefine Aboriginal parental skills. Both Child Welfare systems and Aboriginal people need to understand the differences and similarity of parental skills of our respective systems. To discuss the positive or accepted practices within Aboriginal families may enlighten Child Welfare and rekindle traditional values that existed before colonization. Mainstream values concerning parenting within Aboriginal family's conflict with collective community and spiritual beings of our people.
- Now we must learn and honour the traditional parental role. We must seek guidance from elders about what the parental role used to be and talk to the community about healing and reclaiming parenthood.
- Involve parents in decisions with children – don't be secretive behind their backs
- Let the community be the one to approach the parents who are experiencing difficulty
- We can attempt to re-introduce children in care to their families. Families need to be informed and supported in the loss of their children have experienced. The families need the financial and political support from government to allow them to practice their traditions and to pass this richness onto their children who lost it.
- Have the children who have been in care and who are now parents, be invited to become part of the Elder's Circle to help educate the on parenting skills. Education is also an important factor in re-learning the old parenting ways of the Aboriginal people, such as the practice of not imposing corporal punishment as a method of discipline.
- Providing some way for the children to connect with a mentor or significant person(s) that can show them love and acceptance consistently throughout their development to adulthood ( someone who believes in them)

It seems clear that communities have a clear sense of what they need if they are to have healthy families and children. It also seems clear that the current system of serving children and families is poorly aligned with community perspectives, based as it is on bureaucratic imperatives and hamstrung by provincial and federal funding and policy constraints. The holistic and flexible models favored by Aboriginal people do not fit well with the specialized and often rigid models of practice that have been imposed upon them. What seems most evident is the extent to which much of current practice fails to consider the impact of

the past century of oppression on individuals, families and communities. We suggest that until the intergenerational impacts of this century in particular are faced head on, the implementation of child welfare programs that do not take into consideration the kinds of preventative and educational programs proposed will continue to fail. We have observed a pattern of failing to understand the messages of Aboriginal communities, and are hopeful that by finding a common language as suggested by this experience will lead to more enlightened practice that is not only congruent with Aboriginal aspirations but will encourage funding sources and policy makers to modify their expectations accordingly.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

An ancient Amazonian legend provides a further source of wisdom. According to the legend, the blue-black Rio Negro and the creamy, caramel-colored Rio Solimões, run side by side, without mixing at the mouth of the Amazon river. The waters of the two rivers differ in temperature, clarity, density and acidity, and continue side by side for miles before becoming the Amazon. Both rivers converge at one point but each retains its essential quality and characteristics. The resulting foam is considered to be new knowledge that would not have been created if the rivers had not met ( Based upon an oral telling by Dr. Timothy Pyrch). It seems that by creating such a convergence of our two rivers, Aboriginal and Western, we might be able to create to create new knowledge that would not only better serve Aboriginal communities, but all communities, while retaining the fundamental integrity of our respective world views. This would require the hard work of sharing our experience and how we are feeling about matters of importance to us and helping the other to understand, and reciprocating this experience. This is the ultimate objective of the “Making our Hearts Sing” initiative in Alberta; the provision of an opportunity for conversation and understanding.

It seems to us that by creating a convergence of our two rivers, Aboriginal and “mainstream” for lack of a more descriptive term, it is possible to create new knowledge that would not only better serve Aboriginal communities, but all communities. To achieve this vision; we need to think about the following possibilities:

- Develop a concerted effort between provincial authorities and Aboriginal people to ensure that a destructive federal fiscal policy that has been in place for over a century is rescinded and replaced by one that does not result in the continuing removal of children from their families and communities because this is the primary purpose of the funds provided.
- Consider the contribution of Aboriginal spirituality to a holistic and community centered practice model.
- Learn from Aboriginal people’s history of oppression and the outcomes that continue to plague them today.
- Learn about Aboriginal world views by connecting and relating with an Aboriginal mentor and guide, be prepared to listen to the perspectives of Aboriginal communities.

These are practical ways of thinking about services that are governed by the learning that has occurred and we are hopeful that they will improve matters for Aboriginal children, families and communities. The next stage of our work will be to generate increased operational specificity in program development guided by the principles enunciated by our communities, such as the importance of culture, community, kinship, identity and respect. This will be addressed by continued exploration and study of our history with Aboriginal communities to learn from past experiences and to correct these for future generations. We will also examine, document and evaluate promising programs and practices that better meet the needs of Aboriginal children and that help to live out the values and principles that communities have taught us.

In the interim two documents attempt to summarize the findings of this project and can be found in Appendix “A” and “B”. The former sums up the findings based upon Sturgeon Lake experience, while the latter is directly related to the Blood Reserve. These are expected to serve guide-posts for future planning that are grounded in the views of the Elders and community members.

## **PROJECT OUTCOMES**

Book chapters have been produced that describe the process and outcomes of different aspects of this project.

