



# TRANSFORMATION PROJECT

INDIGENOUS  
PARALLEL  
PROCESS

JULY 2024





Trellis' commitment to reconciliation starts with taking this opportunity to acknowledge our honour and privilege to live and work within the Treaty 7 territory. We acknowledge the traditional and ancestral territory and oral practices of the Blackfoot Confederacy, which includes the Siksika Nation, the North and South Piikani Nations and the Kainai Nation. We also acknowledge the other members of Treaty 7 First Nations, the Tsuut'ina and and İyāñé Nakoda (Stoney Nakoda) which include Chiniki, Bearspaw and Goodstoney First Nations. In addition, the City of Calgary is homeland to the historic Northwest Métis and to the Otipemisiwak Métis Government, Métis Nation Battle River Territory, Nose Hill Métis District 5 and Elbow Métis District 6. Finally, we acknowledge all nations, genders and spirits who live, work and play in Moh'kinstsis, the Blackfoot name for Calgary, and Treaty 7 Region of Southern Alberta who help us steward this land, honour and celebrate this territory.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For over a century, Indigenous children in Canada have been removed from their families and home communities by non-Indigenous agencies. The “Sixties Scoop” was a child welfare adoption and fostering program across Canada that “scooped up” Indigenous children from their families and placed them in mostly non-Indigenous homes. It began in the late 1950s and persisted into the 1980s. In fact, between 1989 and 2012, First Nations children specifically spent over sixty-six million nights in foster care, or 167,000 years of childhood (Blackstock, 2016). This does not account for the often-under-represented Métis children also lost to the system. Today there are more Indigenous children in the child welfare system than there were at the height of the Sixties Scoop. As University of Regina Professor Raven Sinclair, herself a Sixties Scoop survivor, states:

“Sadly, the involvement of the child welfare system is no less prolific in the current era... the “Sixties Scoop” has merely evolved into the “Millennium Scoop.”

In recent years, there has been a significant push from Indigenous leaders and child welfare advocates across the country to address the myriad of systemic issues contributing to the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care. But experts say factors like colonialism, chronic underfunding of child welfare systems, discriminatory practices and poverty remain.

While the Canadian/Western model of community-care tends to still be firmly focused within Indigenous communities there is an increasing argument that communities impacted and harmed by existing child welfare practices must be the ones to lead pathways to transformation.

In January 2023 Trellis began its journey of transformation by asking a small group of community Elders one simple question: “What do you consider the most important component of a revised Indigenous group care model”? Paired with several engagements with Indigenous youth, Trellis staff, and through a comprehensive literature review, a series of immediate, medium, and long-term programming, organizational, sector and systems transformations form the content of this report and are outlined below. Additional best Indigenous group care practice models and conceptual materials can be found in the Appendix, and literature review at the end of this report.

TRELLIS SPECIFIC TRANSFORMATIONS:

## 1. YOUTH AND FAMILY

Immediate Transformations: Programming & Organizational

- a. Ensure that housing/basic needs are a given.
- b. Allow for more parental guidance/involvement in existing group home.
- c. Resource long-term therapeutic cultural/holistic interventions.
- d. Reduce/remove systems racism and Western bias in existing group home/practices.

## 2. TRELLIS STAFF

Immediate to Medium-term Transformations: Programming & Organizational

- a. Ensure children remain within and retain their connection with community.
- b. Recognize importance of the interconnectedness of language and culture.
- c. Recognize criticality in incorporating Indigenous values.

## 3. AGENCY

Medium to Long-term Transformations: Sector and Systemic

- a. Work to overhaul Children’s Services model, particularly with respect to Indigenous children & families.
- b. Embrace allyship as a practice model.
- c. Develop and pilot an Indigenous family-systems model of care: “Capturing Families” (Family Systems Lodge - Pilot)

These transformations are monumental in scale as are most decolonizing practices which centre a return to Indigenous epistemologies. They also fall within the first five Calls to Actions (CTA) in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) report which relate directly to the child intervention system and should therefore be considered not only aligned but most urgent if we are to transform the health and welfare of Indigenous children, youth, and families now and into the future.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CALLS TO ACTION



# TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF CANADA (TRC) CALL TO ACTION

## CTA #1

Calls on all levels of government to commit to minimizing the number of Indigenous children in care through resourcing, assessing, monitoring, and educating child and family services organizations.

## CTA #2

Calls on all levels of government to produce and publish annual reports with Indigenous-specific data, including the number of Indigenous children in care (as compared to the number of non-Indigenous children in care), the reason for apprehension, total spending on services, and the effectiveness of interventions.

## CTA #3

Calls on all levels of government to fully implement Jordan's Principle, which is a child-first principle that ensures Indigenous children get the care they need when they need it.

## CTA #4

Calls on the federal government to enact Indigenous child intervention legislation establishing national standards for apprehension and custody cases and various principles, including affirmation of the right of Indigenous peoples to establish and maintain their own child and family services agencies, the importance of taking the history of Residential Schools into consideration, and the prioritization of culturally-appropriate placements.

## CTA #5

Calls on all levels of government to develop culturally-appropriate parenting programs for Indigenous families.

In closing, the Trellis transformations serve to address and provide a guidepost for Trellis to help with the healing of Indigenous families; specifically, through changes to policies, process/practice, and re-emergence of oral pre-colonial structures. Aligning with the voices of the Elders who assisted, these transformations focus elevating gifts, not the problems of families; prioritizing culture & ceremony and most importantly using trauma informed prevention & healing models that serve the entire family. Most of the transformations are long term and will require allyship with interested parties while others can be implemented fairly quickly; serving to build a better future for Indigenous families. It has been an honor to help tell this new story of hope and transformation.

- All my relations, Suzanne and Sharon

# METHODOLOGY

## HOW WE CAME TO KNOW

Indigenous knowledge is diverse, with unique contributions & insights that are often place-based and embedded in language, place & Natural laws. Western knowledge is based on empirical truths and one-knowable reality enacted through a variety of knowledge traditions, methods, tools, and approaches to knowing & recording the world. Indigenous research methodologies in contrast are active, centering Indigenous voices, issues, and historical antecedents in ways that are aimed at offering discernable benefits to Indigenous people and communities. Co-created research that defines problems or community knowledge gaps with a focus on the desires of community can also re-frame research to better serve community interests. As described by Tuck (2009) desire-based methodologies embrace the messy and multi-layered future-state desires of communities. They also apply a more holistic lens, exposing the multidimensional destruction of colonial process as experienced by communities in ways that have not been visible before.

"...desire-based research frameworks are concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives. ...Such an axiology is intent on de-pathologizing the experiences of dispossessed and disenfranchised communities so that people are more than broken and conquered. This is to say that even when communities are broken and conquered, they are so much more than that—so much more that this incomplete story is an act of aggression." (2009: 416)

Approached from this "eyes-wide-open" perspective, Indigenous research conducted in ethical, multi-dimensional, desire based, and holistic spaces can generate added information which can be both self-determining and empowering for researchers, participating communities, the academy and society overall. Supported from within, Indigenous research can help re-build community identity, pride, and Nation sovereignty.

Principles of Natural laws are embodied within Indigenous stories adding to the richness of the data being received. According to Pikani Elder/ Dr. Reg Crowshoe (2020) when operating within an oral tradition research questions become iterative, complex, and continually fluid based upon the filtration of good and bad information from participants, and their environments as they tell their stories. This necessitates a fluid research structure that can shift with the ebbs and flows of the participants as more information is revealed. This culturally sensitive approach builds the human relationships so critical in asking Elders to share their knowledge and respects the unspoken rules of social and cultural conduct (aspects often overlooked by those unfamiliar with Indigenous methodologies). This entails the following:

- Having a respectful, long-term relationship with Elders.
- In-person and face-to-face circle conversation opening with a prayer and smudge.
- Listening first, and then being invited to speak.
- Sharing of thoughts and observations.
- Being generous and respectful to others.
- Not flaunting knowledge or "expertise."

A photograph of Elder Darryl Brass, a man wearing a brown hat and a dark shirt with colorful beaded necklaces, sitting in a chair and reading a red book titled "BAD MEDICINE". He is in a room with bookshelves in the background.

**Elder, Darryl Brass**  
Trellis Circle Keeper

# CULTURAL PRINCIPALS OF A PARALLEL APPROACH

The cultural principles of a parallel approach include discipline, responsibility, respect, accountability, and sanctified kindness – these principles are critical when working in this way. Parallel work preferences oral practice instead of the default written systems used by Western organizations. Communication, decision making, and implementation of actions are all facilitated through ceremony or talking circles as required. Contextually, the complementary parallels between the oral practice and the written practice can be seen in Figure 1. Developing the new direction for Trellis is centred on the journey of paralleling Indigenous and Western ways based on the following principles both today and into the future:

- Ethical space as the foundation for all discussions and decisions.
- Elders lead discussions and decisions.
- Western allies support gatherings and documentation of “truth.”
- Indigenous and Western allies work together as relatives.
- Indigenous governance principles are applied to all activities going forward.

To create ethical space, we must acknowledge that there is a Western system and an Indigenous system, both performing the same functions in parallel as described below.

| FUNCTION      | INDIGENOUS WAYS                                  | WESTERN WAYS                                       |
|---------------|--|--|
| Assembly      | Meet in a Circle                                 | Meet at a Table                                    |
| Call to Order | Open the meeting with a Smudge                   | Open the meeting with a Gavel                      |
| Discussion    | Circle Leaders guide the discussion              | Meeting Chair guides the discussion                |
| Decision      | Decisions are made by Consensus                  | A Motion / Vote makes decisions                    |
| Recording     | Discussions and decisions are captured in a Song | Discussions and decisions are in Written Documents |
| Application   | Requests are made with a Pipe Ceremony           | Requests are made with Written Documents           |

Figure 1

Ethical space recognizes and honors Western and Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing without imposing on one or the other. A commitment to ethical space:

- Creates relationships based on trust and mutual respect.
- Allows systems to work together to achieve a shared purpose.
- Means both systems are honoured as equally valuable.
- Requires knowing and validating each system in parallel.
- Creates an opportunity to work together with integrity and shared purpose as a pathway to reconciliation.

As traditional knowledge and worldviews are embedded within oral practice, the use of Venue, Action, Language, and Song (VALS) are key components of any oral process. Activities undertaken in Ethical space require validation. Validation can occur in diverse ways. The table below demonstrates how Western practices parallel to the VALS process.

| VALS     | INDIGENOUS VALS WAYS                      | WESTERN PRACTICES                     |
|----------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Venue    | Identify place of smudge for gathering    | Location of meeting and call to order |
| Action   | Demonstration of qualifications / ability | Attendees and roles/qualifications    |
| Language | Discourse and knowledge shared            | Discussion and official motions       |
| Song     | Validation of legal right                 | Approval of minutes                   |

# WAYS OF DOING

Historically, research or (engagement) has been done on Indigenous people with results that are either meaningless or harmful to community. For engagement to be useful, it was critical to have the constructs of health, healing, child welfare and group homes understood and translated into Indigenous concepts that have meaning. Underscored by conceptual frameworks such as OCAP™ (ownership, control, access, and possession) and FIBI (For

Indigenous, By Indigenous), we worked in ethical spaces that enabled the co-creation and validation of Elders direction described in this work. For Elders to own, protect and control how their information was to be used, Elder Dr. Reg Crowshoe's governance model was used with permission, to parallel and translate the concerns and transformations in ways that all parties could understand and support as seen in Figure 2.



Figure 2

## CONSULTATION CIRCLE PROCESS

Elders are challenging systems to bring back appropriate oral methods such as circle process and ceremony for community discussions including active, co-created research. Oral process' such as storytelling can uncover hidden truths that are important to communities (Lightfoot, 2017) and positions researchers in essential roles as allied co-investigators, with a mandate to help revise these historical wrongs for the benefit of community healing. Our Elders are PhDs as understood in parallel and are respected for their knowledge of oral process and community needs and the value of cultural knowledge and practice as a way of restoring and resurging our communities.

The stories and direction from the three (3) Elders involved in this work were critical to understanding lived experiences of Indigenous communities, their relationship to child welfare overall, and Western group homes specifically. Elders included in the circles were leaders, educators, Knowledge keepers, nurturers, warriors, and activists who guided their nations through the darkest times of the 20th century (reservation era, residential school, language loss, sixties scoop, child welfare, self-governance, constitutional change, land claims, intergenerational traumas, environmental chaos, cultural upheaval).

## ELDERS ETHICS CIRCLE PROCESS

We began the work by offering tobacco to three (3) Elders from the Calgary area to function as the Elders' Ethics Circle. The Elders accepted this mandate and assisted with review, translation, and approval of the research questions, as well as helped guide future processes through protocol. After accepting our request to meet, we coordinated a half day circle to describe the research and re-frame the original research questions in a way that made greater sense from a traditional perspective. Circles were recorded with permission and transcribed. Guided by a parallel oral governance model we premised Indigenous experience and advice, paralleling oral direction with written literature if appropriate. Elders were posed several key questions:

1. What do you consider the most important component of a revised Indigenous care model?
2. What must change to integrate the spirit & intent of Bill C-92 re: urban & designated communities?
3. To best serve the actual needs & healing of our families, what is needed?

Following our work with the Elders ten (10) Indigenous youth with lived experience in the group home system (current or previous) were also interviewed by Trellis staff who held a positive relationship with them. They were asked:

1. What did you like about the current child welfare group care system? What did not work?
2. If we were to build a new system what should be changed?
3. What barriers have you faced being in group care as we try to unify families? (youth & families)

We also hosted two engagement sessions with Indigenous and non-Indigenous Trellis staff to understand the following questions:

1. Should we be building a prevention & diversion model instead of intervention?
2. How can we divert away from the child welfare group care system and not towards it?
3. What would you need to take it to the next step (what would the family need to be successful in this new model, timelines for success, what would it take)?
4. If we create a new model, how do we help families and communities continue their healing journey (education, pride in being Indigenous etc...)?

Finally, six (6) Indigenous, Nation and non-Indigenous organizations involved in aspects of the child welfare overall, and Western group homes system. They were asked:

1. Should we be building a prevention & diversion model instead of intervention?
2. How can we divert away from the child welfare group care system and not towards it?
3. In this new Trellis model, how do we help families and communities continue their healing journey at the same time as the youth (education, pride in being Indigenous etc.)?
4. What would Trellis need to take it to the next step as an agency (that is still working in intervention) with an intent to move towards a different model, timelines for success, what would it take?



**Elder, Charlotte Yellowhorn McLeod**

# KEY FRAMES AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Transformative thinking requires an understanding of the distinct viewpoints of Indigenous Elders on the cultural and social relationships between systems, such as Western child welfare/CFS and group homes. Figure 3 constructs were used as grounding; first to historically frame Indigenous people's relationship to child welfare and secondly, to transform Western child welfare/CFS and group homes into a paradigm today that functions as a place of healing and reconciliation.

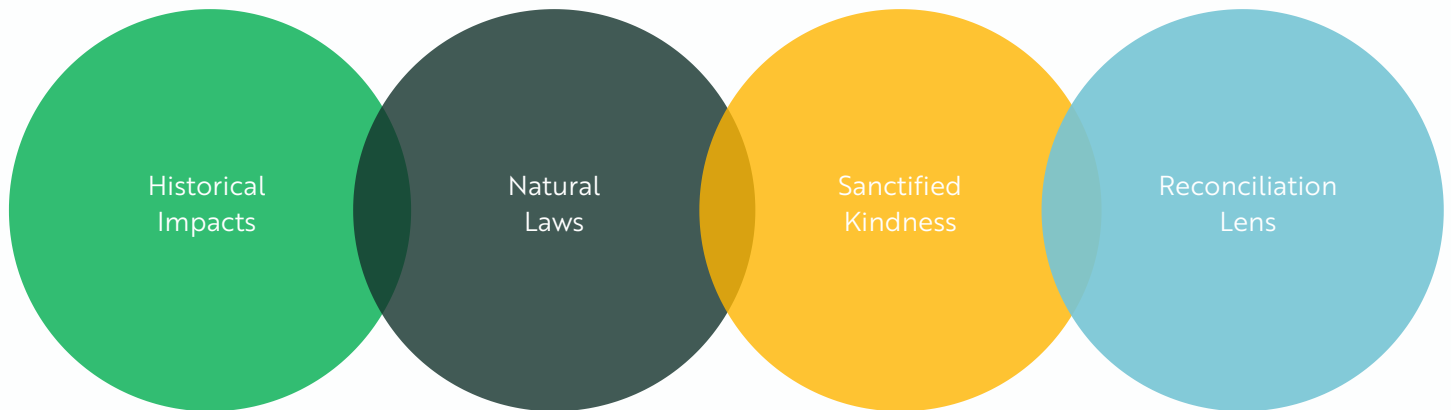


Figure 3

## HISTORICAL IMPACTS

Historically, Indigenous communities operated from common cultural understandings that supported intricate governance structures including legal, educational, housing, family, and health systems. This relational understanding – or “all my relations” – included the land and the systems upon it. Most Indigenous communities today still understand themselves “in relation to the land” hence the destruction wrought from colonial expansion has had devastating effects on entire communities.

New structures and policies such as residential schools, the Indian Act, and Métis land scrip brought Western governance and land systems into communities. The “jagged worldviews” that exist today, most frequently viewed as the result of intergenerational trauma, were established, and later maintained by these institutions and their Western systems, and further estranged Indigenous people from their own knowledge systems. Indigenous leaders from across Canada have expressed the dire need to address the numerous systemic problems that contribute to the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care through extreme transformations in the child welfare systems and on the ground supports. Extensive intergenerational trauma is also evidenced in the high rates of child welfare, homelessness, housing insecurity, and mental health issues. Every community is impacted by intergenerational trauma, so this must be considered when working on community healing.

## Natural Laws (Making Relatives/Relationality)

Natural laws are understood as the worldviews/a way of life that informed Indigenous communities prior to colonization. Siim’ohksin and Wahkotowin are ways of understanding for example, what family wellness meant to Indigenous peoples prior to colonization; concepts of relationality to each other and the land. The Nitsitapi (Blackfoot) say that their worldview comes from the Sky People; this is where the stories of creation and Natural laws are born. Every Indigenous Nation has their own distinct worldview, the way in which they spiritually and physically situate themselves in the world relative to all other beings; that is, their relationships. The act of ‘Making Relatives’ is reflected within the concept of Siim’ohksin (Nitsitapi) or Wahkotowin (Nehiyew) and refers to the fact that all things in creation are related. Relationship is understood through the cultural principles of Discipline, Responsibility, Respect, and Accountability. When we talk about using a Siim’ohksin or Wahkotiwini approach, we are talking about using an oral approach to making relatives. Each term is similar in context, thus validating the other. Both function in an oral capacity on a human level, within the environment (urban, in this respect) among the community, family, and individual. Siim’ohksin or Wahkotiwini are the closest approximations for the Western idea of ‘Making Relatives’ and underscores a complex ideology and ceremony of building relationships through sanctified kindness and active Reconciliation.

## SANCTIFIED KINDNESS

Is a practice that creates a safe space for open conversation, equality, compassion, and gentleness to all living things; it can create a safe space for learning and understanding. It can provide the foundations for truth and reconciliation, and the first steps towards eliminating systemic racism. Early education and awareness are critical elements of sanctified kindness.

“We were given sanctified kindness through the smudge. It brought us together as relatives, with the whole environment: plants, animals, all human beings. We believe no one was stronger than the other, but we all need each other to achieve goals.”  
- Elder Reg Crowshoe

To Indigenous people, sanctified kindness is one of the Natural laws, it brings people together as relatives, with the whole environment, plants, animals, and all human beings. It is about building that relationship. If coming from a world of sanctified kindness, anything is possible. The concept of sanctified kindness aligns with the idea of “sharing with compassion,” it is the giving of a resource, including stories, to help the community.

## RECONCILIATION LENS

Reconciliation may be seen by some as the restoration of a conciliation state. Many Indigenous people claim that this initial state between the Indigenous people of Canada and newcomers never existed. Others define reconciliation as making peace with the past in a way that creates respectful and long-term partnerships between different peoples. Making and maintaining relatives as well as comprehending how diverse values may and should guide communal healing are all aspects of reconciliation. By developing and upholding a mutually respectful partnerships or allyship between Indigenous communities and Western systems, a reconciliation lens seeks to preserve the work in parallel rather than mixing or premising one approach above the other. To make that happen, it is necessary to be conscious of the history, to accept the harm that has been done, and to concentrate on steps that will alter Western behaviour. Norms, system bias, and complicity are among the things that need to be contested, as well as alternative service models.



**Elder, Diane Meguinis**



# WHAT WE HEARD HOW WE CAME TO UNDERSTAND

## YOUTH AND FAMILY INTERVIEWS: DISCUSSIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

### CLIENT/LIVED EXPERIENCE

“They want a perfect family before you go back like them to be perfect when the truth is, there is no such thing as a perfect family, any family, like, you know, these things like every child needs their own bed.”

- Indigenous youth comment

Interviews with Indigenous young people in the Western child welfare/CFS and group homes consistently spoke to four transformations that will be articulated below. The young people we spoke to cite many negatives with the existing system and few positives. Young people spoke wished for an “intervention” where they could still have connection with family, more cultural and therapeutic supports, and a greater voice and decision making for their own future. Young people spoke about the “professionalization of parenting” that comes with group home experiences; most young people missed their families and with a few exceptions their biggest driver was to remain close to their siblings, parents, and extended families. Because of Western bias and racist narratives that continue to demean Indigenous families, most youth felt and were in-fact told, that

felt that they were being placed in group homes as a form of punishment that disallowed any opportunity for belonging or connection to who they were as Indigenous people, as well as to their families. In addition, most youth felt that their basic needs (shelter, food, and security) were not being adequately addressed.

The following four transformative opportunities below expand upon these narratives and should be implemented immediately in existing Trellis group homes. Each transformation is described as either programming, organizational sector, or systems. Programming and organizational can be changed immediately, while sector or system implies medium or long term in length, depending on the changes required.

## IMMEDIATE TRANSFORMATION

### Ensure that Housing/ Basic Needs are a Given

#### DISCUSSION

Most youth felt that additional funding was required so that their stay in group homes felt more like home. Many felt like their stay forced them to grow up very quickly and, in these cases landing in a “safe place” with other peers and a sense of foundational safety was critical. Most youth appreciated the recreational opportunities that went along with their stay however, clothing, food and other foundational needs were sometimes cited as inadequate. This is particularly important considering the developmental and nutritional stages of teenage and early adulthood. As one young person said,

“We sometimes barely get any, like, we barely have any money for food. And it is like because we are a small house, but like, a lot of people here. Like, eat a lot of food. And it is not really like most of them get, most of us get into fights, because we are all hungry, because we do not really have like, we are told to, like, we get suckered. But we are told to make ourselves lunch and breakfast, when the system does not really have enough money so we can buy the things so we can make ourselves breakfast or lunch.”

#### WHAT THE YOUTH HAD TO SAY >>



## IMMEDIATE TRANSFORMATION

### Allow for more Parental Guidance / Involvement in Existing Group Homes

#### DISCUSSION

Parental guidance (or the guidance of a safe and caring adult) and long-term involvement is an important consideration to transforming the group home setting. While group homes offered non-parental and peer mentorship supports, most young people longed for their families, wished for family reunification, and recommended an approach that allowed the family to heal and grow together. Most young people suffered because of being separated from their families and therefore this section should be considered as the greatest point of systems transformation. An important nuance to surface here is that in some cases bio-parents may not be safe, and in those cases other caring adults may be more appropriate.

While the desire to reconnect to natural family (parents and extended family) was by far the strongest recommendation many cited barriers with the system and the workers to re/connect with family. Many spoke about physically distant placements far from their families when really all they wanted to do was to walk over to their parents' house or their families so that they could feel connected. As one young person said,

"It is hard to connect with family. I cannot walk over to my mom's house. It is not the best system and like, for kids who like trying to go back home, for kids that must go back home, it is not really built for that."

For those youth who did not feel a connection or sense of safety with their natural family a secondary option was to provide non parental natural supports or peer mentorship options. Dis-trust in the system and in their family of origin made it difficult for some of the youth to imagine a safe space to heal. Many spoke at length of time it takes to build positive relationships and some youth spoke about being closed off to the world mostly because of their past experiences. As one young person said,

"Youth are propelled into survival mode, and an element of independence that they are not ready for, lack of secure relationships they can trust and lean on for guidance and support through their difficulties and their identity journey. It feels like every move is under a microscope."

In these cases, young people advocated for peer mentorship opportunities where youth who had previously been in care could help those who are currently in care. Offering opportunities for youth with lived experience to give back as a peer was one option to help youth who are struggling and do not wish to be reconnected with their natural families.

Finally, most felt that the system/ group home was in place to punish them for something that was out of their control. Many young people spoke about being split up from their siblings and how this created additional trauma for them. Most also felt that the system was intent on keeping them "as prisoners" until such time that their family was "perfect" as defined by Western standards. Most felt that they did not have a voice in who they might choose to live with and that in fact they were never even part of this discussion. As one youth said,

"...every child needs their own bed. Well, I grew up with bunk beds with my siblings, you know, when you grew up in one room, you know, and that is just very normal, and they make a lot of red tape for you to cross before you can do anything."



# IMMEDIATE TRANSFORMATION

## Resource Long Term Therapeutic Cultural / Holistic Interventions

### DISCUSSION

One of the positives noted was the existing accessibility of therapeutic interventions. Young people who enter group care are automatically paired with the therapist to help with the short-term trauma of being removal from family. These types of therapeutic interventions need to be fully resourced and available throughout group care, as well as aftercare with bio-books to take with them. Some young people liked the model of aunties and uncles where different traditional family roles and dynamics occurred organically. Many requested Elders on site for cultural learning and supports and culturally relevant opportunities for learning, sharing, and growing; to build love, belonging and connection. Quite simply youth wanted to be in a space where growth and healing is nurtured however in most cases young people felt there was lack of culturally relevant and holistic programming to support them.

Many young people felt that support for their parents was also necessary in addition to the kinds of support they were receiving. Some suggestions were parenting classes, circle of security, circle of courage and other programs that encouraged social emotional

learning and the development of parents and families. As one young person said,

“And it makes me think about how we must work with families to help fix these issues and to provide a space where we can unite families again and figure out what is going on. More my parents on the family side. That is the problem. I do know that they do try to connect with my family. It is just my family itself that has so maybe more support for the family to help them as well too.”

Finally, Indigenous staffing was noted by all respondents as critical to the success of either group home or family intervention models. Indigenous workers were considered more caring and culturally sensitive. Young people felt that they could relate better to their stories and their experiences; someone that they could be themselves around without judgment or bias. Many young people felt that Indigenous staff had gone through many, if not all the same things they had and that it felt better to be able to speak to someone who really understood what it meant to be Indigenous in Western society.



## IMMEDIATE TRANSFORMATION

Reduce/remove systems racism and Western bias  
in existing group home / practices

### DISCUSSION

As mentioned in transformation #3 participants felt that and Indigenous staff and systems would reduce the level of stereotyping and bias that they feel underscored the current group home system. Many youth described unacceptable Western assumptions, stereotypes, and racism that permeates the system and as a result negatively influences young people's feelings about themselves as Indigenous people, their families, and their cultural culture. As one young person said,

"I do not know... I suppose some places just feel

like you are not really like a human... they treat you differently I do not know how to explain it but yes, okay. So, there is so many assumptions, like stuff that, you know, for sure. Like the ideas and stuff that workers put into the head. The ideas of your family? Yes, about how bad they are..."

Young people wanted not only for this to cease but wanted to have a stronger voice in the group care setting, in decision making that affected themselves and their families, as well as planning for their own future.



## STAFF INTERVIEWS:

## DISCUSSIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

Interviews with staff and Elders consistently spoke of three transformations, articulated below. Staff and Elders who are familiar with aspects of the Western child welfare/CFS and group homes and those who are involved in the development and delivery of Indigenous-focused programming and supports were interviewed to understand what worked and what needed to shift. They consistently spoke of the need for the relinquishment of government control, mandate, and authority over Indigenous children and families, and for the devolution of full services including respectful funding to community-based

diversionary, prevention, and Wahkotiwin service models. They also stated that these models must be rooted in Indigenous values—where the family and the community are involved in the care and protection of children.

Below are examples of innovative practices across Canada that have successfully transformed Western child welfare/CFS and group homes into community-based diversionary, prevention, and Wahkotiwin style service models:

### EXAMPLE #1

After finding what is believed to be 751 unmarked children's graves at the site of the former Marieval Residential School, Cowessess First Nation was the first community to make use of Bill C-92, federal legislation passed in June 2019, which gives jurisdiction over child welfare back to First Nations. In March 2020, the community voted to pass the Miyo Pimatisowin Act, which allows Cowessess First Nation to self-govern and make decisions in the best interest of their children and families and was one of the first in the country. They operate: Child and Family Intervention & Healing Services; Sovereignty & Jurisdiction Services; Cultural Identity & Healing and Connection to Home Fires.

### EXAMPLE #2

Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre in Winnipeg Manitoba operates Family Group Conferencing (FGC) as an Indigenous-led evidence-based model that assists families involved with CFS-mandated agencies become the decision-makers in reunifying their families. Within the structure of the program, all members of a family meet to discuss what is needed to ensure their child(ren) will be cared for and safe and are supported by an FGC mentor. FGC has consistently high prevention and reunification rates, through access to Indigenous teachings and ceremony and by using resources effectively. FGC is a successful way to maintain and reunify Indigenous families and strengthen Indigenous communities through relationships, support, guidance, and advocacy. All services strive to be family focused and responsive to the individual needs of each family. They all incorporate inclusive strength-based practice and respect the cultural practices of Métis families. The programs strengthen families, enhance family functioning, and maintain family. Parenting support and education, differential response/family enhancement, empowering children and youth/Circle of Life, Lifelong connections programming, cultural programming.

### EXAMPLE #3

The Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre (SSSC): Indigenous Family Reunification Centre (IFRC) in Winnipeg Manitoba is a short-term residential program that seeks to keep Indigenous families-in-crisis together rather than separating members into institutions and systems. The intent is not to remove the child(ren) from the home environment and into the child welfare system; rather, the goal is to work with the caregiver(s) by offering them the opportunity to participate in a land-based residential program that provides the necessary supports—cultural, spiritual, clinical, social—that enables them successfully to reintegrate back into their family and community.

These three models operationalize many if not most of the principals we heard from advocating for prevention vs diversion (PVD). Relevant comments are:

- The current system focuses heavily on Intervention –the reality is that if we had the opportunity to be involved with families/children 10 years ago, this focus (intervention) would not be the most important.
- Prevention needs to be the focus—people cannot take care of their children until they take care of themselves (“Early On” model).
- If prevention had more money, intervention would not need to be so heavily funded.
- In terms of timelines, intervention investment is currently a years-long process while prevention is limited.
- New resources for PVD would need to be sourced before moving away from intervention.
- Due to a current focus on intervention, funding for it cannot be cut as there are families who need it; a reshaping of the system could change that.
- If PVD is not done skillfully, it could work against families.
- PVD outcomes must change and align with Indigenous principles vs impact.

The following three transformative opportunities below expand upon these narratives and should be implemented immediately in existing Trellis group homes. Each transformation is described as either programming, organizational sector, or systems. Programming and organizational can be changed immediately, while sector or system implies medium or long term in length, depending on the changes required.

## IMMEDIATE CHANGES FROM THE STAFF



## IMMEDIATE TRANSFORMATION

Ensure children remain within and retain their connection with the community

OUR YOUTH  
ARE OUR  
FUTURE.

### DISCUSSION

"Our youth are our future."

Staff agreed strongly with this sentiment but asked how we prepare them. What ways are best to ensure they return to/maintain connections with their families and communities? One of the Elders spoke of her academic writings on the "Theory of Change," which starts in Spirit ("Who am I?"), then Emotional ("How do I understand?"), then Physical in skill-building, and Mental in a more holistic approach. Refer to the proposal for the current care model.

They also spoke of the need to consider the diversity of Indigenous youth (Cree, Blackfoot, Anishinaabe, Métis, etc.) and the best way to work with and teach them in a general sense ("preparing them"). As with all children and youth, the focus must be on teaching the basic understanding of why things are the way they are within the Indigenous community and worldview, which will contribute to their understanding of the significance of Elder(s) in their lives. One Elder spoke of the introduction to and inclusion in ceremony for youth, such as a Naming and/or Transfer Ceremony; the resurrection of ancestral names is critical in belonging and centering oneself and would contribute to forging a strong bond with Indigenous roots and culture. It is important to include children in care.

"I still have the language (Blackfoot) but don't have the culture so living my life backwards."

- Blackfoot Elder

## IMMEDIATE TRANSFORMATION

Recognize importance of the interconnectedness  
of language and culture

### DISCUSSION

One Elder spoke of his time in the Indian Residential School System (IRS) as a child and how it affected his adult life and later years, tying his experiences to the importance of language. He attended from ages 7-16 and turned to alcohol as a coping mechanism in adulthood. He spoke of how difficult sobering up was, that he quit drinking but found the pain was still there; the reality that without the bottle, he no longer had a crutch. Alcohol, which was introduced/available to buy in the community in 1966, added fuel to IRS efforts—many parents/families were drunk, exacerbating the influence and hold of the Child Welfare System.

He went on to speak of how IRS was the start, with the 60s Scoop continuing the theft of children onwards to the current Child Welfare System. The Indigenous community is dealing with an inherited system that was always broken; therefore, the focus needs to be on fixing it in a way that works within the Indigenous worldview. The current system is the “wrong way back” for children.

He placed great emphasis on the importance and interconnectedness of language in culture and how youth need access and learn their own. He also spoke of the importance of “astoo-ma-top” or growth of what is being taught, with a focus on spirit and action and less talk. He believes that Elders prefer to talk in the language but also need to aggressively work on youth involvement in both language and culture.



## IMMEDIATE TRANSFORMATION

### Recognize criticality in incorporating Indigenous values

#### DISCUSSION

On the topic of family reunification, staff and Elders stated that not only does the programming need to keep children out of care as much as possible, but when they do have to go into care, the number of days they stay there needs to be reduced. The necessary model needs to be rooted in Indigenous values—where the family and the community is involved in the care and protection of children, must be inclusive of Elders/Knowledge keepers/community, and be self-sustaining.

One of the Elders spoke about Bill C-92, how not everyone wants it, and how it comes down to control vs money, with many agencies jumping on because of the dollar value. Bill C-92: An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families affirms the rights and jurisdiction of Indigenous peoples in relation to child and family services and sets out principles applicable, on a national level, to the provision of child and family services in relation to Indigenous children, such as the best interests of the child, cultural continuity, and substantive equality.

Within a rural setting, it is important for First Nations to know what will be done with their children—this is not often done with Métis children. Workers often call the Métis kids the “flavor of the month” because they were easy to place. Within “The Métis Way,” children are sent back to parents/grandparents’ relatives, or someone in the community. Métis children often fall under provincial jurisdiction, therefore separate and/or tailored models are necessary.

One Elder went on to explain how current CFS are neither prevention nor intervention since by the time CFS gets involved, things have already happened to the child/in the family (“after the fact”). Intervention comes after failure/breakdown, therefore they agree that a diversion model would be ideal, where resources are provided to prevent a child from entering the system in the first place. RESPITE is also a necessary part of ANY program. She observed:

“Those who have grown up in care are more willing to give up their kids because it is a ‘crutch.’”

Finally, “Custody cases” are custody agreements between parents and the system; however, CFS is more about court status, with a focus on permanent guardianship orders/temporary guardianship orders because of the money and control attached.

It was agreed that in order for Trellis to serve the best needs of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit children, they need to give up the money/funding over time; acting as an ally to Indigenous agencies in development. An exclusively Indigenous-run, own-authority arm of FNMI is needed. The information also needs to be shared as communities are often within their own world and may be unaware of outside agencies.



**Elder, Karen Acuna**

# AGENCY INTERVIEWS: DISCUSSIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

## AGENCY EXPERIENCES

Six (6) Indigenous, Nation and non-Indigenous organizations involved in aspects of the Western child welfare/CFS, and group homes were interviewed to understand what worked and what needed to shift. Service providers consistently spoke to two basic systemic transformations required for substantive changes for Indigenous youth and families. Quite simply agency participants felt that it was time for

the government to relinquish control, mandate, and authority over Indigenous children and families and allow for the devolution of full services including respectful funding to community based diversionary, prevention and Wahkotiwin services models. These themes will be discussed below in further details as medium or longer-term sector or systemic changes that Trellis can work on as an ally.

## MEDIUM TO LONG-TERM TRANSFORMATIONS: SECTOR AND SYSTEMIC

### MEDIUM TO LONG-TERM TRANSFORMATIONS Work to overhaul the CFS model, particularly with respect to Indigenous children & families

"It is not about that CFS is about control; they are the powerhouse, you know, they are the authority, you know, they took their name, authority, that word authority out of their name... I do not know what year that was 2007, eight, they took that authority word out of their name, but not the practice, they are still very much the authority, they are the boss, and everything that happens within the intervention system, does not happen unless they have approved that. And so, when, when you are in the intervention system, you are an Indian agent in 2023. And I know people do not like that word, but that is what it was.

– Agency comment

## UNPACK EXISTING POLICIES & MANDATE: RECONCILE AUTHORITY & POWER

In 2007 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission outlined 94 Calls to Action with the first five addressing the unparalleled impact of the Child Welfare system on Indigenous peoples. Residential schools, the 60s Scoop and the current child welfare system are consistently referenced as the "new residential school system" and many agencies questioned why in 2023 we are still looking for the answers. For agencies who tried to work within the existing Western system most choose to step out, losing valuable resources and an opportunity to make real changes. As one agency participant shared,

"And that is why we are stepping out of that out of that system. Because we thought we could go into there and create some change and infuse Indigenous parallels. But at the end of the day, they did not want it, you know, they did not want it. And whether it is leadership or legislation or, or just systemic barriers, or all the above. They were not ready; they were not ready to receive the parallels that we were trying to introduce. And, and in the end, when it came down to crisis, when it came down to crisis, when it came down to the

deaths of children, you know, their intervention system, wasn't one of, hey, what can we do differently? We shut down three group homes during our existence, and we shut them down because it was a serious disconnect regarding what was in the best interests of our Indigenous youth. And we felt that group care isn't, is not serving our youth well, but do we need group care how we do? Because what are the other options? we are not going to do it. I have seen them fire people, internally and externally, and now even recently starting to terminate contracts, and communicate to the ministers that, you know, pointing the finger, like, that is what they have done. They are not allies. They never been allies, even though they might use that word."

Most agencies spoke at great length about the reluctance of Western systems to change, the use of statistics, reports, and other mechanism to track "the Indian problem" but with few if any substantive shifts to existing power and mandate. Agencies challenged these stalling tactics and instead wanted to focus on why Indigenous kids were continually coming into care, the human and financial cost of kids in care, and how effective really the western system was in

addressing the real problems of Indigenous kids who were in any type of Western care. One participant felt that even though CFS is understood as intervention that the system itself is built on responding to families “after the fact.” That CFS is not prevention, and it is not intervention and that by the time CFS gets involved, it means the death of the child, the injury of a child and the parents are in jail. This is particularly true for Indigenous families who enter the system with multiple historic and present-day circumstances that have never been dealt with through prevention and diversion. Most believed that a prevention and diversion model would be ideal; specifically, an approach that provided resources to prevent children and their families from ever coming into care. As one agency participant shared,

“And so, we need, obviously, like something to happen today for those kids that are not doing well. So, they need intervention. But we also have families that are like on the margins...on the fringes, just starting their parenthood journey that where we could be doing so much better, so much different. And if it needs to go into intervention, of course, I would be a big supporter and proponent of kinship care, and how important that is to keeping kids connected to their kin, their community, their family, their land, their language, their ceremonies, all those things.”

Agencies questioned whether the existing systems would take this approach since intervening for kids before they came into care, putting the dollars and putting the resources into community-based services would diminish the actual and financial power that CFS is built on. As one agency participant shared, “But people do not want to hear that. Especially when we have all these agencies that are built on our weaknesses and our failures.”

For substantive change, the discretionary power needs to shift from CFS/ social workers, family court and judges to the community or preventative service working with the families. This was a critical change mentioned several times as the existing model that is built on power and authority over Indigenous families is reflected in everything. As one agency participant shared,

“You cannot create this amazing model, and then have all that discretionary power rests with white government, social workers, that you will not get anywhere. We have been doing that for generations, and we have not gotten anywhere. Where does a lot of the authority rest? That decision making, you know, and that is completely different. You know, and so no matter what you create, or what is created with this process, that discretionary power and authority decision making, you know, it can no longer rest with government.”

Finally, participants felt strongly that the Western bias, colonial narratives, and inherent racism in the existing system needs to be acknowledged and removed from services to Indigenous families. Many felt that the whole system is stacked against Indigenous youth and their families. The fidelity of a new community-based model needs to be considered and monitored to reflect substantive change reflected by Indigenous outcomes based in language, worldview, and cultural healing. Practitioners will require training in these new ways of working as agencies worried that if the transition were not done “in a very skillful way,” we could inadvertently build cases against families who otherwise may not experience change and in the end, the intervention fails.



