RUPERTSLAND CENTRE 10 YEARS FOR MÉTIS RESEARCH

Stronger Together:

A Review of Indigenous Child-Intervention Services in Canada with

Best Practices for Métis Children, Youth, and Their Families.

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According to Statistics Canada's 2016 Census of Population, there are 587 545 self-identified Métis people living in Canada. This number represents approximately 35% of the total Indigenous population, but only 1.5% of the total Canadian population. The largest percentage of Métis live in Western Canada with 114 000 Métis people in Alberta, and 120 585 individuals in Ontario. Manitoba follows Alberta and Ontario with a Métis population of approximately 89 360 people, while there are 89 405 in British Columbia, and 57 880 in Saskatchewan. There are approximately another combined 150 000 self-declared Métis people living in Québec, North West Territories and the Atlantic Provinces (Statistics Canada 2016). Despite these numbers, many Child and Family Service initiatives to date have been centred around a generic First Nations people, often lumping Métis families and children into their processes. Métis people have specific and distinct requirements that do not always fit into generalized structures.

Métis are often overlooked as a specific group despite their inclusion as Aboriginal rights holders in Section 35 of the Constitution Act [1982]. In 2003, the Powley Decision [2003] resulted in the 'Powley Test' which is intended to not only define what constitutes Métis rights, but further who is entitled to those rights (2 S.C.R. 207, 2003 SCC 43, Section 12). More recently, in 2016, Daniels v. Canada ([2016] SCC 12) affirmed that Métis people are legal "Indians" under section (91)24 of the Constitution Act, 1982. It has been argued among scholars and grassroots organizations that Métis people and their experiences have continued to be socially and legally invisiblized in Canada (Carrière and Richardson 2013;2017; Chartrand et.al. 2006; Grammond and Groulx 2012; King 2015; Stark 2016). Métis-specific processes continue to be lost within government systems. According to Carrière, "Métis children have become phantoms within the system: they are bodies with outlines without nuanced attention to the inner substance of their lives" (Carrière 2017,51). Carrière is suggesting that Métis children are often understood as a generic Indigenous body without attention to individual needs and requirements. This is a problem that has continued over time.

The Impact of the Residential School System and the Sixties Scoop

There are multiple personal accounts of Métis struggle on the prairies (Campbell 1973; Strasbourg 1997; Dumont 1996; Peters et.al 2018) and a plethora of scholarly contributions that highlight the history of Métis land dispossession (Coulthard 2014; Green 1995; Hall 2015; Hogue 2015; Tough 1996) and colonial attempts to eradicate Métis peoples (Devine 2012). However, there is no stronger evidence of the effects of the removal of Indigenous children from their communities than the legacy of residential schools and "Sixties Scoop". Canada's residential school system was an agreement between the federal government and the churches to not only convert Indigenous children to Christianity, but also to educate children using non-Indigenous knowledge to assimilate them into Anglo society. The federal government's policies specifically surrounding Métis children in its institutions however, continued to be revamped and ever changing. The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) notes that the federal government viewed Métis people as members of the 'dangerous classes' – the class of people (largely Indigenous) who were stereotypically assumed to be problematic and who needed to be educated and assimilated into a non-Indigenous system (2015). Thus, Métis children were *entered* into the federal residential school system based on this classification. However, the federal government also stressed that the provincial and territorial government bodies were primarily responsible for educating and assimilating Métis people living within their

boundaries. Therefore, Indian agents were also responsible for *removing* Métis children from residential schools (Legacy of Hope Foundation 2014). Some Métis specific institutions were created. For example, between the 1920s to1950s, Catholic missionaries operated a residential school specifically for Métis children at Saint-Paul-des-Métis in east-central Alberta (now known as St. Paul) (Devine 2012; Drouin 1968). Within the same timeframe, the Anglican church established an alternate school specifically for Métis in the Yukon. During this time, Métis parents found it difficult to find schooling for their children because the provincial and territorial governments largely neglected to provide a variety of services to Métis people – from healthcare to education. Therefore, many Métis had few options but to have their children accepted into residential schools if they desired their children to have an education (TRC 2015). The history of residential schools continues to leave a scar on not only their students but on the future generations of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) affirms that the historic attempts to create an assimilative education were destructive to Indigenous populations in Canada. These actions have left devastating effects on those who have survived or have been affected by the legacy of residential schooling (Batiste & Barman 1995; Holmes 2006). Physical, sexual and emotional abuse paired with the loss of language, tradition and culture have been responsible for contemporary social, cultural and political issues in Canada. A large percentage of Indigenous peoples have been affected by residential schools. According to a study by Environics, two-thirds of Indigenous people currently living in Canada state that they have either been directly or indirectly affected by the residential school system (Environics 2010). Those affected cite a number of issues that have risen from residential schools that go far beyond culture and language loss. According to the Manitoba Justice Institute, "residential schools laid the foundation for the epidemic we see today of domestic abuse and violence *among Indigenous peoples*" (Hanson n.d., para.20), as well as addiction, sexual assault and/or homelessness that often disproportionately affect members within Indigenous communities (MacDonald 2016). These issues can be traced back to the "sense of disconnect that Aboriginal children experienced as a result of being sent to a residential school" (R.A. Malatest 2004, 10). In addition, of the children who are currently within the child and family services streams, nearly half of those children had parents or grandparents who had one time been in the system (Métis Children and Youth in Continuing Care 2018).

Volume 3 of the Truth and Reconciliation Final Report informs us specifically, that the Métis experience of residential schooling has been overlooked for too long (Canada's Residential Schools: The Métis Experience: The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada *2015,* Vol.3). The historic treatment of Métis people, paired with past assimilative events that have shaped Métis experiences are closely associated with contemporary family and child intervention issues. "Assimilation remains the most predictable outcome of child welfare when Métis children are put through the system. In situations where, cultural plans are poorly conducted, the child's sense of self, culture and belonging erodes with each negative experience. Métis can be deprived a sense of belonging, worth and connectedness to family and culture" (Carrière 2017, 51-2). Carrière is suggesting that assimilative processes are problematic for Métis children and youth because their disconnection from their families and cultures can affect their emotional, spiritual, emotional and mental well-being (Carrière 2017, 51-2). These

disconnections further affect Indigenous identity (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Alberta 2016).

The Government of Canada began to phase out Indigenous residential schools in the early 1950s as Indigenous children began attending public schools administered by provincial authorities (Hanson n.d.). In 1951, an amendment was made to the Indian Act which included providing child welfare services to Indigenous communities. Thus, the assimilationist aims of the government and broader society did not end with the movement of Indigenous children to public schools. Instead, First Nations, Inuit and Métis children began to be apprehended from their homes and communities. The Sixties Scoop was implemented to continue to remove Indigenous children from their communities and to be fostered or adopted into predominantly white, middle-class families in Canada, United States and abroad. These processes occurred during the early 1950s and lasted well into the late 1980s and even into the early 1990s. Between 1950-1990, child apprehensions were often completed by social workers who had no formal training working with Indigenous groups, and were more often ignorant not only to the history but continued effects of colonialism. In addition, social workers often disregarded the reasons for socio-economic disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups. As a result, many children were removed on the basis of race or poverty without their parent's consent (Maurice 2014). Thus, the Sixties Scoop had many intergenerational impacts to Indigenous peoples – including those children and their families from within the Métis Nation. Many Métis Survivors, specifically, experienced profound cultural harms and losses, and in some cases physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual and sexual abuse (Métis National Council 2019).

The Story of Richard Cardinal

The short film, *Richard Cardinal: Cry From a Diary of a Métis Child* by the National Film Board, highlights the experiences of Richard Cardinal, a Métis child who had been apprehended along with his other siblings in Alberta. The province had decided that their mother was incapable of caring for her children. Once removed from his home, Cardinal lived within the fractured child and family services system between the ages of 4-17. Using excerpts from his diary to provide the narrative of the film, it is evident that the boy's young life was difficult. Cardinal highlights the inadequacies of Alberta's child welfare system. While in foster care, he experienced extreme abuse, neglect and hunger. Removed from most of his siblings, he described his life as "lacking physical contact". He was "friendless", "alone" and felt "very scared". It is clear that Cardinal only desired to return home to his family and to his community but was unable. The mixture of abuse, minimal support and non-permanent structure led to Richard Cardinal's untimely suicide. Sadly, Cardinal's story resonates across the Métis homeland. The film closes with the quote, "the answer lies in a return to traditional values in caring for our own children and remembering that every child has many mothers." Other Métis children have expressed their desire to be with their families and communities while in foster care. A Métis child who had been placed in a non-Indigenous foster home in Saskatchewan wrote to the New Breed publication asking to be removed from their current non-Indigenous home in favour of being reunited and adopted by family friends since their family members were unable (New Breed 1976, 2). This child so desires to be within their community that they beg to be returned to friends within the community rather than outside of it. Child apprehension continued to be highly problematic, and during 1950s to 1990s, began to resemble a form of

cultural genocide. Genocide is described by the United Nations under article 2 (e) of the U.N. Convention on Genocide (1948), that "forcibly transferring children of the group to another group" constitutes genocide when the intent is to destroy a culture (Hanson n.d.). More recent studies by the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate of Alberta (OCYA) have indicated that the feeling of "lost potential" was the most common response by Indigenous young people who had felt let down by Alberta's child welfare system (OCYA 2016, 6). Their report also indicates that the children were lost without their families and felt as though they had lost their identity, culture, and language. The participants who responded further stated that the child welfare system made them "feel" confused and forget that they were Aboriginal" (OCYA 2016, 23). Although some children had experienced positive care, many more children in care felt ashamed of their indigeneity, unloved, disrespected, silenced, invisibilized and at times, unsafe (OCYA 2016, 18-22).

The history of residential schooling and the apprehension of children during the Sixties Scoop provide a background to how non-Indigenous centred policies or generic policies affect Indigenous bodies. "Residential schooling set the tone and trajectory of the relationship between the state and Indigenous people" (Irlbacher-Fox 2009, 150) and ultimately projected the continued message of assimilating Indigenous peoples as a whole into mainstream society. Therefore, this history provides a synopsis of the outcomes of child apprehension to satisfy the aims or desires of non-Indigenous institutions, and in turn, provides evidence of the problems associated with non-Indigenous led directions and initiatives. In addition, the testimonies of Indigenous children provide voice to the experiences of living within the child welfare system (National Film Board 2019; New Breed 1976; OCYA 2016). Due to the historical legacy of the Canadian government's involvement in child apprehension, Indigenous peoples in Canada share a valid concern about the impact of policies adopted by Canadian governments on their families, communities, values and customs (Blackstock 2007). As this report will outline, there is a clear movement away from these past procedures. Today, child intervention agencies work towards Indigenous-centered initiatives that are respectful of the multitude of Indigenous cultures, languages, communities, and histories in Canada.

The Role of the government of Canada through Bill C-92

There is currently an over-representation of Indigenous children found within the Child Family Services (CFS) system in Canada. First Nation, Inuit and Métis children represent 7.7% of all children age 0-14 in Canada, and yet make up a staggering 52.2% of children currently in care (Statistics Canada 2016). It remains a fact that Métis children continue to be taken into care in disproportionate numbers (Kikino Métis Children and Family Services Society 2020). This is problematic because the removal of Indigenous children from their families devalues Indigenous culture, language, and identity (Mosher & Hewitt 2018). In addition, according to Barkwell, Longclaws and Chartrand, "a disproportionate number of Métis children are being taken into care, many for no other reason than the real life Métis situation of living in poverty and overcrowded conditions. In effect, Métis children are frequently being alienated from their families, their communities and their culture for economic reasons" (Barkwell et.al. 1989, 34). Poverty is recognized as one of the leading factors that contribute to child intervention (Brittain & Blackstock 2015). This is problematized by the fact that at least 38% of Indigenous children

live in poverty compared to only 7% of non-Indigenous children in Canada (National Household Survey 2011).

