



Symposium Report

Wisdom of The North...

March 17, 18, 2009



**First Nations of Northern Manitoba
Child and Family Services Authority**





SYMPOSIUM OVERVIEW

First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority was pleased to present a northern child welfare symposium titled “Wisdom of the North.....Strength and Diversity of First Nation Child Welfare”.

The event occurred over two days, March 17th and 18th, 2009, and occurred in Opaskwayak First Nation. (Kikiwak Centre).

The purpose of the Symposium was twofold:

1. To recognize the strength and diversity in practice among Northern First Nation Child Welfare Agencies of the North.
2. To foster meaningful dialogue and discourse between First Nation Agencies, community members, and the First Nation of Northern Manitoba child and Family Services Authority.

The goal of the symposium was to bring child welfare practitioners, collaterals, and community leadership together to identify and support effective child welfare practices in Northern First Nation Agencies.

The symposium was sponsored by the First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority.

The six First Nation Agencies of Northern Manitoba attended the event. These included the Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba, Kinao Sipi Minisowin, Opaskwayak First Nation Child and Family Services, Cree Nation Child and Family Caring Agency, Island Lake First Nation Family Services, and Family and Community Wellness Centre Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation.

There were 120 delegates in attendance from various First Nation agencies, as well as from collateral Agencies. Information tables were set up to highlight and showcase each agency’s programming and innovative projects.

In the spirit of partnership building and collaborative practice, the Northern Authority initiated a Northern Symposium Advisory Committee. The committee had met on three occasions in which input and guidance was gathered from the Northern First Nation Agencies.

Terms of Reference were developed in order to guide the planning process, and there was representation from the various northern agencies. (Appendix A).

Key stakeholders were invited to attend this event. This included MKO, Swampy Cree Tribal Council, Child Protection Branch, INAC, as well as service providers within the



region. These included the various four Authority's offices, as well as collateral agencies such as MYS, and the University of Manitoba Aboriginal Focus Programs.

Information tables were set up to provide information on the various agencies, as well as to showcase innovative and culturally appropriate service delivery programs or models.

The agenda was developed with guidance from the planning committee. The budget allocation was carefully adhered to, and the number of agency delegates was decided by the size of the agency.

Speakers were chosen in accordance with their contributions to the field of First Nation Child Welfare. Two speakers originated from the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation and have developed programming and frameworks in accordance with traditional customs and values.



In addition to this, First Nation or Aboriginal Scholars were invited to speak in the area of First Nation Child Welfare. This historical overview was reiterated to staff through a First Nations world view. The agenda was developed to allow time for networking and exchanges of ideas among participants. (Appendix B)

Participants had the benefit of hearing the welcoming remarks of Grand Chief Dr. Sydney Garrioch, and of hearing key note presentation from renowned speaker, Chief Ovide Mercredi. Both men have stellar experience in advocating for First Nation Peoples, and have first hand expertise in the field of Child welfare from a political perspective.



There was a question period, as well as a panel discussion on jurisdictional issues. This panel discussion was moderated by Cross Lake First Nation member, and Awasis staff member, George Muswagon.

Mr. George Muswagon, staff member of Awasis Agency, and band member of Cross Lake First Nation agreed to moderate both days of the symposium.

Northern Authority CEO, Marie Lands, made closing comments which outlined the goals and vision of the Northern Authority. There is a common vision for First Nation children to know their identity, and to have a feeling of belonging. This is



achieved through effective services, as well as the development of culturally appropriate services.

Marie acknowledged the strength and hard work done by first nation agencies and northern authority staff and also acknowledged that there is much to do to complete our vision.

Participants were left with an acknowledgement of the barriers in the field of First Nation child welfare, as well as the hope that innovative practices can and are being achieved for the future families and children we service.

Evaluation forms indicated a strong satisfaction with the gathering. There were requests to hold this type of gathering for agencies every year. Participants felt the tone and atmosphere of the gathering was positive and they enjoyed the speaker's presentations. The event was closed with a round dance being drummed by the Junior Thunderbirds, and each delegate participating.





HIGHLIGHTS

The following section presents short overviews of the symposium, focusing on key themes and ideas raised in plenary presentations, panel discussions, and the workshops.

Building Capacity

The prevailing theme of the symposium was the community and agency's inherent capacity. In the face of great change many of the agencies had adapted their programming and are in the midst of developing programming that fits the needs of their families and community.

Strength of First Nation Practice

There has been a collective contribution to the field of Social Work through First Nation Practice. In addition to this, there are inherent strengths in present practice and their relevance to our Families and Communities. This was evident in the NCN presentation on the Circle of Care Approach.

Historical Considerations

Dr. Grand Chief Garrioch, Dr. Yvonne Pompana, and Chief Mercredi provided historical highlights of the evolution of Aboriginal Child Welfare in Manitoba. This information was valuable to current service providers as new programs and methodology are developed.

Information Booths

First Nation Northern Agencies were invited to set up booths to showcase new and innovative programming and to share information with sister agencies.



The booths were located within the meeting room to facilitate easy access, and to encourage dialogue during break times.

Participants indicated that they enjoyed the booths, as a means of networking, and comparing agency practice.

Thunderbird Juniors Misipawistik Cree Nation

A special highlight was the contribution by the Misipawistik Cree Nation girl's drum group, Thunderbird Juniors. This group is mentored by Connie Cook, Lucy Robinson, and Calvin North of Misipawistik Cree Nation. The girls group contributed greatly to the overall positive



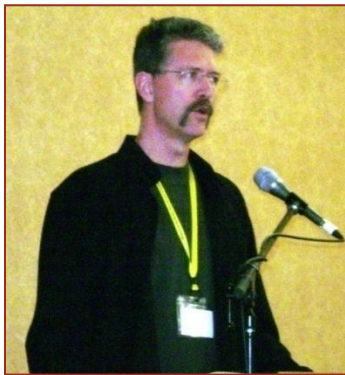


energy of the gathering. They are a personal demonstration of the importance of youth and children.

Shania McLeod
Sarah Flett
Shelby Dyck

Chantelle Robinson
Raven Robinson
Carly Benson

Guest Speakers Greeting



Brian Ridd from the Child Protection Branch had the opportunity to greet the delegates. Brian stayed throughout the two day event and delegates appreciated the networking.