## MEDIUM TO LONG-TERM TRANSFORMATIONS

### Embrace allyship as a practice model



The conversation on “who” should be doing this work, specifically a Wahkotowin community-based model, was a hot point throughout the agency engagement. Indigenous service providers were understood as a non-profit, charitable organization or government with an explicit mandate to serve, support and deliver programs for Indigenous people. Indigenous service providers have experience in delivering culturally relevant programming, and a commitment to co-creation of approaches in ethical space, built on sanctified kindness, and Natural laws. Indigenous service providers also have relevant connections to other Indigenous service providers, Elders, and additional supports that cannot be necessarily captured in the same way by non-Indigenous providers, however allyship by non-Indigenous agencies could be considered in certain circumstances.

Allyship refers to the actions, behaviors, and practices that a formal organization and its leadership willingly undertake to support, amplify, and advocate with others, especially with individuals who do not belong to the same identity groups as themselves. Most participants felt there were two pathways forward for future work in this area:

- Non-Indigenous service providers without the cultural knowledge should move out of this area of service delivery in order to open up space for Indigenous service providers who work from, and honor traditional epistemologies necessary to work with Indigenous youth and families.
- Non-Indigenous agencies, such as Trellis, can act as allied service providers until such time as Indigenous service providers are at full capacity. Agencies such as Trellis who are on a true path reconciliation are working with and consulting with Elders to support true reconciliation; supporting primarily the Indigenous population that they work with. Staff on these teams should primarily be Indigenous and those who are not must prioritize working with, learning, and acknowledging Indigenous history, and the trauma that comes from it. Allied agencies must be willing to move forward in a way supports Indigenous families in the system with new ways of thinking and doing.

## MEDIUM TO LONG-TERM TRANSFORMATIONS

### Develop and pilot an Indigenous family systems model of care

"Prevention & early intervention is a model that people would like to use, to know where they are spending dollars, as opposed to the heavy amount of funding that goes into intervention. None of them have gone into foster care yet. But they end up group homes. And so, these are the kids that they are most concerned about, because a lot of these kids are I mean, they go through the system, then they age out, and then they lose everything. It has been the most successful piece in our view as, as not a key family services provider, but providing support in some capacity to keep families together and do that advocacy."

– Agency comment

Agency participants favored some version of either diversion, prevention or a Wahkotowin approach that included wholistic supports, a family system approaches to healing, language, culture, ceremony, and natural supports in a community-based setting. Most felt that the current systems penalizes; continually blaming families for their failures and inadequacies often from a Western lens that favors' Western ideas about child development, parenting while at the same time ignores the impacts of systems colonization. Family Resource Networks were noted as examples of diversionary work that has successfully supported Indigenous families in a way that eliminates or minimizes the intervention system getting involved as the underlying goal. The other underlying goal is to support vulnerable families during their most difficult and challenging times, helping them to create resiliency and wellbeing in a way that makes sense to them so when crisis does arise, so they have the means, the resources, the connections, and natural supports to address it. As one agency participant shared,

"To me that just feels so foundational. Before anything, it is about where do you put your resources? And we always come from the premise that the families we serve are doing the best they can with what they have. And that includes knowledge. And it includes some natural supports and resources, and they are not to be blamed for where they are, it is more about how you how do we help them gain the knowledge gain, the resources game, whatever capacity they need to be able to meet the needs of their families. And so if you could do that, early on this, a lot of our kids in care have really, really complex high needs, and that they didn't start that way, right, that that grows over time with all the issues and the trauma that is either their experience or handed down of course intergenerationally so, you know, we talked about healing a lot especially with our Indigenous serving programs...helping parents in their own healing journey, so that they have increased resources for their kids."

It should be noted that respondents felt that this shift will require time and "two-paths" – one of intervention for those in crisis, while prevention and intervention models are built. As one agency person said, "the kids and families who need intervention do not go away right. And so, that is how I see the benefits, or the positive outcomes from the prevention and diversion investment will bear out over the years. But then the resource, it is like, you need double resources for a few days for several years, right, so that the new investment and prevention and diversion can have an impact on intervention." This is important to note as finances and outcomes will need to be long term to ensure that substantive changes to both the systems and families are supported for successful transitions. More resources to support families to build their capacity, whether that be with knowledge or skills, or social supports or concrete needs will also be required in community-based programming geared towards diversion, prevention and Wahkotowin ways of healing so that overall, the heavy investment in intervention can diminish.



# UNDERSTANDING THE SIIM'OHKSIN: WAHKOTOWIN APPROACH VS PREVENTION/DIVERSION AND INTERVENTION LODGE PILOT

"It is starting to look like more of a sovereignty model is what we are looking at; a reunification, where the child is at the center, as opposed to the worker, you know, being at the center, and then working outward, you know, so, so we are working with a group of Elders. This model that is currently in existence. Well, the Métis way is to send our children back to one of the parents, the grandparents, a kinship provider, somebody in the community. And the old way was, we never went to court. We just met the children where they were. Sometimes the siblings would come along, sometimes the parents would come along, and they would work with them until they were in a good space, and they would send them back. But we never involved court."

– Agency comment

The words Siim'ohksin (Nitstitapi/ Blackfoot): Wahkotowin (Nehiyew/Cree)–or Natural laws–are words that we were given by our Elders to start creating our own stories around healing. From an Indigenous worldview, all is considered alive, of living energy, and of spiritual value rather than materialistic or financial value. Natural laws are necessary for maintaining a peaceful, thriving, and co-operative society grounded in love and reciprocity. Natural laws says everything is interconnected to everything else, and any change made to one "system" will affect other areas (Redvers, et. al., 2020). With Natural laws or relationships at the core, we have an opportunity to broaden our understanding – to work "in the center of the iceberg" instead of at its tip. Through Natural laws, we can start to understand a path forward supported by anti-colonial and anti-oppressive theory. Most importantly, we preference approaches based on kindness, compassion, and balance. This lens allows us to create our own story and shows us "how to walk" in this work – it challenges us to understand the interconnectedness of healing and wellness, instead of defaulting to an Indigenous or Western approach. While Wahkotowin captures some aspects of both diversion and prevention these are English word that do not connect with the Natural laws that existed prior to colonization and which guided Indigenous lives in a good way. This approach has been in hiding – in hibernation due to the onslaught of colonial violence towards Indigenous peoples but is being repatriated back in a variety of ways including outcomes, programming, and alternatives to CFS and group homes that continue to harm our children and families.

Wahkotowin in many ways can be understood at the core as a family systems model that bring together natural supports, culture, ceremony, and Indigenous epistemologies in ways that are uniquely different from a Western model because they are built from Indigenous ways of knowing not western. Below are several quotes from agency participants that speak to a desire to re-build this approach:

"If we understand the wishes, and dreams and goals that everybody has, and how they can build relationships with Elders, or Knowledge keepers, build cultural connection, that strengthens their own sense of identity and belonging, it creates a safer space to learn important skills like to be around parenting skills could be around self-advocacy skills, or problem solving, or you know, self-determination. Wahkotowin is family reunification, it is teaching homes so that the kids are supported in reentering their family, and the family can learn what the kid has been learning. And they can become a bit more in alignment with some of those parenting practices otherwise the Western system - everybody stays estranged from each other, or there is not the opportunity to gain experience together. And families, they do not get the chance to demonstrate their full ability, so they just get blamed for what is going on."

"Wahkotowin better aligns with our values as an Indigenous organization, how we work with our families and how we work with funders, and we work with government prevention and early intervention, we work with that system, very collaboratively. When you are looking in terms of healing, intergenerational trauma, you cannot do that separately. I am learning that with my own mother. Yes, that, you know, I have done my own set of healing. She is doing her set of healing. Now, we are at a point where we are talking about what that looks like to us. And why was such a struggle, and our relationship looks different...We had to learn to communicate in a way that we both understand each other... bringing them together, occasionally, so they can really flex and apply the knowledge that they accumulate throughout the program or the process."

A Wahkotowin approach is holistic and aligned to cultural, oral, and ceremonial practices that are built from Indigenous epistemologies. Participants understand the impact of colonization on themselves and their families in order to remove feelings of personal and cultural shame and blame.

Agencies were adamant that this new approach need to be located in community. As discussed, the policies, mandate, and power of CFS needs to be dissolved and re-constituted into community-led entities. Full and respectful funding also needs to be provided based on holistic best practices. Partial funding or service delivery that maintains government authority over the process is unacceptable. As one agency participant shared,

“I know the intervention budget is so much bigger than the prevention budget, than the Indigenous prevention budget is nothing, right? So, we are talking about changing policy, mandate, funding, and authority, and redistributing resources to community agencies, because that is the diversion, you are talking about is diverting people into community resources so that they do not end up in child welfare.”

All participants believed that it will be important to build a sense of community – the cornerstone of a Wahkotowin approach. Support from staff and workers or “helpers” for appointments, respite, transportation, and any other supports required will be necessary throughout to build knowledge and relationships built on trust and a sense of community.



# WAHKOTOWIN: "CAPTURING FAMILIES" (FAMILY SYSTEMS LODGE - PILOT)

Following the recommendation of piloting an Indigenous family-systems model of group care, a holistic model that recognizes the "lodge" as a healing place for youth and their families is being proposed. It is designed according to Indigenous values, with guidance and a shared responsibility embedded within the structure. This principle extends to all individuals who interact with youth and their family(s) while in care. The "lodge" requires a strong cultural foundation, as well as the constant presence of Indigenous Elders, to enable the sociological shift in operations from an entrenched child welfare model to one that implements real change via Indigenous processes. This conceptual framework places Indigenous youth and their families at the center with the intent to provide wrap-around services using processes that are culturally appropriate and embedded. A discussion and development of Indigenous indicators and a graduated approach to programming will need to be considered; outlining a process based on the cultural concept of Wahkotowin to stabilize and supports the youth and their families throughout their stay. Important factors of this approach will be:

- Making relatives (intake)
- Looking outward
- Healthy relationships
- Truthing ceremony (Assessment)

Recognizing that a fundamental shift in sovereignty needs to happen, Trellis as an allied service is ideally situated to provide transformative care to Indigenous youth and families involved with a mandated agency. The development of a holistic, Indigenous led "lodge" (group care) pilot that both shelters and nurtures youth and families has real potential to generationally reduce the number of youth in the system. We have heard that an Indigenous-led family-systems approach that focuses on working with both the youth and their family over the long term is necessary. This aligns with the concept of "capturing families" through the creation of supports that empowers individuals to assume the responsibilities of "Wahkotowin," that is, making relationships with themselves and others through culturally embedded processes, programming, and ceremony. This echoes the principles of a parallel approach described earlier, and includes the teachings of Respect, Responsibility, Accountability, Discipline, and Sanctified Kindness.

- Respect For oneself and others; for all living beings; creator, ancestors, community, and family.
- Responsibility Being responsible to oneself and others to live a good life to mentor others
- Accountability Being actively accountable to oneself, community and creator
- Sanctified Creates a safe space for open conversation, equality, compassion, kindness gentleness to all living things; it can create a safe space for learning and understanding

## LODGE FRAMEWORK

The Elders who were part of this discussion articulated the mandate of the lodge as being "how do we prepare a child for life?" Guiding principles, established through ceremony with Elders specifically for the lodge and aligning with the larger Trellis mandate, must be established, and communicated to all workers, Elders, youth, family, contractors, staff, and anyone who has contact or interaction with the facility. Immersive training in the processes of the lodge must also be made mandatory. This is to ensure that all stakeholders understand the cultural framework upon which the lodge will function: "Wahkotowin" embodying kinship, Natural laws, and a relationship with all beings. These simple yet complex concepts are the starting places for youth and their families entering the lodge. It can be said that Trellis has two types of separate, yet interrelated, responsibilities to youth and families:

| TRELLIS AS ALLY / HELPER TO THE YOUTH / FAMILY   | YOUTH / FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY ON THE JOURNEY   |
|--|--|
| <p>Trellis assumes the organizational role to ensure the cultural and legislative infrastructure of programming and supports are in place. This includes cultural, social, and systemic supports within the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical health / medical, recreation</li> <li>• Mental &amp; emotional health / counseling, educational, relational</li> <li>• Spiritual health / ceremony</li> </ul> | <p>Through ceremony, youth and their families are given the responsibility for their personal journeys, supported through the infrastructure of traditional teachings, practical supports, and program/Elder guidance. From a strength-based approach, supports are focused on the following critical areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self</li> <li>• Family</li> <li>• Community</li> </ul> |

Premised on a holistic model that recognizes the “lodge” as a healing place for youth and their families, as opposed to a group care setting, it is designed according to Indigenous values and guidance. Shared responsibility is embedded within the structure, a principle that extends to all individuals who interact with youth and their family(s) while in care. A strong

cultural foundation, as well as the constant presence of Indigenous Elders, is intended to enable the sociological shift in operations from an entrenched child welfare model to one that implements real change via Indigenous processes (avoiding carceral recognition).<sup>1</sup>

The conceptual framework of the lodge is as follows:



LEARN MORE ABOUT THE  
FRAMEWORK 

<sup>1</sup> “Carceral recognition” is coined as a strategy where the system highlights its willingness to accommodate Indigenous parallel processes to further reconcile Indigenous people to the existing authority. Part of the larger conversation of “reconciliation”, it calls attention to colonial structures that, without intention, continue to perpetuate entrenched mechanisms.

## THE FRAMEWORK DETAILS

### YOUTH/ FAMILIES

Placing youth and their families at the center, the intent is to provide wrap-around services, drawing on supports and programming that are holistic in nature, pragmatic, and culturally appropriate. As outlined, they must assume their own responsibility while in care, transitioning them to a level of independence that will assist them once they exit the system.

### ELDERS/KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS

Surrounding that youth and their families are Elders or Knowledge keepers (female/male/Two Spirited) who provide cultural guidance and a stabilizing relationship. These Elders/Knowledge keepers are the individuals who act as cultural mentors and “relatives” by assuming space within the lodge through an in-residence program. Ideally, an Elder will be present before they begin their morning routine (i.e., programs, appointments), throughout the day and at night when that individual retires for the evening. In addition to being an active presence within the home, the Elder(s) will provide culturally relevant teachings and programming, as established.

### INDIGENOUS HELPERS (SOCIAL WORKERS)

Also present within the care setting are Indigenous helpers, as social workers. Recognizing the mandated role that workers have within the home, there are several critical factors regarding their presence: 1) They must be Indigenous; this fundamental requirement impacts the psychological success of the program; 2) Their role is as a helper to the Elder/Knowledge Keepers, in that they provide support, oversight, necessary administration, and assistance when necessary. Case management, reporting, programming, and any other systems-related requirements are completed by the social worker; however, they are understood not to be the primary contact for youth nor their family on a day-to-day basis.

### HEALING SERVICES (PROGRAMMING)

This refers to the administration of a range of multi-disciplinary, holistic, and culturally appropriate programming and services that assists the youth and family while in care. Development of supports are to be completed and validated with both the pragmatic and spiritual input of Elder(s) and/or Knowledge Keepers. Programming must be based on Indigenous values and practices that includes extended family, self-determination, and a strength-based approach. Indigenous practices support individuals to progress with consistency in their living environment and experiences. The inclusion of ceremony establishes a foundation for youth and families to reaffirm their identity, in addition to being able to access Indigenous Elders and mentors on a daily basis.





### UNDERSTANDING “FAMILY” IN AN INDIGENOUS CONTEXT

Recognizing that families are at different stages of stability and growth, program supports must be developed that meets them where families are at, at any point in time. It is common practice in Indigenous communities for extended families, Elders and/or community members to be involved in the care and protection of youth when their birth parents are unable or need support. This extends to youth in care. The definitions of “family” or “kin” must reflect Indigenous perspectives that everyone is a “relative,” whether immediate or ‘removed.’ The presence of a single “relative” can mean the difference between whether a child thrives or dies. The current child welfare model is restrictive in the sense that definitions of “family” fail to recognize the critical role that extended family, Elders and/or relatives play in the lives of individuals.

# INDIGENOUS INDICATORS AND A GRADUATED APPROACH

Agencies spoke about “first stage triage services” that needed to be available when youth and their families first come into care. Ideally, within the lodge, they will be introduced to Elders and/or Knowledge Keepers who are part of the intake process. They are then offered initial programming and supports that stabilize their spirit and ground them within their new living environment. With the assistance of the Elder and/or Indigenous helper, a connection to an identified relative may be established at this first point. Once youth and their families are settled then “second stage case management and continuing education” with a focus on healing needs to continue.

In capturing the wellbeing of families while in care, a series of Indigenous indicators will need to be developed that—through a culturally embedded process—recognizes the progress that both the youth and family have made. Specific programming supports—and their associated indicators—are introduced using a graduated approach, outlined as a proposed process:

- 
  - Making Relatives (initial intake): Building a relationship of personal trust and sense of safety—it is critical to stabilize the youth and family support by making them feel safe and welcome through a relationship of trust at the onset.
    - The youth will interact with the Elder and social (family) worker at time of intake, participating in a smudging ceremony (with consent of youth).
    - Families are encouraged to be part of planning care of their child(ren); this forms a sense of empowerment, encouraging them to act in their own best interest versus having the ‘navigate the system.’
    - Indigenous indicators are assessed with the youth to establish a baseline towards progress.
- 
  - Looking outward: Youth and family are introduced to additional programming and supports that address mental wellbeing and family safety.
    - Continued interaction with Elder, family, and social worker.
    - Indigenous indicators are assessed to establish a baseline towards progress; indicators assessed at regular intervals (e.g., quarterly)
- 
  - Healthy relationships: Youth and family are introduced to additional programming and supports that address healthy relationships with themselves, family, peers, and workers.
    - Continued interaction with Elder, family, and social worker.
    - Indigenous indicators are assessed to establish a baseline towards progress; indicators assessed a regular interval (e.g., quarterly)
- 
  - Truthing (Assessment): Full assessment of youth progress, Elder and family relationship, and indicators are completed through a Truthing ceremony.

# HOLISTIC HEALING SERVICES IN THE LODGE (PROGRAMS)

Multiple agencies have identified a series of supports by which programming should be developed to assist youth in their day-to-day well-being, including:

- Caring and stable relationships—supportive, meaningful, and reciprocal relationships between children, youth, and their natural supports; natural supports include anyone who touches the lives of the individuals in a personal context; formal supports include service providers, caseworks, social workers, for example.
- Supportive and safe environments—the social and physical environment which children and youth live, learn, and grow. Pragmatically, this includes food security, providing basic needs (e.g., housing), positive activities that stimulate growth, and creation of a safe place.
- Sense of identity and autonomy—identity tied to culture; autonomy is the ability to make choices toward self-determination and sense of belonging.
- Cultural connection—building a positive relationship to cultural identity.
- Healthy development and growth—an environment that nurtures the health and growth of an individual holistically (mental, spiritual, emotional, physical).
- Connection to the land—cultivating a relationship with the land and natural environment; land-based activities essential to identity and language.
- Meaningful knowledge—formal and information learning opportunities that are culturally responsive and safe.

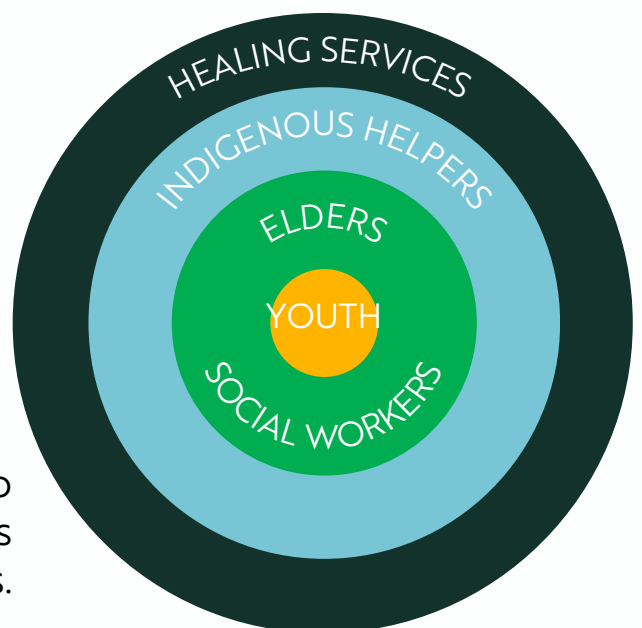
Trellis has an established program of services within their other facilities. For those programs introduced in “the lodge” which are compulsory and originating from Trellis and/or CFS, an Indigenous parallel must be developed with the input and validation of Elders and Indigenous staff. In addition to the inclusion and/or adaptation of these supports, the following types of programs have also been identified:

- Cultural programming—all cultural programming and supports must be developed in full consultation with Elder(s)/Knowledge Keepers through a process of development and validation. Supports may include in-house and/or land-based teachings, ceremony, circles, storytelling, and others as directed by Elders.
- Life skills—traditional parenting; making relatives; natural supports & kinship connection; cooking; financial literacy/budgeting; healthy eating; healthy living routine; personal space; employment skills; advocacy.
- Healing programming—mentorship; family strengths; knowledge transfer; grief; trauma; personal growth; self-care; counselling (Indigenous & non-Indigenous, life space); therapies (equine, creativity, land based, music, art, etc); recreation; sport teams; hobbies/clubs.
- Family group: assessment, preparation, interaction (conference), feedback (reviews); family supports; family helps to develop the care plan (shifting the power).
- Community collaboration and partnerships—establishment of meaningful and relevant collaborations with community partners that provide opportunities for youth and family to succeed; to be identified following development of the goals and guiding principles of the lodge.