- Edited volume “Putting a Human Face on Child Welfare.” This book is intended to publish key presentations at the Putting a Human Face on Child Welfare conference held in Edmonton in October, 2006. It is entitled “Here be dragons! Reconciling Indigenous and Western Knowledge to improve aboriginal child welfare.
- Liebenberg, L., and Ungar, M. (Eds). (Forthcoming September 2007). Resilience in Action. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. It is entitled “Synchronicity or serendipity: Aboriginal wisdom and childhood resilience” and explores the links between these theoretical concepts of childhood resiliency and aboriginal worldviews.
- Two articles have been published. One in “Canada’s Children” entitled Leadership Forums in the Prairies-Making our Hearts Sing in Alberta, a progress report. The other “Here be dragons! Reconciling Indigenous and Western knowledge to improve Aboriginal child welfare” by Jean Lafrance and Betty Bastien in the First Nation’s Child and Family Services Journal (In Press) draws on similar concepts to the book chapter described above.



- Presentations in Adelaide (IAASW), Victoria (Aboriginal CW Conference, Calgary(CWLC and Treaty 7)) and Regina (PCWC) have described the process and outcomes of this research. Copies of presentations are available.
- A new society called “Creating Hope” that was created to provide a forum for the voices of those who were in care during the 60s scoop. Thus far the group has generated a website in which people can connect with and support each other, sponsored a gathering of 200 people in Edmonton where their stories could be shared, created a support group and begun an advocacy program with government ministries. Interest has arisen from peers in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia and more gatherings are planned.
- The Blood Tribe is producing a documentary film with community leaders that will assist in the articulation of Blackfoot culture and language as the basis for further planning and the foundation for planning new services in the context of the legislative framework that is under development.
- The Sturgeon Lake Community has developed some interesting approaches to issues that concern them. This includes the use of community theatre wherein youth scripted, produced and acted in a play that outlines their observations of their community in a powerful medium and invites the community to respond. The response has been very positive. This play entitled “The Third Generation” has been filmed and well received in conferences as an example of community capacity building.

- Aboriginal Co-Chairs of Alberta Children's Services Regional Authorities have collaborated on the production of a film that shared their perspectives and wisdom for the next group of co-chairs that is replacing them and to influence policy making in the future.
- The Sturgeon Lake community has also hosted a gathering entitled "Creating Hope for the Future" which invited three generations who had been served by white caregivers: residential schools during the 40s and 50s, foster care in the 60s and 70s and more recent 'graduates' of the system. It seems clear that while the players have changed in such systems, the outcomes for many children are the same. The proceedings of the community sessions were filmed and audio-taped and are currently being analyzed in greater detail. We are optimistic that they will provide some interesting material for policy makers, program planners and child welfare delivery systems.
- A 40 minute film entitled "Sturgeon Lake Journey toward Empowerment" has attracted considerable interest. It portrays the healing journey of this community in their words.
- Two films have been produced about the experience of adults who have been served during the 60s provide powerful testimony about the life experiences of Aboriginal children in care. Creating hope for the future documents the experiences of child welfare survivors from the 60's scoop. It has been shown at a major prairie teleconference and been very well received as an illustration of the negative experiences of some Aboriginal children in the care of the province during that era. A version of these films has been

presented at the Alberta “Putting a Human Face on Child Welfare Conference, and has generated a great deal of interest.

- Wisdom of the Black Foot Elders – This is still in production. It documents the views of indigenous researchers and scientists. It will be helpful in setting the ground work for future planning and the development of programs and practices that are in greater accord with traditional Aboriginal traditional beliefs, culture and spirituality.
- Aboriginal Co-Chairs in Alberta: Views from the Policy Domain – We have collaborated with the Aboriginal co-chairs of the Children’s Services Ministry in Alberta to produce a film document their experiences in attempting to influence program development in non-Aboriginal communities.
- A spin-off activity is a study with elders and youth of the Saddle Lake Reserve that has explored the perspectives on services of children and elders. This study was conducted by recent graduates of the University of Calgary’s Social Work Learning Circle BSW program with supervision from their former instructor. They are learning and applying a model of research (narrative inquiry) that is highly applicable to Aboriginal communities and that will contribute to a capacity building as well as important new learning about current issues in program delivery.
- A website entitled Innovative Program.com has been created to provide a forum for the sharing of information about innovations that are taking place in our communities.

Readers can check this site out at <http://www.innovativeprogram.com/> and to submit share what they are doing.

- A network for people working in child and family services has been created as part of the “Putting a Human Face on Child Welfare Conference” hosted in Edmonton in November. A link to this network can be found at the following website <http://www.pcwcsymposium.com/index>
- The Saddle Lake community, Boys and Girls Clubs of Saddle Lake, Blue Quills College and Saddle Lake and Edmonton Region Child Welfare held homecoming for their children who are in care in the Edmonton Region in 2006. They invited the children, their foster parents and social workers for a feast and meeting with their parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins and friends. A key outcome for the children is the development of a computerized genealogy for each child so they will know where they come from.

In recognition of the immense losses experienced by Aboriginal children who are lost to their families, the Making our Hearts Sing initiative is helping to instigate the following activities that are intended to build a stronger connection between children in care and their communities.

- The Sturgeon Lake community is exploring the feasibility of building a cultural centre that might serve as a meeting ground for the community, a source of training for non-Aboriginal professionals, and a tourist centre.

- In addition to documenting the experiences of these communities, the project teams have accumulated some powerful film footage that is being converted into documentaries that will serve to sensitize both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to the realities and aspirations of these communities.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

While each community has to determine its own needs in this search, we present some possibilities for consideration. In the short term, several opportunities present themselves. One legacy of the residential school experience is that Aboriginal children are disproportionately represented even today in foster homes and youth detention facilities. The rebuilding of cultural traditions is a key step to overcoming this problem. This process of rebuilding will require that we make resources available directly to Aboriginal communities so that they can develop language, cultural, spiritual and educational programs. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation has made a beginning step in this direction, one that could benefit from appropriate partnerships with university researchers and mainstream service providers who are sensitive to the Aboriginal reality of today.

It is also clear that Aboriginal agencies have to operate with even more inadequate financial resources than non-Aboriginal agencies. The current funding formula not only restricts such agencies from offering preventive programs, it provides limited flexibility to offer innovative programs that are consistent with traditional values and approaches. This could be a priority area for collaboration, with academics and policy makers exercising a concerted effort to convince federal funding sources of the potential efficacy of such approaches over the long term. It also seems clear that many Aboriginal agencies are operating in a policy vacuum because they have

not had the time to develop policies, standards and protocols that are responsive to their unique situations. A collaborative effort would have a greater likelihood of success than isolated efforts to promote change. In this process, special attention will have to be given to the provision of sufficient resources to Aboriginal agencies to address the complex and serious problems that confront them on a daily basis.

In the longer term, and as an overriding principle, we need to begin by recognizing our interdependence with clients, community and stakeholders. The following suggestions flow from this principle and while they are not exhaustive, they could serve as a starting point. It will be clear to anyone with even a nodding acquaintance with much of child welfare practice today that these suggestions do not reflect the reality of practice today. In fact, they are often the antithesis of much of current practice. This makes them even more important from a transfer of learning perspective, since much of the research over the past decade has led us in this direction, but core functions in child welfare rarely reflect these new realities. The following strategies could be a starting point:

- Bottom up or backward mapping those starts with people and works backward to tell officials what social policies or programs are necessary.
- Create opportunities for mutual aid and informal supports for people who are isolated or who are trapped in harmful settings.
- Encourage shared decision-making, participatory planning and problem solving, and mutual interdependence.
- Increase opportunities for client and staff participation in decision-making.
- Create fluid roles for staff rather than rigidly defined roles.
- Structure conflict so it will be constructive rather than destructive
- Create a Dionysian ideology that is focused on purpose and mission as opposed to an Apollonian ideology that is overly focused upon self-preservation.

- Engage in phenomenological research to discover how our programs are ultimately experienced by our clients and incorporate this information into program design.
- Place the questions that concern us in the larger historical and normative context in which they reside.
- Develop a boundary spanning management style, which assists staff and clients to discover and pursue their own developmental needs, even if these might potentially conflict with bureaucratic imperatives.
- Find ways for clients to direct their own destiny and collaborate with them as peers

It is proposed that we can best ensure success by becoming aware of the influence of prevailing paradigms upon our practice. Rappaport (1981) proposes that there is no one best way to solve the problems that face us, but that there many divergent ways that deserve the joint attention of communities, service providers and academics. The difficulty involved with change cannot be under-estimated, but each of us can point to examples that illustrate the possibility of achieving the partnerships initiated by this gathering. It will require that we step out of expected and typical institutional relationships to find a common ground of caring, respect, flexibility, and an orientation toward action from a research and an educational perspective. The community, policy makers and the university can work together to incorporate knowledge from “mainstream” theory, practice, and research pertaining to children’s services with the traditional wisdom of First Nations communities. This path of mutual respect asks all of us to drop the barriers that keep us apart. It is a path that calls on each of us to reflect upon each other’s view of reality, as we find ways to work together to solve problems that would be unmanageable on our own. Don Juan’s advised Carlos Castaneda about taking a path with a heart with encouraging words for those who fear the unknown. “A path without a heart is never enjoyable. You have to work hard

even to take it. On the other hand, a path with a heart is easy: it does not make you work hard at liking it.” We think that this is a path with a heart.

### **Systemic Recommendations**

The following are critical if substantive change is to take occur:

- We must collectively support a legislative framework that provides a higher degree of self-determination for aboriginal people who wish to serve their own families and children.
- Program funding must be on a par with any other community in similar social, economic, educational and health circumstances and provide a full range of services needed to address the numerous issues that has evolved over the past 500 hundred years.
- We must understand how traditional ways have sustained aboriginal families for thousands of years without white intervention and build them upon to create a new society.
- We must co-create new knowledge in the search for answers to can replace the increasingly complex responses created to serve families and children.
- We must fully implement the Convention on Indigenous People’s Rights of 1948 which, taken seriously, would have made a dramatic in the lives of aboriginal people over the past half century.



- We must recognize indigenous people as a people with a living history and with ideas, thought and imaginations and caring. There is a need to place confidence in them and to assist them where we can in the development of approaches that will better serve their communities and their families.
- We must create a political will at the federal and provincial levels that will sustain and support aboriginal aspirations and finally remove them from the shackles that they are imposed a collective and fundamental racism that leaves them disrespected and with few reasonable alternatives.
- We must develop approaches that are the stress interconnectedness, self-determination and equity with others. All communities stressed the importance of human connection as a fundamental requirement for creating a new vision for the future. All communities stressed the importance of self-determination and freedom to experiment and to do things as they see fit just like any other community.
- We can no longer tolerate attitudes that constrain equity and fair treatment and combat the view that aboriginal people are somehow less worthy, less intelligent, and less moral as some assumed in our society.

These recommendations demand a major paradigm shift. They call on us to face the most difficult challenge of all – and that is to change our beliefs and our very ways of thinking. This

requires commitment, goodwill, mutual respect and trust. This will not come easily in light of our prior experiences, but it is nevertheless of critical importance.

We began this imitative with the intention of helping to create new models of practice that would recognize the trauma and pain that are a legacy of provincial and federal systems. Aboriginal people have given us the guide-posts upon which to base such an objective. The fundamentals are clearly understood by aboriginal leaders and elders. The problem is that this is poorly understood and accepted by so many. An important step is to accept this not only at an intellectual level, but at an emotional level, grounded in our common humanity and in our relationships as human beings.

We have experienced great trust on part of communities to develop new models of practice that are in keeping with tradition and culture. There is great reason to believe that this is an important and achievable objective. The worrisome part is the worry that unless we are grounded in the philosophy and wisdom of the Elders, we could be simply recreating new models that are based on our own false thinking.

Our challenge is not to only create new models, but to change our thinking and our actions. We can only achieve this by respecting and acting upon the advice of the Aboriginal community and its precious elders. We cannot do less.

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## APPENDIX “A”

### Thoughts from the North

<b>Experience in residential schools and child welfare systems</b>	<b>Impact on children, families and communities</b>	<b>Advice from elders</b>	<b>Implications for today</b>
<b>Forced separation from parents, family and community and subsequent isolation from own community and society at large</b>	<p>Children felt abandoned</p> <p>Not belonging anywhere – Rejection by family, community and society at large</p> <p>Extreme loneliness</p> <p>Invisibility to white people</p>	<p>Learn about your history</p> <p>Know your relatives and keep in contact with them</p> <p>Maintain family ties</p> <p>Give lots of hugs to your children and grandchildren</p> <p>Develop a cross cultural program between native and white people.</p>	<p>Children are a community responsibility-</p> <p>Find more creative ways to sustain connections to family and community (Homecoming celebrations)</p> <p>Increase understanding and communication between non-Aboriginal child welfare systems and Aboriginal communities</p>
<b>Loss of parental and extended family connection</b>	<p>Lack of love as a foundation for life</p> <p>Breakdown of family life</p>	<p>Connect youth and elders</p> <p>Recognise and support kinship connections</p> <p>Share family values, visiting one another, storytelling, family history (genealogy)</p> <p>Learning the family ways, extension of family ties through cultural ways aunts, uncles extended family</p>	<p>Ensure that children have someone they can trust (Elder/Mentor)</p> <p>Ensure that children feel they belong</p> <p>Let children know that they are special and unique</p> <p>Teach parenting in Aboriginal ways</p> <p>Listen to families, they know what we need to do.</p>