INAC representative Gayle Govereau-Asham greeted the delegates on behalf of Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.



Door Prizes and Draws



Door Prizes and draws were added to the agenda in order to provide some levity and relaxation to the event.

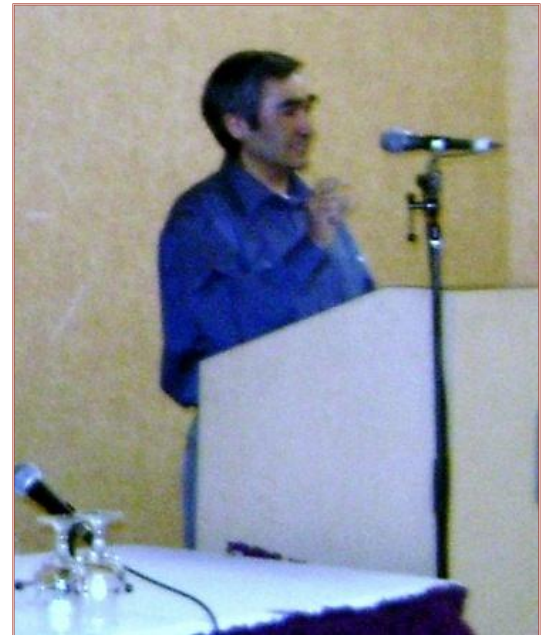
Board member, Josephine Budd, and Moderator George Muswagon announced some of the winners.



WELCOMING REMARKS

Grand Chief Dr. Sydney Garrioch
Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO)

Grand Chief Dr. Garrioch welcomed delegates to the symposium and spoke briefly on the importance of developing First Nation practice. He noted that there are challenges in developing First Nation Practice. Dr. Garrioch acknowledges that there is a conflict within the mainstream practices and the community cultural practices. He challenged practitioners to think outside the box, and to continue to develop practices within the realities of change within Manitoba's new system. Dr. Garrioch spoke of the importance of children and families within the First Nation communities. Guiding principles are to work with the people and to think of the family's best interest. He urged practitioners to remember the overall goal of full jurisdiction of First Nation Agencies.



Identity, self esteem, and belonging are important to the youth, and are important components of what we do as practitioners.

Josephine Budd
Northern Authority Board of Directors
Opaskwayak First Nation

Northern Authority Board of Directors member, Josephine, spoke about moving ahead in three areas First Nation Standards Development, Training enhancement, and Service Provision for Northern First Nation Agencies.

She left with the hope that this gathering that this event will allow for learning opportunities, and reminded delegates that the purpose of the gathering is for the families, children, and communities that we serve.



Marie Lands
Interim CEO of the First Nations of Northern
Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority.

Marie welcomed the delegates as well as the guests, and guest speakers. She expressed her hope that this gathering will allow for meaningful discourse among the delegates, and promote effective First Nation practice.

Marie spoke of her background as a former child in care of the system, a residential school survivor, a post secondary instructor, and as a current CEO of the Northern Authority.



This background has equipped her with an understanding of the system and its effects on families and children. Although it was a difficult journey, it has given her empathy and understanding for the situations of the families and children for whom we provide services. Marie acknowledged that there are challenges within the system, and acknowledged the difficult work that staff is faced with in developing programs, within this environment. She thanked her staff for their work and commitment to this process. Marie introduced some of the program areas at Northern Authority and mentioned the FASD, Quality Assurance program, and Differential Response Programs as some areas that are developing quickly.

Marie emphasized training in the front lines, as a priority of the Northern Authority, as well as identifying and documenting culturally appropriate standards within First Nation Practice, in conjunction with the First Nation leadership. She spoke of the great responsibility that sits with First Nation leadership as they advocate at the political level on behalf of First Nation Agencies and Staff. Marie spoke about the wisdom that sits with the practitioners and those who drive the system. She had been part of the AJI and stated that she feels honored to see the outcomes of the report on a first hand basis. It is important for children to reside within their communities, and to retain their identity and this gathering will hopefully allow for meaningful discourse towards these important goals.

Kerry Bignell
Opaskwayak First Nation
Band Councilor

Kerry welcomed the speakers to the traditional territories on behalf of Opaskwayak First Nation.

He briefly introduced and welcomed Dr. Garrioch, as well as Chief Mercredi.

Kerry has been active in the Child Welfare Field for a number of years, and is currently employed at Opaskwayak Child and Family Services.



PRESENTATIONS

CHIEF OVIDE MERCREDI- MISIPAWISTIK CREE NATION KEYNOTE ADDRESS

For thousands of years, Indigenous people lived on the land, making their living from their waters and traditional territories. While they were for the most part, a nomadic people, they did have settlements that they occupied during the different seasons for trapping, fishing, hunting and gathering of plants, nature's fruits and medicines.



As a people who had a special relationship with their lands, Indigenous tribes had special areas set aside for ceremonial and spiritual use, including lands and waters that were treasured for their aesthetic and recreational value. They did not have reservations. Our ancestors had no need for them. They did not have large settlements, as the land and territory was vast and generous that easily sustained Clans and Families. There was no need to develop permanent settlements but nonetheless they did gather up in different seasons for communal and tribal unity. They had no need of child welfare laws, those kind written in paper. They had laws, of course, laws that had evolved over a long time, laws that had served their society very well. Except, these laws were not written in stone, tablet or parchment. Instead, these laws that guided their way of life, including how to take care of babies, children or youth, were entrenched in their collective memory as a people, and practiced daily as they went about living off the land. Their culture was their law.

What we call culture is a system of beliefs, values and structures that supported our ancestral tribal organisation or societies. Culture kept them from falling into disorganization or dysfunction as individuals or as groups. From birth to death at old age, a person was born into a culture that had evolved over many centuries. A culture that was strong and well-equipped to sustain a Tribal society that had every aspect of society including security and defence. Within this culture, the people had developed a society that taught them how to relate to each other, how to worship, how to treat others who were from different tribes, how to birth children, how to raise children, how to impart on the youth the virtues, ideals and norms of their culture. Within this culture men and women had their roles clearly understood and defined which for the most part was equalitarian and maternal in its foundations.

As a young boy I saw the Cree traditions still practiced like how men and women work hard in their respective roles to keep the family alive and growing. It was a partnership that placed more value in getting things done rather than insisting on an exacting differentiation of roles for men and women. Child care was a shared responsibility that



involved the extended family like Grandparents, Aunts and Uncles. Elders, whether family or not, were part of this culture of raising children as in a communal enterprise.

Let's not forget older siblings, who had a major role in helping look after children and in the transmission of cultural knowledge children needed for their well-being and safety. Older children were expected, and did, contribute to raising their brothers and sisters. This was not considered poor parenting, nor was it considered not in "the best interests of the child" to have older siblings take care of their younger brothers or sisters. It was considered part of their responsibility too, and as preparation for what will be expected from them when they become adults.

Stories were told, some based on actual and contemporized accounts of life that helped to instruct young people about what the Cree world consisted of and what one could expect to see or find in it. Knowledge was shared and transmitted through conversations, and not necessarily conversations directed to you.

Stories told to us by our parents, grand-parents, relatives and even by strangers was one way our cultural knowledge was shared and transmitted from generation to generation. We learned many things about the earth, birds, animals and plants. We learned, as an example to know: where the moose feed, what they eat, what they do in spring or fall, where they birth little "moose's; where fishing was good; where the lake storms are dangerous; and where the rapids are along your travel; what animals to avoid like bears with cubs; where the natural springs are located; what to do when out on the land when you get lost. We learned each day, much of it while being busy being children. I say this as we as children were expected, and did, contribute to the well-being of the family and Tribe.

We learned about Cree history, traditional ideas and beliefs, and values like sharing from stories told to us about Weeshakaychak, a supernatural being that anthropologist later mistakenly call a trickster. In fact Weeshakaychak was a spirit sent by the Creator to teach Indigenous peoples how to survive on Earth. He was the first Teacher.

My friends, we had our ways for dealing with the needs and wants of children and families. These ways had served our people well from thousands of years. Within that culture, the child, youth and family were integrated and part of the paramount mission of our survival as a people. Apart from the demands of physical survival that required great cooperation, say by hunters, the importance placed on family values ensured the cultural survival of our people. The family was the heart and soul of the community.

So, what happened? Why are so many of our children under the care of the state? While we may run the agencies, we do not run them under our Cree authority and responsibility. We run child welfare agencies for the province. Not much as changed in how we do things compared to those provincial agencies that came and removed children from our communities from the 1960s onward until we replaced them with state mandated agencies with our names, like Cree Child a Family Agency or Awasis Agency.

Our intention at the outset was to run these agencies by giving back the responsibility to parents, families and communities. We fully expected to get funded for treatment programs, for services that focused on prevention instead of just protection. Unfortunately the funding formula for the "Indigenized Agencies" was based on protection rather than prevention or treatment help. Consequently, these agencies



could not evolve into agencies that operated in a way that helped to restore the culture of family.

Why are we experiencing so many challenges with our youth? What went wrong? These are the questions that we need to understand if we are to have a good vision on how we are going to take our authority and responsibility back. In my time of growing up, we had not been exposed to the rules or laws of white society for such cultural matters as how parents should take care of their children. There was not need for these laws, as our culture was still intact and strong.

The idea that I want to leave with you, on this part of my talk is this: when a culture is strong, within it is contained all the information or knowledge that people will need to be strong, to develop or grow and to survive as a group or collective.

Last Tuesday, I spoke at a conference of our people who are working for us at the community level. They are at the forefront of trying to reverse the trend of the last four decades when our people's authority and responsibility for babies, children, and youth was taken away by agents of social control, like police, social workers, teachers, courts, and law-makers. Our people who work in Head Start, Maternal Health, FASD and other Health Canada programs were in attendance at this conference. I spoke in favour of our people taking back our responsibility. I talked about the greatest threat to us. In my view the residential schools system and the child welfare system have robbed our people of their culture. Cultural genocide is something that has occurred as a result of laws, rules, policies and programs that have been imposed on us over many years like the Indian Act and the Child Welfare Act. These laws did not accommodate our ways at all and have stripped away our culture piece by piece. I said there, as I say here, that culture loss explains the dysfunction we are now experiencing within our communities. What used to sustain us, what use to serve us—in relation to babies, children, youth and families—has been set aside in favour of a system that acts for the State, not for the Crees. Cultural loss is the greatest threat to our survival.

The idea I want to leave with you, on this part of my talk is this: taking back authority and responsibility is one and the same thing. Our mission is to restore and rebuild our Culture. Can we go back to the past? No, never completely but, we need to reclaim those elements of our Culture that worked to keep our babies, children, youth and families healthy and self-reliant and bring back those tried and tested cultural components to the present.

But, those of you who work under the current single understanding approach know that the present system discriminates against our Culture and is based on the full assimilation of our people. As it stands right now, the child welfare system violates our human rights to self-determination, culture and cultural survival and the survival of our Indigenous societies. This has to change.

I am also a believer in taking from the present what will help us like those programs that support parents and families, like the idea of the rule of law but adapted, adopted and modified to accommodate our people and our culture, and like the idea of specialized organizations to serve the best interest of the child and family. I also do not support the idea that Chiefs have to sit on boards. What is important for the leadership to do is, to



provide the mandate, direction and policy framework for child welfare that is both supportive and consistent with our cultural practices and traditions about child and family matters within our communities. There are many people in our communities that can serve in local child welfare mechanism, and a person can be designated by that local authority on child welfare to serve on a Regional Board.

We can re-structure our agencies to fit our vision, our mandates, our direction, our beliefs and our culture. The goal for us is to develop what is not yet seen, a new approach that is not based on the single understanding of the dominant society. We have to be brave, imaginative and determined to provide child welfare that builds and not destroys our authority, responsibility and culture. Our mission is to lift up our people.

I have no doubt that the dominant society has knowledge that we can use to lift up our people. We can adopt some of the practices and beliefs of the dominant society. No one can denounce completely the child welfare practices of the dominant society, as some of those measures like case management are critical to ensuring children under care do not fall in the cracks and get forgotten. For this reason, we need to borrow some element of Canadian society, but only those cultural components that will be supportive of our quest to take back responsibility. Our goal is to become as strong as two cultures. No where to my knowledge has this been made the mission by any Canadian government. We cannot wait for Canada to get to this point in our relationship with them. We have to be the leaders for a better world for our babies, children, youth, parents, and families.

Taking back authority and responsibility is a practical way to lift up our people.

On a more personal note, I want you to know what I mean by taking back responsibility. Before I do that, we all have to believe that we can do this, not because someone gave us permission, but simply because we want to, and because we can. The future for our Cree family is good parenting. This is what we had before our culture came under attack and was set aside by social workers and the courts. Our cultural revival will require all parents to take full responsibility for their families. To make this happen, we need to have faith that even bad parents can be taught to become good parents.

The pendulum has swung too far in the opposite direction. The idea of “the best interests of the child” which is child welfare law, has done very little to assist parents build their capacity and willingness to look at the best interests of their child or children. We need to strike a proper balance between protection of the child and assistance for the family. We cannot do this if we take the attitude that bad parents cannot be helped, and that bad parents are a lost cause. Granted, there may be every now and then some parents who will not get their act together but I dare say that the majority of them want to correct their dysfunction and when given the chance and resources will do all they can to remedy their situations.



First Nations governments have a responsibility to protect the children and families of their Cree Nation. This is what our ancestors did, and this is what our communities did before our authority over children and families was taken from us by provincial laws that were enacted with good intentions but, nonetheless, intentions that had no intention of accommodating our authority and jurisdiction. This is the challenge our Leaders must accept, and aim to resolve as soon as possible.

The future direction for child welfare in our communities will require First Nations governments taking back authority and responsibility. Our mission is to strengthen our indigenous family units, so that the apprehension of children for their protection will become a rare and no longer a frequent occurrence. What does this mean for our leadership and citizens at home? It means that we will no longer leave the tough problems like sexual abuse, or incest, drug or family violence to the hands of child welfare workers. These are community problems begging for community action and solutions. It means that alcoholism and drug abuse have to be treated as serious social problems that contribute to the apprehension of children. You see, taking back authority is taking responsibility. We cannot just simply say we want our jurisdiction respected and implemented. We have to use our authority to help children directly by developing policies and programs that will eradicate our home-made problems that have helped diminish our cultural values and traditions.

At the moment we have been told not to get involved in child welfare matters and to leave that responsibility to the Province and the Agencies. This is wrong, and our removal has accelerated the lack of community participation and action on the child welfare needs of our children. I am not advocating political interference with decisions made by our child welfare workers or agencies.

My view is First Nations government have an important role to play in setting policy for how child welfare gets delivered within our communities. Let me remind you that jurisdiction over children and families are far broader than just child welfare. There are the questions of security, health, education and opportunities for development for children and families. There should not be any confusion here as to the responsibilities of our leadership and our citizens. Many of the personal crisis shared by parents who have their children apprehended stem from social problems that exist in our communities. These social problems need the attention and solutions of the entire community and Cree Nation. It will be possible for parents to over-come their personal issues or problems, but until we address the full range of social problems and treat them as community problems, we will continue to have our children over-represented in the child welfare system. For this reason alone, we should be compelled to take back our authority and responsibility for children and families.

I thank you for listening.

Chief Ovide Mercredi
Misipawistik Cree Nation



DR.YVONNE POMPANA

"DEVOLUTION OF CHILD WELFARE TO FIRST NATIONS"

Dr. Yvonne Pompana presented on her research and findings surrounding the devolution of child welfare to First Nations. The key points of her presentation are as follows:



- Under the devolution policy and regulated relationship, was it possible for First Nations child and family services to be different than it had been two decades before?
- What if anything would be different in terms of the process that led to the change in the structure of child and family service system, the structure itself, and culture-based service that would denote this as an act of self-determination?

Case Study Methodology

- Where the “research focus was on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of [child and family services]” (Merriam, 1988, p.3)
- Research questions were designed to answer why, how and what happened.

Findings

- Dakota Ojibway Child and Family Services (1979-2000)
- Stage 1 – Indian control of Indian development
- Stage 2 – Devolution of CFS to First Nations
- Stage 3 – Agency fall-out
- Stage 4 – Rebuilding DOCFS
- Stage 5 – Restructuring Manitoba CFS

Findings

First Nations of Southern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority (2000-2006)

- Stage 1 – The onset of change
- Stage 2 – Devolution to the Southern Authority
- Stage 3 – Child deaths – Ombudsman

Research Question

Under the devolution policy and regulated relationship, was it possible for First Nations child and family services to be different than it had been two decades before?

Differences between the two historical periods



- Recognition of the inherent right of Aboriginal people to care for their children as a guiding principle
- Good will on the part of both parties
- Capacity
- Decision-making
- Prominence of culture
- Devolution as conditional autonomy

What if anything would be different in terms of the process that led to the change in the structure of the child and family service system, the structure itself, and culture-based service that would denote this as an act of self-determination?

Implications of conditional autonomy

- Holds the potential for First Nations autonomy but power can be taken away at any point in the process
- Good will, effort, vision were part of the process but not fully extended to First Nations control of legislation and funding
- Vulnerable to changes by government, leadership, public outcries, and major scandals

MARIE LANDS

CLOSING REMARKS

CEO First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority

Marie closing comments included a summary of the various presentations. Marie reminded us of our focus which is on the children and the child welfare issues.

Issues that are important are:

- Developing partnerships
- Preparing for prevention focused programming
- Developing tools and methodology for measurement of First Nation Programs
- Child welfare is an important issue to us as parents, grandmothers, relatives
- Building communication processes is important. This is a priority of the Northern Authority
- On going development of the Northern Authority
- Service purchase agreements are a means of documentation and negotiation for agencies



Bernadette Spence

CEO, VACCFS

Wisdom of the North... Strength and Diversity of First Nations Child Welfare

Bernadette shared on the development of First Nation/Aboriginal Agencies and the contributions that First Nations has made to mainstream practice.

The presentation focused on positive influence of First Nation Practice as well as the power to transform First Nation Agencies.

Introduction

- Goal today is to help you remember our collective contributions and achievements in the field of child welfare
- Share a more recent transfer within an urban context - Vancouver
- Hope is to strengthen our resolve to continue the re-engineering work we started 20 years ago by *deepening our cultural and spiritual inquiry*

Our contribution to practice

- Restored our kinship system of care – despite the fact that we have more children in care than in previous eras
- Increased the return rate of children in care reducing time in care
- Greater community awareness of the vulnerability of children and the need to protect and nurture them

Our contributions....

- We understand the role of the *multigenerational extended family context* +++
- We focus on the strengths and resources that are inherent within our families and communities within a protective context
- We asserted the need to create community awareness/partnerships to look after our own children

Our contributions

- We ensured that child welfare become a standing agenda item within government both at the federal and provincial level ++
- We brought about the concept of collaborative practice (FGC) through recognition of traditional lead roles within families and the use of circle
- We honored the role of governance in our communities by restoring the use of protocol

Our contributions

- We have facilitated the consideration of *ecological, cultural, historical and structural factors* within mainstream practice for understanding our families
- We have gradually come to address the concept of spiritual injury throughout our history by bringing ceremony into the work we do



Our contributions

- We asserted our customary law of keeping children connected to family and Nation through the enactment of legislation that requires our Nations to be involved in the apprehension, guardianship and adoption of member children
- We have asserted through legislation that the best place for a child in care is with their extended family and community

Our Contributions

- We renamed our child welfare agencies in our language to anchor them to our ancestral knowledge and values
- We have evolved effective program models that have improved the outcomes of children and families within the system
- We have worked outside the box despite provincial legislation

Honoring our Wisdom

- Turned our attention to codifying our traditional laws as it relates to the child as a sacred bundle within family, community, policy
- We are unearthing Indigenous knowledge about child, youth, adult, and family development
- Honoring the role of our women as life givers – all good things will flow from here
- *Mindfulness, gratitude, voice and relationship*

Surviving our Growth and Achievements

- Within our constant change environments communication must be repetitive (7)
- We must celebrate every milestone no matter how small it may seem
- Sustenance must come from a spring of organizational and staff wellness and strong governance where staff are valued

The Journey of the Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society my experience within VACFSS

- VACFSS Incremental and Planned Development
- VACFSS transfer of Delegated (CFCS) Services occurred over a period of several years starting with the guardianship pilot project in 1999/2000.
- Followed a phased in approach to service transfer - with each stage associated to multiple tasks and operational standards that must be completed prior to “delegation”
- An Urban Delegated Child Welfare Model Started as a Vision
- The discussions for transfer started in 1992 when a vision was articulated by the urban aboriginal people who received endorsement from the membership of VACFSS to deliver delegated services to the urban Aboriginal community

Overview

Pre service – advocacy work of the urban political representative UNN for aboriginal determination in child family services

- 1992-1998 VACFSS incorporated Family Support/advocacy \$500G
- 1999-2001 Guardianship Pilot Program
- 2001-2007 Expansion of Guardianship
 - Transfer of Residential Resources for CCO's
 - Change of Family Support to Family Preservation
- 2008----- Child Protection Services



» Working group for development of New Model of Child Welfare

- 2009----- Transfer of Support to Residential Services
- 2010----- Projected transfer of in kind funding for Staffed Residential Resources
New Model of Child Protection Services

Vancouver Child and Family services – A profile

- Located in Vancouver
- Urban Agency
- Funded by Provincial Regional authority
- Diverse aboriginal populations
- 50 % of clients served are from outside BC
- 150 staff – 5 programs
- Integrated/community based/provincial system

Communications Plan

- Due to the multiple levels of coordination, education and support that is required to evolve a delegated agency within a large urban context, a program management approach between the partners was implemented, as well as communications plan and protocol development with key organizations - an ongoing requirement.

Stakeholder and Community Buy In

- The stakeholders within an urban environment identified diverse interests and concerns regarding VACFSS capacity to assume these services.
- VACFSS had to obtain support from various dedicated individuals and groups with influence and authority to proceed towards delegated service delivery – no First Nations involvement

Organizational Change, Challenges and Development

- The agency has evolved and has endured significant upheavals, changes, loss of corporate memory with the departure of various board/management.
- Each of whom has contributed to where VACFSS is today
- Clarity of Role, communication, relationship, focusing on vision not the personality
- Scope of Change
15 years
- 10 ED's
- 500G to 25 Million
- 10 to 150 Staff
- 1000 files across several programs
- Integrated child welfare model
- Integrated model of child welfare practice
- 70% aboriginal staff



Organizational Change, Challenges and Development

- The development of aboriginal institutions such as VACFSS is a part of the decolonization process or... from a positive reference “*Making our institutions whole* - for aboriginal people”. There has been much passion, conflict, loss, sacrifice, and the rebuilding of hope at every stage of VACFSS’ development.

Generating Spirit within Organizational Change

- Adoption of values
- Definition of values
- Representation of these values
- Replication and internalization of these values
- Creating spiritual capital

Establishment of Professional Standards, Fair Share, Equitable wages

mentorship arrangements with established agencies (humility)

- VACFSS seconded MCFD teams of individuals to transfer the administrative systems and knowledge of procedures and policy
- Interim step until systems of administration is transferred

Establishment of Professional Standards, Equitable Wages

Negotiated *equitable* wages and benefits

- *Fair Share* Funding
- established specialized teams and departments (HR and finance)
- Establishment of Professional Standards, Equitable Wages Cont.
- The unionization of the agency in 2000 brought about significant organization stability due to an increased sense of employee rights and protection
- VACFSS has a very positive employer/employee relationship.
- VACFSS offers employee wellness, in house elders, healthy lifestyles grounded in cultural practice.

Development and Implementation of Governance Model

- The development of a Board Governance Framework which blends Carver and Traditional models has strengthened the governance and management structure of VACFSS.
- Board’s focus in on multi year strategic planning and delegates the operational management to CEO
- Monitoring CEO through compliance to *executive limitations*

Policy Development

- VACFSS has defined its policy around keeping children connected at the centre of its practice. It is continuing to define its practice and will develop policy that is congruent with strength based practice.
- A clear description of roles and the adoption of a consultative approach to change within the organization supports the need for employees to feel valued and supported.

Internal and External Accountability

- Review processes measure compliance with Aboriginal Operational Practice Standards and Indicators



- The stability of the Board, management staff, level of government and community support, resources that support scope of responsibility, sound administrative systems and standards compliance are the key indicators for assessing agency's operational capacity

Importing of Expertise/Collaboration

- Sharing of expertise and relationship development between VACFSS Board/Management and VACFSS MCFD Provincial and Regional Personnel has been a key factor in ensuring that VACFSS had the necessary information for planning and negotiation. Expertise is valued equally from sectors.

Work Plans with Review Mechanisms

- A Glossy Business plan developed by Consultants without significant input by stakeholders has very little value. The only process that has worked for VACFSS is having a concrete work plan monitored and supported by a Joint Implementation Committee comprised of all the key players from MCFD/VACFSS.

- Video on nomination for Premier's Awards

Development and Continual Review of Work Plans

- Terms of Reference during negotiation that define principles, purpose, record agreements regarding significant areas of contention, is essential to maintain clarity and accountability.

Research, Policy and Establishment of Funding

- Expertise in the area of Aboriginal child welfare research, policy and funding requirements has been an essential component in the negotiations process (data collection) understanding what is behind the stats, accessing regional budgets to determine fair share levels of funding.
- relied on key informants within the Ministry to provide us with the full range of services attached to child welfare, the way in which these services are funded and how the funding is allocated.

Research, Policy and Establishment of Funding

- Through this development we have seen a realignment of services, developed relationships, decreased barriers, increased access to services within the urban area,
- entry of aboriginal service contractors into what used to be exclusively a non aboriginal services contracted sector.

Funding Framework

- Operations Funding is based on the principle of transfer of responsibility – transfer of associated resource
- Maintenance is based on the average cost for urban non aboriginal children and is based on a fair share funding formula % of children in care within region

VACFSS next steps

- Successfully navigate the transition period in partnership with the Region
- Recruit, develop, and retain Human Resources
- Continue to define and clarify our practice models and policy
- Address the issue of diversity within VACFSS
- Continue our dialogue with community with the goal of increasing social capital



Felix Walker
CEO-NCN FCWC
Innovative and Community Driven
Approaches to Child and Family
Services

Background: A Pathway to
Restoration



- In March 2000, the NCN Family and Community Wellness Centre was established following an intensive community consultation process which culminated with the release of a Community Wellness Strategy: “A Pathway to Restoration” in June, 1999.
- This strategy highlighted the importance of developing a fully integrated health related and child and family services system, acknowledging the strength of NCN and recognizing how much can be accomplished as a community, working together.
- *This strategy is the foundation upon which integrated strength based, prevention and early intervention focused programming to support children and families has been and continues to be developed and delivered in NCN.*

Background: Our Mandate

- Our commitment to integrated strategic planning and innovation based on strong relationships between programs and with stakeholders is highlighted in our Mandate.

“To promote the development of new ideas and innovative measures to bring about meaningful change for the children and families of NCN within a holistic approach to human services policy development and service delivery and which incorporates the traditions, culture, language, customs and teaching of the community’s Elders.”

Why an Integrated Service Delivery Model?

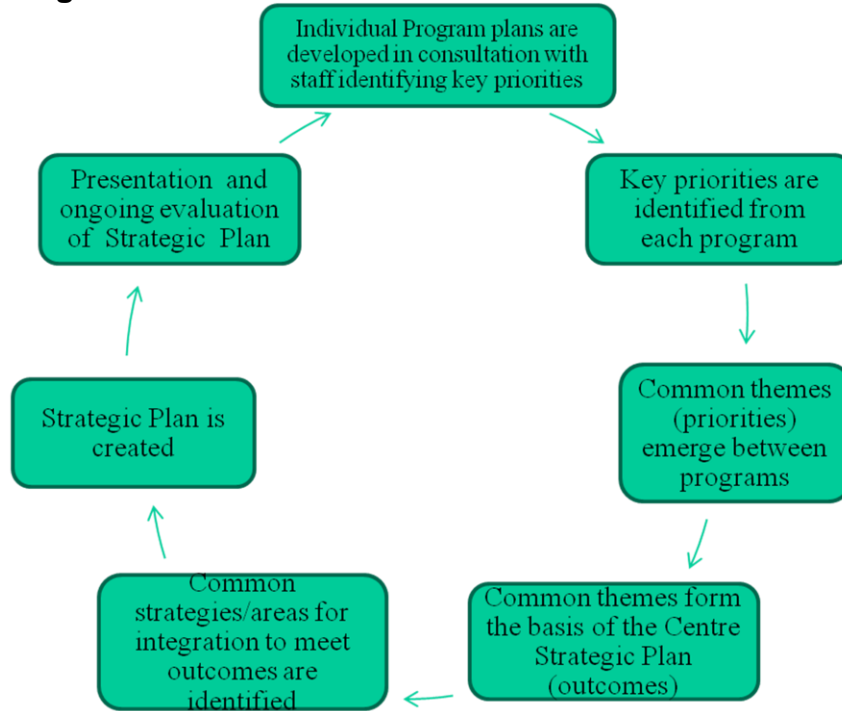
- Integrated Strategic planning results in:
 - Healthy relationships and effective partnerships between programs and among stakeholders.
 - Strengthening of the local service continuum to children and families based on a model of coordinated service delivery and focused investments in programming.

Ability to shift the focus from crisis and towards health promotion and early intervention approaches to service delivery



- Integrated Strategic planning results in:
 - Supports innovation and community driven program development.
 - Ability to effectively address common issues faced across systems and address service delivery and programming gaps.
 - Allows for a more effective use of resources, both human and financial.
 - Supports change based on our vision of healthy self reliant families and nurturing environments for our children

Planning an Integrated Model



Creating Structures and Systems to Support Integration: Circle of Care

- The Circle of Care service planning model is designed to:
 1. Provide children, youth, elders, families and their communities with coordinated multi-service support, and
- Build on the collaboration and strengths which already exists within the Wellness Centre and its sub-offices, as well as other services and programs external to the Centre.