Financial support derives from the federal government for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous child and family service initiatives, but Canadian provinces and territories are primarily responsible for setting their own legislations and standards. Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), specifically, funds child and family services agencies that are both established, managed and controlled by First Nations organizations and those who are delegated by provincial authorities. Recently, in the 2018 budget, and investment of $1.4B was allocated to the First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) program to ensure the safety, security and well-being of Indigenous children primarily *on reserves*. Currently, the ISC funds programs for First Nations peoples that use a *prevention-based funding model* supporting early intervention and alternatives to institutional and foster care. A prevention-based model strives to support children, youth and their families prior to any possible involvement by provincial child service authorities. The ISC supports are very much directed towards First Nations peoples and not to Métis children. Métis have historically received low levels of funding for child welfare and family service. Through the examination of legislation and policies in Canada, it is clear that the judicial obligation to represent the rights and needs of Métis children is lacking (Alexander 1998). The Government of Canada has been engaging with Indigenous partners across the country to co-develop options for future federal legislations on Indigenous child and family services. In February 2019, Bill C-92 [Statute of Canada 2019, c.24] was introduced. Bill C-92 is an *Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families* that was co-developed with Indigenous partners. This Act signifies the first time that the federal government will exercise its jurisdiction to legislate in the area of Indigenous child welfare (Metallic 2019). This bill seeks to affirm Indigenous peoples' inherent right to exercise jurisdiction over their own child and family services structures – which include Métis people as recognized rights bearers in Section 35 of the Constitution Act [1982]. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, reiterates that Métis child and family specific services is also a Section 35 right under the *Constitution Act, 1982*. This new legislation aligns with ISC's existing funding model. Bill C-92, which came into effect January 2020, aims to reduce the number of Indigenous children in care, to improve child and family services, to increase the efforts to address the root causes of child apprehension, and to reunite children with their parents, extended families, communities and nations. Historically, many Indigenous children were separated from their families and communities on the basis of poverty, inter-generational trauma and/or cultural bias. Bill C-92 works to rectify this past by establishing principles that include the best interests of the child (*child-focused model*), the importance of cultural continuity, and equality. The Bill outlines the following factors that would have to be considered when determining the best interest of an Indigenous child:

- "the child's physical, emotional and psychological safety, security and well-being;
- the child's cultural, linguistic, religious and spiritual upbringing;
- the emotional ties between the child and significant persons in the child's life;
- the child's views and preferences;
- the child's needs and level of development;

- the importance to the child of an ongoing, positive relationship with his or her family, community and the Indigenous group to which he or she belongs; the importance of stability for the child; connection to the child's language and territory;
- any plans for the child's care;
- any family violence and its impact on the child; and
- any civil or criminal proceeding, order, condition, or measure that is relevant to the safety, security and well-being of the child" (Statute of Canada 2019, c.24).

This framework provides all Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Inuit, Métis) the direction to take care of their own unique services. It is clear that an attempt is being made to shift away from a generic one-size-fits-all model for all Indigenous peoples in favour of more specific processes that are unique to each independent group. In addition, these considerations centre upon the individual child's needs, makes space for language, culture, spirituality, kinship and community. This new framework further allows for the balance of the child's spiritual, emotional, and physical needs, and the vital connectivity that Indigenous youth should continue have to their communities.

The federal government has committed to six points of action:

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 culturally-appropriate reform.
6. Developing a data and reporting strategy with provinces, territories and Indigenous partners"

(Indigenous Services Canada 2019, under "Progress of Six Points of Action").

Bill C-92 further responds to the Government of Canada's commitments to implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) 2007, to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) Calls to Action 1 to 5, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). There is no doubt that Bill C-92 will shape how provinces and territories will continue in their work to strengthen Indigenous child and family services and programs. Child welfare advocates and Indigenous groups have raised their concerns about adequate access to funding for these initiatives. It is estimated that due to the large number of Indigenous children currently within the system, Indigenous-lead organizations would require approximately $3.5B over five years to effectively take over their own child welfare services These models rely on substantial funding from both federal and

provincial sources. In addition, there are concerns over national standards, accountability, jurisdiction, data collection and reporting (Metallic et.al. 2019).

Overview

Roughly 230,000 child abuse investigations are conducted in Canada each year, and over 62,000 children at any given time are living in out-of-home arrangements (Trocmé et.al 2019). While there are many commonalities between adoption/child custody organizations and government bodies throughout the country, it is evident that there has been a push to develop alternative services to meet the diverse needs of families who find themselves engaged with child services. It is apparent that standardized processes must be manipulated in order to be more flexible and inclusive for Indigenous children and families. Currently, child intervention has been determined to fall under the jurisdiction of provincial and territorial governments in Canada – rendering a plethora of similar mandates and policies. At this time, the federal government oversees the statutes required for the protection of all children, and provides funding to provide for a limited number of programs that are specifically Indigenous focused. These few programs are largely First Nations centred, and often fit all Indigenous children, youth and their families into generic categories. It is evident that Métis have more often been generically lumped into the broad category of 'Indigenous' care and services (Auger 2020), however, Métis are a distinct group with a suit of unique challenges. Canada is unique in that there are both mainstream child welfare agencies and specific agencies dedicated solely to Indigenous peoples. There are approximately 108 Indigenous agencies within Indigenous communities that have been delegated the authority over their own children's welfare. These groups are *delegated agencies* that operate between a limited and full range of protection services. Although provincial and territorial welfare legislation continues to maintain its authority, limited delegated agencies work closely with provincial child welfare agencies while those with full delegation work more independently. These organizations could also be *integrated agencies*.

This section will provide examples of some of the current local Métis child and family services organizations that currently operate locally, in Alberta, followed by a strong focus on those in British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Ontario. Five provinces have been selected for this study due to their inclusion with the Métis National Council (MNC). The Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA), Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF), Métis Nation – Saskatchewan (MN-S), Métis Nation BC (MNBC), and the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO). This section of the report strives to provide a comprehensive overview of the child welfare services available for Métis and other Indigenous peoples not only living in Alberta, but also within other Canadian provinces and territories such as Quebec and the Northwest Territories. Currently, Métis child welfare practice and policy varies by province, with British Columbia, Alberta and Manitoba being the only provinces to have *delegated* Métis child and family service agencies (Auger 2020). However, this report further examines child intervention in broader context, by exploring how Indigenous Maori systems operate in New Zealand. The purpose in looking beyond the Alberta borders is to identify where information and knowledge are lacking in understanding the role and state of Métis Child Services and to provide suggestions to include when contemplating entering into appropriate contemporary models for Métis people in Canada. Thus, this report concludes by outlining a number of programs that use Indigenous centered customary adoption processes and family reunification frameworks when working with Indigenous children, youth

and their families. The models that have been selected and presented within this report are not exhaustive, rather, evidence of a series of best practices to consider when rebuilding Indigenous-centred child and family service programs in Canada.

A Word About Kinship

First, it is important to pause in order to provide a general discussion about Indigenous peoples' understanding of kinship systems. Highlighting the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples' ontological understandings of family, kinship and of relationality is significant because child and welfare policies in Canada, US and New Zealand continue to not only favour non-Indigenous, Western categorizations of these terms, but draw policies based upon them. Due to this fact, it is clear that there are notable discrepancies between mainstream processes and policies that have been developed using the state's framework of child and family service systems, and the Indigenous protocols and laws that have existed prior to colonization.

Although speaking broadly about Indigenous knowledge systems, and being limited by Cree/Michif principles of *wahkohtowin* (Macdougall and St-Onge 2017; Macdougall 2010), many Indigenous peoples understand kinship as an all-encompassing term that extends far beyond the biological connections that one has to their own nuclear family (Cross 2014). These relationships can include not only human connections but also relationships to and kinship with animals, the cosmos and other animate or inanimate entities. Kinship principles are tied to Indigenous concepts of relationality, and rooted within the land and all life upon it. This system of knowing encapsulates teachings about the connectivity to all things which in turn, holds the lessons for how Indigenous peoples understand their human family systems. Thus, Indigenous peoples use complex kinship systems to recognize their connections to distant relatives who are not always known by name. This extended family (which could also be human and/or non-human entities) hold the responsibility to direct and teach Indigenous peoples how to treat others and also how to interact with the land. This system of relationality further includes deeply engrained teachings that set the parameters for the purpose of this study: child welfare, child and family services, fostering and adoption. Caring for, educating and disciplining Indigenous children is everybody's responsibility in the community. This is an important aspect of community-based ontology and epistemology - to nurture and protect strong family ties and connection to the broader community as a means of passing on cultural teachings and language from one generation to the next. In contrast to Western society, Indigenous peoples also carry many obligations to other group members. For example, there are obligations to care for Elders and older members of the population through the provisioning of meat, fish or other resources. Nobody is to be left in isolation and without familial connections. A sense of belonging is integral to Indigenous culture. Without these systems of relationship, Indigenous children are apt to lose their cultural teachings, language and identity. Children gain a "sense of trust, strength, a sense of purpose, and a sense of commonality within their communities" (Cross 2014, 376). The teachings of kinship and relationality envelop many of the key lessons found within their values. Thus, this value-system must be considered when approaching any new or existing frameworks that pertain to Indigenous child and family welfare (Bennett and Blackstock 2002; Carrière 2008; Carrière and Richardson 2013).

Kinship principles are necessary to highlight because they further provide a background to how implications could arise within kinship care systems where the worker and the child and/or family may be members of the same community. Because kinship ties are important to Indigenous peoples, Indigenous case workers may feel obligated to work with their mentees outside of their regular hours – especially if they are part of the same kinship group. They may also feel the need to share their resources with the families that they work with may have trouble defining functional boundaries (Muswellbrook Shire Council 2020).

Alberta

As of March 2016, 7 out of every 10 youth and children in Alberta's child welfare system were Indigenous (OCYA 2016, 12). This is one of the highest representations in the country. Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) currently funds programs and agencies for *First Nations* groups that use a prevention-based funding model to support early intervention and alternatives to institutional and foster care. The province of Alberta is then responsible for the legislative and policy framework for service delivery, and provincial funding. Currently, the Family Law Act [SA 2003, c F-4.5] and Child, Youth, and Family Enhancement Act (CYFEA) [C-12 RSA 2000] provide the basis for regulations pertaining to child intervention in Alberta. The Ministry of Children's Services, Ministry of Community and Social Services, and Ministry of Health oversee the delivery of child intervention services in Alberta. CYFEA received amendments in 2018 (Bill 22) following a number of recommendations to improve the child welfare system for Indigenous peoples. These amendments include increased funding for kinship providers and stronger processes for assessing potential caregivers. Currently, the majority of First Nation child intervention services are delivered by Delegated First Nation Agencies (DFNAs). DFNAs are independent organizations who have become federally or provincially incorporated legal entities. There are currently seventeen DFNAs that provide services under the CYFEA. Alberta has the highest Métis population in Canada according to the 2016 Census. Despite this fact, the CYFEA has no specific reference to Métis people at this time.

Alberta's Child Intervention Services (CIS) continue to enact the federal laws that have been set forth for the welfare of children in Alberta. Their caseworkers provide intervention services among seven regions in Alberta and throughout 17 Delegated First Nations Agencies (DFNA) within the province. Their mandates include providing timely and comprehensive services to protect and respect all children in their care. There are a number of guiding principles behind CIS processes and programming. For example, all children and families who enter into Alberta's Child Intervention Services system will experience transparency, freedom of expression, religion and identity. Children further have the right to education, healthcare and attention. CIS has additional guidelines for Indigenous children their families. When necessary, all efforts are made to have Indigenous children remain connected to their culture while learning about their own history. First Nations children must also have access to any other applicable rights that are covered under the Indian Act. It is within Alberta's Child Intervention Services where there is specific reference made to the care of Métis people. Métis children also have the right to remain connected to their culture while being educated about their history. Métis children have the right to access any other applicable rights that are mandated through the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA). Self-identified Métis who fall outside of MNA's guidelines for membership and non-Status individuals have the right to also remain connected to their cultures,

spiritual beliefs or religion. Children Intervention Services continues to offer culturally specific supports for children, youth and families through its Indigenous, First Nation and Metis Settlements offices. Children's Services in Alberta is committed to keeping Indigenous families together whenever possible. When an Indigenous child comes into care, Child Intervention Services prefers to place Indigenous child with extended family, community members or people familiar with the child's own cultural traditions or ceremonial practices. Indigenous families are able to provide care to children either through kinship care (adhering to a traditional practice) or through foster care, adoption or private guardianship.

There are currently no Métis agencies in Alberta that provide services solely to Métis children and families, however there are a number of Métis services that provide both supportive and early intervention services for the child, youth and families in provincial care. Alberta organizations unanimously employ *prevention-based* and *child-focused models* with emphasis on *kinship care*. In Alberta, *kinship care* is defined as any living arrangement in which any child lives with neither of their parents but instead are cared for by a relative or someone with whom they have a prior relationship (Government of Alberta 2020). The Alberta Government Kinship Care program places children into pre-approved extended family's homes. Supports for kinship care are similar to the supports provided to a child and caregivers in foster care. Whenever possible, children and youth in care live in culturally-appropriate placements where they can maintain a sense of belonging through their continued contact with members of their broader community.

Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA)

Kinship principles continue to be an important component of Métis culture and belonging. Kinship teachings situate children in the world, in their communities, and within their families. The Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) currently assumes responsibility for the representation of all Métis people in Alberta. The MNA has a division of Child and Family Services (CFS) that work with Alberta Children's Services to ensure that the rights and dignity of Métis children and their families are respected and honoured. The organization provides support and advocacy to strengthen the family through culturally sensitive approaches to wellness. The organization further aids in developing culturally appropriate family plans with Alberta Children`s Services staff, offering in-person cultural training, resource referral, and support planning to kinship caregivers and foster families caring for Métis children. The MNA is able to connect Métis Resource Workers with children, their families, and Alberta Children's Services using MNA-affiliated, provincial government and community resources.

Métis Child and Family Services Society

Métis Child and Family Services Society (MCFSS) has a number of offices in Alberta that support the health and well-being of Métis families and communities. They offer a number of programs and services to improve the quality and effectiveness of services that are available to Indigenous Children and their families. Some of these services include foster care, court assistance, prenatal care, in-home support, and counseling. The primary focus of Métis Child & Family Services Society is *preventative care* in order to reduce the future number of Métis and other Indigenous children from entering into the care of Alberta Child and Youth Services. The

organization currently has a kinship program that honours alternate care arrangements. In an effort to maintain cultural continuity and access to friends and family, this program operates to keep children in the care of their extended family networks. The organization then works alongside the caregivers to provide needed services and support.

Métis Calgary Family Services Society

The Métis Calgary Family Services Society (MCFSS) is an independent non-profit, charitable organization that provides responsive, culturally specific community-based services to Métis people in Region 3. MCFSS places an emphasis on urban Indigenous peoples in order to diminish the barriers and gaps in Indigenous services, while embarking on a *community-centered model* to promote the health and well-being of children and families. Métis Calgary Family Services Society is an independent, non-affiliated entity that currently offers reduced-rate childcare, parent/child early development programming, counselling, the Native Network Family Resource Centre, family wellness services, in-home family support systems, the Medicine Wheel Early Learning Centre, and the Aboriginal Student Program (ASP) to all Indigenous peoples (not solely for Métis children and their families).

The Native Network Resource Centre offers a number of services: parenting programs, referrals for basic needs, clothing exchanges, transportation vouchers, hampers, housing advocacy, assistance with resumes, job hunting and employment, cultural referrals and mentorship. The Medicine Wheel Early Learning Centre is a government licensed preschool that enforce Michif language and culture while instilling socialization, school preparation, and family support. The Aboriginal Student Program (ASP) is a stay-in -school initiative that provides mentorship, Elder support, tutoring, educational workshops and literacy programs for Métis and Indigenous youth in grades eight to twelve.

British Columbia

The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) is the provincial government body responsible for supporting and providing services to all children living in British Columbia. In 2009, a commitment was made between the First Nations Leadership Council and the provincial government to improve the well-being of Indigenous children in the province. The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of a group of leaders from the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs who collaborate to develop coordinated approaches to issues relevant to First Nations communities throughout the province (British Columbia Assembly of First Nations 2020). The commitment between the First Nations Leadership Council and the provincial government resulted in the Recognition and Reconciliation Protocol on First Nations Child, Youth and Families which includes the reification of the 'New Relationship with First Nations and Aboriginal Peoples' – an agreement that respects Indigenous laws and responsibilities. The Ministry of Children and Family Development has affirmed their obligation to collaborate with First Nations groups and to provide for the health, safety, and well-being of all First Nations children. The principles put forward by MCFD must include Indigenous services that are child-focused, Indigenous-centered, respectful, inclusive and culturally sensitive. The provincial agreement, the New Relationship with First Nations and Aboriginal Peoples, pairs with the Transformative Change Accord. The Transformative Change Acord was signed between the provincial government of British

Columbia, the federal government, and the First Nations Leadership Council in 2005. The Accord's aims are to close the gaps between First Nations and non-Indigenous peoples in the areas of education, health, housing and economic opportunities in order to establish respectful relationships.

The Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA) is the legislative authority for the Ministry's Child Protection Services in British Columbia. The CFCSA outlines the process and treatment that all children, youth and their families are to receive during and following intervention. The Child, Family and Community Service Act further outlines that Indigenous children, specifically, are entitled to learn about and practice their own specific Indigenous traditions, customs and languages, and further mandates that all Indigenous children remain within their relative Indigenous communities [RSBC 1996, Ch.46]. In May 2018, there were some amendments made to the CFCSA through the inclusion of Bill 26. This Bill responds to the need for early engagement by Indigenous communities to seek solutions to keep children and families together and connected to their communities rather than be out-of-home. Furthermore, the Bill answers to the call for transparency and the sharing of information between the government and Indigenous peoples. These amendments came into effect in April 1, 2019. The CFCSA today recognizes the importance of *kinship and community-centred care*. Indigenous families and Indigenous communities share the responsibility for the upbringing and well-being of their children, traditions, customs and languages (Ministry of Child and Family Development 2020). In addition, the Aboriginal Policy and Practice Framework (APPF) is a framework mandated by MCFD that intends to improve outcomes through Indigenous-centred *restorative policies and practices*. Restorative policies and practices are culturally respectful, safe, trauma informed, supportive and respectful of Indigenous peoples' cultural systems. Restorative policies and practices are further premised on the fact that non-Indigenous/Western populations have harmed Indigenous communities and that organizations have a desire to not only hold themselves responsible for their past wrongdoings, but to change their frameworks going forward.

There is currently an overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care in British Columbia (Kozlowski et.al. 2014). Due to this overrepresentation, the British Columbia Government has developed the Caring for First Nations Children Society Aboriginal Social Work Program. This program is a 13-week mandatory training program for social workers and other care workers who work with Indigenous families in order to better understand the distinct needs of Indigenous communities in the province. This competency based training program is based on a holistic model that incorporates Indigenous culture, best practices and legislative requirements. This program was created in response to Indigenous community concerns that provincial workers were often ill-equipped to work within their communities (Blackstock 2010). The Caring for First Nations Children Society Aboriginal Social Work Program aims to foster and build upon strong local relationship with Indigenous communities while approaching child welfare in a more holistic manner.

The Métis Commission for Children and Families of British Columbia (MCCFBC)

There are currently over 800 Métis children within the child welfare system in the province of British Columbia (Métis Commission for Children and Families of BC n.d.). Many Métis organizations are working towards reducing these numbers through cultural connection

and more engagement with Métis communities. British Columbia currently has provincially legislated organizations that work on behalf of Métis children and families who find themselves involved within the processes of child intervention. As of January 2020, the provincial government no longer has full jurisdiction over Métis child welfare. Thus, The Métis Commission for Children and Families of British Columbia (MCCFBC) has been identified within provincial legislation as the designated representative for Métis children, youth and families within the child welfare system throughout British Columbia. MCCFBC is a non-profit representative for Métis people that was established to provide open dialogue between the province, its laws, Métis children, youth and their families. Although the organization does not currently provide direct child welfare services, they work with every Métis child through the court order process and ensures that the child receives the support and services they need in a culturally safe and relevant manner. Their goal is to foster Métis-specific processes that bridge relationships between communities, services and government to ensure the cultural safety for Métis children, youth and families in British Columbia. The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and Delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAA) are legally mandated to notify MCCFBC if a Métis child enters into any aspect of protective services and are to be provided with any court documents or records that may be relevant to their case. The MCCFBC then works with provincial authorities to ensure that Métis children are able to remain safely connected with their family, culture and community throughout the processes. The MCCFBC regularly engages child welfare workers in conversations and planning that support the cultural identity of Métis children and youth within the province.

Métis Family Services – Surrey

Métis Family Services is also currently delegated under the Child Family and Community Services Act (CFCSA) to provide child protection and family support services to Métis people who are living in the Surrey area. Like MCCFBC, the organization aims to provide support to Métis children and youth and are committed to a *prevention-based model* of care that promotes wellness and celebrates Métis history and culture. In order to provide an alternative and meet the unique needs of the community, Métis Family Services has utilized a cultural case practice that is based on a holistic and comprehensive approach. Métis Family Services operated using a *service-delivery model* in order to provide ongoing individualized assessments that are designed to emphasize the family strengths while incorporating cultural traditions. The cultural program that they provide is based on an individual's community interaction and family history. The programs are thus individualized because children and families are assessed in the context of their own experience and identity using the seven teachings of humility, honesty, truth, wisdom, love, respect and bravery (Métis Family Services 2020). The United Nations defines a service-delivery model as a re-examination of programming to deliver more coherent and integrated supports (2019). Therefore, Métis Family Services continue to provide an ongoing assessment of independent needs to emphasize individual family strengths while incorporating Métis cultural traditions. This framework for process denies the application of a one-size-fits all model for Indigenous peoples and recognizes their diversity. Métis Family Services also have their own suite of social workers who are delegated under the Child, Family and Community Services Act (CFCSA) to review, assess and investigate reports of child abuse, neglect and exploitation, and provide supports to families to mitigate safety risks to Métis children. The social workers focus on prevention and keeping the family unit together whenever possible.

Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC)

Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC) represents nearly 20,000 registered Métis people, and another 70,000 who self-identify as Métis. The Nation aims to "develop and enhance opportunities for Métis communities by implementing culturally relevant social and economic programs and services" (MNBC 2020). MNBC works with the Métis Commission, which is the designated representative under the *Child, Family and Community Service Regulation* for Métis children, youth and families involved in the province's child welfare system (Auger 2020). The Métis Nation Relationship Accord exists between the province and Métis people and commits to bettering the relationship between Métis and the province. Currently, MNBC has no defined role in child intervention within their province. However, the MNBC is invested in creating a concise framework for child and family services in British Columbia. The organization is currently working with the Métis Commission for Children and Families of British Columbia (MCCFBC), the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), Métis communities and Child and Family Service to provide clear and unanimous protocols for Métis children and families within the province. Recently (2020), the working group has signed a Memorandum of Agreement that strives to provide a more collaborative approach to Métis-specific care which includes formal relationships with provincial and federal governments and access to funding in order to support adequate service delivery to Métis children and families. The agreement will "support the issues that have been identified by Métis peoples surrounding their children's and youths well-being in order to both reduce the number of Métis children and youth in government care and to improve services to these children and families" (Auger 2020). The MNBC further strives to work with and participate alongside First Nations groups to strengthen Indigenous experience within British Columbia who are involved with child welfare.

The Kikino Métis Children and Family Services Society (Prince George), lii Michif Otipmisiwak Family and Community Services (Kamloops), and Island Métis Family and Community Services Society (Victoria) also provide support for community prevention and community-based educational programs. They strive for reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and government bodies in addition to nation-to-nation approaches that strive to make changes to the existing Métis child intervention system in British Columbia.

Manitoba

Manitoba has a Métis population of approximately 89 360 people (Statistics Canada 2016). Long recognized as the 'homeland' of the Métis Nation due to the placement of the historic Red River Settlement, it is no surprise that Manitoba would have strong supports available for Métis child intervention in their province. Carrière and Richardson claim, "The Manitoba Métis Child and Family Services Authority give us hope as a model of Métis child welfare governance and services delivery. Its development and governance model can serve as an example of how we can achieve the goals to uphold a Métis 'child-focused' mandate and Métis centred community-driven model" (2017, 5). Prior to 2000, there were numerous smaller groups working alongside the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) to provide child intervention services. These groups, however, were not solely Métis centered. Today, the *Child and Family Services Authorities Act of Mani*toba [Province of Manitoba, 2003 C.C.S.M. c. C90] lists four integrated authorities directed by the province for child intervention. These four bodies include

the General Child and Family Services Authority, the First Nations Authority of Northern Manitoba, the First Nations Authority of Southern Manitoba and the Métis Child and Family Services Authority. These authorities oversee services, disperse funds and ensure that culturally appropriate services are delivered to their respective groups. The agencies work within a collective partnership so that children, youth and their families are able to attain preventative, respectful and supportive care for the safety and protection of their children. The services delivered by the Indigenous agencies are culturally appropriate and respectful of the differences among Indigenous peoples in the province. First Nations groups have independent offices located within their respective Nations that operate under the directive of the First Nations Authority of Northern Manitoba and the First Nations Authority of Southern Manitoba.

Currently, the group of four child and family service authorities in Manitoba are working with *Until The Last Child* to increase permanent placements for Indigenous children and youth currently in their care. *Until the Last Child* is an organization that works alongside child welfare agencies to encourage and support innovative solutions to child welfare in Canada. The Manitoba Pilot Project stresses the importance of children being (re)connected with their family members, their communities and culture. This is an important aspect of the group's mandates because the connections to one's culture, language and community are vital to one's broader sense of belonging and identity. Another pilot program is currently in process - the Community, Healing and Recovering Together (CHART) program. This program brings together a collective group of case workers, family members, children, Elders and health workers to access services in an appropriate, timely and inclusive manner. This initiative has recently received an investment of $1.9M. It is evident that Manitoba has a concise system for child and family services that is easy to navigate - offering four partnering Authorities who work collectively towards the needs of children and youth in the province. The clear message to include the voices of Indigenous communities, to aid in prevention and strengthening the family, to work to keep children within their communities and cultural circles, and to strengthen the delivery of services is found within the group's processes and mandates.

Manitoba Métis Child and Family Services Authority

The Manitoba Métis Child and Family Services Authority is the legal representative for Métis (and Inuit) children and families in Manitoba who are receiving child welfare services. The Metis Child and Family Services Authority exists to strengthen and support the health and well-being of Metis and Inuit families and communities. This organization works towards responsive and sensitive solutions for Metis and Inuit that are specific to each's collective history, experiences, culture and values. "The Manitoba Métis Child and Family Services Authority have succeeded against all odds to establish themselves as a model for Métis child welfare governance in Manitoba and in Canada" (Carrière 2017, 50). This model can work to provide a working framework for other provinces and territories in Canada.

The Authority's guiding principles are as follows:

- "Métis and Inuit families and communities are the cornerstone of the Métis and Inuit Nations and the service delivery system must reflect this vision.

- Responsibility for decision-making regarding Métis and Inuit children and families lies with the family, extended family and community whenever possible.
- The organizational structure promotes and supports community governance at all levels.
- The service delivery system will encompass both formal and informal elements.
- The service delivery system must be operated in an efficient and effective manner.
- The service delivery system will be *outcome-based* and will reflect the core guiding principles of the Métis Authority" (Manitoba Métis Child and Family Services Authority, 2020).

The Authority acts an overarching umbrella organization for Manitoba's divisions of Métis services for children, youth and their families, and is both supported by the provincial government and the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) and recognized as the legal authority under the Métis Child and Family Services Authorities Act of Manitoba [Province of Manitoba, 2003 C.C.S.M. c. C90].

Métis Child, Family & Community Services

Métis Child, Family & Community Services (MCFCS) facilitates Métis children, families and communities at a number of locations throughout the province (Michif Child and Family Services is located in Dauphin). Working closely with the provincial government, the Manitoba Métis Child and Family Services Authority and the Manitoba Métis Federation, their mandate is to empower families and the community to share in their responsibility to protect Métis children and youth and to respect community and family. Some of the more prominent programs include: The Métis Connect Program and Bringing Families Together, the Alternate Care Program which includes Kinship Care, Live-In Family Enhancement (LIFE) and the Circle of Life. MCFCS programs and services will be expanded upon further in this report.

Saskatchewan

Child protection services in Saskatchewan are provided by both the Ministry of Social Services and by individual First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies (FNCFS). As previously noted, FNCFS agencies currently only provide services to First Nations children and their families living on reserve. All First Nations child welfare agencies in Saskatchewan are tied to the same legislative and policy framework as provincial agencies (Kozlowski et.al. 2011). Currently, Chapter C-7.2 of the Statutes of Saskatchewan holds the *Saskatchewan Child and Family Services Act*. The Act affirms that a child's cultural and spiritual needs are vital to their well-being, identity and culture. The Act further outlines that First Nations Peoples ('bands') should be consulted when making any child or youth placement decisions. Within its parts, it is apparent that there is a mandate to keep the child's best interest at the centre of any intervention activities [cC-7.2 4a]. Yet, this Act mentions only 'Indians' and 'bands' within its sections, with no reference to Inuit or Métis, specifically. There are a number of First Nations Child Welfare Agencies in Saskatchewan on reserves. Child and family services for Indigenous peoples are in desperate need for reform in Saskatchewan. As of June 2020, the province has reached an 11-year high for children in their care, and 86% of these children are Indigenous (McMillan 2020). Cowessess First Nation has been the first Nation in Saskatchewan to pass its own child welfare legislation (Bell 2020). The Nation's draft includes reference to maintaining Cree language,

cultural continuity, equality, and the best interests of the child (Cowessess First Nation 2020). Government control of child and family services in the Nation are set to cease in early 2021 and be fully taken over by the policies found within Cowessess First Nation's *Miyo Pimatisowin Act.*

Approximately 5.2% of the population of Saskatchewan are Métis (Carriere 2017), yet it appears that Saskatchewan is slow to develop a Métis-specific system for child intervention. At this time, Métis people continue to fall under the broad spectrum of 'Indigenous'. The Métis Nation – Saskatchewan is currently working towards Métis child, youth and family services however, very little has been published on the results at this time.

Métis Nation – Saskatchewan (MN-S)

Métis Nation-Saskatchewan (MN-S) governs and represents Métis citizens in Saskatchewan. The Metis Nation Legislative Assembly (MNLA) is the governing authority of MN-S, and has the authority to "enact legislation, regulations, rules and resolutions governing the affairs and conduct of Métis peoples in Saskatchewan" (Métis Nation- Saskatchewan 2020). As of May 2020, MN-S is hosting a series of engagement sessions called 'Our Children Are Ours' and includes the participation of government partners, childcare providers, social workers, Elders and Métis citizens to focus on providing holistic child care that is connected to family, culture, language and the broader Métis Nation. They are currently looking for a guiding set of principles to ensure that Métis children stay within their communities and with their families. Their lens, the 'best interest of the child principle' speaks to a culturally relative *child-focused* delivery model. These strategies are consistent with the focus found within Bill C-92.

Ontario

Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services is responsible for overseeing the *Child and Family Services Act* [R.S.O. 19. c.C. 11]. In 2018, many of the regulations within its contents were revoked – particularly those pertaining to First Nations people (Six Nations of the Grand River and Mohawks of Awkesasne) in Ontario. Métis Nation of Ontario President, Margaret Froh states, "Child and family services in Ontario was in need of significant reform, including legislation that replaces offensive terminology with current and more appropriate language. This reform will ensure that Métis children, families, and communities are recognized, respected and included with other Indigenous people" (Métis Nation of Ontario 2020). Subsequently, the new Child and Family Services legislation enacted by the Ontario provincial government in 2018, includes engagement with Indigenous groups, making services more culturally appropriate for all children and youth in the child welfare system, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis. In addition, the *Child and Family Services Act* now recognizes that Indigenous peoples thrive when they remain attached to their specific culture within their communities. Placements for children are made to respect the child's cultural and linguistic heritage and there is importance placed on having the child live either with extended family or with another First Nations, Inuk or Métis family, respectively. The recent amendments to the *Child and Family Services Act* appear to demonstrate the provincial government's commitment to review the current policies and procedures surrounding Indigenous child intervention. There are many provisions that outline the government's commitment to honour their relationships with Indigenous peoples. Each Nation should be entitled to provide

their own child and family services within their own communities. These initiatives continue to be controversial because there continues to be debate over who will have control over the design of Indigenous-centred programs. Others argue that the amendments made to the *Child and Family Services Act* should have been the foundation for a new piece of legislation that was more specific to the needs of Indigenous children, youth and their families (Carrière and Richardson 2017, 55), and not just an addition to existing frameworks. The MNO acknowledged the participation of Ontario and specifically Michael Coteau, Ontario Minister of Children and Youth Services, who expressed Ontario's commitment to move forward with the Métis Nation of Ontario to ensure the specific needs of Métis families and communities are addressed.

Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies First Nation, Métis and Inuit Services

Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) offer a division within their mainstream services, First Nation, Métis and Inuit Services. This division is structured to support and collaborate with Indigenous, First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities. OACAS supports child welfare staff by offering programming and supports about Indigenous culture and history, as well as to Indigenous children and youth in care. The organization acts as an advocate for Indigenous-centred child welfare and work alongside Indigenous communities. OACAS is moving towards facilitating reconciliary processes between Children's Aid Societies and the Indigenous communities in which they serve. There is currently a reconciliation framework agreement entitled, 'Sharing a Good Heart' (2013), in place. Within its contents, there is reference to creating and supporting relationships with Indigenous peoples. This begins by recognizing how Indigenous peoples have been hurt through child intervention services in the past, and how in future endeavors, Indigenous peoples must see value in their services. This framework was developed to include Elders, First Nations and Métis advisors to reimagine a system that is strategically community based. The organization strives to transform the relationship between Children's Aid Societies and the Indigenous Nations that they serve. OACAS's policies are inclusive of First Nations, Inuit and Métis but neither Métis-specific nor Inuit-specific programming and resources are evident.

Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario

The Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario (ANCFSAO), is a provincial organization mandated to deliver culturally-based services to Indigenous children, families, and their communities. The Province of Ontario requires the organization to comply with provincial standards and regulations even when the practice does not provide cultural continuity. Currently, they act as a resource to its member agencies which are comprised of 10 mandated and 2 pre-mandated Indigenous Child and Family Services Agencies. None of these agencies are Métis-specific rather, First Nations based. The Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario works towards the provision of community-based child welfare and family well-being services to Indigenous people through education and training, policy development and analyses, and research and advocacy. The organization is currently working on protocols to respond to Bill C-92 to honour Indigenous sovereignty and jurisdiction.

Métis Nation of Ontario

The Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) is currently the only recognized provincial Métis governance structure in Ontario. Recently, the MNO and the Government of Canada signed an agreement recognizing that Métis in Ontario have the right to self-government. The Métis Nation of Ontario currently has a number of programs available for children under the age of six. These *prevention-based* initiatives are funded by the provincial government, and designed to support all families requiring holistic parenting and family support services. In response to Bill C-92, the MNO is investigating ways to make systemic and fundamental changes to the child welfare system to include Métis children. Since 2014, the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) has worked with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, and First Nation and Inuit partners to co-develop the *Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy (OICYS)* as well as the legislative changes to the revised *Children, Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA), 2018*. The MNO has advocated for reform to ensure that Métis, children, youth and families are no longer separated, and when they are, to ensure that Métis children and youth in the child welfare system are able to transition safely back into their Métis communities. Their efforts build and expand on culturally delivered, *prevention-based* services (Métis Nation of Ontario 2020).

Northwest Territories

Métis people represent approximately 25% of the Indigenous population in the Northwest Territories, yet within the *Northwest Territories' Child and Family Services Act* [S.N.W.T. 1997 c.13] (CFSA), Métis children do not appear within its legislation. According to Statistics Canada (2016), there are currently 3390 Métis people living within the Territories. There are currently four main statutes that govern child welfare in the Northwest Territories. The *Adoption Act,* the *Intercountry Adoption Act* and the *Aboriginal Custom Adoption Recognition Act* regulate the terms and conditions for the adoption of children in NWT. The CFSA is the primary legislation providing for prevention and intervention services and the protection and well-being of children. The Department of Health and Social Services and the regional Health and Social Services Authorities are jointly responsible to fulfill the obligations under the *Act*. The Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority (NTHSSA) oversee the design, planning and delivery of territorial health and social services across the Northwest Territories. Their programs and services include both non-Indigenous and Indigenous directives. Indigenous children make for 91% of the overall children in care in the Northwest Territories (MacLaurin 2010). Therefore, it is critical that programs are created that recognize, respect, and understand the variety of Indigenous cultures that exist throughout the territory. These programs include training social workers and child case workers. *Northwest Territories' Child and Family Services Act* states that the best interests of the child must include consideration of the child's cultural, linguistic, and spiritual or religious upbringing and ties. Thus, the NWT is promoting a *child-focused* and *kinship/community centered care model* for all children in care. The NWT does not currently have a separate specific child and family services program for Indigenous children and are more likely to use a provincial or territorial model that closely follows mainstream processes. The only reserve in the NWT is the Hay River Reserve, and child and family services there are delivered by the Hay River Health and Social Services Authority (Gough 2007). Most of the Indigenous peoples in NWT live off-reserve. The current system has been criticized for its procedures yet, the announcement of Bill C-92 has encouraged Indigenous organizations to currently look for ways by which to take over their own child welfare systems. Traditional Inuit beliefs, values, and practices are becoming more integrated into child welfare systems by the territorial government

within its programs and services, and will only be improved by Indigenous control taking over their own child, youth and family service systems.

New Zealand as a Model

Indigenous peoples in countries and communities outside of North America have also experienced colonial processes in child services. Prior to the 1960s, the responsibility for Māori child welfare was the primary responsibility of the *whānau* (extended family, community). It was not until the Māori people of New Zealand began to move into the larger urban centres that mainstream processes for child and family services began to intervene. Much like the concept of Indigenous ontologies of kinship or relationality in North America, the concept of whānau was a foreign system for non-Indigenous workers. Their own frameworks and policies did not recognize alternate child-care models such as those exhibited between Māori children and their extended family members (Libesman 2004). The *Adoption Act* 1955, the *Guardianship Act* 1968 and the *Children and Young Persons (CYP) Act* 1974 were not structured to support traditional Māori beliefs and practices.

Colonized countries have had a history of non-Indigenous control and manipulation over social and health services involving Indigenous peoples (O'Sullivan 2019). This is a problematic history because over time, traditional Māori protocols for parenting and child care have fractured within these colonial systems (Bamblett and Lewis 2007; Love 2002). The work of child and family service agencies were continually criticized by Māori for their lack of cultural recognition and their non-inclusion of Māori worldviews. Fiona Cram states in the "Safety of Subsequent Children Report", "culturally non-responsive social work practice has been variously described as poor practice, "institutional abuse" (Gray & Cosgrove, 1985, p. 389) and even "cultural genocide" (Blackstock, Trocme, & Bennett, 2004, p. 902)" (2012). These grievances are similar to those made by other Indigenous groups in North America. Like First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples of Canada, the iwi of New Zealand have also struggled to intervene in their own child and family services. Māori worldviews and ways of knowing are deeply rooted in Māori history, relationship and identity (Tuhuwai Smith 1999; Love 2002). Literature affirms the strength of Māori research and frameworks in policy, methodologies and in academia.

