



**Exemplifying the Sacredness of  
Relationality: An Evaluation of the  
Partnership between the First Nation,  
Inuit, and Metis Service Providers and the  
Children's Aid Society of Ottawa**

Qualitative Narratives of Significant Change

February 2012

Report Prepared for the First Nations,  
Inuit and Metis Service Providers and the  
Children's Aid Society of Ottawa  
by the

**First Nations  
CHILD & FAMILY CARING SOCIETY  
of Canada**



Wabono Centre for  
Aboriginal Health



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Neither the First Nations Caring Society nor CASO, or their respective agencies and/or employees, nor any person acting on behalf of either, make any representations with respect to the use of the information contained in this report.

The image on the front and those reflected throughout this report are meant to symbolize the unique approaches taken to working together in partnership for the wellbeing of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families. The pictures of pearlized pea/peas (cover and p. 4) symbolizes the sacredness of the relationships forged between the parties engaged in this work. Green symbolizes the color of wellness and the concept of "pimatisiwin" or the idea of "walking in a good way."

Exemplifying the Sacredness of Relationality:

# AN EVALUATION OF THE PARTNERSHIP

Between the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Service Providers  
and the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa

Qualitative Narratives of Significant Change

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*"Good ideas are not adopted automatically. They must be driven into practice with courageous patience."*

- Hyman Rickover



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We would like to deeply thank the staff and management of the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa and the Aboriginal Service Providers for sharing insight into their perspectives about the partnership activities and the changes implemented with respect to better servicing the First Nations, Inuit and Métis families within Ottawa.

We especially thank all parties for the opportunity of learning from their Touchstones experiences in completing this evaluation of behalf of the partnership.

*I am extremely excited about the evaluation report, and about the partnership and the work being done as well. In my view, it reminds us that reconciliation is possible, if we are committed to it. Thank you so much to the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, not only for this piece of work, but for the inspiration ingrained in the Touchstones of Hope.*

*Tracy Engelking, Senior Counsel, CAS Ottawa*

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## Acronyms

CAS/CASO = Children's Aid Society of Ottawa

CIF = Community Information Forum

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

This qualitative report represents the narrative findings from interviews held in the process of evaluating the partnership between the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers and the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa (CASO). This report provides an overview of the initiative, the purpose and the scope of the evaluation, the methodology and data collection methods used, and the findings derived from 25 interviews conducted among key participants identified by CASO. In reviewing these narratives the focus has remained on some of the indicators of success that have emerged from this partnership. In addition, ideas derived from the participants' narratives present perspectives about where further learning and/or improvements might be made to strengthen the partnership and the work that the First Nations, Métis, Inuit service providers and CASO do collectively on behalf of Aboriginal families residing in Ottawa.

### Scope of the Evaluation

The scope of the evaluation is based on activities and relationships, but more particularly on the partnership that evolved between CASO and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service organizations as a result of the community consultations. Specifically, this evaluation encompasses:

- A review of the partnership between CASO and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers
- Whether the actions taken by CASO are meeting the expectations of community partners.
- Isolating and understanding of the impact of these actions on the community, from the perspective of CASO and its community partners.

### Methodology and Data Collection Methods

The original evaluation framework proposed to CASO identified the "Most Significant Change" technique as the process under which this evaluation would be conducted. The intent

of qualitative evaluation research is to obtain rich open-ended feedback in response (in this case) to questions posed to the CASO and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers about how the partnership is working and where there may be challenges. While the First Nations Caring Society was unable to fully implement the MSC technique, every attempt was made to maintain an approach that was as close to the intent of the evaluation framework originally proposed. The methodological approach to conducting the evaluation of the partnership therefore remained qualitative in nature and focuses heavily on the narrative accounts shared by the First Nations, Inuit and Métis and CASO participants. The particular data methods of inquiry involved:

- Key information interviews
- Observations
- Informal review of documentation flowing from the partnership activities and initiatives

### **Analysis Methods**

The major sources of data for this evaluation primarily flow from the personal interviews conducted with members of CASO and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service organizations and the documentation flowing from the partnership's activities and initiatives. The recorded interviews produced transcripts of textual data that well exceeded 325 pages (154 pages were generated from the interviews with the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service organizations and 174 pages for the CASO staff). The textual analyses of the data from the transcripts involved multiple readings and interpretations of the raw data that was generally "inductive" in nature.

## **Chapter 2: NARRATIVE FINDINGS - CASO STAFF AND MANAGEMENT**

### **1.0 CASO INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS**

Interviews were conducted with 13 individuals employed as frontline staff, supervisors and/or legal counsel within CASO.

### **2.0 UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP**

## **What the relationship looked like before**

We learned from talking to the staff and supervisors that exposure to the Aboriginal community was nonexistent prior to the community consultations that were held in 2007.

## **Shifting paradigms**

A shift in thinking in terms of how to develop relationships with the Aboriginal population and service providers of Ottawa began to emerge. We consistently heard from Society staff that the real impetus behind the changes in working with the Aboriginal population came from two specific sources. The first is as a result of the community consultations in 2007. The second source of change is directly tied to the commitment of leaders both at CAS and among the leaders of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers within Ottawa.

### **a. The reconciliation movement and the community consultations**

We learned from the staff that the reconciliation movement in child welfare played a major role in helping staff become more aware of the consequences of taking Aboriginal children away from their families and the long-term effects to both the children and their families. The consultations held with the Aboriginal community and service providers, were considered by CAS staff as a defining moment in the agency's history.

### **b. The commitment of leadership**

We constantly heard in our interviews with CAS staff that certain people saw opportunities and pushed for change. The commitment to change was explained by staff as coming from a "top-down" perspective. In particular it was noted that the resulting changes were because of paradigm shifts in thinking coupled with political will at both the governance and leadership levels within the CAS agency and among the leadership of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers within Ottawa. It was noted by staff that what brought about change is the important fact that people and leaders on both sides were open to discussing, listening and being less defensive. There was a common understanding from all

directions that services delivered to the First Nations, Inuit and Métis families involved with CAS, needed to be improved.

### **The Aboriginal forum and Liaison Committee**

The early work that initiated change within CASO started first with the development of an internal forum and a Liaison Committee. The CAS staff interviewed for this evaluation shared with us their involvement in one of these two particular initiatives.

The forum was described as an internal forum, which is comprised of staff from within the agency that are expected to expand their knowledge about Aboriginal peoples and share it with their colleagues. Staff indicate that there is representation from all the departments on the forum. The Liaison Committee, we learned on the other hand, is more like a formal structured decision-making body with only CAS supervisors attending committee meetings. The Liaison Committee is also comprised of individuals who work for the Aboriginal service providers within Ottawa. The members of the Liaison Committee bring issues to the table and they work together to come up with solutions. We were told by staff that the members of this committee were committed to starting the meetings with good news stories. These stories were hard to find at first but over time, good news stories have begun to emerge. Liaison Committee meetings are held monthly and they are co-chaired by CAS staff (i.e. the senior legal counsel) and the Aboriginal liaison worker. The Liaison Committee members make recommendations rather than formal decisions.

### **Education and cultural training about Aboriginal peoples**

One of the other areas CASO believe that has brought about significant change and understanding was the opportunity and openness extended to agency staff to participate in educational and cultural teachings provided by Aboriginal people. Through education and training staff within CAS began to understand what it means to be an Aboriginal child and the connection to intergenerational issues, the 60s scoop and how CAS was a part of this history through government policies.

## How the relationship feels today

The CAS staff that we talked to indicate that the relationships with the Aboriginal communities and their service providers have gotten better and are very positive. The relationships with the Aboriginal community and service providers are viewed by CAS staff as an ongoing relationship that is continually growing and getting better. They indicate that now relationships are more welcoming especially since the Aboriginal services providers have gotten to know the staff who work at CAS.

## 5.0 DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE APPROACHES

We asked staff to reflect on some of the approaches that CAS has taken in their efforts to work more cohesively with Aboriginal families and the Aboriginal service providers within Ottawa. There were 8 specific initiatives that were most often mentioned by the staff during the interviews. These are examined in more detail within the report but include:

- 3.01 *The Involvement and Support of the Aboriginal Service Providers;*
- 3.02 *Development of the Designated Teams;*
- 3.03 *The Aboriginal Liaison Worker;*
- 3.04 *Cultural Training Opportunities and Understanding Historical Aspects;*
- 3.05 *Access Visits and Maintaining Community Connections;*
- 3.06 *Kinship and Customary Care Arrangements;*
- 3.07 *Adoption and Inter-Provincial Relations; and*
- 3.08 *Alternative Dispute Resolution Processes.*

## 6.0 REFLECTING ON FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS

Staff was asked to reflect on where further changes and improvement needed to occur. The staff interviewed made the following suggestions for improvements:

- Encourage more education about Aboriginal people and the history of colonization. This needs to start at the university level for those pursuing social work degrees
- Aboriginal families need to be educated about and connected to other community services within Ottawa (these were identified as mental health services, drug and alcohol

- treatment facilities, among others, etc.)
- Foster parents should receive more training about Aboriginal people and the history of colonization.
  - Expand the partnership to include other workers from within CAS in order to facilitate best practices in working with Aboriginal clientele are engrained across the agency and not just in the West Pod and Francophone 1 team.
  - The agency and the service providers need to find a way to ensure that all First Nations, Inuit and Métis families are linked up to community services and able to receive ongoing services.
  - Improve current programming and services – the Circle of Care was mentioned as a program that requires improvement.
  - Ensure that the CASO collects better statistics about the Aboriginal families being serviced across the agency.
  - Some staff noted that they also need to have a better understanding around the number of Aboriginal children and youth being placed in residential facilities and non-Aboriginal group homes by other child welfare agencies that operate from outside of Ottawa.
  - Hire more Aboriginal staff and hire more people to work in the liaison position (i.e. there should be representatives from the Métis and Inuit community in these positions).
  - CAS needs to consider recruiting and employing First Nations, Inuit and Métis staff.
  - Ensure more training opportunities and be open to having staff attend Aboriginal specific child welfare conferences.
  - Consult frontline staff more often – as some staff noted the Liaison Committee should involve them in some of the decision making and include them in meetings because “no one really knows the work they are doing out in the community.”
  - Address workload issues – staff note that working with Aboriginal families and organizations takes time, energy and resources, especially because Aboriginal families tend to have larger families. “Human resources need to match the reality of the caseload.”
  - CAS should increase its representations in the community by attending more community events because it increases the agency’s exposure in the Aboriginal community.
  - Address gaps in services for Aboriginal youth between the ages of 12 and 18.
  - Planning for First Nations, Inuit and Métis children in care needs to be more inclusive and youth should be consulted and engaged in the process.
  - Recruit for more culturally appropriate kinship/foster homes for First Nations, Inuit and Métis children.
  - Aboriginal service providers need to change their attitudes

when working with CAS. Too often the Aboriginal services providers come from a place of anger which CAS staff understand but now that there is a partnership in place, this needs to change because they are all working to ensure the safety, well being and best interests of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and youth.