<b>Experience in residential schools and child welfare systems</b>	<b>Impact on children, families and communities</b>	<b>Advice from elders</b>	<b>Implications for today</b>
<b>Loss of attachment and ability to show love to own children</b>			
<b>Assault on culture, language and spirituality</b>	<p>Loss of identity as an Aboriginal person</p> <p>Loss of pride</p> <p>Low self esteem</p> <p>The loss of culture and language</p> <p>Feeling “white” on the inside in spite of appearances</p>	<p>Seek direction from the elders</p> <p>Involve elders in decision making and teaching</p> <p>Live our traditional way of life and our values</p> <p>Know who we are</p> <p>Record and preserve traditional knowledge, history, stories, songs and traditions</p> <p>Community must take responsibility to improve the standards for child care</p> <p>Take a traditional and holistic approach to child welfare</p>	<p>Take a traditional holistic approach to child welfare</p> <p>Hire our own people to do the job, how can others and understand our ways</p> <p>Train our front line worker regarding our culture, spirituality and language</p> <p>Incorporate our own methods of research and not let ourselves be driven by western ideology – Do not reduce our people to mere numbers.</p> <p>Lay our own foundation and stop being dictated to by INAC</p>
<b>Denigration of parents and race</b>	<p>Alienation from own people and white society</p> <p>Fear of child welfare and of having children removed,</p> <p>Fear of being judged inadequate parents</p>	<p>Pride in who we are</p> <p>Importance of language and cultural history</p> <p>Integrate Blood Tribe ways in our everyday lives and teach these ways to our children</p> <p>Make our religious leaders be true to their roles</p> <p>Help our young people to enhance their</p>	<p>Teach our children what their duties are to become positive contributors to a well community</p> <p>Teach our children about their future road and to benefit from both worlds</p> <p>Having an elder mentor in the program in the community, with youth and elders working together, where elders would give traditional</p>

<b>Experience in residential schools and child welfare systems</b>	<b>Impact on children, families and communities</b>	<b>Advice from elders</b>	<b>Implications for today</b>
		<p>Aboriginal knowledge and way of life</p> <p>Teach our children about native pride and to be proud of who they are</p> <p>Children need to hear old stories and history</p> <p>Ensure each family member has a nature name</p>	<p>teaching and just hanging with the elders</p>
<p><b>Emotional, physical, mental and sexual abuse</b></p> <p><b>Harsh discipline</b></p> <p><b>Undue regimentation of life</b></p> <p><b>Depersonalization – being treated like a number or a “case”</b></p>	<p>Inner pain expressed in addictions, lateral violence,</p> <p>Imbalance of mind, body, emotion and spirit</p> <p>Loss of hope Living in constant fear</p> <p>Fragmented colonialism (Littlebear)</p>	<p>Healing Journeys</p> <p>Listen with a healing heart</p> <p>Share your hurts and let them go, grow from the experience</p> <p>We need to stop blaming ourselves for our situation, we need to take our responsibilities to our communities and people</p> <p>Traditional healing process to deal with alcohol and other problems</p> <p>Love one another, especially yourself</p> <p>Help one another</p> <p>-</p> <p>Help our religious leaders be true to their roles, e.g. alcohol and drug free, no more jealousy and humble.</p> <p>Do not allow ourselves to be driven by</p>	<p>Develop programs that can interrupt the intergenerational transmission of trauma</p> <p>Use indigenous wisdom and science as the basis for program development</p>



<b>Experience in residential schools and child welfare systems</b>	<b>Impact on children, families and communities</b>	<b>Advice from elders</b>	<b>Implications for today</b>
		western ideology and be driven by their scientific methods. We were reduced to mere number in residential schools and by the use of treaty numbers.	
<b>Assault on spirituality</b>		<p>Teach spirituality</p> <p>Learn Indian prayers and traditional smudging</p> <p>Spirituality as our foundation</p> <p>Pray to recognize and acknowledge our purpose in this lifetime</p> <p>Teach our children our language, spirituality, about prayer and the purpose,</p> <p>Pray to recognize and acknowledge our purpose in this lifetime</p>	<p>Incorporate spirituality as the basis for program development.</p> <p>Provide training for front line workers regarding our culture, spirituality and language</p>
<b>Broken relationships</b>	Difficulty in creating and maintaining community and familial relationships	<p>Visit with each other like we used to</p> <p>Help our elected leaders be true to themselves and to their people</p> <p>Deal with our problems</p> <p>To live with respect, integrity and honor</p> <p>Create patience so that conflict can be minimized</p>	<p>Emphasis on prevention and early intervention;</p> <p>Ensure access to needed social and financial resources</p>

Experience in residential schools and child welfare systems	Impact on children, families and communities	Advice from elders	Implications for today
<p><b>Fear that the politicians will not listen</b></p> <p><b>Confusion about how decisions are made, and</b></p>	<p>Policies that prevent many community members from direct involvement in child welfare programs as foster parents, drivers, and visit supervisors;</p> <p>Lack of preparation when children are returned to the community after an out-of-home placement;</p> <p>lack of information regarding programs and entitlements; and</p> <p>poor relationships between the community and agencies involved delivering services to children and families.</p>		

**APPENDIX “B”**

Aboriginal Child Welfare – How we got here and where we might go				
Issues	What happened?	What were the impacts?	What can we do about it now?	Implications for Child Welfare
<b>Lack of parental choice</b>	“Our parents had to send us to the residential school. We were treated very badly right from the beginning. We were not given a choice to keep our kids. They had to be there.”	"This practice of separating children from parents and the parenting role model is singularly responsible for many of the problems related to child care now found among Aboriginal parents" McKenzie & Hudson, p.130). Haig-Brown (1988) emphasized the lack of positive role models because "Children learn parenting skills by the way they are parented" (and for many Aboriginal children who spent ten years or more at residential schools, one must conclude that these children "had limited experience as family members" ( p. 111).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parenting is a community commitment → a child is not raised by one → Stop thinking that there is a quick fix to a long term situation.</li> <li>• Then I would teach Parenting Program and every other self-help program. But not named "parenting". It is too judgmental and makes a parent look like they do not know anything about parenting. It is very demeaning. A program by any other name is more inviting. It has to be fun and not so scary. My clients would hate to go to parenting skills because it could make them feel like they were not a good mother</li> <li>• Redefine Aboriginal parental skills. Both CW and Aboriginal people need to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long term integration of role models and mentors would be a positive because it teaches everyday skills like connection, trust, human relationship, culture, etc.</li> <li>• Remove stigma from parenting classes by making them available to all parents and basing them on Aboriginal ways.</li> <li>• To discuss the positive or accepted practices within Aboriginal families may enlighten CW and re-kindle traditional values that existed before colonization</li> <li>• Learn and honor the traditional parental role. We must seek guidance from elders about what the parental role used to be and talk to the community about healing and reclaiming parenthood</li> <li>• Involve parents in</li> </ul>

Aboriginal Child Welfare – How we got here and where we might go

Issues	What happened?	What were the impacts?'	What can we do about it now?	Implications for Child Welfare
			understand the differences/similarity of parental skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mainstream values concerning parenting within Aboriginal family's conflict with collective community and spiritual beings of these people</li> <li>• Provide programs conducted by older Aboriginal people that did not have the influences of the schools</li> <li>• Encourage other positive role models within all communities</li> </ul>	decisions with children – don't be secretive behind their backs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let the community be the one to approach the parents</li> </ul>

<b>Isolation from family and community</b>	Not only were Aboriginal children educated separately from the dominant society, they were also educated away from their own culture. The practice of separating children "from their parents and their way of life had a drastic impact on almost all Aboriginal families. The structure, cohesion and quality of family life suffered.	Parenting skills diminished as succeeding generations became more institutionalized and experienced little nurturing. Low self-esteem and self-concept problems arose as children were taught that their own culture was inferior and uncivilized, even "savage" (Martens et al, 1988). Taking small children from their parent ... caused "parents and children to become strangers to each	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities for people to heal, to tell their stories, to learn to trust, to find out who they are as an individual</li> <li>• Create opportunities to build bridges between ourselves and our culture and other societies</li> <li>• Our people are not devalued - they are valued as individuals and as a people. There is a place for them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow the community to gather and exchange information, ideas and their struggles around parenting. As a community support one another with all our family systems.</li> <li>• Reconnect people with community - provide mediation where necessary</li> <li>• Create opportunities to learn that we are <u>not</u> what the oppressors said/say we are</li> </ul>
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		other.”(Unger, 1977: p.16)	<p>within this world and they can contribute</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find traditions and customs and activities that will draw families and communities together. While this can be done in a traditional context, allowing families to partake in new traditions together, it would also be beneficial as the time spent together is what counts.</li> <li>• Education is also an important factor – re-learning the old parenting ways of the Aboriginal i.e. no corporal punishment in disciplining their children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-introduce people to their families. Families need to be informed and supported in the loss of their children have experienced</li> <li>• Invite children who are now parents to become part of the Elder’s Circle to help educate them with parenting skills.</li> <li>• Explain to children/parents that what they experienced and lost was not their fault. Use Elders as mentors</li> </ul>
<b>Experience of Abuse</b>	When he was a little boy in a convent he was raped every night. As a result of that I would you expect that I would even be a good father – how do you think I have so much hate?	Children who were physically and sexually abused while away from home frequently brought the trauma of that abuse back to their families. Some abused children have blamed themselves, directing their behaviours at parents, siblings, partners and even their own children. Family members may suffer without even being aware of the abuser's own previous abuse in residential institutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being a survivor of physical and sexual abuse, all I wanted was to be heard, really heard and validated. I wanted someone to listen to my story. It is about sharing of stories that starts the healing. My journey began by being heard (not just a statistic) and feeling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching/educating those who were abused themselves as young children that abuse is wrong and that there are other ways of handling a particular situation</li> <li>• Culture plays an important component for Aboriginal people that teach the men and women role through</li> </ul>

			<p>real and not a number. Picking the strengths, qualities and positive aspects, I later looked at one step at a time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People need to talk about these experiences without being judgmental. Professionals who understand why sexual abuse has occurred need to work with people who have been sexually abused and who have outlived this behavior</li> <li>• That individual needs to feel a sense of emotional empowerment that he/she lost as a child – need to come to that understanding of how this has impacted his/her life</li> <li>• This needs to be done without creating unusual racism and that people’s fears have created oppression within people when residential schools were created</li> <li>• Counseling</li> <li>• Teach people to not act in a way rather than spread it</li> </ul>	<p>culture or respect for self and others, gaining back self-esteem. No longer do I feel like I am a victim, but a survivor through sharing, knowledge, respect, humor, tears and laughter, spirituality and Creator.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have the victims of the sexual abuse talk about their experiences with counselors or Elders.</li> <li>• There needs to be a ceremony for all who have experienced this</li> <li>• Start healing groups that allow for group healing. Share stories to embrace that they were the victims and they were wronged. It was not their fault.</li> <li>• Allow people to speak of their experiences in a kind/supportive environment. Form a support group so that people can lean they are not alone.</li> </ul>
<b>Regimentation of Life</b>	Accounts of life in the residential schools	Most children learn parenting skills without a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take away the hierarchy that feeds the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow everyone, not just Aboriginal children</li> </ul>

	<p>spoke to the total regimentation that took place, leaving children in a quasi robotic state and reluctant to make normal decisions.</p> <p>So everything was controlled. What you spoke, they controlled. They controlled our religion. The nuns taught us what was good and what was evil. The dances and feasts were evil. We were worshipping a different God. There's only one God but they invented another one, I guess, for us.</p>	<p>great deal of conscious effort, primarily by the way they were parented. However, institutional and Aboriginal child-rearing practices had little in common. As Agnes Grant (1996) wrote, "Many parents who had been raised in the institutions did not have the parenting skills to raise their families, nor did they have the life skills to live their own lives successful" (p.78). The students in residential school, whose parents sometimes could not see them for months and even years at a stretch, had limited experience to draw upon (Haig-Brown, 1998, p.103).</p>	<p>oppression. Change <i>The Indian Act</i> to allow equal rights for all First Nations – give us individual ownership of lands and homes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give us more individual rights – don't hand the money down from the top – raise our Treaty payments from \$5.00 year to \$5,000.00 per year to reflect the value of an acre of land today – stop giving unhealthy leadership crumbs by which they govern their people – allow us equal rights wherever we live</li> <li>• Ensure that we have equal rights and access to the Human Rights Commission among other programs that are supposed to protect our rights</li> <li>• Make our language and culture a part of every curriculum available to all students</li> </ul>	<p>to have control to a certain degree on what he or she sees as evil vs. good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop creating policies that divide Aboriginal people – encourage unity and fair treatment - give us the freedom to live wherever we want and still have our culture and language</li> <li>• Give us equal rights and equal opportunity to run our own programs such as Child Welfare</li> <li>• Let us develop our own policies that reflect the views of the majority rather than a select few chiefs who abuse their power</li> </ul>
<b>Intergenerational Trauma</b>	<p>We have parents who are bitter, and are passing their own bitterness on to their</p>	<p>Clinical and research experience among the Lakota reveal that Indian parents who were</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anger, fear and cycle of abuse can be broken</li> <li>• Abuse is not an accepted way to relate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allowing those who have experienced/survived the residential schools</li> </ul>

	<p>children. This vicious cycle has to stop. (AFN, 1989). This generation of young Aboriginal people is the first generation that did not attend residential schools; but because their parents and grandparents attended, they are deeply affected by the wounds and bitter memories of early childhood experiences. Three generations of breaking up Aboriginal families have severely undermined the role of the extended family and kinship networks, causing that structure to break down, or in most cases, to be destroyed (Ing, 1991)</p>	<p>themselves raised in boarding school settings feel inadequate and overwhelmed in their parental role. Further, descendants of boarding school attendees also report a history of neglect and abuse in their own childhoods along with feelings of inadequacy as parents and confusion about how to raise children in a healthy way. This historical trauma has resulted in the impairment of culturally normative parenting styles and high risk for developing alcohol and drug abuse problems associated with ineffective and injurious parenting (Brave Heart, 1995).</p>	<p>to one another</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding what love is and how to love the self first</li> <li>• Educate ourselves</li> </ul>	<p>to express their pain but only when appropriate and only in certain professional situations, i.e. counseling, social work sessions, group talks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take workshops on self-esteem and self-confidence</li> <li>• Write down everything you can remember about residential schools and then let go by having a burning ceremony</li> </ul>
<b>Loss of affection</b>	<p>Before residential schools, in Aboriginal families, a general loving attitude toward all children prevailed, not just for one's own children, but love for all the children of the tribe. An orphan or an adopted child was not in any way mistreated or set apart by the family, but was gratefully taken in and cherished. Aboriginal</p>	<p>By the 1960s, a generation of Aboriginal parents who were not given the choice of raising their children began to show signs of "abrogating their responsibility as parents." , , a pattern of expectation had developed among "some Indian parents that the residential school system provided a...carefree way" of living without children (Caldwell, "I think after a while</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educate families on how to reconnect with one another and how to love one another again</li> <li>• Learn to communicate your feelings to your loved ones</li> <li>• Knowledge of history is one of the keys to begin to get grounded with self. People that have lost their roots are lost. History needs to be taught by their</li> </ul>	<p>For the children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing some way for the children to connect with a mentor or significant person(s) that can show them love and acceptance consistently throughout their development to adulthood ( someone who believes in them)</li> </ul> <p>For the parents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing opportunity for them to address their</li> </ul>