## STAFFING IN THE LODGE: ELDERS IN RESIDENCE AND TRELIS INDIGENOUS STAFF

Staffing within “the lodge” is to be developed with full engagement of Elders, Indigenous staff, and leadership. The focus is on creating an environment of cultural safety and physical security, as well as aligning the outcomes to meet requirements of Trellis at the onset. Developing the program of services, and the intervals to which they will be introduced to youth and their families, will identify staffing requirements at the lodge.

Staffing must be populated according to the lodge framework: Elders, Indigenous helpers (social workers); Healing services.



Youth removed from their family and community are heavily impacted by the loss of traditional connections, natural supports, and relationships. There are two points of emphasis that deserve their own highlight, relative to staffing:

1. It cannot be overstated the criticality of having Indigenous social workers provide support within “the lodge,” because of the ability to form quicker relationships with Indigenous youth, and a shared experience and perspective.
2. The presence of Indigenous Elders is the cornerstone upon which overall success of the pilot is developed.

A scan of comparable facilities—e.g., Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, Chief Red Bear Children’s Lodge Cowessess, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Winnipeg—identifies a range of relevant staffing positions and responsibilities for a piloting of a comparable Trellis “lodge model” (however, without range of salary attached):

- Operations—Director; Manager(s), Programs; Cultural Activities coordinator; Family Outreach(s); CFO/Finance
- Culture—Elders and/or Knowledge keepers (1.0 FTE); Intake specialist; Peer Mentors; Circle Coordinator; Knowledge Transfer coordinator
- Holistic Well Being—Family Support Worker(s); Supervisor(s); Family Safety Liaison; Kinship Coordinator; Counsellor(s) (RPsych, RCC); Opportunities coordinator
- Good Life—Recreation coordinator; Outreach & Community Coordinator; Addictions; Therapies (as listed previously)

The concept of care for the lodge is based on the delivery of culturally appropriate processes and supports situated on Indigenous strengths and understanding. Not all youth and/or family coming into the lodge will have a recognition or knowledge of Indigenous culture; however, they will have a positive response to an environment of safety and respect. By having Indigenous personnel with close connections to community, the level of personal and cultural integrity will remain high and offer a positive alternative to current ways of working.



# APPENDIX

## FIRST NATIONS AND BILL C-92

### CONTEXT OF CHILD WELFARE AND ACT C-92: AN ACT RESPECTING FIRST NATIONS, INUIT AND MÉTIS CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

For over a century, Indigenous children in Canada have been removed from their families and home communities by outside non-Indigenous agencies. The “Sixties Scoop” was a child welfare adoption and fostering program across Canada that “scooped up” Indigenous children from their families and placed them in mostly non-Indigenous homes. It began in the late 1950s and persisted into the 1980s. Although the practice of removing Indigenous children from their families began before 1900 with the Indian Residential School system, the vast overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the Canadian child welfare system is seen as a continuation of this practice.<sup>2</sup>

Since the 1950s, more than 20,000 Canadian Indigenous children have been caught up in the child welfare system, many without the consent or involvement of their parents, families, or communities. Children who were “scooped” were frequently moved far from their homes, sometimes across the country, often into the United States or other countries abroad. Many were placed in homes where their heritage was ignored or actively denied. Although some adopted children had stable home lives, many children moved from foster home to foster home, living an institutionalized upbringing until they aged out of the system. Many children never returned to their home communities; if they did, many had difficulty becoming part of the family and felt “caught between worlds.”<sup>3</sup>

In the 1960s, social workers were not expected to have culturally specific training to enable them to make fair decisions about Indigenous children. Many were completely ignorant of the cultural values or history of the communities they encountered. Consequently, they made value judgements and assessed standards of care based on their own middle-class Euro-Canadian values. They frequently misunderstood traditional child-rearing practices where Indigenous grandparents were often actively involved in raising their grandchildren. Social workers saw this as an indication of neglect on the part of the parents and a reason to apprehend the children. Additionally, the social disruption on many reserves caused by poverty, unemployment, and addiction resulted in some social workers feeling duty-bound to “protect” and “rescue” children from their own families. In many cases, Indigenous parents who were living in poverty but otherwise providing caring homes, had their children taken from them with no consent and no recourse. It was not until 1980 that the Child, Family, and Community Services Act required social workers to notify band councils before First Nations children were removed from communities.

Today there are more Indigenous children in the child welfare system than there were at the height of the Sixties Scoop. In Alberta Indigenous youth are overrepresented in the child welfare system. As of December 2022, 74 per cent of youth in care in Alberta were Indigenous, even though they make up just 10 per cent of the population. As University of Regina Professor Raven Sinclair, herself a Sixties Scoop survivor, states:

Sadly, the involvement of the child welfare system is no less prolific in the current era... the “Sixties Scoop” has merely evolved into the “Millennium Scoop.”

Calling the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the system a “growing crisis,” the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) published 94 Calls to Action (CTAs) in 2015 to redress the legacy of the Residential School system and advance the process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. The first five CTAs relate directly to the child intervention system:

- CTA #1 – Calls on all levels of government to commit to minimizing the number of Indigenous children in care through resourcing, assessing, monitoring, and educating child and family services organizations.
- CTA #2 – Calls on all levels of government to produce and publish annual reports with Indigenous-specific data, including the number of Indigenous children in care (as compared to the number of non-Indigenous children in care), the reason for apprehension, total spending on services, and the effectiveness of interventions.
- CTA #3 – Calls on all levels of government to fully implement Jordan’s Principle, which is a child-first principle that ensures Indigenous children get the care they need when they need it.

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2 (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health n.d.)

3 (Sinclair 2007)

4 (First Nations & Indigenous Studies, UBC n.d.)

5 (Sinclair 2007)

- CTA #4 – Calls on the federal government to enact Indigenous child intervention legislation establishing national standards for apprehension and custody cases and various principles, including affirmation of the right of Indigenous peoples to establish and maintain their own child and family services agencies, the importance of taking the history of Residential Schools into consideration, and the prioritization of culturally-appropriate placements.
- CTA #5 – Calls on all levels of government to develop culturally-appropriate parenting programs for Indigenous families.<sup>6</sup>

In January 2018, at the Emergency Meeting on Indigenous Child and Family Services, Canada committed to six points of action to address the over-representation of Indigenous children and youth in care and to reform Indigenous child and family services. The six points of action include:

1. Continuing the work to fully implement all orders of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, and reforming child and family services, including moving to a flexible funding model.
2. Shifting the programming focus to prevention and early intervention.
3. Supporting communities to exercise jurisdiction and explore the potential for co-developed federal child and family services legislation.
4. Accelerating the work of trilateral and technical tables that are in place across the country.
5. Supporting Inuit and Métis Nation leadership to advance reform.
6. Developing a data and reporting strategy with provinces, territories, and Indigenous partners. <sup>7</sup>

The Bill received Royal Assent in the House of Commons on June 21, 2019, becoming Canadian law, coming into effect on January 1, 2020.<sup>8</sup> This legislation recognizes and affirms the inherent right of self-government held by First Nations in relation to child and family services and confirms that such rights are existing inherent Indigenous and treaty rights in section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. This legislation applies to First Nations children, youth, and families, and means that the application of provincial child welfare laws, policies, and practices to First Nations that changed on January 1, 2020, is now subject to how and when First Nations assert jurisdiction over child welfare. As Métis governments are affirmed through modern day Treaties with Canada, this federal right will be equally available to those provinces that are recognized by the Federal government.<sup>10</sup>

#### Rights Recognition of Bill C-92

- Affirms the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and supports the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action regarding Child Welfare.
- Creates a clear legislative framework that supports First Nations to develop their own child and family welfare laws, including a mechanism for those laws to be recognized as paramount to those of the provincial and federal governments.
- Affirms self-determination and inherent rights of First Nations, and better aligns with First Nations history, laws and approaches to child and family well-being.
- Sets out minimum standards and rights for Indigenous children and families interacting with child welfare services. These minimum standards can be improved upon as First Nations enact their own child and family welfare laws in accordance with their own laws and traditions.
- Sets out new tools including stronger principles for the Best Interests of the Child such as:
  - Affirmation of the right of children to be raised in their families, with their language, culture and identity supported.
  - Right to receive services in their communities, to preserve the child's culture, connections and belonging.
  - Right of the child to be connected to their family and community.
  - Account for intergenerational impacts of residential schools and affirm right of families to not be blamed for trauma and struggles they may experience when parenting.
  - Mandate prenatal support to avoid apprehensions at birth, and place onus on the system to take a holistic approach to the prenatal, birth, and early years.
  - Prioritizes placement for children who must be placed in care with immediate family, extended family, a family from the child's First Nation, or a First Nations family from another First Nation, with placement with a non-First Nations family as a last resort.
  - Emphasizes not removing a child due to poverty, housing, lack of health supports for parents, and instead shifts focus to supporting families through preventative measures.

<sup>6</sup> (Rupertsland Centre for Metis Research 2022)

<sup>7</sup> (Rupertsland Centre for Metis Research 2022); (Métis National Council n.d.)

<sup>8</sup> (Government of Canada, Bill C-92: An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families receives Royal Assent n.d.)

<sup>9</sup> (Government of Canada, Reducing the number of Indigenous children in care n.d.)

<sup>10</sup> As of September 2023, 3 the MMF, MNA and MNO have all requested modern day treaties with the Federal government and have passed the first and second reading.

The affirmation of inherent rights and jurisdiction means that First Nations must drive this process and act according to the self-determined choices of the rights and title holders who are members of the First Nation. This Act did not establish these rights, but it does affirm the right of First Nations to make laws, policies and decisions about their children and families, according to their own traditions, practices, customs, and values. <sup>11</sup>

“This legislation ensures that First Nations laws are paramount, so we can focus on prevention, as opposed to apprehension.” (Perry Bellegarde, former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations)

Since the Act came into force, there has been significant effort by Indigenous communities across Canada to take back authority for child and family services, and in the care of the children of their communities.

#### Future Role of Bill C-92

Bill C-92 affirms Indigenous people's right to regulate child and family services based on their inherent law-making authority. It is the first attempt by the federal government to unravel the impact of colonialism and assimilation, however flawed. Some provinces are arguing to maintain jurisdiction over Indigenous child welfare; others are open to systems that will better serve the need of Indigenous children and families. The Supreme Court of Canada is expected to rule by the end of 2023 on the constitutionality of Bill C-92 that will have far-reaching implications for Indigenous rights across Canada. The ruling will also impact how those organizations who work with First Nation children will form partnerships and agreements for care.

#### Best & Promising Practices: Examples of What's Working

Since Bill C-92 came into force, six Indigenous communities across the country have passed their own child and family services laws under Bill C-92's legal framework, five of which have now signed co-ordination agreements with federal and provincial governments (Apr 2023). Despite the autonomy of each First Nation and community, each approached development through cultural mechanisms and partnerships that aligned with principles of ceremony and kinship. Specific examples include:

##### Cowessess First Nation, SK

- In March 2020, Cowessess First Nation passed its own child welfare legislation, called the Miyo Pimatisowin Act which means "striving for a better life" in Cree. Unlike colonial laws, the Act begins with a prayer, "because it's the Cowessess approach." In July 2021, Cowessess reclaimed its inherent right to look after its own children with the signing of a Coordination Agreement with Saskatchewan and the federal government. The historic signing—the first of its kind in Canada—was attended by Prime Minister, Premier, and Cowessess Chief. The ceremony, which started with a powwow and ended with a victory dance, left those in the community feeling hopeful. Chief Red Bear Lodge, the community's child and family services agency, works to prevent children from going into care. The agency provides a safe living environment predicated in strong cultural intervention and approaches.

##### Wabaseemoong Independent Nations, ON

- In a historic first in Ontario, a trilateral Coordination Agreement for child and family services was signed between Wabaseemoong with the federal and provincial government (March 2022). This agreement supports Wabaseemoong Independent Nations' Customary Care Code which has had force of federal law since January 2021. The Agreement supports the nation's exercise of jurisdiction over its children and families and outlines the roles and responsibilities of all parties to support the coordination of child and family services. It also provides mechanisms to address funding from federal and provincial governments to ensure necessary financial resources are in place. The Agreement arose out of the development of the Customary Code, a journey that started in 2011 in ceremony and worked collectively with Elders, community members, with the leadership of youth. The signing of the Agreement is a culmination of intensive work by Wabaseemoong and partners over many years and will have lasting impacts for generations to come.

##### Louis Bull First Nation, AB

- “This is an important day for Louis Bull tribe. Our children are safe here... In terms of reconciliation, I feel this will also create pathways for other nations to bring their children home. Our children are sacred. The signing of this agreement with the government of Canada to support the Asikiw Mostos O’Pikinawasawin law will strengthen our communities.” (Louis Bull Chief)
- Under the authority of the Asikiw Mostos O’Pikinawasawin (AMO) law, and formally recognized by the federal government, Louis Bull First Nation is the first Indigenous community in Alberta to administer jurisdiction

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<sup>11</sup> (Assembly for First Nations 2020)

over its own child and family services. Unlike Cowessess and Wabaseemoong, the Agreement is between Louis Bull and the federal government only and does not include coordination from the provincial government. The two-year agreement is in place to allow time for the Nation to work with Alberta on their own child services agreement. "Our laws and treaties transcend over three provinces, so it doesn't make sense for us to go to an agreement which limits us within a jurisdiction." (Chief Bull) A coordination agreement is critical to articulate roles and responsibilities to ensure service gaps are not created and children are not placed at risk. Even though Alberta does not recognize the agreement, or the AMO, the Nation is continuing conversations with the province; this first step articulates the challenges and journey towards necessary sovereignty, rights, and a reciprocal relationship that will reduce the number of children in care.

#### Peguis First Nation, MB

- "What we've done through our own self-determination and our inherent rights, we've created this law." (In-house Counsel, Peguis CFS)
- Although not specifically "under" Bill C-92, Peguis First Nation formed its own child and family law through ceremony. A recent example of the nation assuming sovereignty over its own citizens: two infants were being transferred from a provincial CFS office in Winnipeg to Peguis; the office was initially seeking a PGO keeping them from their parents. Peguis declined, as it avoids permanent orders, and the matter went to a King's Bench judge who granted a 3-month temporary order under Peguis's new law. This marked the first time that the Court approved such an order aligning with Indigenous law. The community believes apprehension should be the last resort for families and the nation, with a goal for children to avoid entering the system. Interestingly, there have been no child protection matters for six months for Peguis (since April 2023), a first in community history.

#### Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, NT

- In November 2021, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation (IRC) enacted its own child and family services legislation, the first Indigenous organization in the Northwest Territories (NT) to do so since the passage of Bill C-92. The Inuvialuit Qitunrariit Inuuniarnikkun Maligaskat, or Inuvialuit Family Way of Living Law, ensures Inuvialuit children within the CFS system across Canada remain connected to their culture and supports families to reduce the need for child welfare intervention.
- The IRC has requested coordination agreements from the federal, Yukon, NT, and Alberta governments. Although the NT government previously supported Bill C-92, it has now joined an out-of-court challenge, spearheaded by Quebec, of the federal law. In December 2022, the Premier and NT Justice Minister defended the decision to join the court challenge, saying they want to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the territorial and Indigenous governments. The IRC has joined dozens of Indigenous governments in backing Canada's defense of Bill C-92 to the Supreme Court of Canada. Although not supported, the IRC's positioning of Bill C-92 and development of the Inuvialuit Qitunrariit Inuuniarnikkun Maligaskat is a conversation that highlights a shift in power dynamics and ensures changes to the current child welfare system.

#### Atikamekw Opitciwan, QC

- In September 2022, the Youth Division of the Court of Québec confirmed the jurisdiction of First Nations over youth welfare, regardless of place of residence. This recognition, a first in Quebec, has allowed the community of Opitciwan to be fully autonomous in terms of child welfare, thanks to the Loi de la protection sociale atikamekw d'Opitciwan (Atikamekw of Opitciwan Social Protection Act) which came into force on January 17, 2022.
- Opitciwan has yet to be able to implement the Act because of the constitutional battle between Quebec and Canada over Bill C-92, which is currently before the Supreme Court. Despite this, the Court of Québec's decision reminds the provincial and federal governments that First Nations are in the best position to exercise their rights and responsibilities towards their children and families throughout the territory.

As of October 2023, 46 Indigenous communities across Canada have requested and are awaiting Coordination Agreements under Bill C-92; this includes:

- British Columbia - Stó:lō Xwexwilmexw, Gitanmaax Band
- Alberta - Mikisew Cree Nation, Enoch Cree Nation, Ermineskin Cree Nation, Little Red River Cree Nation, Cold Lake FN
- Saskatchewan - Pasqua FN, Fishing Lake FN, Whitecap Dakota FN, Gordon FN, Key FN
- Manitoba - Sioux Valley Dakota Nation, Pimicikamak Okimawin, Misipawistik Cree Nation, Poplar River FN, Lake Manitoba FN, Marcel Colomb FN, Long Plain FN, Brokenhead Ojibway Nation, Tataskweyak Cree Nation, Black River FN
- Ontario - Fort William FN, Bearskin Lake FN, Eagle Lake FN, Mishkeegogamang FN, Pikangikum FN, Cat Lake FN, North Caribou Lake FN, Ojibway Nation of Saugeen, Moose Cree FN, Animakee Wa Zhing 37 FN, Naohtkamwegwanning FN Nation, Matachewan FN
- Quebec - Essipit Innu FN, Ekuanitshit FN, Unamen Shipu FN, Pakua Shipu FN, Anishnabe of Lac Simon, Abitibiwinni (Pikogan), Kitcisakik Anicinape, Long Point FN, Nutashkuan Innu FN, Abenaki FN Odanak, Abenaki FN Wôlinak, Pekuakamiulnuatsh Takuhikan, Conseil des Atikamekw de Wemotaci, Innu Takuaikan Uashat Mak Mani-Utenam
- Newfoundland & Labrador—Miawpukek FN
- Northwest Territories—Tłegôhtł Got'ınę Government/Norman Wells

## TRELLIS ROLE IN TRANSFORMATION (ALLY)

- Allyship in the context of Bill C-92 is the most respectful way for Trellis to support First Nation's inherent authority over the development and implementation of their own child and family services, regardless of the ruling of the Supreme Court. As with Métis rights, it is the gradual lessening of power and administration by Trellis over decisions, structures, and allocation of funding regarding First Nation care. It includes providing a level of service from the position of mentor or partner by offering knowledge and support that enables capacity building within the community. This is a journey that will be generational and empowering, on both sides, a move that has the potential to effectively address the over-representation and complex needs of First Nation children and families.

### MÉTIS NATION OF ALBERTA AND BILL C-92

Context of Child Welfare and Act C-92: An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth, and families

Wahkotiwon or Natural laws operated in many Métis communities prior to contact, providing core teachings that built strong and wholistic Indigenous identities. The term Wahkotowin or Natural laws as a concept does not have a direct English translation; however, it be defined loosely as "Kinship" or the Natural laws of interconnection and relationality. Natural laws also inform core aspects of cultural identity, creating intricate connections to worldview, beliefs, values, behaviors, and norms of communities that sustain the distinctness of culture over time (Daignault, 2021). Wahkotowin represents the interdependence of all living things and the obligations of all relationships.

Prior to Western colonial disruption Métis families were part of a much wider network of kinship connections, and they prized their extended families. Children of the Métis people came to understand that, in addition to their parents, their aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, and even great grandparents cared for them. Everyone benefited from strong familial ties, and it was understood that one's personal health and happiness were closely correlated with those of others. Known for its inherent qualities of sustainability and multi-culturalism the community also adhered to a strict "rule of law" that was based in respect for the land, kinship, peaceful co-existence, sharing and Natural laws. Described as, "living patterns of those situated there," Shanks credits the communities' adherence to these Natural laws as a key factor in the retention of positive Michif identity, language and Wahkotowin after 1885.

The Wahkotowin of the Métis people was severely disturbed when the government and the church forcibly abducted young children from their families, societies, and cultures in an effort to assimilate them. Many children were sent to schools far from their homes and so loneliness, disruption, and stress significantly increased. Many children were lost forever, disrupting the transmission of family around which all aspects of society, including parenting, marriage, trade, and the economy. This continued during the years of the 60 Scoop, where Federal policy continued to forcibly remove Métis children from their homes to be placed in non-Indigenous households.

Over the past few decades, the Métis have gained more recognition for their Indigenous rights. In Alberta, the Métis Child & Family (Métis child.com) was established to promote the health and happiness of Métis families,

individuals, and communities. At the same time, the Children's, and Family Services (CFS) division was mandated to support Métis families; to maintain and strengthen their relationships to Métis communities and boost resiliency and independence however the actual success of this work was questioned repeatedly by agency participants.

"The system has closed its doors to Métis kids and Métis children are sent out all over Calgary. And it is like Métis children are like the flavor of the month. People think we are not Indigenous- they do not understand that we have a strong and resilient culture. And that is based on the fact that it is easier to place Métis kids in white homes, and this is hard. We still went in, and we would call you know if they if they had a connection or we would call up to Edmonton, and we would talk to them, but it was like Métis kids were the flavor of the month. And that is what the workers called the flavor of the month because they look the right way. You and they were nice looking kids. And they were easy to send out into the white community. So then when I look at Bill C 92. And it talks about reclaiming our children, and it talks about the Métis way. Well, the Métis way is to send our children back to one of the parents, the grandparents, a kinship provider, somebody in the community. And we are not doing that. And it really sad in my heart because we talk about this act, C- 92 exercising that intent, right, the jurisdiction over the provision of the Child and Family Services and their citizens. And we are not doing that. We are just sending kids out to white homes when kids are in significant danger, and they cannot be returned for the home, ..., it is really hard to bring those kids back after that and that is the whole point..."

- Agency Comment

#### Future of Bill C-92

There has been a recent resurgence of Indigenous nations creating their own constitutions. The result of the MNA signing the Métis Government Recognition and Self-Government Agreement (MGRSA) in 2019, the signing of this self-government agreement was the first step to the MNA gaining recognition as a governmental body by the federal government. The agreement, along with the introduction of Otipemisiwak Constitution in Alberta, and the federal government's enabling legislation, will allow the Métis Nation of Alberta to "make laws regarding citizenship, leadership, and governmental operations including C-92 agreements that will allow the Nation to take back jurisdiction and control over Métis children and families through a return to Wahkotowin approaches of family health & wellbeing.

2019 saw the formal establishment of Métis jurisdiction over Child and Family Services by the federal government via Bill C-92 - An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families ensures that Métis children who are placed in the custody of Alberta's Ministry of Children Services maintain a connection to their Métis community and culture. Through accredited Indigenous Governing Bodies (IGB), the Act gives Indigenous communities as distinction-based Nations a way to exercise inherent control over the provision of Child and Family Services to their citizens. For Métis children and families, the Act establishes national principles and standards and would give the Métis governments the freedom to create laws and policies for children and families that are based on their unique histories, traditions, and conditions. The goal for Métis jurisdiction in Alberta has been supported by resolutions passed by the MNA Annual General Assembly at least as far back as 1998. This commitment was most recently reaffirmed in August 2021, when the 93rd annual General Assembly accepted a resolution declaring the MNA's ability to carry out the Métis Nation's inherent jurisdiction over Child and Family Services in Alberta. The resolution clearly states that MNA citizens have authorized the MNA to exercise inherent jurisdiction over Métis Child and Family Services through the enactment of a Métis Child and Family Services law, the negotiation or execution of agreements, and any other necessary or pertinent acts.

#### Best & Promising Practices: Examples of What's Working

There are few best and promising practices that can be guiding approaches for Trellis to work as an ally to Métis youth and families as the Métis Nation - begins its journey towards self-government via the Otipemisiwak Constitution, and eventual implementation of Bill C-92. This is simply due to the systemic reluctance of the federal government to acknowledge Métis Nations federally (Section 35) both before and after the repatriation of the Canadian Constitution in 1982.

According to a report entitled, *The Invisible Children of Child Welfare: Legislation, Policy, and Governance Models for Métis Child Welfare* (Carriere, J & Richardson, C, 2017) Métis children have been systemically left out of not only policy but service provision in ways that culturally resonate. That being said, the following narrative provides an environmental snapshot of the situation across Canada. According to the authors:

- Nova Scotia has one line in their child welfare act (which they refer to as the CFS Act and CFS Regulations that refers to “Indians”). They are currently in the legislative process of updating the Act, which has not been updated since 1991. Métis children are not acknowledged as Indigenous children in Nova Scotia.
- Prince Edward Island, Aboriginal children are clearly viewed as members or descendants of First Nations or as the Act states, “is 12 years old or more, a descendant of an Aboriginal person and considers himself or herself to be Aboriginal”. There is no mention of Métis ancestry as being part of the Aboriginal definition.
- New Brunswick government has not proposed any changes to the Child and Family Services and Relations Act that give special considerations to Aboriginal children and families (Child and Family Services and Relations Act, 1998). However, standards included in the Micmac and Maliseet First Nations Services Standard Manual reflect Mi’kmaq and Maliseet values. There is no mention of Métis.
- In Newfoundland/Labrador the child welfare legislation refers to Inuit children and also to Land Claims settlement. There is no mention of Métis.
- Quebec is also silent as it pertains to Métis child welfare legislation and, although Métis Nation Quebec exists as a political organization, there is no legislative mandate to encourage a larger accountability in child welfare legislation to serve the Métis citizens of Quebec.
- In Ontario, Indigenous or Aboriginal children are referred to as ‘Indian’ or ‘Native’ and the Child and Family Services Act has not been updated since 1990. There was consensus that increased Aboriginal control over the design, delivery and governance of child and youth services is key to improved outcomes for First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and urban Aboriginal youth in Ontario.
- The Child and Family Services Authorities Act of Manitoba refers to the Manitoba Métis Child and Family Services Authority as the legal representative for Métis children and families in Manitoba receiving child welfare services. The Child and Family Services Authorities Act (2003) created four authorities (First Nations Authority of Northern Manitoba, First Nations Authority of Southern Manitoba, Métis Authority and General Authority) that oversee services, disperse funds, and ensure that culturally appropriate services are delivered by their respective agencies consistent with the Child and Family Services Act and the Adoption Act (1999). The Authorities are empowered by the Child and Family Services Authorities Act to mandate agencies to exercise the powers and duties of The Child and Family Services and other Acts. It is unclear how individual Métis specific services are to be developed or provided.
- Saskatchewan focuses on First Nation or as cited in the Saskatchewan Child and Family Services Act ‘Indian’ and ‘bands’ are the only Indigenous group that are mentioned. Funding and agreements with First Nations appears to be the priority in a province that we know has a large number of Métis citizens or 5.2% of the population of Saskatchewan.
- In British Columbia there is a Métis Commission for Children and Families of BC (MCCFBC), a non-profit organization working on behalf of the Métis community of British Columbia in matters related to Métis children and their families involved in the child protection system. Their website description states that, “Currently there are over 800 Métis children in the child welfare system in BC. We are working to reduce these numbers through cultural connection and Métis community caring options rather than government sponsored care. We work with Métis agencies and associations across the province to ensure that children in the care of the Ministry for Children and Families have connections with the community where they live” (Métis Commission for Children and Families of BC, n.d.). MCCFBC also has the mandate to review adoption applications for Métis children and make recommendations to the Ministry of Children and Family Development. To date the legislation in BC does not specifically address Métis children.

In closing, the Alberta the Alberta CFS Act describes services to Indian children; however, no reference is made about how to work with the Métis. Alberta’s Ministry of Human Services oversees the delivery of child intervention services provided by 8 regional Child and Family Service Authorities (CFSAs), one of which is a Métis Authority, under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act (CYFEA). Seventeen Delegated First Nations Authorities (DFNAs) also provide services under CYFEA through agreements between the First Nations, the Government of Canada, and the Government of Alberta.

As per a recent decision on behalf of Alberta CFS, the Métis Settlements Authority is closing and services to Métis children living on Métis settlements will be returned to the jurisdiction of the Ministry. There is no other Métis agency in Alberta that provides statutory services to Métis children and families however there are Métis services that provide supportive and early intervention services.

## TRELLIS ROLE IN TRANSFORMATION

Considering the scarcity of Métis specific legislation, services, and prominence across Canada, allyship in the context of Bill C-92 is the most respectful way for Trellis to support the Métis Nation's inherent authority over the development and implementation of their own Child and Family Services model in Alberta. This diminishing role over time is true reconciliation - including an eventual exciting of service delivery, funding, and power over

Métis families. Acceptable allyship includes acting as a guide or mentor, financial guidance or other specialized knowledge that assists with capacity development. These conversations can occur in ethical spaces with an eye to co-creation with the Métis Nation in Alberta.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The Trellis transformation is built on a wholistic and intersectional approach that must action healing, wellness, and an active diversion away from CFS in all its service lines. Group homes can and should be transformed into spaces that are built on cultural, individual, historical, environment and structural factors. Multi-sectoral and culturally informed approaches are key. Indigenous intersectionality must include a history of colonization. The interrelationship between trauma, inequality, social disadvantage, physical health, mental health, homelessness, addictions, spirituality, requires a high level of coordination and collaboration among all services, government, and community.

In their article *Bringing Home the Kids, Rural Social Work and Community Practice*<sup>12</sup> the authors discuss how the destructive processes of colonization and assimilation of First Nations and Métis people in Canada have not come to an end but instead have simply changed their appearance over the decades: from the tragedy of residential schools to the ravages of the Sixties Scoop, to the incremental devastation of family and community by the bureaucratic process of putting children “in-care,” through which the cumulative negative impacts of contact with Western society remain. In 2006, in the northern Alberta First Nations community of Saddle Lake, within a population of 8,000, approximately 150 children were “in-care” and living two hours away in a large urban center with minimal contact with their home community. The local community based CFS (Wahkotowin) decided it was time to “Bring Home the Kids;” this article describes the resulting event that was designed to reconnect these children to their community. While it was acknowledged that a single event will not solve the problem of the number of children taken into care, it was felt that this opportunity to reconnect would help with the issues of anxiety and disrupted attachment that many of the children (and the community) were experiencing – and would also help to increase community awareness of the number of children who were in care. Similar constructs and interventions are common across existing models preferred by Indigenous communities hoping for positive change. These are discussed below.

### Indigenous Models of Group Care for Children in Child Welfare Systems

There are a number of Indigenous child welfare models operating in Canada.

- **Provincial or Territorial:** The province/territory is responsible for providing services as well as making the laws and providing funding for off-reserve families; most commonly applied to urban Indigenous child welfare agencies and Métis agencies and in Nunavut.
- **Delegation:** Provincial/territorial and/or federal governments grant powers to agencies to deliver child welfare services for a specified purpose but retain overall authority. They can either have full delegation – where the agencies provide the full range of child welfare services either on or off reserve, or partial, where the provincial/territorial government retains protection services, and the agencies provide other services such as prevention and guardianship.
- **Integrated Agencies:** First Nations child and family service agencies include members off reserve and are responsible for child welfare with some direction from the province/territory. For example, Manitoba has four child welfare authorities: the General Child and Family Services Authority, Métis Child & Family Services Authority, First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority, and Southern First Nations Network of Care Child and Family Services Authority.
- **Band By-laws:** Under the Indian Act, Indian Band Chiefs and Councils can pass band by-laws that apply on reserve. The Spallumcheen First Nation in British Columbia established a child welfare band by-law in the early 1980s, which gives them control over child welfare. Each by-law still requires the approval of the federal Minister of Indigenous Affairs.
- **Self-Government:** This is the model that most Indigenous people favor. Under self-government, service delivery, authority, policy, and funding are all under Indigenous jurisdiction. While there is not a First Nations self-government model in Canada, the Nisga’a Lisims Government (BC) has self-government agreements that include authority over child welfare, and they are developing policies and services that will lead to full delegation. In addition, Nunavut could be seen as an example of child welfare self-government for Inuit children and youth. British Columbia has made a commitment to Indigenous people to move towards Indigenous control of child welfare.

There are mainstream child welfare services and specific agencies solely for Indigenous families in Canada. There are over 140 First Nations agencies delivering services to First Nations peoples and 8 Métis agencies delivering culturally relevant services to Métis families.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> (Bodor, Lamourex and Biggs 2009)

<sup>13</sup> (The Health of Canada’s Children and Youth n.d.)

## Culturally-appropriate and Indigenous-led Models of Care – Publications & Programs

### Akamihk Child and Family Services Society, Montana First Nation (Alberta)

Akamihk Child and Family Services Society (ACFSS) is a newly formed organization that will operate under the Montana First Nation and Family Services Law. ACFSS ensures that the rights of Montana First Nation (MFN) children have access to and are given the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential and capability without interference and/or undue delay. The organization aims to keep children grounded in their community, kinship, and Cree culture.

“We are a new organization called Akamihk Child and Family Services, completely new and our vision is to keep children in care within the Nation. The goal will be to focus on preventive care which can keep our Nation’s children out of the child protection system. Families are struggling and it is important that we keep them grounded in their culture and bring them back to their roots.” (Chase Rabbit (McDougall), councilor of Montana First Nation and ACFSS board chair)<sup>14</sup>

### Anishinaabe Child & Family Services (Manitoba)

Anishinaabe Child and Family Services (ACFS) is one of ten agencies within the Southern First Nations Network of Care mandated to provide programs and services to our people that protect our children, promote family wellness, and strengthen our community. ACFS’s mission is to deliver mandated child and family services and programs in a manner which will maintain and strengthen the individual, the family, and the First Nations community within the context of Aboriginal values and customs, within the ACFS’s Philosophy of “The child is a precious gift from the Creator who has entrusted the family of the child with the sacred duty to love, protect, and nurture this child in ways of the First Nations people.”

Anishinaabe Child & Family Services evolved from the signing of the Canada – Manitoba Indian Child Welfare Agreement in February 1982 and Subsidiary Agreement of August 1982. ACFS was created as the result of an agreement between the Government of Canada, the Province of Manitoba, and the Brotherhood of Indian Nations to facilitate increased Band participation and responsibility in the provision of child and family service, as well as provide a framework for the establishment of guiding principles and funding for the fulfillment of such responsibilities.

In 1986, pursuant to the Tripartite Master Agreement, the Province of Manitoba mandated ACFS, which was officially recognized with duties and powers to deliver child and family services pursuant to the Child & Family Services Act in Manitoba. The original composition of ACFS consisted of eight communities: Jackhead First Nation, Fisher River Cree Nation, Peguis First Nation, Dauphin River First Nation, Fairford First Nation (now Pinaymootang First Nation), Lake St. Martin First Nation, Little Saskatchewan First Nation, and Lake Manitoba First Nation. Dakota Tipi First Nation was later included by Order of Council.

In 1987, the nine communities decided to become two entities: Anishinaabe East Side and Anishinaabe West Side. The West Side comprised of Dauphin River First Nation, Fairford First Nation (now Pinaymootang First Nation), Lake St. Martin First Nation, Little Saskatchewan First Nation, and Lake Manitoba First Nation. Today, these five communities continue to carry the original Anishinaabe Child & Family Services Mandate, as the other original bands have formed their own agencies.

### Services To Families

It is recognized that often the best way to serve and protect children is to help their families, and the best time to assist families is before problems grow serious enough to cause family breakups or require the removal of children from the home. This knowledge has been incorporated into the Child and Family Services Act. Manitoba law now encourages child and family service agencies to develop and offer family support services although funding continues to be drastically reduced. These services are geared toward helping families stay together. They recognize the importance of helping families in their homes and communities and encourage community participation in the operation of services.

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<sup>14</sup> (Montana First Nation (Alberta) n.d.)

### Child Protection

The Child and Family Services Act tries to strike a balance between services to children and services to families. The Act strongly encourages agencies to help families stay together and to provide services aimed at avoiding the need to remove children from their homes. Sometimes these services are not enough, and crises may arise that require immediate action to protect children. Under the Act, agencies are required to take appropriate action to protect children. They have the right and a duty to take any of a number of steps to ensure the safety of children and protect them from neglect or abuse. It is sometimes necessary for agencies to apprehend children (take them into care) to ensure their protection. Once a child is apprehended, the law requires an agency to follow certain steps. If the child is not returned home, the agency must apply to a court for a hearing, called a child protection hearing; this normally must be done within four juridical days (days on which the court office is open) of the apprehension. A hearing is often held within 30 days of an application. An agency is also required to make reasonable effort to notify the parents or guardian of the apprehension. If the agency does not return the child to the family and proceeds to court, the parents or guardians have a right to be notified of the date of the hearing. During the time, the child is under apprehension, the parents or guardians may be allowed visits pending the hearing. If the parents disagree with the agency's conditions for visits, they may ask the court to determine appropriate access provision.

An agency need not remove a child from the home to apprehend. The child may be left in the home in the care of parents or guardian or returned home pending the protection hearing. In such cases, the child is deemed to be still under apprehension for purposes of the hearing. In child abuse cases, an agency may ask the court to order the alleged abuser to leave the family home and/or not to contact the child. This is a separate action from a child protection hearing.

Manitoba law tries to keep children from remaining in temporary care for long periods and ensure that the cases of children in agency care are constantly subject to review. Under the Child and Family Services Act, the Director of Child and Family Services and agencies must review, at least once a year, the care and treatment of all children they are looking after. Plans for the permanent placement of children must also be reviewed.

### Foster/Kinship Care

Alternative care or foster/kinship care can mean many things. It can be a grandparent caring for a grandchild, an aunt or uncle caring for a niece or nephew, or a community member caring for a child they are familiar with. These homes are referred to as Kinship Homes. Alternative care or foster care can also be a person or family that is not familiar with a child but would like to open their heart and home to a child in need.

Foster/kinship care is a service provided to families who, for a variety of reasons, cannot assure the safety of their children or parent them in a way that will promote health physical, social, and emotional development. Children live with Agency-approved families until they can return to their own bio-families, or until some other permanent arrangement can be made.

### Adoption/Guardianship

Adoption is a legal process in which a child, which is not yours by birth, becomes yours, by law. In the Province of Manitoba, there are a number of types of adoption. These include agency, private, de facto, stepparent, extended family, and international adoptions. Legal guardianship is a procedure in which the child does not change his or her legal status. Should the child's birth parents wish to have contact or be involved in the child's life, this may be allowed. Legal guardianship may or may not be a permanent arrangement. All adoptions and legal guardianships are assessed case by case. All adoptions of any treaty child will be presented to that child's chief and council for consideration.

### Athabasca Tribal Council Child and Family Services, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (Alberta)

Child & Family Services support the safety and well-being of First Nations children ordinarily residing on-reserve. This ATC program supports the delivery of culturally appropriate prevention and protection services for First Nations children and families, in accordance with the legislation and standards of Alberta. All children are protected by provincial or territorial child welfare legislation as child and family services are matters of provincial or territorial jurisdiction. The CFS department works together with families and communities to develop nurturing, safe, environments for children, youth, and individuals where family strengths are recognized.

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15 (Anishnaabe Child & Family Services (Manitoba) n.d.)

### Kinship & Foster Care Program

ATC Child and Family Services is committed to the protection of children, the preservation of families, and the strengthening of communities. Family can be the strongest connection to the community, maintaining and protecting community connection, Indigenous identity, culture, heritage, spirituality, language, and traditions. Keeping children in need to support within the community and out of the child welfare system can foster better connections and support.<sup>16</sup>

### Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society (Edmonton, Alberta)

The Society is committed to building upon the strengths of Indigenous children, youth, and families to enable them to grow spiritually, emotionally, physically, and mentally so that they can walk proudly in both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

### Five Guiding Principles:

1. All people are equal and should be treated with respect and dignity.
2. All people have the capacity for change.
3. Working towards achieving balance in our lives is a lifetime goal.
4. Healing comes in a variety of forms.
5. The Indigenous way is about teaching how to be, not what to do.

"Never lose sight of who we are, or where we are going."

### Working Warriors

Working Warriors is a project that is designed to provide employment opportunities and community reintegration to multi-barriered, unemployed/underemployed youth who may be involved with the youth criminal justice system. Working Warriors' goal is to support positive change by way of direct employability skills. Using work experience placements, life skill enhancement, outreach services and tailored educational learning opportunities.

### Eagles Nest Youth Housing First

Eagles Nest Youth Housing First is intended to support single youth and families ages 16-24 years experiencing homelessness with barriers to housing stability that can be addressed by providing housing and connecting the person with existing community supports. It is short-term intervention designed to restore housing stability and assist individuals in doing so as independently as possible. The principle of "Housing First" is that every person has the right to a safe and secure home. Our objective as a partner with Homeward Trust is opening doors, building hope, and creating goals to end homelessness.