- Further, frontline staff need assurance that when they make mistakes they can talk openly about their mistakes and learn how to fix them. “We need to ensure that we can work through assumptions and mistakes and talk about how to resolve them.”
- Lastly, CASO needs to strategize for the future – a strategic plan for evaluating programs and services offered to the Aboriginal community was cited as some of the areas that need further planning and strategic direction.

## **Chapter 3: NARRATIVE FINDINGS – FIRST NATIONS, INUIT AND MÉTIS (ABORIGINAL) SERVICE PROVIDERS AND MANAGEMENT**

### **1.0 ABORIGINAL INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS**

We interviewed twelve individuals employed at the following seven First Nation, Inuit and Métis community service organizations within Ottawa:

- Makonsag Head Start
- Minwaashin Lodge - Aboriginal Women’s Support Centre
- Odawa Native Friendship Centre
- Ottawa Inuit Children’s Centre
- Tewegan Transition House
- Tungasuvvingat Inuit
- Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health

### **2.0 UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP**

#### **How the Relationship was Previously Perceived**

The Aboriginal service providers we spoke to indicate that previously no one questioned CAS about the decisions they made or why they forced Aboriginal mothers to take addiction-counseling programs absent evidence of substance abuse concerns. They note that many of the decisions made in

the past were based on racism and a lack of knowledge and understanding of Indigenous cultures and the role of colonialism and the intergenerational impacts of residential schools and the sixties scoop. Aboriginal service providers also indicate that what CAS considered abuse often was not considered as abuse within the cultures of Aboriginal people.

### **What Does the Relationship Look Like Today?**

The movement toward reconciliation and the community meetings where Aboriginal people and their community advocates talked openly with the staff of CASO has really helped in changing how Aboriginal service agencies viewed CASO and their staff. They believe there is more trust and a commitment to change by staff within the Society to work a better way with Aboriginal families and the advocates who know the Aboriginal community best. Aboriginal staff believe that the Society now understands the important role that their service agencies play in advocating for Aboriginal families and meeting the needs of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities in Ottawa. They indicate that they believe CAS recognizes that the Aboriginal service providers can be useful and can actually help Society staff do their jobs while advocating and helping families to move forward.

### **What Made Change Possible?**

The community consultation was considered a defining moment in the development of a better relationship with CASO. Acknowledgement of past wrongs and the offering of a genuine apology offered by the CAS agency that was stated by Aboriginal staff as some of the activities that brought the relationship a huge step forward. The Aboriginal community and their service providers were clear on what they wanted and supported the changes proposed and developed by CAS staff. Aboriginal staff note that Society staff were willing to listen to the Aboriginal community and they were committed to looking at the issues with fresh eyes. And CAS was open to working with the organizations that advocate for Aboriginal families. They indicate that it was the leadership within the Society and within different Aboriginal service organizations that made change possible. They indicate that the lines of communication are becoming more open and transparent.

### 3.0 REFLECTING ON THE CHANGES

We asked the Aboriginal staff to reflect on some of the approaches that the Society has taken in their efforts to work more cohesively with Aboriginal families and their organizations. Aboriginal service providers reflected on a wide variety of initiatives developed by CAS. There were 9 specific initiatives that were most often mentioned by the Aboriginal staff during the interviews. These are examined in more detail within the report but include:

- 3.01 The Role of the Liaison Committee;*
- 3.02 Relationship Building with Society Staff and Management;*
- 3.03 Development of the Designated Teams (West Pod and the Francophone 1 Team);*
- 3.04 Creation of the Aboriginal Liaison position;*
- 3.05 Community Meetings and Access Visits;*
- 3.06 Maintaining ties in and to the Community;*
- 3.07 Kinship Services and Adoption;*
- 3.08 The Circle of Care; and*
- 3.09 Cultural Sensitivity, Training and Education.*

### 4.0 NARRATIVES OF SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

We asked the Aboriginal service providers to identify which of the changes were the most significant change and why. The responses were varied.

- The fact that CAS is ensuring that staff are becoming more culturally aware was stated as a significant change.
- CAS is open to exploring creative solutions when working with First Nations, Inuit and Métis families. More Aboriginal children are staying with their families and adoption of some Aboriginal children is being done in a way that is open and inclusive.
- Relationship building not only with Aboriginal families who are engaged with CAS but relationship building with the staff employed within the Society.
- Others note that fact there is now an Aboriginal liaison worker from the Aboriginal community working within CAS at the Telesat office is the most significant of the changes implemented.

- The designated teams created by CAS to deal specifically with First Nations, Inuit and Métis families was also identified as a change of significance because it helps streamline services to the First Nations, Inuit and Métis population and reduces the number of CAS staff that Aboriginal service agencies must deal with.
- Others indicate that acknowledgement of past wrongs and mistakes coupled with getting a genuine apology is really the most significant change as it is the one major event that spearheaded systemic change.

## 5.0 IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES AND AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

One of the biggest challenges noted by some of the Aboriginal service staff is the fear that when the Aboriginal organizations starting planning, talking and participating in the Liaison Committee meetings and working with CAS that the Aboriginal community might think they are siding with the Society.

This presents as kind of double-edged sword for Aboriginal service providers because they need to have the trust of CAS but they also need to maintain the trust of the Aboriginal people they advocate for. Throughout our interviews, Aboriginal participants were adamant that having the trust of the Aboriginal population is paramount to the partnerships they have developed with the Society.

The following suggestions for improvement identified by the Aboriginal participants include:

- More effort needs to be put into recruiting foster and adoptive homes from the First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities.
- The time clock and the time frames within the CFS legislation need to be amended.
- Consideration should be given to the idea of developing a family healing center where entire First Nations, Inuit and Métis families can attend.
- Foster parents who adopt Aboriginal children should be required to maintain Aboriginal children's connections to their community and culture of origin.
- Ensure that foster parents are aware of the community events that are happening in the First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities of Ottawa.
- The Liaison Committee and Aboriginal liaison

- coordinator need to report back to the larger Aboriginal community.
- CAS needs to identify the number of First Nations, Inuit and Métis families that are involved with CAS.
  - CAS needs to implement a way in which Aboriginal families can self identify as being Aboriginal should they become involved with CAS as a way of improving their statistics about the First Nations, Inuit and Métis clientele served.
  - More Aboriginal liaison positions need to be hired and established inside of CAS or housed across the Aboriginal community organizations.
  - The Aboriginal liaison position needs to be evaluated for effectiveness and how she is fulfilling her role within CAS.
  - Aboriginal service providers and Aboriginal parents need to learn more about CAS, the legislation and processes.
  - The Circles of Care program need to hire and include more Aboriginal facilitators.
  - Aboriginal staff identified the need to evaluate the Circle of Care program separately from the partnership.
  - CASO should consider and explore the idea of housing CAS staff to work from the offices of Aboriginal service organizations.
  - It was suggested that CAS should send letters to Aboriginal families and their service organizations advising when they have closed a family's file. The letters need to come out quicker.
  - Aboriginal service providers suggest that CAS should advise them of Aboriginal children and youth who have been apprehended in other provincial jurisdictions and transferred to residential and group home facilities in Ottawa.
  - CAS sensitivity training needs to be improved and it needs to be continuous to match the turnover of staff within the CASO agency.
  - Aboriginal training and education for foster and adoptive parent also needs to be improved.
  - Aboriginal service organizations need financial compensation for providing training to CAS staff. Aboriginal agencies should not be expected to provide training and education for free. Aboriginal knowledge needs to be recognized and respected.
  - Ensure that the voices of First Nations, Inuit and Métis families are included in future evaluations.

- CAS and the Aboriginal service providers need to consider long-term planning strategies for the future for the partnership and for the Aboriginal liaison position. “What are the next steps? Where do we go from here? We need a 10-15 year strategic plan to guide us into the future.”

## Chapter 4: LESSONS LEARNED AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The findings from this evaluation reflected upon four objectives that were identified at the beginning of this report. They are summarized as follows:

### **1. Render a preliminary evaluation on the effectiveness of partnership initiatives, activities and/or outcomes.**

Both CASO and the Aboriginal service providers report a general satisfaction with the way the relationship has been built and staff from both parties appear pleased with the changes that developed. The activities implemented thus far are viewed by the Aboriginal service providers as working to benefit First Nations, Inuit and Métis families. In addition parties on both sides of this partnership believe that the work undertaken through the partnership should continue. The comments and narratives made throughout this report by the two parties to this partnership reflect this perspective.

The primary element that emerged from conducting this evaluation was the importance and sacredness of the friendships and relationships that have emerged thus far. Developing and maintaining relationships is the heart of all partnerships. Relationship building is important in the everyday lives of Aboriginal peoples just as it is to the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social service agencies that work everyday to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, youth and families in Ottawa.

The stories identified and incorporated into this report are in keeping with the narrative approach in understanding the beneficial impacts that have accrued to the Aboriginal community because of the significant relationships that exist between the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers and CASO. The strength of these relationships is an important

component of this partnership because it has helped to overcome some of the distrust that is often evident when First Nations, Inuit and Métis people become involved with child welfare systems. The evidence of relationship building between CASO and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers is probably the most significant outcome of the partnership.

Reconciliation is not an event but a movement. From what can be seen from the findings of this evaluation, this partnership has opened the door to reconciliation and participants appear to be on board with continuing to form stronger relationships with one another.

## **2. Reflect on the partnership between CASO and Inuit, Métis and First Nations service providers and identify ways to build on and strengthen this relationship.**

The partnership between CASO and the Aboriginal service providers is unique in that no Aboriginal specific child welfare service agencies exists within the City of Ottawa to service Aboriginal families compared to what exists in other provincial jurisdictions (i.e. Manitoba, Saskatchewan). Through the use of the *Touchstones of Hope's* guiding principles, CASO and the Aboriginal services providers of Ottawa have promoted the idea of reconciliation through the building of positive relations at the local level to better service Aboriginal children and families living in Ottawa.

In order to understand the effectiveness of the changes that have been implemented to date, the parties to this partnership need to celebrate the successes that have resulted since this partnership was created. What greater way is there to honour the sacredness of the relationship than to host a one or two day conference to highlight the successes (and perhaps challenges) in creating this partnership? This conference should build upon how the community consultations spearheaded change as well as highlight the work of the designated team and the creation of the Circle of Care Program. Other potential areas of growth might include discussions on developing one or all of the following:

- Develop a joint bi-annual newsletter highlighting activities, events, stories, successes, etc. about the work of the partnership;

- Develop a website highlighting the goals of the partnership and highlight the work done to date;
- Develop videos explaining the partnership, the work that has been done collaboratively for the Aboriginal community and some of the gains made to date;
- Develop a yearly award in recognition of CASO staff, Aboriginal service providers, community members and other collaterals whose service record exemplifies the essence of the partnership.
- Publish an article in an evaluation journal on the successes and the sacredness of developing partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service organizations.

### **3. Facilitate discussions on improvements or adjustments to the partnership activities, initiatives and/or outcomes.**

Each of the parties to this partnership identified numerous areas needing improvement. There were five common suggested areas of improvement identified by the staff of CASO and the Aboriginal service providers. They were identified as:

- Hiring more Aboriginal staff representatives from the First Nations, Inuit and Métis populations to work in liaison positions housed either at CASO or within Aboriginal service agencies;
- Solidify strategies for collecting and reporting on the statistics regarding the Aboriginal families serviced by all departments, not just within the designated teams;
- Consider developing long-term strategies which plans for the future of the partnership, the Aboriginal liaison position(s) and the Circle of Care program;
- Ensure that the Circle of Care program is evaluated for effectiveness;
- Ensure that the voices of Aboriginal families are included in future evaluations;

Additionally, the following recommendation should also be noted:

- Strengthen relationships with the Métis families and community service organizations that may exist within Ottawa.

#### **4. Promote learning from the changes implemented by CASO and identify implications for future development in the agency's work and relationship with the Aboriginal community in Ottawa.**

##### **Key Elements of Good Partnerships**

Today there is simply no way that goals can be accomplished in building healthy, vibrant communities without having strong partnerships and working together to encourage positive changes. No matter how one looks at things, partnerships are critical and the relationships that are forged in the process of building partnerships, are sacred. We learned that the following key elements exist from reviewing the narrative findings evident throughout this report. These key elements are important to the ongoing maintenance of the partnership between CASO and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners of Ottawa:

- Maintain honesty and trust
- Ensure ongoing and open communication
- Listening leads to understanding
- Be flexible
- Promote team work and collaboration
- Share resources
- Accept that change is part of growth
- Know when to compromise
- Grow the partnership (this requires ongoing revision and renewal)

Continued application of these elements will ensure that the relationship between CASO and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities along with their respective service providers can and will become stronger as they learn to “walk together in a good way” over time.

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## Chapter

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

*In order to provide services in a manner that recognizes their culture, heritage and traditions, and their concept of extended family, non-Aboriginal child welfare service providers have to learn about and understand those things. In order to learn about and understand those things, we will need to listen to those in the know.*

*(Engelking, 2009, p. 4)*

**T**his qualitative report represents the narrative findings from interviews held in the process of evaluating the partnership between the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers and the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa (CASO). This report provides an overview of the initiative, the purpose and the scope of the evaluation, the methodology and data collection methods used, and the findings derived from 25 interviews conducted among key participants identified by CASO<sup>1</sup>. In reviewing these narratives the focus has remained on some of the indicators of success that have emerged from this partnership. In addition, ideas derived from the participants'

<sup>1</sup> Although CASO identified the persons who would ultimately be interviewed for this evaluation, all parties involved in the partnership were given the opportunity to identify the key individuals from within their organizations who would participate in the interviews associated with this evaluation.

narratives present perspectives about where further learning and/or improvements might be made to strengthen the partnership and the work that the First Nations, Métis, Inuit service providers and CASO do collectively on behalf of Aboriginal<sup>2</sup> families residing in Ottawa.

## Background and Overview

The First Nations, Métis and Inuit service organizations of Ottawa recognized the importance of reconciliation in child welfare to the First Nation, Inuit and Métis families and communities they engage with on a daily basis. In recognizing this the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service organizations approached CASO to begin a dialogue on implementing changes to the way they engage with populations around child welfare matters. As part of this dialogue, an ongoing process of truth telling, acknowledging, restoring and relating (Blackstock, Cross, George, Brown, & Formsma, 2006), was undertaken by CASO to strengthen its relationship with urban Inuit, Métis and First Nations community members. Reconciliation was also seen as important for improving the linkages with Inuit, Métis and First Nation service providers. This work was and is guided by the Touchstones of Hope principles for reconciliation in child welfare (Blackstock, et al.). Developed by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leaders in child welfare, the Touchstones of Hope principles embody a community-based philosophy to re-visioning child welfare practice for First Nation, Inuit and Métis children and families.

In the winter of 2007, CASO hosted two community consultation sessions - one with service providers and one with community members - inviting a “full and truthful accounting” (Blackstock, et al., 2006) of child welfare practice as experienced by First Nation, Inuit and Métis families in Ottawa. Challenged with “anger” and “palatable pain” (Engelking, 2009) the consultations created space for CASO to acknowledge these truths and begin the work of restoring relationships and relating in creative ways with the First Nation, Inuit and Métis families residing in Ottawa.

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this report reference has been made explicitly to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit but primarily we have used the term Aboriginal. The use of the terms First Nations, Métis and Inuit is very specific and refers to three distinct populations while the use of the word “Aboriginal” is a constitutionally recognized term that collectively refers to the three groups recognized.

## Description of the Partnership

The two consultations that occurred back in 2007 with the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Service Providers and the Aboriginal community resulted in two committees—an internal Forum of CASO staff (members responsible for learning about the histories, practices and cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and sharing this knowledge with fellow employees) and a Liaison Committee (comprised of representatives from CASO and First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providing organizations), tasked with developing stronger relationships between CASO and the Aboriginal service organizations and Aboriginal communities within Ottawa. The Liaison Committee consists of the following community partners:

- Makonsag Head Start (<http://www.makonsag.ca>)
- Minwaashin Lodge - Aboriginal Women's Support Centre (<http://minlodge.com>)
- Odawa Native Friendship Centre (<http://www.odawa.on.ca>)
- Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre (<http://www.ottawainuitchildrens.com>)
- Tewegan Transition House (<http://www.urbanAboriginal.ca/tewegan/>)
- Tungasuvvingat Inuit (<http://www.tungasuvvingatinuit.ca>)
- Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health (<http://www.wabano.com>)
- Children's Aid Society of Ottawa (<http://www.casott.on.ca>)

CASO has since undertaken a variety of actions to change how the agency and its staff work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis families, including the implementation of an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) program called Circle of Care. The development and implementation of the Circle of Care Initiative was (and continues to be) guided by the Liaison Group, and is derived from traditional practices. This evaluation does not evaluate the ADR initiative however the narrative data presented in this report speaks to reconciliation activities such as the Circle of Care as it is directly connected to the activities and solutions for working with the Aboriginal populations that arise from the partnership between the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers and CASO.

## Scope of the Evaluation

The scope of the evaluation is based on activities and relationships, more particularly the partnership that evolved between CASO and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service organizations as a result of the community consultations. Specifically, this evaluation encompasses:

1. A review of the partnership between CASO and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers
2. Whether the actions taken by CASO are meeting the expectations of community partners.
3. Isolating and understanding of the impact of these actions on the community, from the perspective of CASO and its community partners.

## Objectives of the Evaluation

The findings from this evaluation reflect upon a number of objectives that included:

1. **Reflecting on the partnership** between CASO and First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers and identifying ways to build on and strengthen this relationship.
2. Engaging with those who work with families (CASO clients) to **render a preliminary evaluation on the effectiveness** of partnership initiatives, activities and/or outcomes.
3. **Facilitate discussions on improvements or adjustments** to the partnership activities, initiatives and/or outcomes.
4. **Promote learning from the changes** implemented by CASO and identify implications for future development in the agency's work and relationship with the Aboriginal community in Ottawa.

## Methodology and Data Collection Methods

The original evaluation framework<sup>3</sup> proposed to CASO identified the "Most Significant Change" technique<sup>4</sup> as the

<sup>3</sup> The evaluation framework and work plan are attached at Appendix A of this report.  
<sup>4</sup> The Most Significant Change (MSC) technique is a qualitative method of participatory

process under which this evaluation would be conducted. The intent of qualitative evaluation research is to obtain rich open-ended feedback in response (in this case) to questions posed to the CASO and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers about how the partnership is working and where there may be challenges. While the First Nations Caring Society was unable to fully implement the MSC technique<sup>5</sup>, every attempt was made to maintain an approach that was as close to the intent of the evaluation framework originally proposed. The methodological approach to conducting the evaluation of the partnership therefore remained qualitative in nature and focuses heavily on the narrative accounts shared by the First Nations, Inuit and Métis and CASO participants. The particular data methods of inquiry involved:

- Key information interviews
- Observations
- Informal review of documentation flowing from the partnership activities and initiatives

The ultimate goal of evaluations that are qualitative in nature is to conduct in-depth interviews with key informants who have first hand experience and understanding, in this instance, of how the partnership activities between CASO and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers has evolved. In doing so, the central goal is not to achieve high participation numbers but, instead, to ensure that specific interviews about the partnership from both sides are rich in data (Thorne, 2000). The sampling techniques utilized ensured that a *diversity of perspectives* from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals involved in the partnership were included and data was to be as rich and in-depth as possible.

The data collection spanned a two-week period from August 10 to 16, 2011. Interviews were conducted at a variety of locations in Ottawa within the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

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evaluation that involves the collection of significant change stories at different levels of intervention (for example program staff, change agents, intervention participants) and collectively deciding on the most significant change stories based on selected themes (called domains). MSC offers a qualitative approach to monitoring that does not employ quantitative indicators. Davies & Dart (2005) note that MSC should be used as a complement to other evaluation methods rather than a stand-alone technique. MSC has roots in the overseas development field but is becoming more widely used in community development and behaviour change interventions.

<sup>5</sup> This technique required more time and human resources than the First Nations Caring Society were able to catalyze within the time frame and funding constraints of the evaluation project.

environments associated with the partnership. A team of two researchers conducted the majority of interviews. On occasion, it was necessary to split up and conduct concurrent interviews to ensure the scheduling of interviews remained on track<sup>6</sup>. Interviews ranged from 25 – 90 minutes in length and were audio taped using digital recorders (two for back up in case the main recorder failed). Interviewees/participants were asked to formally consent<sup>7</sup> to participating in the evaluation of the partnership prior to interviews starting. Contact information (i.e. name, address, phone and email) from each interview participant was collected and recorded on a data management tracking form<sup>8</sup>.

Twenty-five interviews were conducted among the members of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service organizations and CASO partnership. The identification of these twenty-five individuals was made at the discretion of CASO staff<sup>9</sup>. Thirteen (13) were conducted with CASO staff while twelve (12) interviews were conducted with members from the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers. The interview questions were shared with all the identified participants prior to the interviews taking place. Copies of the interview questions were also made available to the participants at the start of the interviews so that participants could follow along as the interview progressed.

