



# Reconciliation Framework

"Sharing a Good Heart"



Ontario Association of  
Children's Aid Societies  
The voice of child welfare in Ontario



# RECONCILIATION FRAMEWORK

Sharing a Good Heart

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## **I. Preamble**

In the fall of 2011, the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) developed an Aboriginal Services Advisory Committee composed of the Executive Directors of the five Aboriginal child welfare agencies belonging to OACAS, along with five Executive Directors of non-Aboriginal agencies serving large numbers of Aboriginal/First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) children and families and representatives of the Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario (ANCFSAO). By 2013, the six pre-mandated agencies became Associate Members and also joined this group. Through several meetings of this Committee, a consensus emerged around the need for acknowledgement of the horrific history of child welfare and Aboriginal/FNMI children and families, and eventually for reconciliation between Aboriginal/FNMI communities and the child welfare sector.

In early 2013 the Aboriginal Services Advisory Committee commenced the development of a "Reconciliation framework" for consideration by OACAS and its member societies, also commonly known as Children's Aid Societies (CASs).

A consultative process with OACAS staff and members of its Aboriginal Advisory Committee resulted in the development of a "think piece" to guide consultation and dialogue sessions with several CASs and those involved in related issues. In addition, a number of focus groups about reconciliation were conducted in all six zones. From this feedback, a series of options was developed, some of which incorporated current CAS practice, while others were suggestions from group participants. These options are grouped into the following five categories:

- 1. Welcoming Aboriginal Culture**
- 2. Creating Relationships**
- 3. Supporting Restoration**
- 4. Reconciliation**
- 5. Public Education**

How these options are applied or implemented is dependent on the state of the relationship between the parties. This framework provides some questions for consideration to support CASs in dialoguing about where they are in terms of their relationship with the Aboriginal/FNMI communities they work with. As you embark on this work, appreciate that this is not an easy journey: Reconciliation will require empathy, courage, and creativity on everyone's part.

The next few years will see tremendous movement and change with respect to the provision of services to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) families and their children. It is through this lens that these relationships will have to be considered as this Reconciliation framework is rolled out.

## **II. Introduction**

The written narrative on the history of North America spends little time or attention on the ethnography of the continent prior to 1491. There are few written descriptors from before contact, and the oral histories are difficult to obtain. Indeed, many of the rich narratives of the past are lost. History is defined by the experiences of those who write it; thus, the written narrative of the European colonizer pays little reference to the Aboriginal experience before European arrival.

Aside from archaeological evidence, much of what is known today about Indigenous culture is obtained from what is left of oral traditions that were interrupted and compromised by the process of colonization. North America was a highly diverse and complex continent, with multiple cultural realities occurring simultaneously. The diversity of human experiences in the Americas prior to contact was incredible. The whalers of the Northwest had a very different life than the so-called mound builders (whose capital rivalled London in size) of the Tennessee Valley. Neither of these peoples lived like the hunters north of the Great Lakes, nor like the great Pueblo peoples of the Southwest, who created skylines that would be enviable to condo dwellers today.

The Inuit of the Far North, whose relations stretched around the top of the world (Alaska, Russia, and Greenland), and who survived in an environment more akin to Mars than southern Ontario, lived as small, closely knit families in well-organized camps. The Inuit were perhaps the greatest hunters, as a single Inuk hunter could bring down a 3.5 metre polar bear with just a bone-tipped spear (Chansonneuve, 2005).

There were no Métis peoples pre-contact, as the Métis nation emerged through the process of Canadian colonization itself (Chansonneuve, 2005).

Before contact, more than 400 languages were spoken across North America by a population estimated to be at least 10 million. Relations between FNMI peoples pre-contact ranged from peace to war, cooperation to competition. The diversity of the FNMI communities of North America also meant that they had multiple ways of organizing, stratifying, and categorizing themselves.

Prior to the colonial period, FNMI communities cared for their children in ways that were consistent with their cultural practices, spiritual beliefs, laws, and traditions. While there was a wide diversity of cultures, there were also common values and traditions. FNMI communities were generally organized collectively, placing a strong emphasis on extended families and clans in the case of First Nations. They shared a worldview that valued children as critical to their survival. Parenting was a community responsibility; to this day, in many communities, all adults are aunties or uncles to the children living within the community.

