Caring for our Children

Rethinking Development Conference: Antigonish, Nova Scotia
Aboriginal World View: Caring for OUR children

Mother Earth

Has tools to ensure Safety and Well Being

Community and family work together to care for children

Mother Earth is the ultimate caregiver

Safety and Well being Paramount

Family

Child

Community
Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has been absorbed into the body politic

Duncan Campbell Scott
Certificate of Indian Status
This is to certify that Name an Indian within the meaning of the Indian Act, Chapter 27, Statues of Canada (1985)

Indian Status Card, DIAND
“They almost wiped us out with small pox.. It went down to 500 people… the small pox was deliberate

Guujaaw, Haida Nation
Residential Schools
They encircled reserves to stop runaways and then moved door to door taking school age children over the protest of parents and children themselves. Children were locked up in police stations or cattle pens until the round up was complete.

Bennett and Blackstock, 2002
Fifty years ago mainstream child welfare approaches have been applied to assess and respond to child maltreatment in Aboriginal families in much the same way –
Basic Principals of Child Protection

Has tools to ensure Safety and Well Being

Safety and Well being Paramount

STATE steps in when family fails to ensure safety and well being
But was this the best model to respond to a community in crisis as a result of residential schools and colonization?
There are between 22,500 and 28,000 First Nations children in the care of the Canadian child welfare system... three times the number that attended residential schools in the 1940’s.

First Nations CIC Increase by Region 95-01

- BC 90.4%
- Alberta 52.7%
- Sask. 160.3
- Man. 11.4%
- Ontario 163.8%
- Quebec 93.8%
- Yukon 5.0%
- Atlantic 130%

- Data represents on reserve children only
The population of Status Indian children decreased 1% during this same time period.

Statistics Canada
20 years ago First Nations began establishing their own FNCFSA to deliver child welfare on reserve and stem the tide of children leaving their communities— they are required to follow provincial statutes and regulations that have substantively failed Aboriginal children
So why is it that governments require First Nations to follow their child welfare policies – even though there is little evidence they benefit Aboriginal children?
Maybe it is because we were not aware that Aboriginal children come to the attention of child welfare for different reasons than non Aboriginal children.
Primary form of maltreatment by Aboriginal status for substantiated or suspected maltreatment 1998 CIS* 
(N=3,159)

chisq=244.31 , df=8, p>.001
We did not know that Aboriginal children are removed at twice the rate of their non Aboriginal peers despite there being no significant difference in child functioning.
Child characteristics by Aboriginal status for substantiated or suspected maltreatment 1998
CIS* (N=3,159)\(^{P>.001}\)
More child characteristics by Aboriginal status for substantiated or suspected maltreatment 1998 CIS* (N=3,159)

- **Aboriginal**
  - Developmental Disability: 2%
  - Substance Abuse: 3%
  - Running Away: 4%
  - Sex Behavior: 3%
  - Special Education: 3%
  - Irregular School Attendance: 16%
  - Criminal/Other: 3%

- **Non-Aboriginal**
  - Developmental Disability: 4%
  - Substance Abuse: 8%
  - Running Away: 4%
  - Sex Behavior: 4%
  - Special Education: 2%
  - Irregular School Attendance: 10%
  - Criminal/Other: 2%

- **Other visible minority**
  - Developmental Disability: 2%
  - Substance Abuse: 3%
  - Running Away: 3%
  - Sex Behavior: 4%
  - Special Education: 6%
  - Irregular School Attendance: 6%
  - Criminal/Other: 3%
We may have not understood that the real risk factors to Aboriginal children are often outside of the control of Aboriginal parents—poverty, poor housing and substance misuse.
We assumed that First Nations parents had the same access to supports as non Aboriginal parents.
Contrast of Supports

Canada

Federal, Provincial, Municipal

Government

VS

Corporate

90 Billion in annual revenues
G-8 economy
Income 38K/yr

On Reserve

Federal (pop count) – child welfare 22% less

Government

VS

Corporate

Minimal VS supports
Income 8500-9500/yr
Primary source of risk resulting in removals

Focus of Assessment of Risk

Likely focus of Decision to Return

Family

Child

Community
The Way Forward

• Respecting that Indigenous peoples are in the best position to care for Indigenous children (Cornell and Kalt, 2002; Chandler and Lalonde, 2003)

• Equal access to resources (MacDonald and Ladd, 2000; Nadjiwan and Blackstock, 2003)

• Focused and broad based social activism to address structural risk to communities
What we do to help

Research: Affirm the Voice and Build the Story

Education: Providing the knowledge for change

Being respectful but being loud

Caring Across the Boundaries: Building Children’s Allies

Database, research, online journal

UN NGO Working Group, conferences, community gatherings, newsletters, NGO and academic networks

VS program and Reconciliation projects
Our Challenges

• Canada’s human rights record can blind it and others around the world to its mistreatment of Aboriginal children.
• Engaging Canadians to see the truth of colonization without having them turn away
• Embracing our ignorance – the real answers are at a community level
• Our small size makes it difficult to sustain relationships across disciplines in the way we would like
• We are the only national Aboriginal NGO for children and thus demands often exceed our ability or capacity
What has worked

• Being **small but delivering excellence**
• Not being a representative **organization**
• Taking our organizational direction from **communities** – who suggest research questions, programs etc.
• Investing in **community expertise**
• Research design and method and results as a **valued tool for community**
• Believing in the goodness of people and being a **vigilant witness**
• The **power of contradiction**
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