Reviewing child welfare policies in New Zealand to include Indigenous worldviews can build healthier relationships with families and communities and between Māori people and the New Zealand government. Currently, New Zealand's Child, Youth and Family (CYF) department oversees the country's child and family services program, child protection services and juvenile justice. The CYF is now in partnership with Oranga Tamariki. The Oranga Tamariki Act (1989) or, Children's and Young People's Well-being Act (1989) was amended in 2017 to include provisions for the government to recognize and honour the Treaty of Waitangi – a Treaty that outlines the right of Māori to their own cultural identity and free participation in Māori values and processes (Section 7AA). Today, the *Children's and Young People's Well-being Act* (1989) centres children amidst the web of their families, *whanau* (kin group), *hapu* (extended kin group with many *whanau*), *iwi* (descent group with many *hapu*) and family groups. The key principles of this *Act* include the participation of Indigenous family in the process. The *Act* further outlines the parameters for child safety and protection, the effects that intervention may have on a family. The *Act* provides the guidelines for Māori children to be placed with a member

of the child's own *hapu* or *iwi*, or another person with the same background and/or location. In 2020, New Zealand's Child, Youth and Family child and family services framework relies on Indigenous-led approaches that set to correct past procedures in order to return decision-making back into the hands of Māori families and communities. This *restorative model* is vital for Indigenous sovereignty and responds to the provisions outlined within the Treaty of Waitangi.

For the health and well-being of Māori children and their families, it is imperative to continue to rebuild a foundation for child welfare that is based on Indigenous protocols. "Assessing child welfare programs, and measuring health and well-being outcomes using non-Indigenous worldviews do not lend themselves to Indigenous ways of knowing, and provide the foundation for misunderstanding, confusion, and inadequate support" (Kingi & Durie 2000, 11). Bamblett and Lewis uncover that the lives of Indigenous children can be improved through the restoral of Indigenous circles of care through by focusing on prevention and early intervention (*preventative models*) (2007). Māori have developed a number of models based on their history, identity, and teachings. Māori employ a *health and well-being model* based on the teaching of *Te Whare Tapawhā*, which "compares health to the four walls of the house, all four being necessary to ensure strength and symmetry and each wall representing a different dimension of health – *taha wairua, taha tinana, taha hinengaro* and *taha whānau*" (Williams et.al. 2019). Other Māori wellness models are those based on *Te Pe Mahutonga* and *Mauri Ora*. Te Pae Māhutonga for example, is the name for the constellation of stars that form the Southern Cross, and is used as a symbolic model of health within Māori community and public health systems. According to the Te Mana Ora Community and Public Health Authority, the four central stars can be used to "represent the four key tasks of health promotion and reflect particular goals: Mauriora, Waiora, Toiora, Te Oranga. The two pointers are Ngā Manukura and Te Mana Whakahaere and represent two pre-requisites for effectiveness, namely leadership, identity and autonomy" (Te Mana Ora 2020, under "te pe mahutonga'). *Mauri Ora is* "life-force alive". A Māori person with a Māori life force is alive to all things Māori (Arohaina Riwaka Thorpe, n.d.). The inclusion of Māori specific views about well-being can only strengthen child welfare programs going forward. Keeping children attached to their communities and within their families is a crucial factor for their health and welfare. Thus, child and family frameworks must be built with health and well-being in mind. To remove children from Māori communities is further problematized because non-Indigenous controlled apprehension guidelines conflict with Māori teachings that believe that their children should never be removed from their *whānau*. Despite these deeply rooted values, the state continued to remove children using their own frameworks. Fiona Cram suggest that this history continues into the present when two world-views collide. "Child apprehension from Māori communities is a poor practice because social workers do not have the skills, knowledge and resources to address the systemic problems (eg, poverty, disempowerment, loss of parenting practices) – nor the intergenerational trauma and grief faced by indigenous families in colonized countries" (Cram 2012, 17). Restorative processes would help to mitigate these past wrongs.

Community continuity helps to minimize the risk that children will require protection (Atwool 2006) because community continues to be at the centre of *iwi* identity. Studies have shown that for Māori *tamariki* (Māori children), "mental well-being, growth and development are integrally linked to *whakapapa* (Māori genealogy), family backgrounds, and connections with *whānau* (extended family). There are a number of Indigenous directed programs that

employ *Whānau*-centred initiatives. *Whānau* includes the physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions based on *whakapapa* (genealogy) and encompass extended family such as foster children and those who are deceased – again moving beyond narrow Western definitions of relationality. Initiatives such as these focus on the whānau as a whole, are built upon Māori strengths and continue to increase *iwi* capacity.

In 2010, the *Whānau Ora* Taskforce made a number of recommendations across a number of sectors for better government/ Māori relations. Most of their recommendations centre around the importance of including Māori voices (*Wha ̄nau Ora*: Report of the Taskforce on *Wha ̄nau*-Centred Initiatives 2010). The core teaching of *whānau* is employed by a number of Indigenous- centred organizations and within programs in New Zealand. *Whānau, iwi,* and *hapū* have a collective responsibility to care for all Māori children. Research has shown that high quality prevention, early interventions and strength-based positive youth development practices can make a lasting difference for children at risk of entering into child welfare programs (Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, 2010; Ministry of Youth Development, 2017; Zhang 2018). The Oranga Tamarinki Ministry for Children supports *whānau* through *Hui ā-whānau* and the *Mokopuna Ora* Sustainability Project framework. The organization's goal is to use timely *preventative models* to keep children, youth and their families together. Rather than apprehending Māori children, the Ministry's focus is on collaborating with a diverse group of professionals and community-minded individuals with specialized skills who are able to assist the family. Strengthening Families (*whakapiripiri Nga Whānau*), for example, is an organization that can bring together the child, family, and any relevant agencies to establish individualized action plans. Care can occur in private homes and in schools and spans from working with the child to the parent and with any other social services provider. The organization has access to a team of budget advisors, truancy officers, social workers, medical specialists, counsellors, teachers and other support workers. Oranga Tamarinki's *Hui ā-whānau* framework includes writing a contract, or a *whānau* agreement, between the family and *whanau.* Each plan is individualized. Oranga Tamariki identifies what needs to be done differently to achieve positive outcomes, resolve issues and respond to the needs of the child. Māori programs have focused largely on cultural acceptability, removing barriers in the way of *iwi* participating in programs, addressing colonialism, racism and intergenerational traumas, emphasize *whakawhanaungatanga* (relationship building) and focus on healing through long-term supportive care.

The Te Kahui Mana Ririki program is a parenting program operated by Mana Ririki Violence-Free Whanau that is drawn from traditional Māori parenting practices. Their framework is based on the teachings of *Ta Te Tamariki Tana Mahi Wawahi Taha* or, 'it is the job of the children to smash the calabash'. The calabash is a gourd that holds precious liquids and are valued. The gourd is a symbol for rules, methods or beliefs. Thus, it is the child's job to continue to test everything and adults need to accept this fact. Tikanga Ririki is based on deeply rooted beliefs about *tamariki* (Māori children). The Mana Ririki Violence-Free Whanau website includes a concise description of traditional Māori relationships with their children:

- "Tamariki are Ataahua: Children are perfect. They are the face of God. Ata or atua is a reflection or a god. Ahua is aspect or nature. Babies are perfect, and they are still perfect when they are children.
- Tamariki are tapu: Tapu is special, sacred. Children are special because they come from the ones who have gone before – the tipuna – and they are the parents of the ones to come. They are sacred because they whakapapa to the atua; the gods.
- Tamariki need aroha: Children need love. They need adults who are committed to them. Aroha is love and it is commitment. This is vital to children. They need love, and they need adults who will commit to them totally and always.
- Tamariki need hinengaro: Hinengaro is the mind – the place where problems and conflicts are solved. If tamariki are shown violent solutions, they will find it hard to learn non-violent methods.
- Tamariki are wairua: Children are spirit. Wai is water or stream. Rua means two. Children are spirit. They are both male and female. Both sides need developing to be in balance. The female in boys needs to be evident and the male in girls. Boys have a tender and nurturing side, and girls have a strong and directional side.
- Tamariki have mana: Children have status and power. Respect them. Children have their own power. They are the face of God; they are wairua and they are tapu. This gives them mana.
- Tamariki need turangawaewae: Children need to belong. They must trust their whanau and friends. Turangawaewae is a secure and safe place where tamariki know everyone. It means whakapapa and whanaungatanga; family relationships and connections

(Mana Ririki Violence-Free Whanau 2020, under "Mana Riki Tamariki Beliefs").

The Te Kahui Mana Ririki program demonstrate their commitment to a *child-centered model* of care and utilize traditional Māori understanding of children and families as their base. There is much emphasis placed upon the family, wellness, and esteem. Māori wellbeing continues to be at the foundation of Māori development and built upon Māori understandings of what constitutes a "good life". *Child-centred* focuses continue to infiltrate many child welfare systems in new Zealand. Kaupapa Māori Family Start, for example is another child-centred, intensive program that focuses on improving children's health, learning, relationships, family/*whānau* circumstances, environment and safety. It is a free, confidential, home-based support service for families/*whānau* with babies under 12 months old and – under exceptional circumstances – up to 2 years old. The program supports families/whānau who struggle with challenges or issues that may put the health, education and social outcomes for their children at risk.

Tamariki, whānau, iwi, and *hapū* are at the centre of Māori frameworks. Programs such as Family Group Conferencing (FGC) have been created by Indigenous peoples in New Zealand to develop specific programs alongside the immediate or broader family. This model is currently being used in Manitoba, at the *Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata* Centre. The FGC model protects Indigenous culture and knowledge through Indigenous values, ceremonies, programs and approaches that support both individual and family healing and wellness. There is open communication between the FGC team and youth, their families, CFS mandated agencies and other identified supports. It is important to note that the Family Group Conferencing Model

continually advocates for alternate kinship structures to keep children connected with their communities.

This report has provided a brief overview of Indigenous child and family services and has made evident that there are a number of processes in place to work towards of number of successful models. Those that have been effective and are commonly found among the organizations within this report include the following: *child focused model, prevention based model, kinship or community centered model, restorative models* and *service delivery models*. Many of these frameworks continue to align with the Government of Canada's commitments to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) 2007, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) Calls to Action 1 to 5, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). But it is important for Indigenous discourse to take over these conversations and for child welfare programs to no longer operate solely within standard non-Indigenous frameworks. These frameworks embody the core guiding values of Indigenous systems. In the next section, we will explore best practices available in Canada.

Best Practices

The introduction of Bill C-92 has created a space to review the current frameworks that are in place for Indigenous child welfare in Canada . Bill C-92 has the potential to provide openings for an increase in Indigenous-led organizations to take back the control over the welfare of their own children and redraw the parameters for child and family services within their own communities. Bill C-92 affirms the inherent right of *all* Indigenous peoples – including the Métis Nation - to develop their own laws for their own children, youth, and family. David Chartrand, President of Manitoba Métis Federation states, "The shift from intervention to culturally appropriate prevention and family (re)unification is an important step towards reconciliation" (Manitoba Métis Federation 2020). Chartrand is reiterating that culturally appropriate intervention will help to strengthen Métis families and the Nation as a whole.

Child welfare groups have continued to come together to discuss the issues facing Indigenous children and youth today. These groups have consistently identified the over-representation of Indigenous children within the child welfare system as one of the most paramount issues. Multiple reports have been written outlining the negative experiences of Indigenous children within the child welfare system, and just as many reports have highlighted a number of calls to action which have largely gone unfulfilled. In an effort to correct this history, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Alberta's (OCYA) created the report, *Voices For Change: Aboriginal Welfare in Alberta*. OCYA has uncovered that there are not only a number of gaps in perspectives between Indigenous communities and CFS, but a number of important issues must be addressed. These include: 1) The rebuilding of new relationships between the provincial and federal government and Indigenous communities in an effort to improve and increase self-determination and support. 2) To review existing child welfare legislations as they pertain to Indigenous groups and to include Indigenous context. 3) To provide adequate support and access to resources that will facilitate prevention, intervention and after care support. 4) The importance of the Government of Alberta to adopt "Jordan's Principle" – a child-first principle that makes services available to all Indigenous children regardless of their location on or off

reserve. 5) To utilize a strength-based approach to form a body of Indigenous authorities who are capable of developing adequate standards that are in the interests of Indigenous peoples. 6) The importance of children remaining connected to their families and to increase the frequency of kinship care arrangements, further discussed below. 7) All procedures must be long-term, sustainable and consistently monitored (Voices For Change: Aboriginal Welfare in Alberta 2016, 3-5). The OCYA engaged in focus groups with over 700 children who had been in the child welfare system, and through the children's testimonies were able to collect feedback to make the process more positive. The children outlined the importance of relationships and maintaining connections with significant people such as their parents, siblings, relatives, peers, Elders, role-models and other friends from their communities. But these relationships also extended to include the strong attachments that were at times, made with foster families. Some of the participants stated that once they were removed from their foster homes, they were unable to continue the relationships that they had created. The children also stated that while in foster care, they desired to feel a sense of belonging, to feel safe and to have the stability that they were lacking in their family homes. They desire loyalty, emotional support, encouragement and to feel loved (OCYA 2016, 21-2). Furthermore, many of the participants stated the importance of good, truthful communication with clear messaging and clear outlines. The children wanted to understand their family's situation, the possibilities for returning home, and the future of 'aging out' (turning 18) and living outside of the child welfare system (OCYA 2016, 23). Elders have stressed that Indigenous children and youth in care need to "be connected with their traditions and culture, taught about their background and ancestry, understand what it is about, and be proud of it" (OCYA 2016, 26). In addition, traditional parenting, community attachment and kinship care protocols must be respected.