While the colonial period fractured this system of care, it has survived. Many First Nations communities express traditional care practices in the modern notion of customary care and its capacity to provide better outcomes for the children involved (MCYS, 2013).

(Extracted from OACAS, 2014, p., with modification).

### **III. Background**

The child welfare field is responsible for promoting the best interests, protection, and well-being of children, and for supporting and strengthening families by offering key services to help them in times of trouble.

The role of Children's Aid Societies, as defined by OACAS, is "to protect children from harm." This mandate is distinct from the work done with service partners and the community "to prevent abuse and neglect, improve child safety, maintain children's health and wellness and support and strengthen families to better care for children."

The issue of child protection is complex, and distinguishing between protection and prevention is one of the first challenges when reframing the discussion to incorporate both a Western and Indigenous worldview.

Aboriginal/FNMI family members in focus groups were asked to describe how they wanted child welfare professionals to carry out their work. They described child welfare professionals who would:

1. Support families in their responsibility to care for and protect their children.

2. When they are not in a position to care for and protect their children, help families develop a plan that:
  - Ensures the least disruption to the family
  - Supports the family to re-establish their ability to maintain safety
  - Keeps the child in the circle of care that ensures his/her Aboriginal identity is recognized and respected

The complexity of child welfare is most evident when establishing a plan of care for children. Any decision made about the protection of children needs to reflect a balance between short-term protection and long-term impact. When removed from their family, community, and culture, Aboriginal/FNMI children experience a loss of identity and displacement. In the long term, children, youth, and adults who do not have a clear sense of identity face many challenges in life. The impact of identity loss through colonization has been well documented in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. And when we compare FNMI peoples to other Canadians on a wide spectrum of the social determinants of health, Aboriginal/FNMI peoples consistently fare worse.

FNMI peoples are not inherently less capable of living well or caring for their children. Instead, the historical legacy of residential schools, the 60s Scoop, the slaughter of dogsled teams and relocation for the Inuit, the lack of recognition of Métis peoples' Indigenous status, and other forms of colonization have all led to entire communities being in a perpetual state of loss.

(Extracted from OACAS, 2012 p. 21, with modification)

In the words of an Aboriginal worker, consider the following statements.

*Family violence (witnessing and being directly abused) impacts children. And so does separating children from their families. Particularly when we place children in environments that do not acknowledge or are disrespectful of culture. What are the consequences of separating young children from their mothers when they are in a time when they need to do attachment? How do we assess these situations to know what will be the least traumatic? (Focus group participant)*

When child welfare professionals decide to remove a child from his/her parents, they are playing a part in continuing the legacy of colonization. Child welfare professionals have the potential to diminish a child's sense of identity, to weaken the family's ability to become stronger. By removing a family member from the original home community, child welfare professionals can have an impact on the strength of that First Nations community through the loss of another community member.

*When I was in grade two I was placed in foster care by the Children's Aid Society along with my three sisters. I believe one of the reasons I was there was because of "alleged neglect", meaning that they said my mom couldn't take care of us. We were in foster care for two years and during this time we were placed in five different homes just waiting for someone to come and pick us up to take us home. "Maybe this car will be the one to take us home." I would then cry myself to sleep. This thought repeated itself over the course of those two years.*

*When a child goes into care there is little to help them understand the reasons. They are left wondering what happened and at an emotional level the experience of being put into care can be traumatizing (Middleton-Moz, 1989). I think that when a child goes into care they have needs related to their cultural identity. When I was in foster care, all the homes that we were placed in were White homes and where there was alcohol abuse. In another home, there was sexual abuse. None of these homes provided us with positive cultural mirrors of who we were as Anishinaabe children. First Nations children ought to continue to know who they are while in care, especially children who experience long term foster care and Crown wardship or adoption (King, 2010).*

The statistics are sobering:

Research has repeatedly demonstrated the over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care and in interactions with the child welfare system more generally. For example, the 2000–2002 provincial and territorial data suggest that 30% to 40% of children and youth placed in out-of-home care were Aboriginal despite the fact that less than 5% of children in Canada are Aboriginal (Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003, as cited in Gough, Trocme, Brown, Knoke & Blackstock, 2005, p.1). Further, the number of First Nations children from reserves placed in out-of-home care increased by 71.5% between 1995 and 2001 (McKenzie, 2002).

An analysis of the 2008 Canadian Incidence Study (CIS) of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect found that 22 percent of children under the age of 16 investigated by child welfare services in Canada because of suspected maltreatment were identified as Aboriginal.



This rate is up from 16 percent in 1998, and is four times the rate for non-Aboriginal children, despite the fact that Aboriginal children under the age of 16 make up five percent of the general population (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010)

(Extracted from OACAS, 2012 pp 22-23).

More detailed data from the First Nations Component of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2008 (FNCIS, 2008) revealed the following disparity metrics between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cases involved in the child welfare system.

#### Child Functioning Concerns – FNCIS 2008

**FAS/FAE:** The rate of First Nations investigations involving FAS/FAE was **28.3 times greater** than that of non-Aboriginal investigations involving FAS/FAE.

**Positive toxicology at birth: 17.5** times greater

**Child/youth alcohol abuse: 11.2** times greater

**Multiple incidents of running away: 9.3** times greater

**Drug/solvent abuse: 8.0** times greater

**Physical disability: 6.8** times greater

**Failure to meet developmental milestones: 6.2** times greater

**Intellectual/developmental disability: 5.2** times greater

#### Caregiver Risk Factors – FNCIS 2008

**Alcohol abuse:** The rate of First Nations investigations involving alcohol abuse was **19.9 times greater** than that of non-Aboriginal investigations.

**Drug/solvent abuse: 10.8** times greater

**Domestic violence: 6.0** times greater

**Few social supports: 5.2** times greater

**Caregiver history of foster care/group home: 11.3** times greater

## Substantiated Investigations – FNCIS 2008

**Neglect:** The rate of substantiated neglect investigations was **8.0 times greater** for the First Nations population than for the non-Aboriginal population.

**Exposure to intimate partner violence: 4.7** times greater

**Emotional maltreatment: 5.4** times greater

**Physical abuse: 2.1** times greater

**Sexual abuse: 2.7** times greater

Other stark statistics include:

- Between 1995 and 2001 there was a 71.5 percent increase in the number of on-reserve First Nations children in care.
- Between 1960 and 1990, 11,132 First Nations children were adopted; the numbers are believed to actually be higher. Seventy percent of apprehended Aboriginal children were put in non-Aboriginal homes. In the 1970s, one in three Aboriginal children were separated from their families and put in adoption or foster homes.
- In 2003, 22,500 First Nations children were in State care in Canada. By 2010 the numbers have increased to an alarming 27,500. First Nations children are six to eight times more likely to be in foster care than the non- Aboriginal population.
- About 60% of foster care placements are based on substantiated allegations of neglect: poverty, poor housing, and caregiver substance misuse constitute neglect.

These statistics show that Canada continues to violate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (UN CRC). Specific to direction around the care of Indigenous children, the UN CRC says, “states should always ensure that the principle of the best interests of the child is the paramount consideration in any alternative care placement of Indigenous children.” When placing Indigenous children the state must “pay due regard to the desirability of continuity in the child’s upbringing and to the child’s ethnic, cultural and linguistic background.”

The problem of Aboriginal children in care and placed outside their communities and culture is not new. To Aboriginal families, these statistics simply reveal the continuation of a process of colonization. Individuals outside of the family and community decide on whether Aboriginal individuals are effective parents, just as they have decided on whether they are Indigenous, could vote, could own dog sleds, could live on the land and in the community where they originally lived, or could access services that all other Canadians receive.

As a child welfare professional, no matter how skilled or well intentioned, you remain part of the colonization legacy of separating Aboriginal children from their families. This makes your work exceptionally challenging.

...the system itself is set up to discriminate against First Nations peoples and continues to implement an agenda of assimilation. The colonial game is still on, it's only the rules and players that change (Shane Tabobondung, Chief of Wasauksing First Nation).

(Extracted from OACAS, 2012 pp 23-24)

#### **IV. What is Reconciliation?**

Reconciliation involves building mutually respectful relationships between CASs and the Aboriginal communities they serve. These relationships will allow Aboriginal communities and CASs to work together to solve problems and generate success in ways that consider everyone's best interests while meeting the needs of and protecting children and families.

Achieving reconciliation involves raising awareness and knowledge of Aboriginal history and culture, changing attitudes that are often based on myths and misunderstandings, and encouraging action that sees everyone playing their part in building better relationships. It must also be recognized that the actions of the past, such as placing Aboriginal children in residential schools and the 60s Scoop, without question played and continue to play a key role in the state of child welfare in Aboriginal communities.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) explained that reconciliation does not mean forgetting the past, but neither does it mean dwelling on the past. It is predicated on two major new steps on the part of non-Aboriginal people: a "sincere acknowledgment" of past injustices and a "profound and unambiguous commitment to establishing a new relationship for the future".

There are two important principles to remember while carrying out this work. . First, any effort towards reconciliation must recognize that the Aboriginal families served by CASs have been harmed by past actions. Second, any actions towards reconciliation must be seen as meaningful by Aboriginal communities and families.

It must be acknowledged and accepted that reconciliation will look different for every community, and that the feelings and wishes of local FNMI and Aboriginal communities must be key considerations as CASs embark on this journey. There is already great diversity in the province in terms of relationship between CASs and the Aboriginal and FNMI communities they serve. Perhaps most important, there are real differences in how Aboriginal and FNMI communities perceive the need for reconciliation.

The following is some material that may be useful in thinking through these processes, as it includes information on partnership building, negotiation, and community-based conflict resolution, as well as ideas on how to maintain a spirit of partnership once created.

## **V. An Elder's Thoughts**

Fred Kelley is an Ojibway Elder from Onigaming community in Treaty 3. He is an Elder in Midewin, the Sacred Law and Medicine Society of the Anishnaabe, as well as a Drum Keeper and Pipe Carrier. Mr. Kelley is a survivor of residential schools in Kenora, Ontario, and Lebret, Saskatchewan, and was a member of the Assembly of First Nations team that negotiated the historic Residential Schools Settlement. Fred served as Chief of his own community and is the Grand Chief Emeritus of the Anishnaabe Nation in Treaty 3. While his accomplishments are too great to list in detail, it is important to note that he continues to serve as spiritual advisor to First Nations leadership in Canada, including the Assembly of First Nations and Grand Council Treaty 3.

He offers the following insights into the First Nations perspective on reconciliation.

Reconciliation: Persons or groups at peace and in harmony with themselves and with others may, in my view, be characterized as conciliate. That is to say, they are in a state of contented equilibrium. A personal conflict or an external incursion disrupts and may even permanently destroy the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being of the individual and the family. An intractable conflict upsets and may also permanently destroy the physical, social, political, and cultural order of equilibrium within a group, community, and nation. When this happens, reconciliation is needed to regain and restore peaceful balance within and without.

Hence, a process of reconciliation properly designed and delivered should:

- Restore a state of wellness (equilibrium) within the individual following a personal conflict or trauma whether it is self-inflicted or caused by a perpetrator – a person in authority or an enemy.
- Restore amicable relations between groups following an intractable conflict caused by an inadvertent act or a purposeful malice by the offending party(s).

Worldview: A culture provides a cognitive orientation toward a world in which the individual is compelled to act. A culturally constituted world view is created, which, by means of beliefs, available knowledge, and language, mediates personal adjustment to the world through such psychological processes as perceiving, recognizing, conceiving, judging, and reasoning... intimately associated with normative orientation, becomes the basis for reflection, decision, and action... and provides for consensus with respect to goals and values. [Irving A. Hallowell, who worked for years with Anishinaabe, paraphrased.]

A culturally correct process of reconciliation should be based on an understanding of the local worldview and lifeways undisturbed – the Anishinaabe as a case in point, whose view of equilibrium (overall feeling of wellness) can be capsulized by a **"complete feeling of good in heart"**.

- Miinote eh (meeno tay ay) – singular: he/she is feeling well and good in heart
- Miinote eh wug (meeno tay ay wug) – plural: they are feeling well and good in heart
- When good relations prevail between parties, it can be said that they share in good heart:
- Miinowinchiidiwug (meeno wee chee ndee wug): they are in good friendly relations; or in good heart together
- Reconciliation: the Anishinaabe word and concept: After estrangement and good relations are restored, the prefix "re" in reconciliation can be described by "azhe" meaning "going back to the previous order".
- Azhe miinote eh (azhay meeno tay ay) – singular: he/she is feeling well and good in heart again
- Azhe miinote eh wug (azhay meeno tay ay wug) – plural: they are feeling well and good in heart again

- Azhe miinowinchiidiwug (azhay mino wee chee nde wug) – they are in good friendly relations; in good heart together again; they have reconciled.

There are of course other words and concepts depending on the circumstances, contexts, processes, and objectives. Healing, restorative justice, conciliation, mediation, conflict resolution, and such others come to mind.

## **V. Reconciliation Framework**

It is evident that there is a high level of diversity across the province with regard to relationships between CASs and Aboriginal/FNMI communities. As such, any framework for reconciliation needs to acknowledge this diversity and respect that individual CASs and Aboriginal/FNMI communities will be at different places in their relationships across the province.

Regardless of the state of these relationships, the sector cannot afford to do nothing. Based on feedback received, we have identified a continuum of options that a CAS might use to establish, enhance, and maintain its relationships with the Aboriginal/FNMI communities it serves. The following is an overview of this continuum, which has been grouped into five areas:

- 1. Welcoming Aboriginal Culture**
- 2. Creating Relationships**
- 3. Supporting Restoration**
- 4. Reconciliation**
- 5. Public Education**

For some CASs the starting point may be the first area. Other CASs that have developed strong relationships with their communities may find themselves further along on the continuum, while some may have reached the point of readiness for restoration activities, parallel services, and an act of reconciliation such as an apology. Regardless of the starting point, a few overarching questions have emerged as foundational considerations for moving forward. First, the sector must acknowledge it is committed to restoring the care and responsibility of Aboriginal/FNMI children to Aboriginal/FNMI people. That is, we as a sector understand and believe that Aboriginal and First Nations communities have the right to make decisions about and care for their own children. Next, we recognize that child welfare has not been and is not, in its current approach, helpful to FNMI children and families. Our sense is that moving forward does not require saying yes to all of the questions before starting. The journey is an iterative process, where humility, respect, honesty, and adaptability will be essential.

## **CRITICAL QUESTIONS**

1. Are you prepared for the journey? Some of the messages you will receive will be emotionally charged and potentially hurtful.
2. Are you prepared to divest resources to support Aboriginal and FNMI communities to work with you as an equal partner?
3. Are you prepared to commit to a comprehensive plan for reconciliation?
4. What is the history of CAS intervention with the FNMI communities that your agency works with?

## **Other Considerations**

The following considerations may be helpful to CASs as they begin to plan a path through the continuum of the Reconciliation Framework:

1. Are there practices that your agency can identify that are representative of reconciliation?
2. How does your agency recognize its role in the past? Present? Future?
3. How public do you want this to be?
4. Are there meaningful actions that can be taken early on to demonstrate the sincerity of your efforts?
5. Are there issues within your agency that might pose significant barriers to establishing a reconciliation strategy?
6. How will your agency engage the local Aboriginal and FNMI community in the development of a reconciliation policy and implementation plan?
7. How will Aboriginal and FNMI families be able to experience a reconciliation-based service?
10. Are there some meaningful dates that should be considered in announcements or other actions?

As discussed previously, this is not a checklist but offers suggestions and ideas around steps that a CAS might take in enhancing its relationship with the FNMI communities it works with. It is also by no means comprehensive, and Societies should remain open to new ideas from within or from their FNMI partners.

*Child welfare work is all about building and maintaining relationships. As a child welfare professional, you assess whether the relationship between parent(s) and children is safe. To accurately perform that assessment, you need to establish a credible relationship with the parents and those around them to be able to get to the truth.*

*The complexity of family violence in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities does not offer an easy solution or specific action. Violence has had a profound effect on all of the relationships in Aboriginal families. The violence is uniquely rooted in colonization and the actions of others, destroying the core family and community relations that exist within and between Aboriginal families.*

*The presenting issues in Aboriginal families are rooted in the relationship each family has with the present as well as the past and the future. Child welfare professionals can support hope and resiliency in each family and the openness for change in family relationships with an understanding of what has impacted and continues to impact on relationships in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit families.*

*The ability to assess how to protect the child while also supporting the family to address the violence requires knowledge and skills about how relationships are built, maintained, and healed in the Aboriginal community*

(Extracted from OACAS, 2012, pp 18-19).

## **1. WELCOMING ABORIGINAL CULTURE**

Each CAS needs to develop a comprehensive strategy to ensure that Aboriginal culture is present in a consistent way within their agency so that staff are regularly exposed to it.

### **a. Increase Cultural Awareness of CAS staff**

- Increasing awareness for your staff can mean creating a comprehensive overview of the local Aboriginal communities, including their history and present-day goals. In addition, an overview of significant child welfare issues such as the 60s Scoop will be important. Existing agreements and protocols with local Aboriginal communities should be part of the awareness material. This should be part of the orientation for all new staff.



- Some pre-training may be required to create an environment where cultural awareness can be meaningful.
- Have First Nations speakers in to share the history of their community and how it was settled.
- Have First Nation speakers share their personal stories of residential schools and (or) the 60s Scoop.
- Have Aboriginal people share information around spiritual practices.
- Ensure that orientation of all new staff includes visits to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities and agencies.

***Example:***

- Peel CAS held an event wherein an Elder was brought in to explain the spiritual and ceremonial significance of the strawberry.

**b. Partner with Aboriginal/FNMI Communities in Agency Events and Initiatives**

- Ensure Aboriginal leadership is involved in planning and implementation of agency events such as Foster Parent recognition and AGM Youth Appreciation Events.
- Ensure Aboriginal participation in your agency's AGM.
- Ensure CAS representation and participation in Aboriginal/FNMI community events.
- Sponsor and support annual cultural events that showcase and highlight local community culture and stories.

***Example:***

- Highland Shores CAS partners with Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte and Alderville FN to plan its annual Youth Achievement awards. Awards are presented to not only children and youth in care, but also to First Nation and local community children and youth, thereby ensuring broader participation.

**c. Support Cultural Programming for Aboriginal Children and Families**

- Ensure that Aboriginal children and youth in care regularly participate in FNMI and other Aboriginal community events.
- Ensure that Aboriginal children and caregivers have access to spiritual/cultural supports.
- Advocate for funding for these types of programs, as they are not considered “core services”.

**Example:**

- *Payukotayno sends its youth in care on a yearly retreat with Elders to ensure that they reconnect to the land.*

**2. Creating Relationships With Aboriginal, First Nations, Métis, And (Or) Inuit Communities**

**a. Develop a specialized response for Aboriginal/FNMI children and families.**

- This must not be seen as an end in and of itself, but rather as a transition to a mechanism to support restoration to a First Nation managed service.
- Care must be taken to ensure that the service is not “ghettoized” and that the agency as a whole commits to learning about Aboriginal culture and the community(s) it serves.
- Where possible, the Aboriginal community must have a leadership role in managing the unit or team responsible for providing the service.
- The agency needs to assign a senior management level staff person to act as a liaison and “champion” within the agency.

**Example:**

- *Several agencies have established units to specifically work with Aboriginal children and families. Some of these include Sudbury CAS, Algoma CAS, London-Middlesex CAS, Brant CAS, and Simcoe CAS.*

**b. Aboriginal Advisory Committee**

- This committee could be comprised of Aboriginal or First Nations representatives, as well as senior leadership to oversee protocols and decision making around service design. Consider having Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal co-chairs.
- Understand that this will require both time and commitment to build trust and effect change.
- Be clear on roles and responsibilities.
- The purpose should be to support and inform cultural support to Aboriginal children and families. Be aware of best practices in this area.
- Ensure Aboriginal/FNMI representation in hearing client complaints.
- Consider the development of community councils for each zone consisting of representatives from the local Aboriginal communities. These councils would plan and implement cultural support for Aboriginal clients receiving service from a CAS. Number of representatives would vary from region to region.
- Understand the diversity in service delivery models that exists and encourage the development of a model that best suits local conditions.

**Example:**

- *Several agencies have a longstanding Child Welfare Advisory Committee, which does everything from inform their service model, to troubleshooting client complaints. These include Sarnia-Lambton CAS and Simcoe CAS.*

**c. Sponsor a Yearly Event Whereby the Aboriginal, First Nations, Métis, or Inuit Community is Honoured and Celebrated**

- Ceremony to acknowledge and honour the relationship between your CAS and the local Aboriginal/FNMI community.
- FNMI communities are to take a leadership role in planning the event, with support from the CAS.
- Ensure senior CAS leadership and staff attend, as well as representatives from Aboriginal/FNMI communities.

### **Example:**

- *Six Nations of the Grand River has a ceremony that translates to "Polishing the Covenant Chain," which served to honour the alliance they had with Great Britain.*

### **3. Supporting Restoration**

#### **a. Advocacy Strategy**

- Commit to an advocacy plan in partnership with local Aboriginal/FNMI communities that compels the Ministry to restore services to Aboriginal/FNMI communities should those communities wish to pursue restoration of jurisdiction

#### **b. Develop protocols that promote true collaboration with Aboriginal/FNMI communities around planning and decision making for their children and families.**

- Invite the creation of protocols and practices in partnership with Aboriginal/FNMI communities that supports their autonomy in decision making about their children and families.
- Dedicate staff to review existing cases to ensure that your agency has honored the spirit and intent of these protocols and practices.
- Commit resources where necessary to ensure that Aboriginal/FNMI communities can participate as equal partners.
- Develop systems to ensure consistent application of these protocols and practices.

#### **d. Restore child protection jurisdiction to Aboriginal/FNMI communities.**

- CASs invest funds and resources throughout the transfer of the child protection jurisdiction (Aboriginal/FNMI -agencies receiving jurisdiction and CASs transferring cases).

#### 4. Reconciliation

- **CAS and First Nations, Métis, or Inuit Communities Participate in Touchstones of Hope**
  - Includes 4 components:
    - Truth Telling
    - Acknowledging
    - Restoring
    - Relating
- For CASs and Aboriginal/FNMI communities who have already established protocols and committees.
- Engage First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada to facilitate. Touchstones of Hope are a set of principles and action ideas aimed at guiding community-based reconciliation efforts ([http://www.fncaringociety.com/sites/default/files/Touch-stones\\_of\\_Hope.pdf](http://www.fncaringociety.com/sites/default/files/Touch-stones_of_Hope.pdf)). It represents broad consultation and a convergence of Aboriginal authenticity and accountability.

#### Example:

- *Ottawa CAS has participated in Touchstones of Hope, and utilized this as a vehicle to develop a comprehensive approach to Aboriginal, Métis, and Inuit services.*
- **CASs and First Nations Former or Existing Clients Participate in Regular Talking Circles**

Talking Together is a circle process. A circle is a basic Aboriginal symbol. It is also a symbol of Aboriginal justice. In a Circle, there is no right or left, nor is there a beginning or an end. Every point (person) seated in a circle looks to the same center as the focus. The circle is the symbol of justice because it is perfect, unbroken, and a simile of unity and oneness. It conveys the image of people gathering together for discussion.

The drawing together of people who know the family, and care about the family, can be a very powerful process. If one considers the solutions that a child welfare organization has available for the family — e.g., alcohol treatment, parenting courses, and counselling as a bundle of solutions — in the circle, the bundle has the potential of being much bigger and can be tailored to fit the needs of this particular family.

Key to the Talking Together Circle is the importance of confidentiality, the sacredness of the Circle, and the feeling of safety and being heard.

- Led by an Elder, clients or former clients can be given the opportunity to express the impact child welfare has had on their lives.
- This can be an intense experience, which is why it must be supported by an Elder, and why it must be completely voluntary on the part of CASs and clients.

**Example:**

- *"In 1990, Nishnawbe Aski Legal Services Corporation (NALSC) received direction from the Chiefs of Treaty No. 9 to create and promote alternative and community-based justice systems for its members. The Talking Together Program was created in 2002 to address the child welfare needs of 51 First Nation communities in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) territory.*

**c. An Apology**

In the dialogue sessions with local Children’s Aid Societies the question of an apology was raised. Although there was a diversity of views and matters of timing and implementation were raised, there seemed to be a sentiment that an apology was the right thing to do. Our sense is that travelling down the road of reconciliation necessarily involves both a recognition that wrongs were done and an apology. It seems to us that even proposing working on reconciliation begs the question of why. Why leads to admissions of failing to consider Aboriginal culture and the Aboriginal family when acting in the best interests of the child.

Agencies may be able to work on a better relationship with Aboriginal communities by admitting that the past and perhaps the present way of doing things is not as successful as it should be. This may push an apology off to another time, but our sense is that at some point individual Children’s Aid Societies, and perhaps OACAS, will have to seriously consider the question of an apology. Equally important will be the apology itself and how it is presented. Given the diversity of opinion on this question, our sense is that some communities may be ready for an apology, while others will come to that point as better relationships develop. And it will be up to each community to work with OACAS and the local CAS on how to best acknowledge any past injustice.

- Reconciliation activity and (o)r ceremony, where an acknowledgement of past injustice or an apology is under active consideration.
- OACAS should lead a strategy to compel the provincial government to recognize, acknowledge, and apologize for the impact of child welfare on Aboriginal communities, and consider doing the same on behalf of member agencies.

## **5. Public Education**

- OACAS should consider its role in a public education campaign, in particular a campaign designed to educate people about the 60s Scoop.
- CASs must become full and active partner with local Aboriginal/FNMI communities to combat the racism, oppression, and discrimination these individuals sometimes experience in trying to participate in Canadian systems and institutions.
- OACAS should advocate with the Ministry of Education for the development of curriculum and training of educators regarding issues like the 60s Scoop.
- In partnership with the local First Nations and Aboriginal communities, each CAS should consider the development of a local public education campaign regarding child welfare issues.
- Each CAS should consider the development of educational material for local libraries and (or) museums.

## **V. Final Thoughts**

A well-thought-out plan will be essential for reconciliation to be a success. There is little doubt that reconciliation in child welfare is a hugely important public policy issue. As noted above, the matter of child welfare is linked to other issues that CASs have no control over. However, advocating for action from both the provincial and federal governments could position OACAS in a positive light. Identifying key partners could add credibility to the efforts and be mutually reinforcing.

Efforts in this area will be challenging; however, a light will be shone on all the work of building relationships with Aboriginal/FNMI communities. Aboriginal/FNMI communities have long been marginalized by the child welfare sector in Ontario. In 1985, new provisions were declared within the CFSA giving First Nations a stronger voice in the future of their children, through creating mechanisms that would allow them to participate in decision making and to develop their own child welfare service. In spite of this change, progress has been inhibited due to lack of strong government support and a comprehensive strategy to support First Nations communities as equal partners in the child welfare sector. As a consequence there are issues with resources and capacity within their communities that have inhibited their capacity to fully participate. In addition, the legacy of child welfare has been bitter for many First Nations and Aboriginal people, and there have been no significant changes to how the child welfare sector is responding to the challenges First Nations children and families currently confront. Hence, moving forward will be for many a long, sometimes arduous process, but we can no longer stand by and do nothing. The status quo is not an option.

## References

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