Eagles Nest provides intense support for those experiencing any of the following barriers and these have interfered with keeping stable housing:

- Addictions
- Incarceration/Legal issues
- Basic life skills/Budget
- Violence/Abuse
- Lack of Education/Employment
- Health concerns: emotional, mental, and physical
- CFS involvement

### Orenda House

Orenda House is a supportive-living housing project for families who are stable and seeking a sober living environment for their children and themselves. The onsite Resident Manager provides community resources, support, and guidance when needed.

Orenda House is a drug and alcohol-free environment and is part of the Crime Free Multi-Housing Initiative to provide a safe community for families that are looking for a healthier lifestyle. Residents are able to access a variety of services offered at Bent Arrow and in the community. The manager is able to provide a variety of supports and services to the families living at Orenda House.

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<sup>16</sup> (Athabasca Tribal Council Child and Family Services n.d.)

### New in Town Aboriginal Welcome Service

At New in Town Aboriginal Welcome Service, we offer a coordinated and culturally relevant transitional support service for Indigenous people and their families. We work with people who have been in Edmonton for one year or less, have recently arrived, plan to move to Edmonton, or have recently been released from a corrections facility. New in Town works with multiple partners and service providers to reduce risk-factors and increase positive supports. Our team is easy to connect with, whether you are in your home community and planning to move to the city or have already relocated and are looking for more information, advocacy, and support.

### Kahkiyaw Ayisiyinowak Ka Wahkohtot

Kahkiyaw Ayisiyinowak Ka Wahkohtot is a Collaborative Service Delivery (CSD), partnership between Bent Arrow, Boyle Street Community Services and Edmonton's Children Services. The family referrals are sent in by CFS. We believe in keeping families together and reducing the number of Indigenous children in care. The family is the driver in this process, and together in partnership, we support the family to address safety concerns and create positive outcomes.

Our program has a strong relationship-based Indigenous cultural foundation. We use ceremony, circles, and teachings from the medicine wheel in our work with families. Our teams work to support families to meet service and safety goals. This can be done through in-home support, parenting support, addressing addictions, housing and job search, court support, making community referrals to programs and extended supports within their community.

### Sacred Circle Family Intervention

Sacred Circle Family Intervention provides services to families who have CFS involvement as well as high risk youth. Sacred Circle supports goal building, fundamental life skills and the transition to independence. We offer collaboration with service teams, as well as connection to community and Elders.

Supports include:

- Connecting the families to community resources
- Mediation
- Conflict Resolution
- Intervention

This is a fee for this service program.

### Nitotemak—Foster Care/Kinship Care

Nitotemak—Foster Care/Kinship Care believes that the wholistic needs of children and the sense of belonging in a family and community are met through placing children in safe and loving homes. Kinship and Foster Care homes provide resources to cultural connections so that every effort is made to ensure the child is raised in their culture and that they never lose these connections.

We assist our caregivers through the kinship journey right up until permanency is reached or until reunification with bio-parents can take place.

We support our families by providing ongoing supports which include:

- Monthly home visits
- 24/7 on-call support when needed.
- Financial supports
- Building on natural supports
- Any other resources that caregivers may need.
- We support the cultural identity of every child in our program. We are focused on family find and connecting our Indigenous children to their communities.
- Connection, Collaboration and Continuous Improvement.

### Kikosewin Family Resource Hub

Kikosewin is Cree for the act of being with family. The Hub is for all family members to grow together. We believe in the importance of Family and that children and youth are safe, healthy, and nurtured by their parents or caregivers. Kikosewin's Hub offers an array of services, supports and programming that supports children, youth and families aligning in three core areas:

- Child Development and Well-being
  - Caregiver Capacity Building (by creating parenting opportunities and experiences to strengthen parenting abilities)
  - Social Connections and Supports
- Family Resource Centre
  - Offers early childhood development and parent education programs with cultural and non-cultural content for children, youth, and families to attend in a fun learning environment.
- Home Visitation
  - Provides in-home one-on-one support for parents prenatally through to 12 years old. Home visitors provide child development information and support to help parents achieve their goals to be the best parents they can be.
- Dad's Engagement
  - This program focuses on engaging with and supporting dads in the community through guided peer support.
- Relentless Connectors
  - Aims to reduce the need for intervention by CFS by meeting the needs of families dealing with multiple struggles. The worker works with the families on parent-identified goals and supports them to be the best parents they can be.
- Youth Programming
  - Offers youth programs with cultural and non-cultural content for those aged 13-17 years old.

#### Iskwew House

Iskwew House is funded through CFS and offers a transitional residential program for pregnant or parenting Indigenous teen girls and their babies, who are in the care of CFS (these young women must have "in care status"). The objective of this program is to provide a supportive learning environment for these young women as they prepare for parenthood and independence. Our goal is to support positive parent/child interaction and promote healthy child development.

#### Kokomish House

Kokomish House is a group care program which provides intermediate and long-term care to Indigenous youth, 12–17 years old, who are in the care of Child and Family Services. Using Traditional Indigenous perspectives and values we provide our youth with supervision, guidance, life skill development, life space counselling, support, advocacy, recreation, and cultural programming, but most importantly we provide our youth with care. Our youth attend ceremonies and events in the community as well as those offered by the Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society. We have basic structure of rules and guidelines, but, when possible, we allow our youth to make mistakes and learn from natural and logical consequences. We utilize community programs to support the development and care of our youth--such as schools, sports teams, employment, hobbies/clubs, cultural groups, and recreation. We collaborate with the justice, education, and Child and Family Services systems to better serve our youth. We also advocate for our youth in those systems.

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#### Blood Tribe Child Protection Services (Alberta)

The Blood Tribe Child Protection Services Corporation is delegated by the Minister of CFS to carry out the provisions of the Child Youth and Family Enhancement Act on the Blood Reserve and to provide case management services to band members who live off-reserve but who are deemed to be ordinarily resident on the reserve within the catchment areas of the Southwest Child and Family Services Authority.

Service programs include:

- Assessment/Investigation
  - An assessment/investigation is completed to determine:
    - If a child needs intervention
    - If family enhancement services will satisfy the child need for intervention
    - If protection services are required

#### Family Enhancement

The provision of services to a child and family through a Family Enhancement Agreement, which address the child's survival, security, and development within the family home. An Enhancement Agreement with a youth may be entered if the youth is living independently of the youth's guardian and in need of intervention services

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17 (Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society (Edmonton, Alberta) n.d.)

For a youth that was in care or had an Enhancement Agreement when they turned 18 years old, the director may enter into a Support and/or a Finance Assistance Agreement up to age 22 to assist the youth in transitioning to independence.

### Protection

Protection services are any services provided to a child who is either in the Custody of the Director or is the subject of a Supervision Order, Temporary Guardianship Order, Permanent Guardianship Order or Agreement, Apprehension, Interim Custody Order, Custody Agreement With Guardian, or a Custody Agreement With a Youth.

### Service Provision

Service to children and families may be provided directly by caseworkers, by community agencies, or through contracts or fee for service agreement with private service providers and may include:

- Family Support
- Parenting Assessment/ Education
- Child Development
- Mediation
- Addiction Treatment
- Psychologist Assessment/Counseling
- Youth Worker
- Secure Services

### Foster Care/Kinship Care Home

The Foster Care/Kinship Care programs are based on the belief that the family unit and parent model is the most beneficial and desirable setting for raising a child. A foster/kinship care family is a substitute family for a child whose birth family is unable or unwilling to assume full responsibility for the child.

Caregiver undertakes an approval process that includes a Home Study, Criminal Record Check, Child Intervention Check, Medical Report, Safety Check, and references. Foster homes are required to be licensed under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and complete training.

### Adoption

Adoption is intended to provide a lifelong commitment of permanence and stability for children. It can provide a sense of place and belonging to children who may not otherwise be able to have this experience. Adoption Services include:

- Birth Parent Service
- Private Adoptions
- Adoptions home approvals
- Matching children with permanent guardians with approved adoptive parents
- Post-approval services
- Supports for permanency.
- International adoption
- The post-adoption registry

The adoption home approval process includes Home Study, Criminal Record Check, Child Intervention Check, Medical Reports and References. The Blood Tribe will support the adoption of Blood children in permanent care with members of the Blood Tribe and Blackfoot Confederacy.

### Private Guardianship

Any adult who has had continuous care of a child for a period of more than six months may apply to the court for a Private Guardianship Order. This is a self-help process and information/documents are obtained from Family Court. If the child is involved with child intervention services, our office may assist with the application.

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### Chief Red Bear Children's Lodge, Cowessess First Nation (Saskatchewan)

In their efforts to heal the damage done to Indigenous children by the child welfare system in Canada, members of Cowessess First Nation are building their own community-led child welfare program rooted in the idea of keeping a "home fire" burning to connect children to their culture and community.

"[The home fire] doesn't necessarily mean bringing all the children back home, but it starts with that culture, feeling the land, remembering who you are and where you come from." (Nicole Cook, associate CEO of Chief Red Bear Children's Lodge).

After finding what is believed to be 751 unmarked children's graves at the site of the former Marieval Residential School, Cowessess First Nation was the first community to make use of Bill C-92, federal legislation passed in June 2019, which gives jurisdiction over child welfare back to First Nations. In March 2020, the community voted to pass the Miyo Pimatisowin Act, which allows Cowessess First Nation to self-govern and make decisions in the best interest of their children and families and was one of the first in the country.

### Chief Cadmus Delorme:

"Citizens of Cowessess First Nation begin ceremonies, feasts, gatherings, songs, healing, and other occasions with traditional protocols which have been passed on from generation to generation since time immemorial. Our human birth, the Creator gave this to us. It was at that time the Creator blessed us before our human birth, from the Creator's flame, a 'soul flame' – the soul flame is there to look after our bodies, our minds, and our souls. We picked from the Creator's flame before our human birth, the tiny flame we picked became our soul, which is called a soul flame. Cowessess First Nation laws and legal traditions are an essential part of our culture. Within these laws are the protocols, etiquettes and methodologies that provide direction and guidance in participating of ceremonies.

Non-Indigenous colonial jurisdiction has resulted in the diminishment and loss of language, culture, songs, practices, and jurisdiction. The Miyo Pimatisowin Act will guide Cowessess First Nation in the formal and informal methods that will maintain behaviors, ideologies, institutions, policies, and economics of its people and resources. These formal and informal methods will be built upon the medicine wheel teachings of mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual pillars. The Coordination Agreement will build on the relationship Cowessess First Nation has with the Government of Canada and the Government of Saskatchewan. Like a braid of sweetgrass, each strand will represent the unity each will need to play to assure the Miyo Pimatisowin Act is supported and lead by the Cowessess First Nation over children and families requiring help.

### Chief Red Bear Children's Lodge is based on four Foundational Priorities:

- Child and Family Intervention & Healing Services
- Programs, services, and resources draw upon the strength of community to ensure no child is alone, support strong cultural and family connections, strengthen kinship ties, and build parental capacity.
- Sovereignty & Jurisdiction
- Sovereignty and jurisdiction over child and family healing services for its citizens is respected, enabled, and supported by community, organizational leadership, staff resources, and all partnerships.
- Cultural Identity & Healing
- Cultural identity, rejuvenation of language, and the practice of traditions and ceremony are integral in all Programs, healing services, staff activities, and governance.
- Connection to Home Fires
- All our children and families identify with and are connected to the Nation's home fires, feel supported in their healing journey, and can rely on the strengths of the Nation, regardless of location and need. <sup>19</sup>

### Closer to Home (Calgary, Alberta)

Closer to Home Community Services (CTH) is a charitable organization located in Calgary, AB since 1995. CTH provides a wide range of services designed to meet the unique needs of children, youth, and families.

Vision: Every child thriving within supportive family and community relationships.

Mission: Closer to Home Community Services facilitates growth and belonging in communities of meaningful relationships. Our integrity is grounded in evidence-based practice authentically informed by, and connected to, diverse cultural wisdom. We journey with children and families to uncover strength, hope, and healing, creating new possibilities for a brighter future.

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<sup>19</sup> (Cowessess First Nation (Saskatchewan) n.d.)

Our Work: Through the use of evidence-based practices and innovative solutions, Closer to Home strives to preserve, reunify, and build stronger families who can care for their children and contribute meaningfully to their community. Our family-centered, strength-based services ensure that children have stable, healthy, and safe living environments in which to grow and develop. And in some cases, when families are separated, we provide a place for children and youth to call home while offering therapeutic support with the ultimate goal of family reunification.

Closer to Home is committed to addressing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Actions.

Our Principles:

We take pride in having established a culture that is built upon a unified set of principles:

- Respect for Diversity
  - Practices that accept and promote individual cultures, traditions, spiritual beliefs, and lifestyles. Services that are aware of the complexity of social issues related to the historical trauma experienced by Indigenous communities and promote ethical spaces within the organization that respect Indigenous values and worldview related to health, healing, and cultural connections.
- Individualized Approaches
  - Interventions developed to preserve the family, in partnership with the child and family, are strength-based, inclusive, and purposeful.
- Effective Services
  - Integrated quality assurance systems provide the necessary feedback to improve services and facilitate continuous quality improvement that results in better outcomes for children and families.
- Outcome-Focused Programs
  - Meaningful outcomes are identified, measured, and achieved with integrity, excellence, and accountability. The CTH Evaluation and Outcome Framework provides an internal roadmap to better identify salient outcome indicators, reliable measurement tools and clear feedback loops to ensure outcome information is utilized to continuously improve services.
- Trauma-Informed Approaches
  - Interactions with children and families are respectful, dignifying, and positive. Interventions are trauma-informed and focused on family preservation and reunification. Children are safe, their voices are heard and valued, and their choices respected.
- Client and Stakeholder Satisfaction
  - Services solicit the opinion of all participants and stakeholders in a systematic manner and are responsive to identified needs and concerns.
- Collaborative and Inclusive
  - CTH participates in partnerships that offer benefit to and increases the social impact of services offered for children, families, and communities.

#### Group Care: Community Teaching Homes

The Teaching Homes provide individualized treatment with support services for each youth referred by CFS to meet their individual needs.

Support services include:

- Providing supervision and treatment to the youth in a community-based teaching home
- Live-in Teaching Parents and other staffing supports that help youth learn the skills necessary to:
  - Successfully returned home.
  - Move to another long-term placement.
  - Live independently

Children who are brought into care and are placed in our community-based teaching homes will have the opportunity to create a treatment plan with the teaching parents to identify essential skills that will benefit them in learning how to build strong relationships with others including with family members. They will also identify skills for school and work, being involved in the community, and living independently. By creating these opportunities, children in the teaching home programs will discover their success while in the program and generalize their newly learned skills in future placements and all settings of their life long-term.

#### Foster Care

Closer to Home has been supporting families in Calgary for 20 years.

Sometimes, families face an immense challenge or crisis that causes them to separate. In these scenarios, Foster Parents are critical.

Foster Parents provide a safe, nurturing environment for children to grow and develop during a difficult time in their lives. Foster Parents ensure every child feels loved and valued while learning important life skills such as communication, managing strong emotions and problem-solving. In many cases, the children's parents are simultaneously working to resolve their challenges and hope to be reunited with their children.

#### Indigenous Programs:

Closer to Home Community Services' programs and services incorporate treatment strategies that respect and affirm culture, traditions, and beliefs. We encourage individual independence and self-determination. Closer to Home Community Services works in collaboration with other resource providers to support children and families within their own communities.

#### Siim ohksin: Wahkotiwin

Siim ohksin: Wahkotiwin is a home visitation program providing support to parents with newborns and children aged 0-6 who are in a variety of at-risk circumstances. These circumstances could include low income, parents without family or community support, a history of abuse/neglect and parents who find it difficult to cope with day-to-day family challenges.

Depending on family needs and the agreement between Home Visitors and families, Home Visitors can visit with a family 1-3 times per week and be involved with a family for as long as one year.

The Siim ohksin: Wahkotiwin Family Support Worker works to enhance parenting skills, improve knowledge and understanding of child development, promote healthy family functioning, and increase connections with their community. Healthy Families is an Early Intervention program, and it is designed to be a launching pad for families and provide the jumpstart they need to raise a healthy, happy family.

The focus of this program is to strengthen parenting capacity and family relationships to prevent potential crime involvement. This program is delivered through the Indigenous lens of 'Siim ohksin: Wahkotiwin,' with the intention of enabling participants to restore harmony with self and others and incorporate the principles of Discipline, Responsibility, Respect and Accountability into their lives to prevent involvement or further involvement with the justice system.

The Family Support Worker will connect with these and other families to establish trusting relationships in their homes, community or at Pekewe, teach parenting knowledge/skills, and connect families with Elders and Knowledge keepers at Pekewe and the existing programs and community of Ee-des-spoom-oooh-soop.

#### Youth Drumming and Culture

Our Youth Drumming and Culture program allows participants to drum and sing, connect with Indigenous Culture, and create beautiful crafts! This group is open to youth aged 10 to 17 years old.

#### One-On-One Support

One-On-One Support is individualized support that involves skill-building, discussing family conflict, goal setting, connecting with culture and more. Our Ee-Des-Spoom-Ooh-Soop facilitators can meet with individuals to help address challenges and successfully achieve goals. This may involve skill-building, discussing family conflict, setting personal goals, connecting with culture etc.

This program is available by appointment only.

#### Indigenous Cultural Supports

Cultural resources and programs are offered to help strengthen the connection to culture for Indigenous families.

Family Group Conference program, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre (Winnipeg, Manitoba)

Family Group Conferencing (FGC) is an Indigenous-led evidence-based model that assists families involved with CFS-mandated agencies become the decision-makers in reunifying their families. Within the structure of the program, all members of a family meet to discuss what is needed to ensure their child(ren) will be cared for and safe, and are supported by a FGC mentor, as well as a broad range of Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata wrap-around supports and services. FGC acknowledges that families have the capacity and expertise to address family concerns and

develop their own care plans with success and accountability, provided they have adequate and necessary resources and relevant information to guide and support their decisions.

FGC has consistently high prevention and reunification rates, through access to Indigenous teachings and ceremony and by using resources effectively. FGC is a successful way to maintain and reunify Indigenous families and strengthen Indigenous communities through relationships, support, guidance, and advocacy.

Families also receive the benefit of accessing more than 50 Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre programs, including community care centers, youth leadership development programs, and Indigenous knowledge services in Winnipeg.

The FGC model is based on an Indigenous-led process where Indigenous communities worked together to keep their children safe. In 2000, the Maori people of New Zealand gifted Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre with the Indigenous model and the responsibility of being the caretakers of the FGC model, maintaining its integrity and restoring the sacred bond within families.

The FGC model protects cultural integrity and Indigenous knowledge to empower family reconciliation and restore the sacred bond within families. It is common practice in Indigenous communities for extended families and/or community members to share in the care and protection of children when their birth parents cannot or need support to do so.

FGC families are respected, honored, and cared for through Indigenous values, ceremonies, programming, and approaches that support individual and family empowerment, healing and wellness. Each FGC is a working collaboration and involves open communication between the FGC team and youth, their families (we adopt a broad definition of family), CFS-mandated agencies and other identified supports, encouraging the achievement of short and long-term goals and aspirations of children, youth, and their families.

Admission, self-referral, and CFS-mandated agency referral

1. Self-referrals or CFS mandated agencies can ONLY be referred through the following Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre Programs:
  - a. Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre Caring for Our Relatives Programs: Youth Group Care (residential care facilities) and Care Homes (foster care programs).
  - b. Families can come to any of the three Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre Community Care Centers located in Winnipeg to prevent their children from going into care and/or attend with staff from a CFS-mandated agency.
2. If families meet the criteria of the programs above, an FGC mentor will assist with completing several forms to provide basic information about the family and child(ren). This information will be reviewed by the FGC team and a decision will be made if FGC is the best option for the family; the team may recommend other options to the family and/or CFS-mandated agency.
3. If all parties agree, an FGC family mentor is assigned, and the FGC process begins. There are three steps involved in FGC: Preparation, the Family Meeting, and Care Plan, as well as monitoring, review, and evaluation.
4. CFS-mandated agency staff and family members must be committed to the success of the FGC Care Plan and to working with the FGC mentor and CFS-mandated agency staff as needed. The focus of each and every FGC Care Plan is the child(ren) and their relationship with both sides of their immediate and extended family.
5. Regular meetings, communication and care planning occur between children and their families, a CFS-mandated agency representative and the FGC team to support the short and long-term goals of the Care Plan. Supporting reunification is the main goal of the FGC Care Plan.

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21 (Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre (Winnipeg, Manitoba) n.d.)

## Gitxsan Child & Family Services Society (BC)

Gitxsan Child and Family Services Society (GCFSS) in British Columbia strives to create strong, healthy, safe children and families within a supportive Gitxsan community by providing protective and preventative services that balance the traditions and culture of the Gitxsan people with the modern context of today.

GCFSS serves the five communities of Kispiox, Glen Vowell, Gitsegukla, Gitsegukla, and Gitanyow, as well as the many Gitxsan people living off reserve throughout BC and beyond.

Founded in 1999, GCFSS originally operated under the guidelines and protocols of the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the provincial agency responsible for child welfare at that time.

In 2005, GCFSS hired the first Gitxsan social worker and began a program to identify Gitxsan foster homes, bringing children back home to the community. These were the first steps in a significant shift toward regaining control over the welfare of Gitxsan children.

In 2007, an agreement between GCFSS, the Ministry, and the federal government transferred responsibility of guardianship services of Gitxsan children from the Ministry to GCFSS. This historic event marked the first time the provincial and federal governments had agreed in writing that a First Nation family services agency could operate in a traditional 'way.'

### Mission:

To provide culturally sensitive support, prevention and protection services to Gitxsan children and their families by attaining the necessary level of knowledge, capacity, and delegation to ensure success.

### Vision:

By embracing and strengthening our Gitxsan Ayookw, we will ensure the health, safety, and well-being of our majagalee (children) and Wil naa tahl (our families).

GCFSS operates with the following principles:

- Gitxsan children are precious and deserve to be protected; they are the future of the Gitxsan Nation
- The Gitxsan ayookw carries timeless values and wisdom, which will guide service delivery and program development.
- The Gitxsan family provides natural protection for children.
- We will respect ourselves, each other and all that walk through our doors.
- We will work cooperatively and collaboratively as a team.
- We will embrace equality recognizing that together we are stronger.
- We will be accountable for our actions.
- We will work in an environment that benefits from the positive energy created by humor.
- We will operate with a high level of commitment<sup>22</sup>

## KTC Child and Family Services, First Nations of the Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council (Alberta)

The KTC Child & Family Society has been providing child & family services to the member First Nations of the Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council through a Tri-partite Agreement with Canada and the Government of Alberta since 1997. Historically, child welfare services were delivered by the province to the First Nation communities. Children were removed and placed outside of their home communities and were sometimes adopted out without consent or consultation with the First Nations. Discussions took place and the Chiefs of the First Nations that had formed Tribal Councils decided that First Nation people should "Take Care of Their Own." With that in mind, Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council (KTC), which was made up of three member Nations (Whitefish Lake First Nation, Loon River First Nation, and Woodland First Nation), had further meetings and discussions with the Province and INAC. A Tri-partite Agreement was signed, and KTC Child & Family Services Agency was incorporated on June 10th, 1997. The KTC Child & Family Services Agency was given delegation to provide Child Welfare Services to their people and is legislated by the Child, Youth & Family Enhancement Act.

The three parties enter into a new agreement every five years, which has enabled KTC Child & Family Services Society to continue providing Child, Youth & Family Enhancement Services to the aforementioned member First Nations and including new member nations (Peerless–Trout First Nation joined the Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal

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22 (Gitxsan Child and Family Services Society (BC) n.d.)

Council and KTC Child & Family Services Society as of February 1st, 2013; Lubicon Lake Band joined the Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council in June 2013 and KTC Child & Family Services Society as of January 2014). Whitefish Lake First Nation left KTC Child & Family Services Society as of October 27, 2020, and created its own agency to provide services to its member children. Woodland Cree First Nation left KTC Child & Family Services Society as of March 31, 2022, and created its own agency to provide services to its member children.

### Family Enhancement

The Family Enhancement Program (FEP) encourages parents and families to work directly with FEP workers and community resources to address the issues that brought the family to the attention of KTC CFSA. This program provides an option for lower-risk families to prevent the need for protective services. Ongoing screening and assessment ensures that children and youth remain safe in the family environment.

Parents and guardians are responsible to care for their children, but sometimes they are not willing or able to provide a safe and secure home for their child or protect them from abuse or neglect. Child Protective Services are needed when:

- A child has been abused or is at risk of abuse by the parent or the parent does not protect the child from abuse.
- A child has been neglected by the parent.
- A child has been subjected to cruel and unusual treatment or punishment by the parent or the parent fails to protect the child from cruel and unusual treatment or punishment.
- A child's parent is deceased, and no arrangements have been made for the care of the child; or
- The parent's whereabouts are unknown.

There are two types of care that KTC CFSA provides: Foster Care and Kinship Care.

### Foster Care

Foster Care is the full-time temporary care of a child in an approved home. A foster family is a substitute family for a child when the natural family of the child is unwilling or unable to provide appropriate care to the child. Foster parents provide a safe, secure, and compassionate placement when a child's need for this environment is vital. When children must be placed in foster care, the goal is the safe return of the children to their natural families, or to other appropriate permanent families, or to prepare them to live independently.

### Kinship Care

Kinship Care is the full-time care, nurturing and protection of a child or children by relatives, members of his/her Community or band, godparents, stepparents, or any adult who has a kinship bond with the child. The objectives of kinship care are to maintain a connection between the child/youth and his/her extended family and community when Child & Family Services has determined that the child/youth can no longer reside in his/her parent's home.

Foster children range in age from newborns to teenagers and come from various cultural, ethnic, and spiritual backgrounds.<sup>23</sup>

Mamawi Awasis Society, Little Red River Cree Nation (Alberta)

Vision/Mission: We embrace the opportunity to promote and enhance the well-being and healthy development of children and families. We will provide preventative and protective services in the least intrusive and culturally appropriate manner which reflect and honor the holistic needs of the Little Red River Cree Nation.

The Mamawi Awasis Society includes the following programs:

### Casework Program

Child protective services (CPS) casework practice can cover a variety of interventions. Effective casework practice allows child protection staff to work together with families to identify strengths, needs, goals, and desired outcomes. Often, the goals focus on enhancing caregiver protective capacity, which can help maximize children's safety and minimize their risk of harm. The Casework Program includes resources ranging from decision-making and safety-planning phases to case planning and management. Specific resources include information on in-home services, working with families involved with CPS, and cultural competence. Evidence-based and promising interventions are also shared.

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<sup>23</sup> (First Nations of the Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council n.d.)

### Foster Care Program

The goals of the Foster Care Program reflect the philosophy of the Enhancement Act. A foster family is a temporary placement for a child who cannot remain with his or her own family due to safety concerns. The supportive atmosphere of a caregiver home assists a child in developing healthy self-esteem, assisting in meeting children's social, emotional, and physical needs, and offers positive role models on which a child can pattern values and behavior.

### Kinship Care Program

The goals of the Kinship Care Program reflect the philosophy of the Enhancement Act. Placement with family is a priority for children. Children placed with family do much better than children placed in general foster care. A kinship home is a temporary placement for a child who cannot remain with his or her own family due to safety reasons. A kinship caregiver is an extended family member of a child, or a person who has a significant relationship with the child or is a member of the child's cultural community.

### Family Enhancement Program

The Family Enhancement Program leads the delivery of services as mandated by the Child and Youth, and Family Enhancement Act. The services range from early intervention and Family Enhancement to Child Protection Services. Family Enhancement leads the delivery of programs mandated by the Child Care Licensing Act, Protection against Family Violence and Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act. It also leads outcomes based on service delivery initiatives in child intervention that promotes positive outcomes for children, youth, and families by strengthening both practice and business with service providers. <sup>24</sup>

### Mamowe Opikihawasowin Tribal Chief Child and Family Services West Society (Alberta)

Mamowe Opikihawasowin Tribal Chief and Family Services West Society was incorporated on June 26th, 1996, and is comprised of Beaver Lake Cree Nation, Goodfish Lake First Nation, and Heart Lake First Nation. It maintained quality Family Enhancement Services to participating First Nations of Mamowe Opikihawasowin. The purpose of the Society is to assist all member First Nation in the delivery and management of Enhancement Services.

The Society encourages and supports children and families to maintain the Nation's culture, traditions, and spirituality by becoming responsible and respectful through the enhancement of Kinship in a secure and loving environment. It encourages and supports the wholesome development of children by providing services and programs that are designed to meet the needs of each resident and acknowledge the benefits of family support systems while ensuring the safety and security of its member children.

Mamowe Opikihawasowin Tribal Chief and Family Services West Society offers a range of programs including:

- Kinship Care Caregivers
- Caregiver and kinship Recruiting/Training
- Family Enhancement Services
- Intervention Services
- Supports For Permanency
- Support and Financial Agreement
- Aboriginal Parenting
- Restorative Healing Circle
- Trauma, Loss, and Grief Care <sup>25</sup>

### Miskanawah (Calgary, Alberta)

Since 1988, Miskanawah has led the effort to support vulnerable children and youth in a holistic way throughout Calgary and the surrounding area. Miskanawah (mis-con-a-wah, meaning "Pathways" in Cree) is a multi-service organization, offering programs for children, youth, families, and community with the philosophical framework that is rooted in Indigenous teachings, ceremonies, and guidance from Elders. These traditional values and beliefs have tremendous healing potential and are embedded within their service delivery practices. As its name implies, this approach guides individuals and families in building pathways to and within the community, strengthening their natural supports, and engaging in healthier ways of living.

Mission:

Guided by Indigenous teachings, Miskanawah offers evidence-informed, supportive services to people in the Calgary area as they strengthen their circles of self, family, community, and culture.

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24 (Little Red River Cree Nation (Alberta) n.d.)

25 (Mamowe Opikihawasowin Tribal Chief Child and Family Services West Society (Alberta) n.d.)

Vision:

Children, youth, and families thrive within a culturally responsive community.

Values:

Culture – Miskanawah is firmly grounded in Indigenous culture and strives to strengthen cultural identity for Indigenous people in the greater Calgary community by inviting the community to join in Indigenous traditions ceremony and celebration. Miskanawah recognizes people are influenced by a variety of cultures every day and that culture is a fundamental part of our daily lives. As such, Miskanawah works to create an inclusive and supportive environment where people feel safe to learn, explore, and celebrate the rich cultural diversity of its staff and persons served.

Community – Miskanawah centers its practice in the establishment of community as a means of creating natural supports both as supplement to and when transitioning out of formal/professional supports. Staff work to create community by sharing resources, creating partnerships, and participating in gatherings, celebrations, and ceremony.

Respect – Miskanawah practices respect by honoring staff and client knowledge of themselves, encouraging the practice of honest and non-judgmental listening, and making space for cultural protocols from diverse backgrounds.

Trust – Miskanawah understands the responsibility of working with vulnerable populations, and seeks to meet and exceed that responsibility. Staff create and nurture trust by being dependable, responsive, and consistent with their colleagues and clients. Staff at all levels are encouraged to be innovative, express their ideas, and provide open and honest feedback.

Youth Programs:

Strengthening Home Fires

Strengthening Home Fires (SHF) is a new Scattered Site Supportive Housing program that will support Indigenous youth to identify, access, secure, and maintain housing. SHF is founded on the understanding that colonization, trauma, and systemic discrimination are major causes of homelessness for Indigenous peoples and that strengths-based, trauma-informed, and culturally grounded approaches to working with Indigenous youth are critical to their success and wellbeing. The program name "Strengthening Home Fires" communicates the overarching goal of creating a safe and stable place to call home. In addition, SHF will provide support to non-Indigenous homeless serving agencies to strengthen their capacity to service Indigenous youth through cultural connections and activities, such as:

- Engaging in partnerships and outreach support, inviting participants from other agencies/programs to take part in cultural and ceremonial activities.
- Workshops and group-based cultural programming
- Healing opportunities and ceremonies
- Cultural awareness, competency, and humility training

Diamond Willow Youth Lodge

Diamond Willow Youth Lodge is a safe, welcoming place for youth between the ages of 12-29 to drop-in or participate in a variety of programs and activities. Designed by young people, for young people, the lodge is a hub where Indigenous youth connect with peers and participate in their own sense of healing and well-being while accessing a variety of programs and supports.

re:VISION Indigenous Youth Employment

re:VISION is an innovative, culturally based program that creates connections between Indigenous youth and employers. The program is focused on supporting young people in our community to work with employers who are open to learning about the unique needs of the Indigenous community. re:Vision offers a new approach to supporting both youth and employers to nurture a successful working relationship.

Nipisis (neep-sis)

Cree for "young willow." Caring and supportive relationships are essential to the development and well-being of a young person. The Nipisis program builds the strength and resiliency of Indigenous youth in care through caring and supportive relationships. Youth reside with a community family to continue their education and to learn important life-skills. They leave the program when they are able to return home or live on their own

Building trust and mutual respect, these living arrangements are intended to be long-term and to help build confidence, empowerment, strength, and relationships while supporting the youth's cultural identity and connection. The age range for this program is 12 to 17 years old.

#### Oskipmatsahk (oski-pi-maci-sak)

Cree for "young or new life." This program supports youth who have been involved with CFS, have recently turned 18 and transitioned into adult services. Oskipmatsahk provides services to young people who have transitioned from living in a foster home or a residential placement to living independently. Through modelling and mentorship, Support Workers help young people learn how to access community resources, further their education, learn important life skills such as cooking and budgeting, and find employment when appropriate. The Oskipmatsahk program also provides ongoing opportunities for youth to learn about their culture. Through these cultural experiences, young people increase their understanding of who they are and where they come from, improving self-confidence, positive self-worth, and enhanced sense of belonging.

Family programs:

#### Tawaw Family Resource Networks (ta-wow)

Cree for "welcome, we've made space for you here." The Tawaw Family Resource Networks (East and West) use a hub-and-spoke model of service delivery to offer a range of early intervention and prevention services that are grounded in Indigenous cultures and teachings. The Tawaw hubs offer warm, family-friendly environments where people can come to connect with each other, culture, and community supports.

The Tawaw spokes (programs) offered are:

- Indigenous Home Visitation
  - In-home visitation supports from a family-centered approach.
  - Works with families with children ages 0-6
  - Offers connection through Cultural Services spoke, ceremonies and Elder supports, representing a diversity of Indigenous bands, cultures, and traditions.
  - Strengthens parental capacity, connection to community, and awareness of child's development.
- Cultural Supports
  - Connects children, youth, and families to culturally relevant supports.
  - Elder supports and ceremony are integrated into program offerings.
  - Programming will change over time based on family need.
- Early Intervention
  - Group and one-on-one parenting supports offered, based on traditional parenting teachings and the Nurturing Parenting Program
  - Child-parent play activities are suggested and encouraged.
  - Childcare is available during programming.
  - Group and one-on-one youth life skills programming also offered.
- Rapid Access Counselling (offered through Kindred)
  - Counsellor available for rapid access to mental health supports twice weekly (once a week at each Hub location)
  - Family need will determine the length of service provision.
- Grandmother Turtle (offered through Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society)
  - Culturally safe early childhood development programming for Indigenous children ages 0-6 years, and their parents, grandparents, and other significant caregivers
- Culturally Informed Youth Wellbeing Program (offered through Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society)
  - Culturally safe and trauma-informed child and youth development programming for Indigenous children and youth ages 7-18 years and their parents, grandparents, and other significant caregivers

#### Nitsanak Mamawintowak (nit-sa-nak-mama-win-to-wak)

Cree for "families coming together." Nitsanak Mamawintowak provides parents, babies and their young children with home-based parenting support and education from Indigenous and Western perspectives. Families are provided with opportunities to develop social networks and relationships at community learning events and have access to traditional Knowledge keepers and Elders, who are available to offer guidance, teachings, and ceremonies.

This program is open to all families within the City of Calgary who (are):

- Expecting a baby or have a child under the age of six.
- Would like support in their parenting and family life.

Community Programs and Initiatives:

Ka-pe-kiwehtahat (ka-pi-kiwih-ta-hat)

Cree for "bringing them home." Ka-pe-kiwehtahat is a new Homelessness Prevention program for Indigenous youth, families, and single adults in the Calgary community. Miskanawah recognizes our home fire as the heart of belonging and essential to building strong, resilient Indigenous communities. Founded on the principle of Wahkotiwin: living in relationship, Ka-pe-kiwehtahat is an extension of Miskanawah's community of care, where we envision our circle of relatives supporting Indigenous children, youth, families, and single adults in building their home fire using traditional approaches to healing and wellness. Through culturally grounded housing support services, Ka-pe-kiwehtahat seeks to support access to safe, affordable housing options and prevent housing breakdown for Indigenous people in the Calgary community.

The Ka-pe-kiwehtahat Housing Support Team supports Indigenous people at risk of homelessness by assessing existing housing challenges and risk factors, providing available resources, creating a plan for housing security, and building strategies to prevent homelessness in the future. One-time financial support is available for qualifying youth, families, and single adults. Ongoing connection to cultural and social supports is provided upon request.

Nanatawiho Kamik

The Healing Lodge at Miskanawah is a safe and caring healing therapeutic environment designed specifically for Indigenous people. We offer culturally appropriate services and programs to Individuals and families in a way that incorporates Indigenous values, traditions, and beliefs. The Healing Lodge treatment program integrates traditional cultural values with other non-Indigenous approaches to create a holistic approach toward healing. Interventions including Elder services, connection to the land, and traditional medicines and ceremonies, are provided. These values and practices foster respect, honesty, generosity, strong cultural identification, and hope for positive life changes.

Indigenous people have the best opportunity for culturally safe, evidence-based, high quality and responsive mental health care so that they have good quality of life and well-being and can live well in their communities and on their terms.

Guided by Indigenous teachings, the Healing Lodge wants to empower our Indigenous communities to take ownership of their mental health and well-being, prevent and manage mental health challenges and ensure the earliest access to appropriate mental health care. The Healing Lodge also hopes to work with all our partners to systematically address the social determinants of mental health and well-being.

Our values are our statement of standards and behaviors we model in the work we do and how we interact with children, youth, families, elders, individuals, and communities and amongst ourselves. These values are consistent with the core values of Miskanawah. Our Values are Respect, Openness, Empowerment, Collaboration, Recovery and Hope.

Planet Youth

Planet Youth is a long-term, upstream approach originating in Iceland in 1996, to support environmental change and reduce substance misuse for youth in their community. During the development of the Planet Youth Calgary model, the Indigenous Parallel has been engaging with youth, Elders and community agencies to incorporate Indigenous protocols, processes and youth voice into services for youth.

Indigenous Youth Engagement in Planet Youth Calgary began in 2021 through collaborative discussions with youth, United Way of Calgary and Area, Miskanawah, Trellis Society, USAY, and The Social Impact Lab. Youth Wellbeing Circles were established to engage Indigenous youth, their Elders, and mentor youth ("Youth Elders") together, over a sustained period of time in a "design lab" process. Youth Wellbeing Circles explored current issues faced by Indigenous youth and creative solutions from an Indigenous perspective. Several Elders were consulted in the creation of the Youth Wellbeing Circles and guided the facilitators to create parallels between Western concepts and Indigenous teachings. Miskanawah is honored to be working closely with the United Way of Calgary and Area to develop a Planet Youth model in Calgary, to meet the unique needs of Calgary's Indigenous youth.

### Land-Based Healing

Miskanawah's land-based ceremonies and activities focus on protecting the smudge, healing the spirit, and building relatives by engaging with traditional languages, songs, stories, and teachings within the natural surroundings of Mother Earth. Miskanawah's land-based activities include:

- Sweat Lodges
- Pipe Ceremonies
- Teepee raising
- Fire teachings
- Elder's gatherings
- Youth and family camps
- Medicine harvesting
- Outdoor crafting

In addition to the above ceremonies and activities, Miskanawah's land-based healing location offers a beautiful space for experiential learning opportunities for staff, families, and community partners. This may include workshops, team building, and training where we can engage in collaborative learning with community.

Many of Miskanawah's programs and services include land-based healing as a key component of service delivery, as connection to the land remains an important priority for Miskanawah to support the continuation of Indigenous traditions, ceremonies, and healing practices. Our Elders remind us that our land-based strategies and cultural offerings are also opportunities for Miskanawah and our community partners to create ethical space between Indigenous and Western world views.<sup>26</sup>

### Métis Child and Family Services Authority (Winnipeg, Manitoba)

The Métis Child and Family Services Authority is a non-profit organization responsible for the administration and provision of child and family services by the agencies under its jurisdiction, Métis Child, and Family Community Services and Michif Child and Family Services.

"As Bill C-92, An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families comes into fruition, our responsibilities as a CFS organization have never been higher. The Métis will soon fall under federal jurisdiction and be recognized as an independent nation responsible for the care of its own children. We are excited to have the independence and freedom to protect and care for our children in a safe and culturally appropriate environment. As we work toward increased independence and improved systematic functionality, our children continue to grow as Inuit and Métis children on the Red River Métis homeland. We will continue to provide our children with the best care possible, and continually ask ourselves "is it good for the child?" (Mona Buors, Minister – Métis Child and Family Services)

The Métis Child and Family Services Authority functions under the belief that Métis families and communities have the right and responsibility to care for their children. The Authority works to strengthen the capacity of families to care for children through culturally relevant community-based programs, believing in the inherent strength of Métis families and in the need to build on the capacity of the community to care for and nurture Métis children.

The Authority operates with the following guiding principles:

- Ensure daily practice is guided by asking ourselves "Is it Good for the Children?"
- Change the landscape and history of child welfare practices through recognizing the importance of reconciliation, culture, and family.
- Recognize the responsibility for decision-making stays with the family, extended family, and community whenever possible.
- Provide community-based supports to our agencies that mirror the needs of the children and families.
- Recognize the importance of reflecting family values through our service delivery.
- Apply the wisdom of Elders to guide our decisions and service practices that we know will impact future generations.
- Respect and honor the diverse individuality of all people.
- Support our agencies to build capacity within the original family unit to care for and provide a safe environment for their children.

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26 (Miskanawah (Calgary, Alberta) n.d.)

Through the Métis Child, Family, and Community Services department, the following programs are offered, most under the themes Strengthening Families, Empowering Our Children and Youth, Alternative Placement Services, and Métis and Inuit Cultural Programs:

#### Keeping the Sash Around the Family

MCFCS has developed a continuum of programs that focus on strengthening the capacity of families to care for their children. Many of the services are unique to the agency and have been developed as result of the innovative and thoughtful thinking of MCFCS staff teams. All services strive to be family focused and responsive to the individual needs of each family. They all incorporate inclusive strength-based practice and respect the cultural practices of Métis families. The programs strengthen families, enhance family functioning, and maintain family connectedness.

#### Strengthening Families:

##### Family Support Program (All Regions)

The Family Support Program provides a range of prevention and early intervention services to strengthen families and reduce risk factors in order to prevent family disruption or alternately to be able to reunify children with their families. The program uses a strength-based, purposeful planning model in its work with families and identifies the individual strengths of parents as well as overall family strengths.

The Family Support Program provides:

- Parent Support Education involves individual work with parents in their home to enhance their parenting skills and abilities and build on their existing strengths.
- Respite involves the provision of safe alternative care for children so that parents are able to attend programming, classes, and therapy.
- Supported Family Time involves supporting parents who have children in the care of the Agency engage in a gradual resumption of their role as the caregiver to their children in order to facilitate reunification. Individual support is provided to the family in order to resolve identified concerns and enhance the parent's competencies and strengths.
- Emergency Support - In times of crisis the Agency provides families with support such as transportation, emergency food, milk and diapers, emergency respite and support services.

Family support services are accessed through referrals from your family services worker or intake worker.

#### Parenting Support and Education

Through various parenting and support education programs, MCFCS strives to provide a supported learning environment where parents can learn from each other. MCFCS offers the following programs in different regions at various times throughout the year - Triple P Parenting, Nobody's Perfect and Young Mothers and Kokum's Program.

#### Differential Response/Family Enhancement

Differential Response/Family Enhancement involves changing the manner in which families are approached following a report of child maltreatment, and the types of services that are provided to families following such a report, rather than responding with the traditional investigative approach. This allows the Agency to provide a supportive service focusing on the overall needs of the family and the well-being of the children. Services are goal-focused and time-limited (up to 270 days). Planning builds on identified strengths and focuses on needs identified through an assessment process with the family. Sharing circles, with the support of the program's cultural worker, and planning meetings with extended family members, are used to broaden families' support networks.

Winnipeg's Family Enhancement team consists of five family enhancement workers, two family enhancement mentors, and a cultural worker.

#### Empowering Our Children and Youth:

##### Circle of Life Program - Child and Youth Support Services (in most regions)

This program provides children involved with the Agency with planned, individualized and group support and mentoring from one-to-one support workers. The program connects with youth to provide guidance and support through relationships based on trust and open communication. Engaging with families and expanding the children's knowledge and understanding of their culture and history are also key aspects of the program. The program workers facilitate The Little Bears activity-based support group.

### Skills for Life Program (Winnipeg)

This program focuses on enhancing youth's life skills to prepare them for interdependent living. Program staff are sensitive to the challenges and uncertainties of transitioning from adolescence to young adulthood and guide the youth through a series of structured learning sessions. Staff offer one-to-one and group supports to assist individuals in mastering skills. Budgeting, banking, cooking, nutrition, self-care, safety, housing, and access to community resources are key areas of teaching.

### Life-long Connections Program (Winnipeg)

This program promotes, acknowledges, and respects the need to ensure that every child and youth in care has at least one life-long connection with someone who is committed to a permanent, supportive relationship with them. The life-long connections worker actively seeks out family or significant individuals to determine if they are able to build a life-long, supportive relationship with the youth. The goal is to expand the circle of supportive individuals in the child's life.

### Métis Spirit Program (Winnipeg)

MCFCS, in partnership with the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF), identified that youth require a more gradual transition from being a youth in care to an independent adult. There is a significant need for ongoing support services for youth once they reach the age of majority to assist them as they transition out of care. The age of majority staff involved with this program support, coach, and mentor youth to gain the necessary life skills required to live independently in the community. Support is offered individually and in groups. The program also offers an outreach component for youth who are not actively engaged in an age of majority plan to provide those youth with ongoing information about services that are available to them.

### Honoring Our Youth

MCFCS holds quarterly celebrations to honor youth who have reached their 18th birthday and are leaving the care of the Agency. Each celebration offers youth an opportunity to celebrate this significant milestone with their friends, family, and support network.

### Métis and Inuit Cultural Programs:

#### Métis and Inuit Cultural Awareness Training

This training is open to all foster parents, community members and staff of other community agencies. It is considered mandatory training for agency staff in order to support the continued development of a culturally relevant service delivery system within the Agency.

#### Individual Counselling and Support

This program provides individual support and counselling to children, youth, and families using holistic traditional healing methods. Services are provided in a manner that is consistent with the cultural values and beliefs of the family. The support offered seeks to enhance the well-being of children, youth, and families and promote pride and a positive identity as an Indigenous person. <sup>27</sup>

### Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre – Indigenous Family Reunification Centre (Beausejour, Manitoba)

The Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre (SSSC): Indigenous Family Reunification Centre (IFRC) is a short-term residential program that seeks to keep Indigenous families-in-crisis together rather than separating members into institutions and systems. The intent is not to remove the child(ren) from the home environment and into the child welfare system; rather, the goal is to work with the caregiver(s) by offering them the opportunity to participate in a land-based residential program that provides the necessary supports—cultural, spiritual, clinical, social—that enables them successfully to reintegrate back into their family and community.

The IFRC reduces the number of Indigenous children in care and keeps them at the center of a healthy family system, thus mitigating the effects of intergenerational and unresolved trauma. Demonstrating the effectiveness of keeping families together rather than child apprehension has the potential to “Indigenize” the entire child welfare system. The project has connections and Board members from First Nations across Canada, with partners who represent more than thirty (30) First Nations in Manitoba.

The project was conceptualized through a research agreement with the University of Victoria, who assisted in developing the initial proposal (Reaching Outward). Using a charrette planning model, planners and partners were asked this question: "How do you fit within this plan?" It forced potential partners to articulate their understanding, contribution, and commitment before coming on board. It also assists in focusing on "what is essential" (during and after) as the process moves along. A primary partner involved in this process is the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, engineers, architects, and consultants with experience in fundraising, programming, and infrastructure.

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Siksika Children and Family Services, Siksika Nation (Alberta)

The Siksika Family Services Corporation has been providing services to its member on Reserve since 1973. The Calgary and Area Child and Family Services Authority (CFSA) began providing services in 1987, with the "Native Unit" originally being housed at the Plaza 14 District office.

In 1991, services for Siksika children and families were provided a separate site, coordinated with Siksika Income and Employment Services. By 1997, Siksika Calgary operated its own office in Marlborough Mall. Although still reporting to the manager of the Native Services District Office, the Siksika supervisor conducted many planning meetings between the Siksika Director, the Calgary supervisor, and the manager or designate of the Native Services District Office.

By 2000, Siksika began to provide screening and investigation services out of their new worksite at 132 -16th Ave. NE, Calgary. During this time, they were under the joint supervision of Siksika managers with the Calgary and Area CFSA. By December 2000, Siksika operated their protection component autonomously while working collaboratively with the Calgary and Area CFSA. In this new office, Siksika continued to provide Income and Employment Services.

As a result of an agreement being signed with the province of Alberta in April 2001, the Calgary Siksika office operated their own independent office within the Calgary city limits, which provided: screening, investigations, casework, and early intervention services to Siksika members who were living within the jurisdiction of the Calgary and Area CFSA.

Today, the Siksika Calgary office continues to operate autonomously while working in collaboration with the Calgary and Area CFSA to provide the best possible service to Siksika members. To accomplish this, Siksika agreed to follow Regional Fee for Service Guidelines and Exceptional Consideration protocols. The Region also agreed to provide Siksika Calgary with equal access to Contracted placements and services. Under the New Act, the Calgary Siksika Office offers Family Enhancement Services. Income and Employment continues to be provided out of the same office.

Siksika Child Services are guided by the following values:

- Siksika cultural content in all service delivery
- Engagement with community partners to provide support to our clients.
- Empower families to be more self-sufficient.

Siksika Child Services offers four main services: Child Protection, Family Enhancement Program, Kinship Care, and Private Guardianship.

### Child Protection

Siksika Children and Family Services believes in taking a holistic approach to ensure the well-being of all Siksika children. To achieve this, they offer intervention services designed to protect children from physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse and neglect. Families can become involved with Siksika Child Protection Services through a variety of circumstances. When a report is received that a child may be at risk, Siksika Children and Family Services assigns a caseworker to:

- Investigate the reported abuse/neglect.
- Collaborate with the family to identify unique and individualized supports and services that will help address and heal any issues the family may be facing.

There are some extreme situations where the child or children cannot remain in the home because their safety cannot be guaranteed. In these circumstances, a child protection worker will:

- Arrange for children to live with extended family (kin), foster families, or in a group home facility.
- Arrange permanent guardianship for the family.
- Arrange for independent living services for youth, and support youth.

### Family Enhancement Program

A Family Enhancement Program is a less-intrusive alternative to child protection. Working together for a short-term, the Siksika Generalist Case Worker and parent(s) focus on the family's strengths and finding resources that can help the family heal.

Participants in a Family Enhancement Program are parent(s) who have chosen to sit with a Siksika Worker and assess their current situation and any concerns. Note: If it is determined that child protection is a more appropriate choice and that the child(ren) are at risk, it is the obligation of the Worker to return the case to CFS. After assessment, the following may take place, depending on the family's unique needs:

- Referral to helpful community resources
- Involvement of extended family (as required)
- Mentorship
- Parenting skill development
- Counselling
- Mediation

### Kinship Care

In Siksika culture, extended family stretches far beyond just grandparents or uncles and aunts. A Siksika kinship caregiver can be any person who has had a significant relationship with the child and their family. Kinship care allows a Siksika child in care to stay with a person or family that they and their family already know and trust. Siksika Children and Family Services is a strong supporter of kinship care because of its many benefits for the child and their immediate family. Some of these benefits include:

- Experience of familiarity and continuity for the child in care
- Child stays connected to their community and cultural values.
- Child's parents can remain hopeful that they will stay connected to their child.

Adults who have a significant relationship to a Siksika child in care can apply to become a kinship caregiver. Much like a foster parent, they would first need to be approved by a Siksika case worker by meeting the following criteria under the Government of Alberta's Youth, Child, and Family Act:

- Are physically and emotionally able to take care of the child's needs.
- Have had no major illness or trauma in the last 12 months.
- Are financially capable to take care of the child.

The following screening will also take place of any adult household members:

- Criminal record check
- Child intervention check
- Home safety check

Kinship applicants are also expected to provide personal references (at least one family member), medical reference, and mandatory attendance to caregiver training.

### Private Guardianship

Siksika strives to ensure all children grow up in a loving, stable, and permanent home. Private Guardianship is an alternative to adoption used by Siksika to provide this for Siksika children. Any adult who has been taking continuous care of a child can apply to become a permanent guardian. If the child has been under the care of Siksika due to a Permanent Guardianship Order, help is available to help support throughout the application process.

How does the court decide on Private Guardianship applications?

In the consideration of Private Guardianship applications, the court bases its decision on the following factors:

- Is it in the best interest of the child?
- If the child is 12 years of age or older, do they consent to the guardianship?
- Have the parents of the child given proper consent?

Siksika will also be required to do a home study report prior to approval, which examines the following:

- Is it in the child's best interest for the applicant(s) to become their guardian?
- Is the applicant a suitable choice to become the child's guardian?
- Does the applicant have the capacity and willingness to take responsibility for the child?
- Are all members of the household willing to foster a safe environment for the child?

Note:

It is important for Siksika children to remain connected to their community, their cultural values, and their traditional spiritual practices, and the Government of Alberta's Child, Youth, and Family Enhancement Act has criteria in place to help preserve and protect Siksika culture.

Potential caregivers are expected to provide the following:

- Cultural connection plan that will foster the child's connection with Siksika culture, and Siksika identity including religious or spiritual practices unique to Siksika and community cultural events and traditions.
- Commitment to ensure the Siksika child obtains all of their rights under The Indian Act.
- Commitment to talk to the child about their Siksika identity, and what their status under The Indian Act means as soon as the child is capable of understanding these concepts.<sup>29</sup>

Southern First Nations Network of Care (Manitoba)

In partnership with member Agencies, and under the governance of the Southern Chief's Organization, the Southern First Nations Network of Care is responsible for the management of child and family services for First Nation children and families throughout Manitoba. SFNNC's goal is to ensure that children, families, and communities in need have the support they require to promote healthy growth and long-term wellness and are currently transitioning to ensure all policies and procedures align with the principles set out in "An Act Respecting First Nation, Inuit, and Métis Child and Families," such as Indigenous sovereignty over child welfare, continuity of care, and substantive equality.

With the introduction of Act C-92: An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth, and Families (formally Bill C-92), SFNNC continues to keep all agencies informed of new developments and implementations while moving towards engagement with the leadership of respective communities. This change will transform not only the look of child welfare and services to families and children but potentially the member agencies.<sup>30</sup>

Tribal Chief Child and Family Services (East) (Alberta)

Tribal Chief Child and Family Services East Society is the mandated delegated agency that has delivered statutory child and family prevention and intervention services to the Kehewin Cree Nation and the Frog Lake First Nation since June 24, 1996.

Tribal Chief Child and Family Services (East) Society has been moving forward with the objectives and vision of the Kehewin and Frog Lake communities with direction from the Board of Directors as indicated through community consultation and Tribal Chiefs Elders Advisory Group. The commitment of the Tribal Chief Child and Family Services (East) Society is to ensure that all member children have contact and meaningful involvement with their community of origin and that they maintain their cultural and family connections.

Tribal Chief Child and Family Services (East) Society strives to ensure that all member children who may come to need Intervention or Family Enhancement services, be returned to their families of origin and their home communities at the earliest time possible, while following the requirements of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and active participation by all involved family and community resources.

Tribal Chief Child and Family Services (East) Society is also committed to making decisions that are founded on working with the strengths of the family and utilizing the least disruptive measures possible before taking children into care. These least disruptive measures and services include Family Enhancement services/agreements and developing a plan that the family can follow to build on strengths and address issues of concern in a positive and supported home environment, keeping children in the home, and ensuring child safety.

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29 (Siksika Nation (Alberta) n.d.)

30 (Southern First Nations Network of Care (Manitoba) n.d.)

## Vision Statement

Miyonohk Ekwa Miyo Macihowin Nihiyaw Awasis Ka-apacita Nehiyaw Pimatisowin.  
Safe and healthy First Nations children with cultural awareness.

## Mission Statement

Kecinahowin Miyo-Ayawin Oci Awasisak Ekwa Anihi Peyakahowina Oci KohkiciwawiskoniKana.  
To ensure the well-being of the children and the families of the member First Nations.

Some programs available include:

### Foster Care

Tribal Chief Child and Family Services East Society has a number of Foster Care and Kinship Care homes in Frog Lake First Nation, Kehewin Cree Nation, as well as off-reserve. The homes are mandated by the Child, Youth, and Family Enhancement Act. Foster care is provided as temporary family-based care for children who, for their own safety and well-being, cannot stay in their own homes.

### Kinship Care

Kinship care is one of several placement options in Alberta for children who cannot live with their family because of concerns related to their safety and well-being, such as abuse or neglect.

### Apprehension

Tribal Chief Child and Family Services (East) Society or any CFSA, works with families to help them provide a safe and nurturing home for their children. However, if parents are unable or unwilling to provide a safe and nurturing home for their children, TCCFS (East) Society or any CFSA will become involved to ensure the well-being of the children.

Apprehension occurs when the Tribal Chief Child and Family Services (East) Society or CFSA takes custody of a child from the parent(s). The child is cared for by the TCCFS (East) Society or CFSA.<sup>31</sup>

Whitefish Lake First Nation #459 Child and Family Services Society (Alberta)

Vision:

"Whitefish Lake First Nation's Vision is to strengthen the safety and well-being of its members' Children, Youth and Families."

Mission Statement:

"Our Mission is to promote a healthy and self-sustaining community, utilizing a holistic (body, mind, and spirit) approach in meeting the needs of the children, youth, and families of the Nation."

Programs available:

### Intervention

In terms of intervention, the Society's mission is to promote a healthy and self-sustaining community, utilizing a holistic (body, mind, and spirit) approach in meeting the needs of the children, youth, and families of the Nation.

Intervention Goals:

For the Child

- Promote and provide for the child's need for safety, protection, emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.
- For the Family:
  - Promote, support, unity, and wellness for family; establish and maintain a positive working relationship with families.
- For the Community:
  - Encourage community involvement; to educate the community about our program; to establish and maintain positive working relationships with community service-providers and to encourage community involvement.

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31 (Tribal Chief Child and Family Services (East) (Alberta) n.d.)

## Prevention

### Mission Statement

In terms of prevention, the Society's mission is to promote a safe community for children through culturally appropriate prevention and well-being services and teachings, which improve family wellness; through a concept of togetherness within our beliefs, tradition and language. "

The Prevention Program was established in October 2019 with the following goals:

### Primary Prevention:

- Promotion and awareness on how to recognize and respond to child Violence and Anger Management sessions.
- Nutrition classes for teen parents
- Awareness campaigns on how and where to report suspected child maltreatment.

### Secondary Prevention:

- Group intervention or specific family support activities that are linked to the child protection concerns.
- Home visit programs for new parent(s) / teen parent(s).
- Parent mentoring programs
- Life-skills training
- Parenting skills training
- Family counselling, guidance, and assessment

### Tertiary Prevention:

- These activities relate to specific family member needs and are aimed at preventing/ending the crisis- to avoid removal of the child(ren) from the home.
- Immediate crisis intervention supports.
- Intensive family preservation services
- Family support workers
- Restorative intervention services
- In-home support aides
- Childcare, respite care
- Reduce the number of children in the care of Alberta CFS– Intervention Services.
- Establish well-defined Intervention.
- Prevention programs so that our children can remain with their families on reserve.
- Reunite children that are under the care of Intervention Services, with their families and our community.
- For families to take responsibility in creating safety for children to remain in Whitefish Lake First Nation

## Kinship Care

Kinship care is an extended family home that is approved to care for a child or youth in care. The caregiver has a family relationship or significant connection to the child – for example, grandparent, aunt, or close family friend. Supports for kinship care provide supports to a child and caregivers in kinship care.

### Program goals:

- To promote and provide for the child's need for safety, protection, emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.
- To promote, support, unity, and wellness for family; establish and maintain a positive, working relationships with families.
- To encourage community involvement; to educate the community about our program; to establish and maintain positive working relationships with community service-providers and to encourage community involvement.

### Role of a Kinship Caregiver:

- Children living in kinship require love, comfort, security, and stability. WFLFN kinship care program is based on the belief that whenever possible; children will have the opportunity to live with extended family or those they feel connected to and that these connections promote the overall well-being of children and youth. Kinship care program allows for a child who needs to come into care to be placed immediately with someone familiar in Whitefish Lake First Nation #459.
- Kinship Caregivers

- Take care of the day-to-day needs of the child residing in their care, including the child's physical, emotional, spiritual, and cultural needs
- Work as part of a team with the child, the parents and extended family, support network, caseworker, and other professionals
- May participate in training that enhances and develops their parenting skills or is specific to the needs of the children in their care.
- Participate in planning meetings.
- Support and facilitate appropriate contact between the child and their own family <sup>32</sup>

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Discover Trellis' ongoing path to reshape Indigenous child welfare in Canada. This report addresses the enduring impact of the "Sixties Scoop" and systemic challenges faced by Indigenous communities.

Guided by Elders and Indigenous youth, Trellis outlines immediate, medium, and long-term transformations, including ensuring basic needs, increasing parental involvement, and combating bias in group homes.

Staff are urged to prioritize children's community connections, language, culture, and Indigenous values. Agency-level changes propose a Children's Services overhaul, allyship adoption, and a pilot Indigenous family-systems care model. Aligned with Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Actions, this report calls for urgent, culturally-centered change for the well-being of Indigenous children and families.