Today, Child and Family Service organizations have moved away from child apprehension in favour of less intrusive family-centered approaches (Trocmé 2019). These efforts must continue to centre on specific and unique processes that will allow for Indigenous children to remain within their families and within their broader communities. Family-centered approaches align with traditional and customary Indigenous practices of kinship and belonging. Indigenous-centred programs must continue to be realized and practiced within Indigenous communities. Going forward, it is vital to continue to have meaningful and respectful collaboration with all Indigenous peoples in Canada. There must be a focus on ongoing reconciliatory action to be inclusive of Indigenous laws and knowledge. Reconciliation is an important step in Canada's future and can inform a number of programs and services going forward. Cindy Blackstock (2006) for example, embodied the process of reconciliation through the inclusion of Indigenous leaders from the Six Nations of the Grand River in Ontario in the development of the community-based action plan, the *Touchstone of Hope*. This program employs Indigenous ontologies to restore and restructure Indigenous child welfare policies in the region using five principles: self-determination, holistic response, culture and language, non-discrimination and structured interventions. The program uses a four-stage process of reconciliation: truth-telling, acknowledging, restoring and relating. Reconciliation processes, such as these, must begin to include more Métis-specific foundations and processes. Like *Touchstones of Hope*, there must be core guiding values that include the holistic strengthening of Indigenous culture, language, and identity by way of non-discriminatory intervention that is both structured by Indigenous peoples and community centred (Blackstock 2006). Indigenous peoples

have traditional protocols surrounding child care and adoption that must be included within future programs involving Indigenous youth and their families.

Children have been adopted within Indigenous communities since time immemorial (Arsenault 2006; Baldassi 2006; Grammond & Guay 2016). Although closed in 2013, the Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency (YTSA) in Alberta was one of the first groups to integrate traditional Indigenous adoption practices and teachings with Alberta provincial adoption laws (Atkinson 2010). The agency was formed in response to the overwhelming number of Indigenous children who were being removed from Indigenous communities and being adopted by non-Indigenous families outside of the community. YTSA mandated the importance of taking control over their own children's well-being and futures. The organization was very successful despite that many of the children who had been adopted were more challenging to place. Many of the children were those with disabilities, fetal alcohol syndrome, part of a sibling group, or who were already older children or teens (Blackstock 2010). The Elders and staff of YTSA attributed their success to the adopted children's reconnection to their families and communities. The children and youth felt supported within their Nations. Indigenous leaders in Alberta further recognize the importance of these programs. Keeping Indigenous children within their communities using internal Indigenous-based programs are a step towards self-governance (Lusty 1987). The YTSA is further responsible for setting the example for a strong working model that other organizations could emulate.

a) Customary Adoption Protocols/ Customary Care Model

Child and family policies continue to be provincially and federally mandated and these child welfare legislations continue to apply to all of the child and family services agencies in Canada. Yet, there continues to be growing evidence that government bodies are engaging in consultative processes with Indigenous agencies and communities. In 2017, the Government of Canada surveyed 480 people to ask for ways to reform and improve the First Nations Child and Family Service Program (Improving Child and Family Services in Indigenous Communities, 2018). Aside from access to adequate funding, the survey concluded that better family support services and the acceptance of Indigenous-centered focus for their own customary, kinship and foster care processes were of utmost importance. Currently, there a number of non-Indigenous programs that are embodying these categories. Many of these efforts are centered around Indigenous children remaining within their communities and are indicative of *kinship or community centered models.* However, it is argued that there is a distinct need for more specific laws and legislations developed by and for Indigenous peoples using their own specific customary laws and practices. These laws must be outlined by Indigenous peoples and not from the outside. Research has uncovered that Indigenous controlled child and family service groups are highly successful. "Emerging research and community reports agree that First Nations child welfare agencies are more successful at foster home recruitment, retention, and thus placement in community. They also do more culturally based work but the requirement of following provincial legislation and standards sometimes hampers their ability to innovate" (Blackstock 2010, 6). Blackstock also is highlighting that it is often difficult to operate within the constraints of provincial child and family services legislations and guidelines. The provincial and federal court systems have more often used their own discretion about accepting or rejecting customary laws and processes. This is problematic because Canada's legal systems emulate European

guidelines and ways of knowing that are contradictory to Indigenous ways-of-knowing– a fact recognized to be at the centre of many Indigenous legal issues extending far beyond cases pertaining to child welfare (Fiske 1995). Although Indigenous peoples have the right to their own customary laws and processes in Canada, the courts have "continued to deny First Nations the power to be the final authority for disputes regarding how to interpret, enforce or adapt customary law" (Fiske 1995, 193). In addition, the courts question the validity of many Indigenous laws because they contradict how the Canadian state knows and understands blood and property-based conceptions of being 'Indian' (Lee 2015). But even more problematic is the fact that these colonial systems have continued to infiltrate membership codes within Indigenous communities. These codes for belonging limit the opportunities for children and youth to be reconnected to their communities. These codes limit *who* can become an adoptee and *who* can become a member. Thus, there continues to be a mistrust of provincially legislated adoption programs (Irlbacher-Fox 2009). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has asserted that "Canada's child welfare system has simply continued the assimilation that the residential school system started" (TRC 2015, 128). The legacy of assimilative actions continue to be at the forefront of Indigenous minds.

There are few sources that outline the history of adoption/kinship care/customary care protocols within Indigenous communities. However, within the existing literature, it is clear that there are a number of adoption/kinship care/customary care processes that were practiced by not only Māori, but the Anishinaabe, Métis, Mi'kmaq, Inuit, Ojibway, Cree, Tlingit, Nisga'a. Gitxsan, Innu, and Haida (Arsenault 2006; Auger 2001; Grammond & Guay 2016; Lee 2015). Customary adoption is broadly defined as, "the conscious decision to care for any person: a child, adult or Elder, who is not directly biologically related, but who has displayed a need for familial support and protection" (Auger 2001, 177–202). Thus, there are adoption protocols in place for not only children, but for all people (Auger 2020). In Jeannine Carrière's article, "Lessons Learned from the Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency Open Custom Adoption Program", she writes about the traditional ways a child could be placed within alternate care frameworks in Alberta. These scenarios could include: if the child's parents were deceased, if a couple who were unable to have their own children or whose own child had passed away were without, or if elderly relatives needed extra support (2015). Customary adoption is intended to be a permanent solution (Cross 2014).

Although adoption protocols differ between Indigenous Nations and communities, the intent and outcomes are very similar. For example, the Ojibway people use the term *wenidjanissingin* while Mi'kmaq use the word *ankweak* to describe how they take care of children who are not biological offspring by bringing them up as their own. Indigenous children are predominantly raised by their grandparents, aunts or uncles (Auger 2001; Carrière 2010; Cross 2014). Métis people have historically recognized the importance of keeping their children within their communities. *ka oopkitmashook'* drew the framework for historic customary adoption protocols. The guidelines for traditional Métis adoption processes were as follows: if parents were deceased or unable to care for their child, the child would be raised by a grandparent or godparent in order to pass on their family's Métis culture and identity. The godparent was often a "good choice because they already had both a physical and spiritual responsibility to the child in question" (Douglas et.al. 2020). If a godparent or grandparent were unable to care for the child, aunts and uncles followed by community members would be asked.

Regardless, children without parents would never be apprehended to unknown people outside of the community. The community then had the responsibility to share food, clothing and other provisions to the family who was taking care of the children through customary adoption. The goal of customary adoption practices/kinship care/custom care was to strengthen the child's existing relationships while maintaining and reinforcing a sense of culture, identity and community (Keewatin 2004) and to forge new relationships through the making of new relatives (Auger 2001; Carrière 2010; Cross 2014).

Customary adoption practices demonstrate kinship principles at their base and solidify children as members of their broader community while making evident that children are not only the responsibility of their biological parents but each person in their community (Arsenault 2006; Cross 2014). Customary adoption protocols act to recover and reclaim traditional practices thus, children remain under community guardianship to maintain their culture, language and identity. Customary Care Agreements recognize that Indigenous children and youth thrive when family connections and cultural traditions are preserved and protected, thus the child continues to live within their community - connected and in contact with their biological parents and extended family. Customary adoption promotes how Indigenous peoples understand the notions of permanency as opposed to formal adoption which includes the termination of parental rights (Cross 2014). The community supports the biological, adoptive and extended families and are better equipped to provide cultural support through maintained connections with Elders and other knowledge keepers. Indigenous peoples have also noted that the child welfare system should take into account who potential kinship caregivers are today, rather than who they may have been in the past (OCYA 2016, 26). Intervening with customary protocols eliminates the philosophical barrier to adoption as conducted in mainstream society (Cross 2014) and limits having Indigenous people reconnect with their communities as adults. Indigenous-focused practices reject apprehension to non-Indigenous peoples and speak back to the legacy of assimilation: the Sixties Scoop and residential schooling.

These customary care practices and protocols are currently being incorporated into a number of Indigenous communities by way of Indigenous organizations. Each framework will have variations from the others that are dependent on the specific values of the community, their history and protocols. The Ojibway and Cree for example, are incorporating the teaching "Mamow Obiki-Ahwahsoowin" through Tikinagan Child and Family Services, located near Thunder Bay, Ontario. Tikinagan has been in operation since 1984, and was one of the paramount Indigenous controlled child welfare agencies in Canada. Mamow Obiki-Ahwahsoowin is an Ojibway/Oji-Cree term that means "everyone working together to raise our children" and was founded on the principles of keeping their children within their communities while maintaining a fluid experience that respects culture, heritage and the importance of the connections to the extended family (Carrière 2010, 2). The model was designed and continues to be delivered by Indigenous peoples and incorporates the care for children according to traditional values and customs. Their mandate is to provide a culturally appropriate response to children and families in need of help within their communities through Indigenous-trained community-based workers. All aspects of their service include their accountability to the community and to their leaders, the child and the child's family, as well as through ongoing consultation with Elders. The Wee-chee-way-win Circle of Care demonstrates the circular nature of Indigenous teachings and the inclusion of all people that not only begins but ends with the child. Each person who is

interested in caring for the child must become a member of the circle. Although not exhaustive, the members if the Wee-chee-way-win circle could be comprised of parents, siblings, foster parents, the Nation's Chief and council, Elders, teachers, school staff, guidance workers, caregivers, Tikinagan workers and employees from outside resources. This group of people work in support of the child to provide a respectful and healing space. According to the Nation's 2018-2019 Annual Report, there are a number of pilot projects in the works which include creating and developing a law on children, youth and families and developing a comprehensive delivery framework in partnership with Sandy Lake. Through their demonstrated expertise, they hope to provide their assistance to more communities like Sandy Lake to help them disentangle themselves from provincial interference in child and family services cases within their communities. In addition, the organization is currently working on the Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwg (KI) Family Law project. This project will bring forth the Nation's own laws on child and family services in place of using provincial legislation. The goal is for KI to take over the provincial Child, Youth and Family Services Act (Tikinigan Child and Family Services Annual Report 2018-2019).

The Métis Child and Family Services Authority, Michif Child and Family Services, and the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) currently organize and facilitate a program entitled, Métis Connect. Métis Connect strives for family, extended family and community-based decision making when it comes to the needs of children and/or youth in their care. The organization also runs the Kinship Care Program which provides various programs and services to caregivers who have pre-existing relationships with the child. These people could be grandparents, aunts and uncles, family friends or trusted members of the child's home community. Métis Connect staff work with extended family and community members to then form a network for the child to better understand their identity, their belonging, their community and culture. The organization continues to engage in ongoing partnerships with these key decision makers when planning and making decisions for children. LIFE is part of MCFCS's kinship care model which overlays with customary adoption protocols. "Within the Metis community there is a long history of extended family and community members providing care, nurturance and protection for children whose parents were unable to provide care. The philosophy of MCFCS is grounded in these traditions and beliefs, with the Kinship Care program working to keep children within their own family networks and communities where possible" (Métis Child, Family, and Community Services 2020).

Not all customary adoption models are found within the geographic boundaries of First Nations. The majority of Indigenous peoples live in urban areas. This number represents the most quickly growing number of Indigenous population (Environics 2010). Despite their location, urban Indigenous peoples continue to prioritize language, customs/traditions, family values and spirituality as the most important aspects of Indigenous culture that should be passed on to the next generation (Environics 2010, 62). Indigenous programs within Toronto have been shaped to promote a holistic model for the care of Indigenous children and their families. This holistic model is most effective for Indigenous children because it most "reflects an Indigenous worldview in which the emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual domains are equally important and ideally, in balance; and where the child is not seen in isolation but as a part of the community" (Canadian Council on Learning 2009, 36). The Best Start Plan: Toronto's Vision for Children represents workers from agencies across Toronto who work directly with

Indigenous children and their families. Currently named the *Aboriginal Advisory and Planning Committee*, this committee assures that Indigenous child care service programs reflect the cultural, linguistic, political and historical of Indigenous peoples. Native Child and Family Services of Toronto is often considered the top urban Indigenous child welfare agency in the country (Blackstock 2010).

Customary Care protocols are also in place for Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST). Their process is to work with community even before any court applications are made with support from the Band, Elders, the child's biological parents. It is also important to note that children over six years old also must support the agreement. The organization strives to provide a quality program that promotes the well-being, caring and healing for children and their families. Their service model is highly culture-based, respectful of Indigenous values, and driven by the needs of the community. Research into the needs of Indigenous urban communities in Toronto was completed in 2012 by Johnston Research Inc. There were a number of key findings. Firstly, urban Indigenous peoples prefer Indigenous specific services – even willing to travel long distances to attain them. Secondly, if services are not specific to Indigenous peoples, the families tend to feel invisibilized within the system. They are often hesitant to self-identify as First Nations, Inuit or Métis. Their organization provides access to cultural activities that promote healing and resilience, strengthen connections to the community and Elders, deepen relationships between families and their workers, and increase the ability of workers to offer culturally safe services for children and families.

While exploring customary adoption processes, it is clear that there are some barriers or perhaps, realities. For example, these systems continue to be influenced and informed by how the Canadian state frames and recognizes indigeneity. Exclusive boundaries are often drawn out using both blood-quantum and territory as categorizations for inclusion and belonging. Indigenous peoples' laws and customs have been historically overshadowed and constrained by non-Indigenous processes (Coulthard 2014; Irlbacher-Fox 2009; Tully 2000; TallBear 2013). Therefore, colonial systems have continued to trickle into customary law process practiced by individual Indigenous groups and have further altered the way that customary protocols operate. Customary adoption processes have also been affected. Traditional Indigenous citizenship is generally not based on any blood quantum or Indian Status (RCAP 1996, 251–263) rather, inclusivity is based on kinship principles, relationality and connection (Palmater 2011). Yet, contemporary actions demonstrate that Indigenous groups have continued to narrow their membership numbers based on blood quantum which in turn, has minimized the numbers within their independent Nations. This is a problematic practice because these actions emulate the historical colonial desire to minimize Indigenous groups and diminish the state's responsibility to sovereign Indigenous nations (Corntassel 2008; TallBear 2013).

Damien Lee explores early Anishinaabeg teachings and Creations Stories to uncover the foundational guidelines for customary adoption laws (2015). Lee uncovers that although customary adoption protocols are being followed, there are times when the adoptee is refused membership due to their blood relation or inclusion in the community. He argues that Anishinaabeg adoption organizations must shift from a narrow focus on blood lines to a relation-making approach. This practice would increase membership, emphasize inclusivity, and reject reductionist colonial understandings of belonging. Band membership regimes that do not include

adoption as grounds for fully belonging with Indigenous peoples today "obscure the full range sui generis legal orders that can be used to "re-member" our families, communities and nations" (Lee 2015, 88). The Anishinaabeg did not customarily use blood line or blood quantum as community qualifications rather, Anishinaabeg framed identity and belonging within a person's behavior (Doerfler 2015), *daebinaewiziwin or,* their duty or rights (Borrows 2011) or community acceptance (Simpson 2000; 2008). Customary adoption protocols should include the care of all children, not only Indigenous children. Lee states, "customary adoption is often expected to be solely for the care of Indigenous children, as far as the racialized notions of indigeneity allow" (2015, 87).

Returning back to core traditional activities or teachings that have been passed through the generations are a likely avenue to make sense of and redraw the narratives for customary adoption practices. For example, Irlbacher-Fox explores how moose hide tanning can be used as a grounding framework for Dene to understand their ways of being, values, and worldviews (2009). The "intense, participatory, and profoundly family-and community- oriented nature of tanning makes it a fitting cultural analogy" (Irlbacher-Fox 2009, 38).

Grammond and Christiane Guay (2016) explore customary custody and adoption among the Uashat mak Mani-Utenam community in northeastern Québec in their article, "Understanding Innu Normativity in Matters of Customary 'Adoption' and Custody". Their work is evidence of how legal and institutional frameworks can be more respectful to Innu processes, how meaningful dialogue between the government and Innu can be employed, and how respectful legal pluralism can prevail in cases of 'child circulation'(Grammond and Guay 2016, 14). As stated, Indigenous peoples have the right to their own customary laws and processes in Canada. The Youth Protection Act was amended in 2017 to include the importance of Indigenous cultural identity and its preservation, and provisions that require cooperation with Indigenous communities. Section 37.5 of the Act Québec authorizes the Government of Québec to enter into alternate child welfare agreements and processes with Indigenous communities. The Innu have begun to initiate, negotiate and implement their own practices. Uauitshitun, the social services centre of Uashat mak Mani-Utenam, has been researching traditional parental practices, land-based healing practices, and processes for customary adoption protocols. The Indigenous peoples of Québec have been striving for customary adoption processes to be recognized yet, there continues to be difficulty in the core composition of both Québec and Innu laws. The Innu legal institution of *ne kupaniem/ne kupanishkuem* has few similarities with Québec adoption laws. Yet, the enactment of legislation that would recognize customary adoption more emulates the equivalent of an adoption under Québec law. Innu law is based on one's individual freedom to restructure one's family relations. As noted in Ontario and Tikinigan Child and Family Services' guidelines, the individual could also be the child. This aspect does not align with provincial Child and Family Services guidelines in Canada and continues to be challenged because leaving the decision with a minor is a foreign concept. There are other aspects of customary adoption that do not align with the Government of Québec's policies or non-Indigenous laws. Firstly, traditional Innu society typically did not have a hierarchical authority, therefore adoption agreements are made between the people in the community who are involved with the process without any involvement of a third party. Secondly, customary adoptions for Innu are generally informal and result from an agreement or a consensus among the parties Although some Indigenous Nations in British Columbia and Manitoba celebrate with an adoption

ceremony (Atkinson 2010), the Innu do not finalize adoption in that way. Thirdly, the agreements are oral and understood rather than written, processed and filed.

Customary Adoption protocols are intended to be permanent solutions for Indigenous children to remain within their communities and connected to heir families. At times, children are able to be reunified with parents or other caregivers after a temporary separation.

b) Preventative and Family Reunification Models

The Government of Canada largely funds programs for Indigenous child and family service organizations who continue to employ a *prevention-based model* in an effort to support early intervention to avoid institutional and/or foster care. Prevention-based models strive to support children, youth and their families *prior* to any involvement by provincial child service authorities and *prior* to any possible apprehensions. *Family reunification models* strive to reconnect families after a period of time apart. Child welfare agencies in Canada, the United States and Australia have continued to highlight and prioritize the importance of reunifying families following child apprehension (Chambers et.al. 2016; Landers & Danes 2016; LaBrenz et.al. 2020). Despite these prioritizations, there are few in depth studies that explore the outcomes of these programs (LaBrenz et.al. 2020). Furthermore, more research must be undertaken to explore Indigenous specific reunification processes for Indigenous children and their families (Landers & Danes 206). Emerging literature from the United States outline a number of child, parent, family, and child welfare case characteristics that can predict the likelihood of reunification. Although there are few Canadian sources that highlight dynamics that influence reunification within its provinces (Deane et.al. 2018), some of the characteristics that have been noted in US studies include: the age of the children, the reasons for placement, the length of time in care, the reliability and consistency of relationships with care workers, a child's emotional or behavioral difficulties, the number of placement changes, the individual needs of the family, specific family social and economic disadvantages, and histories of substance or sexual abuse (Chambers et al. 2016; Landers & Danes 2016).

Reunification Programs layer on top of prevention-based models and many organizations offer both preventative and reunification frameworks. Hultain Family and Community Services Society (HFCSS), for example, provides a comprehensive Family Preservation Reunification Program in British Columbia. HFCSS works with Indigenous families who have been referred to their organization because of their need for timely intervention because their children have become at risk for removal. This organization provides an intensive three-stage program that includes first stabilizing the situation, and then moving on to an education curriculum with ongoing outreach, one-on-one sessions, and in-home/community support. The agency's programs accommodate a number of stages and requirements. The Journeys of the Heart (JOH) program is a ten-month preparatory cultural learning program for Indigenous children aged 2 to 5 and their caregivers. This program provides children with tools and skills to enter into the mainstream education system while nurturing and honouring their cultural identity. The L, KI, L (L,TH,KEEL) Child and Youth Mental Health Program refers to "confidence and the positive feeling arising from an appreciation of one's own ability and originates from the SENCOTEN language of the WSANEC community" (Hulitan Family and Community Services Society 2020). L, KI, L (L,TH,KEEL) is intended to help improve mental health, build

confidence and empower Indigenous children, youth and their families. However, the program surpasses mainstream interventions not only through their inclusion of cultural teachings but through their focus on understanding colonization and the intergenerational impacts of residential schooling, This program uses the teachings of the Medicine Wheel to address the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual needs of children, youth and their families. The Medicine Wheel or Healing Wheel is intended to promote lessons of balance and teaches that all aspects of self are interconnected and interdependent upon one another. Hulitan provides support for families who have experienced sexual abuse. The NIȽ YEK̲ OLs Sexual Abuse Intervention Program is community based and provides opportunities to develop an understanding of healthy sexuality while being supportive of healthy parent and child attachment. There is also an Out-of-Care Caregiver Support Program that is designed to provide caregivers with the support, skills, community resources and cultural connections needed to manage their households and maintain a stable environment for long-term children in their care.

An example of a preventative program in action is through Manitoba's Métis Child, Family, and Community Services (MCFCS). The Family Support Program provides a range of prevention and early intervention services to help strengthen families and reduce possible risks. For example, the agency's Differential Response / Family Enhancement framework strives to change the manner in which families are approached following a report of child abuse/abandonment/neglect. Rather than approach the family using more traditional investigative processes, the agency works to provide a number of services. This approach allows MCFCS to provide a supportive service that focuses 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" (Métis Child, Family, and Community Services 2020). MCFCS uses a strength-based, *solution focused planning model*. The Family Support Program is available to families who need assistance. The staff work individually with parents in their homes to strengthen their parenting skills and abilities. The program is also able to provide care for children so that parents are able to attend programming, classes and therapy. Individual support is also available for transportation, food, milk and diapers, emergency respite and support services (Métis Child, Family, and Community Services 2020). Despite multiple preventative programs, some families may not have had been able to access these programs or it may be determined by child and family service authorities that a child's safety is in imminent jeopardy. The Family Support Program is also structured to reunify children with their families. Through Supported Family Time, parents who have children in the care of the agency are able to gradually resume their caregiving responsibilities to their children in order to facilitate reunification. The aims of child welfare are to reunite families rather than break them apart through permanent foster care or adoption. Thus, Manitoba provides a strong framework for family reunification after an extended period of time apart.

Following a review of Manitoba's child welfare system and the need for family enhancement programs in 2015, attention was given to the Métis Child, Family, and Community Services (MCFCS) Live-In Family Enhancement (LIFE) program. Working hand-in-hand with the Family Support Program, LIFE works as a process for family reunification following apprehension. LIFE mentors live with children and their families in a foster-home environment

to provide mentorship and 24-hour support (Métis Child, Family, and Community Services 2014). LIFE caregivers act as mentors to the parent(s) in order to teach them important parenting skills. Their mentorship not only promotes the health and well-being of families. The program further provides a suit of resources for up to one year. Deane, Glass, Vystrcil-Spence and Mignone (2018) conducted an evaluation of the implementation and outcomes of the LIFE program. Their findings conclude that the LIFE program significantly improves the relationship between family, social workers and the agency while building trust with extended social support systems. Families experience a stronger connection with each other and caregivers learn improved parenting skills, household management skills, and complete employment training. In addition, the costs do not exceed those of regular fostering. Deane, Glass, Vystrcil-Spence and Mignone uncovered six themes from the responses of staff and participants. These are: "1) establishing predictable routines; 2) developing self-esteem and competence in parenting; 3) building trust in the agency and others; 4) broadening the circle of support and repairing relationships; 5) managing the household; and 6) obtaining secure housing and income" (Deane et.al 2018, 40). LIFE establishes predictable family routines via the Dragonfly Reunification Program training program, for example. The program utilizes attachment-based intervention – that is, using the assumption that parents and children have both experienced disrupted attachment to each other. This program provides a mentor to talk though traumatic experience, loss, and abuse in order to improve family bonds and promote healthy attachments. This mentorship is an important aspect of the LIFE program.

According to the Commission of Inquiry into the Circumstances Surrounding the Death of Phoenix Sinclair, child protective caseworkers continue to have an overwhelming number of cases that far exceed the average set forth by the Child Welfare League of America and Manitoba Children's Advocate of 10-15 caseloads per worker (Hughes 2013). Workers in Winnipeg, for example, assume caseloads of up to 40 families. This amount of pressure on the system and on the staff result in a high turnaround within child protective service departments. It was previously noted that consistent and reliable relationships were one of the key factors in successful reunification. In both FRP and LIFE, there is a consistent mentor/worker that remains with the family for the duration of the program. The agency further strives for life long connections between the child and supportive mentors. Once the child has reached the age of majority, the organization holds a ceremony to celebrate their transition into adulthood. However, the program further extends to those who have reached adulthood. The young adult can remain in contact with a Spirit Worker who can provide ongoing support, advocacy and connections to such things as community resources, anti-homelessness resources, education, employment and job readiness. The Métis Child, Family and Community Services Authority are demonstrating that although children have reached the age of majority (18), they continue to be important members of the Métis community. Métis Child, Family, and Community Services 2018/2019 Annual Report outlines their guiding principles:

- "Métis families and communities are the cornerstone of the Métis Nation and the service delivery system must reflect this vision.
- Responsibility for decision-making regarding Métis children and families lies with the family, extended family and community whenever possible.
- The organizational structure promotes and supports community governance at all levels.
- The service delivery system will encompass both formal and informal elements.

- The service delivery system must be operated in an efficient and effective manner.
- The service delivery system will be outcome based and will reflect the core guiding principles of MCFCS"

(Métis Child, Family, and Community Services 2018/2019 Annual Report 2019, under "Guiding Principles", 2).

Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services (VACFSS) was formed in 1988 in British Columbia to develop the child welfare system and to promote in-home support programs for urban Indigenous families. The organization began by providing cultural support to children and to caregivers. Since 2001, the agency has continued to provide a full range of delegated services through Indigenous Family Preservation and Reunification Services. The organization currently works in accordance with the Child, Family and Community Services Act, yet work to reimagine these legislative frameworks to support alternate Indigenous ways-of-knowing. Their restorative practices continue to reject solely using approaches of mainstream social work, are grounded in accepting and practicing intergenerational Indigenous knowledge systems, worldviews, and culture (specific to the family being served), and framed within an awareness of and engagement with colonial history (VACFSS 2020). VACFSS currently coordinates services with Métis Family Services. Their guiding principles are as follows:

- "First Nation, Urban Aboriginal and Métis communities and/or their representative agencies have a right and a responsibility to be involved in the planning for their member children and families wherever they reside.
- All decisions about transferring and/or sharing services including time frames, responsibilities and costs are based on consideration of an Aboriginal child's safety and well-being, and on the best interests of an Aboriginal child.
- Aboriginal children and families are to be consulted throughout the planning process, including transfer of guardianship services and informed when services are transferred.
- In the transfer of services, the Aboriginal child or family, the identified Aboriginal community and/or Delegated Aboriginal Agency (if applicable) are involved.
- Those who have ongoing roles and responsibilities for services to the Aboriginal child and family are provided with relevant, timely information regarding the transfer of services.
- Planning for transfer of services involves both the originating Delegated Aboriginal Agency and the receiving Delegated Aboriginal Agency.
- Services are transferred or shared between or amongst Delegated Aboriginal Agencies in a manner that promotes continuity of established plans and seamless service delivery to Aboriginal children, youth and families.
- Resources are developed locally to meet the needs of an Aboriginal child, unless it is in an Aboriginal child's best interest (consistent with section 71 of the *CFCSA*) to be placed in another region.
- Aboriginal families and children are entitled to timely, appropriate and consistent service within their community of residence"

(VACFSS 2020, under "Métis Services Protocol", 4-5).

In Alberta, the Métis Capital Housing Corporation (MCHC) provides the Family Reunification Program (FRP) through referral. The MNA institution, Métis Capital Housing Corporation along with its sister company, Métis Urban Housing Corporation, are Canada's largest providers of affordable housing for Indigenous peoples. Since 2013, FRP works to reunite families (typically with children aged 0-12), who have experienced any form of prolonged separation, and act as the final stage for family reunification. The program is coordinated with Alberta Child and Family Services who follow provincial and federal standards for child safety and care. Like Hulitan Family and Community Services Society's program, L, KI, L (L,TH,KEEL), the FRP program has been built upon the core cultural and traditional teaching of the Medicine Wheel. The four quadrants consist of the emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual areas of selfhood and is indicative of the skill developments that every individual progress through over their lifetime. MCHC proposes that the final quadrant us therefore the 'transitional stage' that leads to their new temporary home. MCHC recognizes the importance of incorporating Indigenous teachings in their processes and it is evident that the child's sense of self, culture and belonging strengthens with each positive experience, improves their sense of belonging, worth and connectedness to their families, communities and culture. Enacting teachings such as the Medicine Wheel combats assimilative processes of the past and instead, grounds Indigenous experience in Indigenous tradition and history. The program's goal is to provide Indigenous families with adequate long-term housing and emergency placements. While living in the home, the program further offers around the clock routine, structure, and emergency support, parenting skills development, connection to resources within the community, employment and educational planning for parents, individualized support/therapy for the children to assist them to work through their issues, integrating children and youth into schools and communities, mentorship programs, providing childcare while parents attend programs. Saskatchewan currently operates an FRP program at the 'Balwin' site. Located in Saskatoon, the program has been in operation since 2009. The dedicated FRP staff consists of caseworkers who are qualified in several fields from social work, addictions, counselling,

Recommendations

There are a number of recommendations that have been suggested by a plethora of organizations to improve child welfare systems. The OCYA specifically, has outlined a number of comprehensive recommendations for Alberta Indigenous peoples in their report, "Voices For Change: Aboriginal Child Welfare in Alberta" (2016), ranging from specific Treaty territories to the Métis Nation. The recommendations that have been made in the report to improve Métis specific systems are as follows:

- "A full partnership is needed government to government. Children enter the system and the Métis Nation of Alberta is not aware of where they are. Notify the Métis Nation and Métis Settlements.
- Front line staff need to be involved in development of legislation and policy change.
- There are funding barriers for families to re-unite, children can be placed anywhere in Alberta and there is a high cost to travel. No one goes to child welfare for help because there are barriers with the process of receiving help.
- Foster Parents receive financial support for children while the parents live in poverty. Redirect funds to support families.

- Cultural teachings need to focus on Métis as well as First Nations.
- In addition to basic needs, young people's mental, emotional, and spiritual needs should be addressed.
- More support and easier access to kinship supports is needed. Families don't want to get involved because of the hoops and the financial barriers. What happens when children age out, they are lost without their identity. It is easy to take children away but no supports to keep children with family.
- Aboriginal people don't fight back when they should because they believe the system is always against them.
- The legislation and policy need to change to support the involvement of the MNA to support children. Government needs to recognize the authority of the MNA the way they do the Chiefs.
- Increased involvement in child welfare delivery. MNA needs to know when a Métis child comes into care not just CFS.
- Make family engagement mandatory and give family, foster parents, and youth a voice.
- Métis and First Nations to come together for partnership to move forward for young people to better understand each other.
- Kinship care – "Equal payment for equal treatment."
- Youth say they have nowhere to go and that Elders need to be connected to youth.
- There is a need to reunite families and focus on more prevention.
- Provide support for Métis citizenship/registration.
- Increase awareness of available supports and how to access them as the systems are too complicated.
- Resources are needed to research family trees as there is only one Métis registration office in Alberta.
- More supports for FASD are needed, particularly after a youth turns 18.
- Parents need to be held accountable to their children and there is a need to break the cycle of families where parents were in care with no connection to their natural family.
- Regarding Métis registration, we need a formal process (even more critical when a Métis child is adopted) between MNA and Service Alberta to allow the MNA to access documents required to complete registration.
- Start with prevention programs rather than removing children.
- Teach youth about risks while at the same time providing hope for the future.
- Young people need positive role models and we all need to be accountable to support youth.
- Start in schools and encourage and mentor young people. Teach and discuss the hard topics and give youth a voice at an early age.
- Provide access to Elders in the schools.
- Teach youth about the effects of intergenerational trauma.
- Create a Métis system like the DFNA's.
- Need to recognize Métis as unique and remember that Métis traditions are not the same as First Nations.
- Develop Métis child welfare standards and partner with the MNA in their development.
- Establish a way to get communication out to all Métis people.
- Improve navigation of the system. Front line workers need to know how to navigate all government programs.

- Workers need to engage with young people more often and know how they are doing.
- Programs should be built with connections and be accountable to one other.
- Regular reports should be published that differentiate between First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples.
- Different cultures have different stories.
- MNA needs to be responsible for Métis child welfare standards and those need to be reflected in provincial policy.
- Have annual public reporting."

(Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Alberta, Voices For Change: Aboriginal Child Welfare in Alberta 2016, 46-7)

The recommendations that have been made by OCYA echoes recommendations from various sources within this broader report:

1. **Kinship care and customary adoption models need to be developed in collaboration with communities**. Care must be non-discriminatory in terms of relative status, and include for extended family, friends, Elders, or community supports. Prospective care-givers must be selected based on who they are today rather than who they may have been in the past. Enabling a kinship-based model further connects Métis to a set of kinship principles that places the child within both the physical and spiritual world.
2. **Initiatives must continue to be prevention-based**. Prevention-based models help to strengthen families and reduce possible future risks of apprehension.
3. **Communities must interpret their own specific principles within the context of their own specific culture and location**. It is clear that many Indigenous peoples live in urban spaces, far removed from their traditional or historic communities. Space must be given to provide supports for Métis, specifically, that both respects and honours these complexities. Métis are a unique people who are different than other Indigenous groups.
4. **Adequate time must be given to create new programs.** Although Manitoba has a strong legislative model for child family services, Carrie Bourassa cautions that in many ways, the new framework occurred too quickly and that a number of discrepancies continue to arise (2010, 7). Consultation with Indigenous groups who have been working towards or who have implemented their own child welfare agreements is paramount.
5. **There must be emphasis placed on reunification programs with multiple avenues available for parents, children and youth to rehabilitate.**
6. **There must be adequate and consistent funding models**. Métis child welfare services are being deprived of necessary funds to provide adequate and prolonged preventative and statutory services. Métis agencies are currently funded through provincial governments predominantly for family support programs while statutory services are provided mostly through provincial ministry offices. (Janzen, Jeffery, & Smith, 2015, 13). The federal and provincial government must mandate to collectively support all Indigenous peoples in Canada and extend their focus from First Nations to include specific Métis and Inuit funding models. Funding must also be available for preventative programming.
7. **Strong and united Métis governance structures need to be in place**. Métis are often left out of the equation. Kerry Alexander discusses the need for infrastructure to exist for

Métis specific legislative frameworks. "Governance structures for Métis services depend on legal frameworks that recognize the importance of Métis child wellbeing. In order for Métis agencies to develop Métis specific services to children and families the legislative frameworks that support this infrastructure must exist. We have a context in Canada where this has not been the case yet we have a recent Supreme Court decision that recognizes and affirms the Aboriginal rights of Métis people in this country" (Alexander 1998). These frameworks have been slow to evolve. In addition, there are a number of Métis organizations that operate outside of the Métis National Council (MNC), and there is currently ongoing dialogue about inclusion and identity.

8. **Inclusion of Elders and cultural supports**. Elders have wisdom to share with children, youth and their families. Their wisdom can add to the importance of preserving and recovering cultures. Elders can also encourage learning from the land and provide ongoing cultural support for parents, teachers, and the community.

9. **Development of Métis-specific courses or programs within the social work discipline.**

10. **Land-based healing processes should be adopted** (Grammond and Guay 2017)**.**

11. **Language rejuvenation and cultural healing programs are paramount in order to strengthen Indigenous identity and to feel a sense of pride** (Blackstock 2007; 2010)**.**

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