Creating Structures and Systems to Support Integration: Circle of Care

- The Circle of Care planning process is based on the principles of the Medicine Wheel and acts as a guide for working with families who require a combination of several services to support them in finding balance.
- This process involves direct family involvement and collaborative implementation of services and results in



1. Shared responsibility
2. Shared decision-making
3. Shared service goals
4. Shared accountability

Creating Structures and Systems to Support Integration: Council of Elders

- The Council of Elders will serve as the Local Child Care committee and acts as a guide for working with families who have been involved with CFS .
- This process involves direct family involvement and collaborative implementation of services and results in
 1. Shared decision-making
 2. Shared service goals
 3. Shared accountability

Creating Structures and Systems to Support Integration: Rediscovery of Families

- The Rediscovery of Families is a community-based program that builds on the strengths of families and the traditional lifestyle of our past.
- Allows families to experience what family means and promotes the traditional roles of the family.
- Coordinate community services upon the families return to the community.
-

Creating Structures and Systems to Support Integration: Removal of the Parent(s)

- Since 2004, the Family and Community Wellness Centre, with the support of Chief and Council, secured a Band Council Resolution (BCR) that authorizes the removal of parent(s) from Band Owned housing.
- This process allows the parent(s) to experience the disruption of family environment that children experience when they are removed from their home.
- Respite workers are placed in the home while the parent(s) are placed with relatives.
- The parent(s) meet with CFS Intake as soon as possible to address issues that may be present.

Creating Structures and Systems to Support Integration: Teen Intervention Program (TIP)

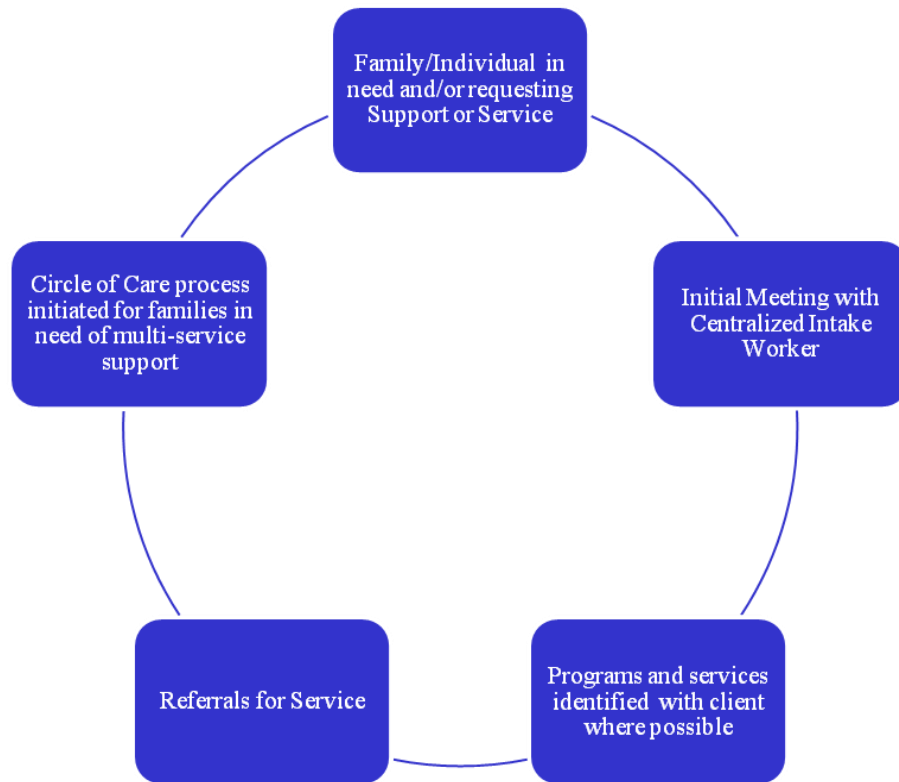
- Children/Youth that are at risk and that are not in school are enrolled in our Teen Intervention Program.
- Participants in the program are taken out on the land and taught the values and beliefs of our elders in a traditional land based setting.
- Program encourages life-skills and the emphasizes respect for themselves and their families.



- Partnership play a key role in providing innovative services to families in urban settings.
- Awasis Agency and NCNCFCS have committed resources to develop and implement an intervention and prevention program model for children and families residing in Thompson, Manitoba.
- Staff involved in this initiative will be responsible to develop and implement these programs which In June 2009, the NCN Family and Community Wellness Centre further integrate programs and services through a centralized intake system targeted to begin April 2009.

Creating Structures and Systems to Support Integration: Centralized Intake

- In June 2009, the NCN Family and Community Wellness Centre further integrate programs and services through a centralized intake system.



Supporting Integration of BHC and BF through Training

- Innovation in and integration of prevention focused planning and programming requires a trained and empowered staff who possess multiple skill sets across disciplines.
- Training and professional development that the Centre has invested in which relates directly to BHC and BF related programming includes:
 - Critical Incidence Stress Management (CISM) which led to the development of a mobile crisis team.
 - Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST)



- Support of the Community Wellness Diploma program
- Support of the Aboriginal Focus Program

NCN Family and Community Wellness Centre

- Governed by a five member Board of Director's, appointed by Chief and Council, on staggered three year terms.
- Has a total staffing level of 220 FTE's.
- The central office is located in Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation and operates offices in South Indian Lake (OPCN), Thompson, Winnipeg Brandon and Leaf Rapids.

Mission:

“In Unity, We Promote Community Awareness, Empowerment, and a Safe Environment Towards Holistic Wellness”

Shirlene Asham

Differential Response Coordinator

First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority

Shirlene reported on the status of the Differential Response program to be implemented in Northern Manitoba.

Shirlene spoke of the importance of First Nation people delivering services. She spoke of the roles and structure of the First Nation Family. Child and Family Service programs need to be developed in accordance with the First Nation World View. She drew on her personal experiences as one who walks in the Traditional way, and as a service provider in the child welfare field to demonstrate the points.

She spoke of the practices of First Nation peoples and outlined the commonalities of values among the First Nation groups.





BIOGRAPHIES OF PRESENTORS

Chief Ovide Mercredi

Keynote Speaker, Chief of Misipawistik First Nation

Chief Ovide Mercredi is a Cree, a lawyer, a negotiator, an author, a lecturer in Native Studies, and an activist on behalf of First Nations in Canada. He was born into a traditional trapping, hunting and fishing lifestyle in Grand Rapids, Manitoba in 1946. He is currently serving as Chief of the Misipawistik First Nation.

Chief Mercredi is perhaps best known to most of us for his deep involvement in constitutional law reform issues and Aboriginal and Treaty rights negotiations. He acted as a key adviser in First Nations' opposition to the Meech Lake Accord, and in 1989 was elected Manitoba Vice-Chief of the Assembly of First Nations. He was first elected National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations in 1991, and served two terms until 1997. He also led the First Nations negotiations in the Charlottetown Accord.

Yvonne Pompana

Yvonne Pompana is Dakota from Sioux Valley First Nation. She is a mother to two daughters and grandmother to three granddaughters. She maintains strong connections to her home community and culture even though she has been residing in Winnipeg since 1976. Yvonne worked for the Department of Northern Affairs from 1976 to 1984 when she left to attend university. Yvonne received her B.A. and M.S.W. from the University of Manitoba and in January, 2009 acquired her Ph.D. in Indigenous Studies from Trent University. She has been teaching at the Inner City Social Work Program, an ACCESS Program of the University of Manitoba since 1994. Yvonne's presentation is derived from her dissertation research which was titled, *Tracing the evolution of First Nations child welfare in Manitoba: A case study examining the historical periods 1979-2006 and 2000-2006*. Basically, her focus will be on the devolution of child and family services to First Nations, specifically to Dakota Ojibway Child and Family Services and the First Nations of Southern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority.

Bernadette Spence

Bernadette is the CEO of Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society (VACFSS). She will speak on the experience of First Nation people in the B.C Territories and the on-going development that VACFSS is conducting with respect to Child Welfare Services.

Bernadette is originally from Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation.



Felix Walker

Felix Walker is the Chief Executive Office of the Family and Community Wellness Centre which is located in the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation.

The Family and Community Wellness Centre was established to support holistic wellness by providing different opportunities to NCN Members, to help build on their strengths as individuals, as members of families and as part of our community.

The mission of the Centre is to promote, nurture and foster a sense of holistic wellness through the provision of meaningful, community based and culturally appropriate activities in a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment.

The Centre's range of programs and services has been developed in consultation with the community.

Felix will be outlining the philosophical base of the programs and the vision for this integrated service delivery system.

Shirlene Asham

Shirlene has an extensive background in the social services and child welfare field. She is currently completing her Masters of Social Work Degree at the University of Manitoba and is a policy analyst for Northern Authority.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SPECIAL THANK YOU:

Marie Lands – CEO First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Authority

Staff of First Nation of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Authority for their assistance

Elder – Priscilla Cook Opaskwayak First Nation

Connie Cook

Lucy Robinson

Calvin North

And the Junior Thunderbird's Girls' Drum Group

Beatoes Productions

Awasis Agency for showing their canoe trip footage

CNCFCA for showing their canoe trip footage

Northern Authority Board of Directors, in particular Josephine Budd for her planning, and active involvement in the planning of this symposium.

To all the agencies who donated prizes for door prizes.

To all the agencies who shared information at agency tables



APPENDICE

Appendix A

The Terms of Reference were as follows:

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Northern Symposium Advisory committee

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Northern Symposium Advisory Committee is to provide advice and feedback to the Planning of a two day symposium to be held in Northern Manitoba in 2009.

Method of decision making is through use of collaboration and consensus.

ACTIVITIES

Two meetings in which to discuss and advise on the content structure, and outcomes of the northern child welfare Symposium

The Advisory Committee will engage in the following activities:

- Provide advice and feedback on Theme, Location, Speakers, and structure of Symposium.
- Meet at an initial planning meeting, and at least once three weeks prior to the Symposium.

COMMITTEE COMPOSITION

The members of the Advisory Committee will be comprised of:

1. N.A Staff Member
2. Conference Planner Northern Authority
3. Awasis Representative
4. Opaskwayak Representative
5. Cree Nation Representative
6. Island Lake Representative
- 7.

Five representatives of Northern First Nation Child Welfare Agencies, as well as two Northern Authority Staff members.

TERM

The committee will dissolve upon the completion of Activities as noted in the terms of reference.



Advisory Committee Membership

In addition to the event planner, Cybil Williams the members consisted of:

Kerry Bignell	Opaskwayak	OCNCFS
Mary Sayese /Pam Friesen	Administrative Assistant	Northern Authority
Mary Werba	FASD Specialist	Northern Authority
Alfred McDougall	Associate Executive Director	ILFNFS
Clarence Paupanekis	Executive Director	KSMA
George Muswagon	Associate Executive Director	AWASIS
Claudette Lehmann	Associate Executive Director	CNCFCA



AGENDA

Appendix B

Tuesday, March 17th, 2009

8:00 am – 9:00am ----- Registration

9:00 am ----- Opening Drum Song
Elder's Opening Prayer - Priscilla Constant

9:15 am ----- Welcoming Remarks: Kerry Bignell
Councillor – Opaskwayak First Nation

9:30 am ----- Opening Remarks:
Grand Chief Dr. Sydney Garrioch,
Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO)

10:00 am----- Message from the Northern Authority Board
Josephine Budd

10:30----- Health Break

10:45 am – Noon ----- Key Note Address:
Chief Ovide Mercredi – Grand Rapids First Nation

12:00 pm----- Lunch

1:00 pm ----- Dr. Yvonne Pompana

2:00pm ----- Marie Lands CEO Northern Authority

2:45 pm ----- Health Break

3:00 pm ----- Moderated Panel Discussion:
Chief Mercredi, Dr. Pompana, Marie Lands

4:00 pm ----- Agency table review



AGENDA

Wednesday, March 18th, 2009

8:00 –9:00 am ----- Registrations

9:00 am ----- Prayer and Drum Song

9:15 am ----- Bernadette Spence
CEO Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family
Services

10:15 am ----- Health Break

10:30 ----- Felix Walker CEO
Family and Community Wellness Centre
Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation

11:30 am ----- Shirlene Asham
Differential Response Coordinator – First Nations of
Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority

12:00 pm ----- Lunch

3:00 pm ----- Closing Remarks – Marie Lands

4:00 pm ----- Closing Song and Prayer