	<p>people have been noted to accord unquestioned acceptance of, and respect for, all individuals, irrespective of age or sex, not only for their abilities but also with considerable tolerance as well for their weaknesses. (Bull, 1991).</p> <p>“We were taken away from our mothers, and the bonding was taken away from our parents. We were taken away, that’s why we don’t hug.</p> <p>The nuns were so mean to little kids, when they should have just loved them, but they didn’t. . . . when my mother died, they didn’t comfort me”.</p>	<p>families got used to not having their children and they didn’t take full responsibility . . . the bonding wasn’t really there . . . and they were used to not having their children. But that’s why they’re suffering because there’s no bonding”.</p> <p>“If you go and hug someone, you can just feel the tenseness, we hardly ever had that, and that began from the residential school, I think, because we never loved on another that way.” “They (our children) don’t realize how hard we had it and they think we are just neglecting them. We just don’t know how to show our affection to them.”</p>	<p>own people. The ‘lost’ need to see that the Aboriginal people were once a proud nation and can become a proud nation again. Provide HOPE and HELP THEM TO BELIEVE IN ONE-SELF.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accept the thing we can’t change</li> <li>• Sharing of experiences of what needs to be changed</li> <li>• Safe affection, open discussion on feelings, emotions, inadequacies</li> <li>• Realize the positive</li> </ul>	<p>pain of not being loved or shown love and listen to what they need to heal from this. Then to provide education about child development and how it applies to their paradigm and how they can begin to express love to one another. To provide support to the families on their journey to learning to love one another by patiently allowing it to unfold naturally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reconnecting estranged families</li> </ul>
<p><b>Education</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I feel it is important for people working in the human service agencies with Aboriginal people to have knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have more agencies built for inner-city youth to reconnect with</li> <li>• Encourage family enhancement models and create child</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need more Aboriginal facilitators working in ‘education’, child welfare and court systems – people need to be taught to listen to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More Aboriginal classes offered, more Aboriginal language courses offered at younger ages</li> <li>• Have potlucks</li> </ul>

	<p>about the Treaties, <i>The Indian Act</i>, colonization, oppression and to be supportive of traditional healing methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are not owners of our children; we are the teachers, role models for our entire life - not only until our children leave home. We need to have more Aboriginal people in top level management.</li> <li>• We can re-introduce Aboriginal traditions into all Canadian schools. We can offer sufficient mental health workers to work with these children (MHW – Aboriginal preferred. Listen to their stories so that feel validated</li> <li>• Aboriginal communities need to start opening up more amongst themselves, i.e. elder and youth gatherings</li> <li>• Activities that bring the community together</li> </ul>	<p>protection <u>within</u> the home, not outside the home</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring culture and traditions back to all people</li> <li>• Acknowledge that it took many years to do the damage and that it will take many more to ‘undo’ this damage and that each small steps is a positive progression</li> <li>• Use empowerment theory and get more people on the bandwagon to successful independence</li> </ul>	<p>be honest for what they are even if they’ve just crawled out of a ditch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I taught Traditional Parenting Skills to Aboriginal adult students which they found very interesting. Not only did they become knowledgeable but took home many skills to work with their children. I believe that we require more educated Aboriginal Facilitators or Liaison Workers</li> <li>• Teach and pass on the stories to workers in the child welfare system, education and court systems. It should be made mandatory for all public service workers.</li> <li>• Aboriginal people need to be in control of their own healing</li> <li>• Cannot be a time limit, or dollar amount place upon it</li> <li>• Outsiders – support and encourage</li> </ul>	<p>encouraged at schools→ parent/teacher interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liaison in school work with school counselors → have cultural days at school</li> <li>• More sharing of stories, have sharing circles, sweats, more cultural camps, etc.</li> <li>• More support workers that go to people’s homes for a couple of hours to help parents send their children to school, etc.</li> <li>• Rename Child Welfare as ‘Family Social Services’ because healing has to be not only an individual level, but also on the family level</li> <li>• Bring the resources to the people as much as possible. We live in the wealthiest province in the country, yet these still exists lack of resources</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Encourage the resurgence of 'old' traditions and native language</li></ul>			
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