### Interview Questions

The following eleven (11) questions were asked of the CASO partners<sup>10</sup>:

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<sup>6</sup> A copy of the schedule (without names) of interviews and interview locations and times can be found at Appendix B.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix C for a copy of the Consent Form.

<sup>8</sup> A copy of the data management tracking form used for this evaluation can be found at Appendix D of this report.

<sup>9</sup> As stated earlier, while CASO identified the interview participants, all parties involved in the partnership determined the key individuals from within their organizations who would participate in the interviews for this evaluation.

<sup>10</sup> The evaluation team, in conjunction with CASO developed two sets of questions. Approval of the questions, after some initial suggestions and revisions, was subsequently made by CASO and members of the Liaison Committee.

1. Please tell us a bit about yourself and the work you do at CAS.
  - a. Were you involved in the initial community consultations in 2007?
  - b. During your time at CAS, have you taken part in any teachings or trainings related to Aboriginal peoples? If yes, what was that like for you? Does it impact on the way you interact and work with families?
2. Looking back over the time since you started at CAS, has your work with Aboriginal agencies in Ottawa changed in any way? Does it feel like a different relationship?
3. Can you describe one of changes or new initiatives at CAS that you are involved in? How did this initiative develop? Can you briefly explain how it works?
  - a. Who is responsible for ensuring that the plans and decisions arising from this initiative are followed? (If applicable)
  - b. Examples might include: inventory list, access in community, Cultural Kinship matches, Internal Forum, Designated team member, recruitment/participation in community events, Circle of Care or Liaison Committee.
4. What makes the initiative more appropriate for Aboriginal families who get involved with CAS?
5. Apart from this initiative are there any other ways that CAS is changing its practice and approach to working with Aboriginal families?
  - a. Do you think the work of the Liaison Committee is being felt in the community?
6. Thinking about all these changes, which do you feel is most significant? Why is this change important to you?
7. How is this change making a difference for the families you work with? Can you tell us a story about it?
  - a. What changes or impacts have you seen for families as a result of this initiative?
  - b. What roles and responsibilities have family members taken on (exhibited) as a result of this new initiative?
8. Why do you think this change occurred? What made it possible?
9. Is there anything that isn't working well, or that could be working better? What needs to be improved?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share?
11. Do you have any questions to ask of us?

The following twelve (12) questions were asked of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service organizations:

1. Please tell us a bit about yourself and the work you do. How does your job involve working with CAS?
2. Looking back over the time since you started this work, has your experience with CAS changed in any way? Does it feel like a different relationship?
3. Do you feel that CAS is working to acknowledge its history/relationship with the Aboriginal community in a real and genuine way?
  - a. Do you think CAS recognizes the intergenerational issues stemming from this history?
4. Can you describe one of changes or new initiatives at CAS that you are involved in? How did this initiative develop? Can you briefly explain how it works?
  - a. What role does your organization play in implementing this initiative?
  - b. Examples might include: inventory list, supervised access outside of CAS, Kinship Services based on cultural/community matches, smaller CAS teams that are designated to the Aboriginal population, CAS participation in community events, Circle of Care, Liaison Committee or case consultations.
  - c. How long have you been on the Liaison Committee? (if applicable)
5. What makes the initiative you are describing more appropriate for Aboriginal families who get involved with CAS?
6. Apart from this initiative are there any other ways that CAS is changing its practice and approach to working with Aboriginal families?
  - a. Do you think the work of the Liaison Committee is being felt in the community?
7. Thinking about these changes, which do you feel is most significant? Why is this change important to you?
8. How is this change making a difference for the families you work with? Can you tell us a story about it?
  - a. What changes or impacts have you seen for families as a result of this initiative?
  - b. What roles and responsibilities have family members taken on (exhibited) as a result of becoming involved in this new initiative?
9. Why do you think this change occurred? What made it possible?
10. Is there anything that isn't working well, or that could be working better? What needs to be improved?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share?
12. Do you have any questions to ask of us?

At the conclusion of interviews, thank you cards and \$10 coffee shop gift certificates were provided to each participant as a gesture of appreciation for their time and participation in the evaluation of the partnership.

A typed transcription of the responses to the above noted interview questions was later distributed via email to each of the interview participants for their feedback and verification of the accuracy of the information contained therein<sup>11</sup>. Feedback involved revisions, deletions and/or additions to the transcript. Throughout this report the writer has taken every precaution to ensure that the findings are not presented in any way that could compromise the participants' anonymity. The quotes that appear in the sections on findings within this report do not reflect the names of any interview participants.

### **Analysis Methods**

The major sources of data for this evaluation primarily flow from the personal interviews conducted with members of CASO and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service organizations and the documentation flowing from the partnership's activities and initiatives. The recorded interviews produced transcripts of textual data that well exceeded 325 pages (154 pages were generated from the interviews with the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service organizations and 174 pages for the CASO staff). The textual analyses of the data from the transcripts involved multiple readings and interpretations of the raw data that was generally "inductive" in nature. Thorne (2000) indicated that inductive reasoning, generally, uses the data to generate ideas (hypothesis generating). *Inductive analysis*, as noted by Thomas (2006), refers to an approach that uses detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model of interpretation made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher (p. 238). Thomas noted, as evidenced in the way that this report is prepared, that the following analysis strategies associated with a general inductive approach include:

<sup>11</sup> Only five interview participants requested minor revisions to their transcripts. A sixth interview participant telephoned the evaluation researcher to discuss the transcript and expressed concerns about who, other than the evaluation researcher, would have access to the transcript. Members of the partnership were not given access to any of the audiotapes or transcripts of interviews, except their own written transcripts. Audio recordings of the interviews themselves were not shared with any of the participants. Audiotapes and written transcripts are to be destroyed within 2 years from the completion of this evaluation report (by August 2014).

1. Data analysis is guided by the evaluation objectives, which identify domains and topics to be investigated. The analysis is carried out through multiple readings and interpretations of the raw data, the inductive component. Although the findings are influenced by the evaluation objectives or questions outlined by the researcher, the findings arise directly from the analysis of the raw data, not from prior expectations. The evaluation objectives provide a focus or domain of relevance for conducting the analysis, not a set of expectations and specific findings.
2. The primary mode of analysis is the development of categories from the raw data into a model or framework. The model contains key themes and processes identified and constructed by the evaluator during the coding process.
3. The findings result from multiple interpretations made from the raw data by the evaluator(s) who code the data. Inevitably, the findings are shaped by the assumptions and experiences of the evaluator conducting the study and carrying out the data analyses. *For the findings to be usable, the evaluator must make decisions about what is more important and less important in the data.*
4. Different evaluators may produce findings that are not identical and that have non-overlapping components.
5. The trustworthiness of findings derived from inductive analysis can be assessed using similar techniques to those that are used with other types of qualitative analysis (pp. 239-240).

An overview of the 5 steps to the inductive coding process used for this report is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: The Coding Process in Inductive Analysis**

Step 1: Initial Reading of text data	Step 2: Identify specific text segments related to objectives	Step 3: Label the segments of text to create categories	Step 4: Reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories	Step 5: Create a model incorporating most important categories
Many pages of text (328 in this case)	Many segments of text	30 to 40 categories	15 to 20 categories	3 to 9 categories

The general inductive approach provided a convenient and efficient way of analyzing the qualitative data that emerged from the interviews specifically conducted for this evaluation. The inductive approach provides a simple, straightforward approach for deriving findings that are linked to focused evaluation questions. In addition, these analytic processes help in detecting the main narrative themes within the accounts that interview participants gave about their experiences and perspectives (Thorne, 2000), from which the writer came to discover how they understand and make sense of their lives and the partnerships they have collectively developed.

Organization of the interview transcripts and data analysis were conducted with the assistance of NVivo, a software program that organizes raw data (interviews, observations, etc.) and links them with other project related documents or “data bites” which the researcher coded and made analytical notes about, and then edited and reworked ideas as the project progressed (Walsh, 2003; Bazeley, 2007). Although there are many qualitative data analysis computer programs available on the market today, they are, including NVivo, essentially aids to sorting and organizing sets of qualitative data. In and of themselves, none are capable of the intellectual and conceptualizing processes required to transform data into meaningful findings (Thorne, 2000).

### **Limitations**

There are some general limitations to this evaluation that should be acknowledged at the outset. Readers need to be aware of the limitations of the qualitative material as they read through the finding of this report (Rao & Woolcock, 2003). First, the theoretical framework originally proposed required the use of the “Most Significant Change” technique. This technique, while worthy, required more time and human resources than the Caring Society was able to galvanize within the time frame and funding constraints facing the evaluation approach. Secondly, the individuals participating in the evaluation were small in numbers and have not been randomly selected making it highly problematic to draw generalizations to the wider population. Because the participating individuals for this evaluation were chosen on the basis of recommendations from

of the parties to this specific partnership, it would be difficult to replicate and thus difficult to independently verify the results. Thirdly, the analysis of the narrative content contained within the transcripts involved interpretative judgments on the part of the researcher and therefore caution must be emphasized that outside researchers and/or readers looking at the same data may arrive at different interpretations (Polkinghorne, 2007). These limitations should not be taken to devalue the approach taken, or the data obtained nor the findings of the evaluation. Most of these limitations are general to qualitative research methodologies and not specific to this evaluation. Quantitative research (which often involves a large number of randomly selected cases) has its own set of limitations (Walker, 2005) and indeed a quantitative approach was determined to be a poor fit for the needs of this evaluation.

The following additional limitations that were noted in the evaluation framework originally presented to CASO by the Caring Society include:

- Distance of the lead evaluator from the location of the data collection<sup>12</sup>. During the data collection stage this was offset by the involvement of a student completing a practicum placement with the Caring Society who resides in the Ottawa area. The student assisted with collecting and transcribing some of the data (the student's placement ended in August 2011).
- Due to ethical concerns respecting vulnerable populations<sup>13</sup>, this evaluation report does not include the perspective of families receiving services from CASO and/or the participating First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers. While CASO and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service organization participants were asked to reflect on their observation/understanding of families' experiences with CASO, these voices cannot be assumed to speak *for* families or to know the truth of how families experienced these systems but they do provide some understanding of how families in the

<sup>12</sup> The writer (although employed with the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada located in Ottawa, Ontario) resides and works in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

<sup>13</sup> Families were originally identified as target stakeholders who should be interviewed. However it was agreed that CASO should undertake to interview families separately after a university-based ethical review has been conducted to ensure that interviews conducted with vulnerable populations (like Aboriginal families) are ethical. Doing interviews with vulnerable populations can be challenging and there may be liability in undertaking research with vulnerable populations (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen & