



Aboriginal Children and Families in Urban Communities



the Métis
Nation of
Ontario



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



Aboriginal
Shelters of
Ontario

Dilico
Anishinabek Family Care

July 18, 2012



Commission to Promote
Sustainable Child Welfare

Commission de promotion de la viabilité
des services de bien-être de l'enfance

Urban Aboriginal Seminar Summary of Proceedings

1.0 Background and Purpose of the Seminar

The Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare was established in the Fall of 2009 to develop and implement strategies to promote the sustainability of child welfare in Ontario. From the early days of the Commission, one of the key areas of focus for our work has been to advance effective, affordable, culturally appropriate child welfare services to Aboriginal children and youth throughout the province, whether they are served by designated Aboriginal CASs or non-Aboriginal CASs.

The Commission developed a comprehensive description of Aboriginal child welfare in a discussion paper and engaged in validation of our conclusions and emerging directions through a targeted consultation process. We have also examined a number of specific matters of concern (e.g. the underutilization of customary care, the approach to funding of designated Aboriginal CASs, the potential for harmonization of traditional practices with government-prescribed requirements) and have formally submitted recommendations to the Minister of children and Youth Services.

The Commission recognizes that the unique historical and socioeconomic issues facing Aboriginal communities have had a deep and widespread impact on their children and youth and we have concluded that Ontario has both a moral and a financial obligation to help address these issues. Aboriginal children, whether First Nations, Métis or Inuit, must have access to services that reflect their needs and are delivered in ways that respect their culture, heritage and traditions.

Fundamental changes are needed to meet these aspirations for Aboriginal child welfare. Despite recent legislative changes and efforts by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and children's aid societies to be more responsive and effective, the child welfare program, built around a Euro-Canadian "children's aid society model" falls well short in serving Aboriginal children in Ontario.

Changes are required to the governance, funding, accountability and performance management framework and delivery of services to Aboriginal children, youth and families, within the context of their communities. And these changes do not rest solely in the purview of the Ontario government or of children's aid societies. The importance of working with Aboriginal political leaders, communities and agency leadership cannot be overstated. Work needs to begin on mapping out these "fundamental changes" in a strategy for Aboriginal child welfare. At the same time, the state of affairs for Aboriginal children in Ontario demands that action be taken immediately on a number of short-term matters that will make the current delivery system more effective and efficient in serving Aboriginal children and their families.

1.1 Purpose of the Seminar

As the end of the Commission's mandate approached we acknowledged what we had been hearing from a number of leaders: that we had not given adequate consideration to the challenges faced by First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and families in urban centres. The Urban Aboriginal Seminar held on July 18, and this summary report, are intended to identify some of those challenges and bring attention to them.

1.2 Structure and Process

Elder Basil Green (Elder and Chair of the Board of Directors of Anishinaabe Abinoojii Family Services) opened the day with a prayer. Kenn Richard (Executive Director of NCFST), as host, welcomed the participants, all of whom then introduced themselves. Daryl Sturtevant (ADM at MCYS) brought greetings from the Ministry and referred to the establishment of the Ministry's new Aboriginal Policy Unit.

The balance of the day was organized around a series of presentations and discussions on a range of subjects relevant to urban Aboriginal children, youth and families. After the presentations and discussions, Theresa Stevens (as Executive Director of ANCFSAO) was asked to summarize her impressions of the day and the session concluded with final comments by each participant.

The agenda is attached as Appendix 1.

1.3 Participants

The session benefited from the observations and knowledge of leaders from:

- Anishinaabe Abinoojii Family Services
- Association of Native Child and Family Service Agencies of Ontario
- Association of Native Shelters of Ontario
- Dilico Anishinabek Family Centre
- Métis Nation of Ontario
- Mnaasged Child and Family Services
- Native Child and family Services of Toronto
- Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies
- Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres
- Ontario Native Women's Association

The full list of participants is attached as Appendix 2.

2.0 Summary of Presentations

As part of planning for the session, five participants had been asked to prepare presentations on the challenges faced by the children and families they service in urban centres. After each presentation, participants were invited to comment, supplement or ask questions.

2.1 Presentation #1

<i>Cultural, social and other human services for Aboriginal children and families in urban communities</i>	Presenter- Sylvia Maracle, OFCIC
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Presentation Highlights:

- Recent statistics show that Ontario has the largest population of Aboriginal youth and families living off-reserve. With more than half of the total Aboriginal population in the province now settling in large urban cities, the multi-generational urban Aboriginal population is growing fast.
- Cities and towns that previously had few Aboriginal residents are now seeing significant numbers—with no/very few Aboriginal supports/services
- More than half of these urban residents are female, mostly from a single-female household with children. Many of the urban Aboriginal females are victims of violence, which leads to increased contact with the police, courts, and child welfare agencies. Friendship Centres provide Healing and Wellness programs

that deal with victims of violence, mainly focusing on girls and women. Friendship Centres also provide services for men to work toward ending their violence against women.

- Friendship Centres in urban communities report an increased need for housing and shelter, as well as serious lack of coordination among the social/human service agencies.
- Many of the Friendship Centres in Ontario serve smaller towns where access to legal clinics, court support services, and family support services is limited. Without service integration and coordination among the agencies, children and families at-risk are underserved.
- Culturally inclusive services for children and parents need to be strengthened. Aboriginal children and youth in urban areas, in particular, do not have the same opportunity to develop and maintain their cultural identity as those living on reserves. In fact many of them they learn about their culture by accessing agencies such as those represented at the table today. Therefore, it is critical for service agencies to build trust and work together flexibly and with the needs of the children and families as the focus, to provide culturally appropriate services. The respective roles of the agencies will vary by community in accordance with the availability and capacity of each of the players.

Summary of Discussion:

- Culturally appropriate and safe prevention services are critical in urban communities. In addition to the need to collaborate in order to overcome the fragmentation that currently exists individual agencies face barriers such as long wait lists, proximity, lack of human resources and qualified workers.
- Working towards a holistic approach to child welfare services that focuses not only on protection services but a range of prevention services should be a priority. Agencies that provide children's mental health services, housing, family support, health care, and legal support need to work in partnership with one another to provide early intervention services to the children and families in need.
- The ultimate goal is to have Aboriginal children and families taken care by their respective Aboriginal communities, not by the non-Aboriginal child welfare system. In fact, the legislative mandate of designated child welfare agencies goes beyond providing protection services and provides an opportunity for them to

adopt a more comprehensive model that reflects the distinct needs of Aboriginal children and families.

- In this regard, it is important to develop and foster capacity and competency within Aboriginal communities. Negotiations with colleges and universities to include an Aboriginal focus in curricula should be considered.

2.2 Presentation #2

<i>Distinctiveness of Metis children and families and their needs in urban communities</i> Presenters- Wenda Watteyne and Storm Russell, MNO
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Presentation Highlights:

- Métis Nation of Ontario currently represents 73,000 Métis people in Ontario and supports 18 community centres that provide Healing and Wellness programs designed and delivered to meet the needs of Métis children and families. Most recently, Métis specific health research has been the focus as significant gaps in health services for children and youth between 6 and 18 years of age.
- There is a lack of recognition of the Métis people as a distinct cultural group, different from other Aboriginal groups. Ontario's current legislation fails to distinguish the Métis from other Aboriginal identities.
- Lack of knowledge and awareness by government and the public makes it difficult to mobilize resources and provide services specific to Métis children and families. This is confounded by the lack of available data to identify and understand the specific needs Métis children and families living in large urban centres. Local agencies, including CASs do not collect relevant data. As a result, a large gap exists in culturally appropriate child welfare services for Métis people.

Summary of Discussion:

- When determining the identity of a Métis person, he/she must self-identify as a Métis, must not be a member of an "Indian Band" as legally defined, or Inuit, and must be able to prove genealogy.
- Training for front-line workers is required to sensitize / educate them on Métis people and specific considerations in serving them
- The lack of awareness is a barrier in building partnerships with other service agencies.

- Although inadequate data is a problem for all Aboriginal people, the lack of data and available information on Métis children and families, makes it particularly difficult to mobilize resources and secure funding.
- Distinguishing Métis people from other Aboriginal children and families may be challenging especially in large urban centres because the identity of the Aboriginal person is very much diffused.
- MNO may benefit from discussions with several of the agencies represented in the seminar regarding these issues.

2.3 Presentation #3

The perspective of and challenges for Aboriginal women and mothers in urban communities; Presenters - Betty Kennedy, Tannis Smith, ONWA

Presentation Highlights:

- Aboriginal women and children continue to be overrepresented in the child welfare system. In urban settings, the level of violence against Aboriginal women, in particular, is pervasive and directly related to the number of children coming in contact with a child welfare agency.
- The top ten challenges facing Aboriginal Women and Mothers in urban communities are:
 - Access to culturally safe addiction assessment, treatment and aftercare services
 - Safe , affordable housing
 - Loss of income when children enter CAS care
 - Lack of co-ordination/wrap-around services for families involved with child welfare
 - Racism/ discrimination
 - Lack of advocacy, family support and court support
 - Inconsistent and limited access to children when they are in care of CAS
 - High turnover of managers
 - Lack of family preservation services
 - Lack of customary care including barriers to approval of Aboriginal families.
- Forming coalitions is critical. Mothers and children often face challenges with ODSP, OW and housing which ultimately lead to their involvement with the child welfare system. In the absence of a strong partnership with other social programs, Aboriginal women and children continue to struggle with poverty.

- Part X of the CFSA, if properly interpreted and applied, allows for a lot to be done without necessarily amending it.

Summary of Discussion:

- Poverty is a recurring theme in child welfare, along with homelessness. Although some of the themes raised today relate to broad social conditions, some are the result of individual behaviour.
- The child welfare system, despite changes that have been implemented is not sufficiently designed to consider context and structural deficits in the community, and the assessment of families focuses heavily on the risk assessment model.
- Advocacy and coalitions among service providers are critical to improving the lives of children and families in urban settings.
- While legislative changes are warranted, a lot can be done within the current Act provided it is properly interpreted and applied (e.g. range of services, customary care).

2.4 Presentation #4

Youth, mobility and child welfare service in urban communities;
Presenter- Kenn Richard, NCFSAT

Presentation Highlights:

- Native Child and Family Services of Toronto serves the largest population of urban Aboriginal children and families. Despite the myth that the Aboriginal population in Toronto is transient, over half of them are long term residents of the city. This is indicative of a growing multi-generational community and the need for culturally appropriate services for children and youth. For this reason, NCFST provides several on-going cultural programs for children and youth, which are delivered on and off-site.
- There is a growing need for transitional housing and shelter. Homelessness is identified as a primary reason for child apprehension.
- Inner city gangs continue to threaten the wellbeing of Aboriginal children and youth. Aboriginal youth tend to be drawn into African-Canadian gangs or South Asian gangs which results in not only antisocial and criminal behaviours but also a further loss of their cultural identity.

- Current funding fails to support the need to liaise in a meaningful way with Bands, does not account for the rapid growth of the Aboriginal child and youth population nor the complexity of cases. The funding approach also fails to address cultural considerations, the need for wraparound services and supports for transition-aged youth.

Summary of Discussion:

- Although Toronto’s situation is distinct because of the size of the city and of the services available within it, there was general agreement that the picture presented by Kenn applies to other urban centres.
- There was agreement that the needs of urban Aboriginal children and families are not less severe than those who live on reserves and are influenced by the challenges of the big city.
- The inadequacy of the approach to and levels of funding for CASs was acknowledged. Without diminishing the validity of those concerns, at the same time, resources can be sought outside of child welfare. For example, the *Legal Aid Services Act* provides opportunities to establish Aboriginal legal clinics. These agencies could then provide legal support services to children and families for child welfare matters. This sort of creative thinking is needed to better serve Aboriginal children and families in large urban areas.

2.5 Presentation #5

The CAS model as applied to Aboriginal children in urban communities;
 Presenter- Karen Hill, OACAS

Presentation Highlights:

- Many Aboriginal families are fleeing their communities on reserves to escape violence and extremely poor living conditions. “They are refugees within their own country”. In turn, these families are met with challenges when they arrive in urban cities as there are significant contextual differences between reserve communities and urban communities. Reserve communities tend to be small and tightly-knit so that discipline, mutual support and constant monitoring exist among the members of the community. In urban settings, however, this level of scrutiny is lost and a different type of scrutiny emerges where neighbours contact authorities after hearing yelling or when children miss school. In the absence of community support, Aboriginal families become extremely vulnerable.

- Child welfare agencies must understand that Aboriginal families are often exploited, and live in a chronic state of stress. This leads to multi-generational trauma, significant deterioration of functioning, and hopelessness. Mainstream approaches to these unique challenges do not help Aboriginal children and their families. Child welfare agencies must implement a philosophically different approach, and need to support families with proper care and cultural connectedness.

Summary of Discussion:

- Aboriginal CASs have higher case loads and most of their case loads are very complex and demand heavy levels of resources.
- Aboriginal families have needs that are much greater than child welfare services and support. In this regard, a priority must be strong partnership and building relationships for positive outcomes for children and families.

3.0 Summary of Themes

In addition to the particulars reflected in the sections above, the Commission noted certain themes that should inform the thinking of agencies and the government as they work toward improving opportunities and outcomes for Aboriginal children and families in urban settings.

1. Trust and strengthening partnerships among urban Aboriginal service providers

A collaborative approach among Aboriginal agencies is needed to improve the lives of Aboriginal children and families living in urban settings. Families who leave their reserve communities to settle in large urban cities are often exposed to violence, chronic poverty, and deterioration of functioning. Long-term residents also face multi-generational challenges that include addiction, mental health, and cultural awareness issues. As such, Aboriginal cases are very complex and require support from multitude of social/human services. Service agencies must develop and foster partnerships with each other to ensure that their services are accessible for families in need, and to foster a holistic approach to child welfare.

2. Progress within the current legislative framework

Although some amendments should be considered, child welfare agencies should explore opportunities that are possible within the current legislation. Part X of the CFSA goes well beyond child protection services. Furthermore, other statutes may be leveraged to benefit Aboriginal children and families. For example, it is possible under the *Legal Aid Services Act* to establish Aboriginal legal clinics.

3. Training and education

There is a growing need for education and training of Aboriginal human service professionals in Aboriginal communities to meet the complex needs of children and families living in urban settings. There is a lack of cultural safety in mainstream services that can be addressed in part, through education and cultural training. Social Work educational programs should require courses on Aboriginal people and culture to encourage the development of knowledgeable and motivated Aboriginal workers for service agencies and greater cultural awareness by non-Aboriginal social workers. Educational curricula that reflect the historical trauma and cultural distinctiveness of Aboriginal peoples should be negotiated with colleges, universities and with the Associations that provide educational programs to CAS staff.

4. Culturally inclusive approach to child welfare

Cultural learning and connectedness are critical for Aboriginal children and families in large urban settings and should be part of the work that is done by CASs with every child, youth and family. Unlike on reserve communities, in the cities there is a lack of physical space or place for them to learn and experience their culture. Developing relationships with other Aboriginal people can be challenging, especially for young children and youth.

5. Lack of Recognition

Lack of recognition of the realities of Urban Aboriginal people, made worse by indifference and the absence of reliable data comes in many forms.

- The Metis people are not recognized as a distinct Aboriginal identity and are often not differentiated from First Nations by policy makers and service providers.
- Similarly, the differences in cultures within First Nations are overlooked or dismissed as not significant.

- Reserve communities are recognized as having some legitimacy because they have a political structure and a place in legislation, while urban Aboriginal communities are overlooked.
- The complexity of cases in large centres which combines the challenges of all Aboriginal people with the risks and challenges of large cities is not recognized. The focus is typically on the very real challenges of isolation and access to services in small, remote, Northern communities-- but too often at the expense of acknowledging the multitude of issues faced by urban Aboriginal families and children.

6. Funding Approaches

Funding approaches for child welfare and other sectors do not reflect urban Aboriginal realities and the demands on Aboriginal service providers. They are based on government program lines and as such are not geared to a holistic approach to healing and well-being and do not support culturally safe and appropriate services.

4.0 Commission Recommendations

The Urban Aboriginal Seminar provided the Commission with further insights from a number of leaders of organizations that serve Aboriginal children and families in Ontario. We thank all of the participants for their generosity in taking the time to share their views with us and with one another.

Much of what we heard reinforced advice and recommendations that we have previously made; but looking at Aboriginal challenges and issues from an urban perspective has given us a different level of understanding that has led us to recommend further actions.

The Commission therefore recommends that:

The language of the *CFSA* should be amended to replace outdated and imprecise terms that refer to Aboriginal children and families and more specifically, to recognize First Nations, Métis and Inuit as the three Aboriginal identities. These amendments should be made when the *CFSA* is next reviewed, as required under Section 224 of the Act.

Further to the Commission's recommendations on Aboriginal child welfare (December 20, 2011) that an overall strategy be developed for Aboriginal child welfare (recommendation #1) and that action be taken on certain near-term priorities (recommendation #2), the Commission recommends that:

In the preparation of a strategy for Aboriginal child welfare and in developing plans to address tactical and short-term issues, urban Aboriginal considerations be taken into account and leaders from organizations serving Aboriginal children and families in urban communities be engaged in those efforts.

In light of the observations of the participants at the Urban Aboriginal Seminar regarding the value of such a meeting and their desire to see further sessions in the future, the Commission recommends that:

Leaders of organizations serving urban First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and families meet at least twice each year to identify priority issues and potential solutions that they can implement together and further, that they communicate the results of these discussions broadly, including to appropriate Ministries of the Ontario government.

Appendix 1



Commission to Promote
Sustainable Child Welfare

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Urban Aboriginal Seminar

Wednesday, July 18, 2012
10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

The Longhouse
Native Child and Family Services –
30 College Street, Toronto

AGENDA

Time	Item
10:30	Opening Ceremony , Welcome and Introductory Remarks
11:00	Presentation #1: Sylvia Maracle, OFIFC <i>Cultural, social and other human services for Aboriginal children and families in urban communities</i>
	Discussion
11: 30	Presentation #2: Doug Wilson or Wenda Watteyne, MNO <i>Distinctiveness of Métis children and families and their needs in urban communities</i>
	Discussion

12:00	Lunch Break
1:00	Presentation #3: Betty Kennedy, ONWA <i>The Perspective of and challenges for Aboriginal women and mothers in urban communities</i>
	Discussion
1:30	Presentation #4: Kenn Richard, NCFST <i>Youth, mobility, and child welfare services in urban communities</i>
	Discussion
2:30	Presentation #5: Karen Hill, OACAS <i>Children's Aid Society model as applied to Aboriginal children and families in urban communities</i>
	Discussion
3:00	Response to the Presentations and Discussion: Lead Respondent- Theresa Stevens, ANCFSAO
	Open Discussion
3:30	Closing

Appendix 2

List of Participants

Name	Official Title	Organization
Greene, Basil	Board Chair and Elder	Anishinaabe Abinoojii Family Services
Atanasoff, Mark	Quality Assurance Analyst	Native Child and Family Services of Toronto
Ense, Linda	Executive Director	Native Women's Centre
Gonneville, Shelley	Manager of Operations	Métis Nation of Ontario
Hardy, Micheal	Executive Director	Dilico Anishinabek Family Care
Hill, Karen	Director, Aboriginal Services	Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies
Keddie, Marion	Director, Finance & Admin	Native Child and Family Services of Toronto
Kennedy, Betty	Executive Director	Ontario Native Women's Association
Maracle, Sylvia	Executive Director	Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres
Quintanilla, Teala	Child & Youth Policy Analyst	Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres
Richards, Kenn	Executive Director	Native Child and Family Services of Toronto
Russell, Storm	Senior Policy Analyst	Métis Nation of Ontario
Schultz, Kimberleigh	Homelessness Policy Analyst	Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres
Smith, Tannis	Advisor	Ontario Native Women's Association
Stevens, Theresa	Executive Director	Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario
Tabobondung, Carrie	Executive Director	Mnaasged Child & Family Services
Watteyne, Wenda	Director, Healing & Wellness	Métis Nation of Ontario
Sturtevant, Darryl	Assistant Deputy Minister	Ministry of Children and Youth Services
Lewis, Barry	Commissioner	Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare
Underwood, Ene	Commissioner	Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare
Lee, Chres	MSW/JD Student	Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare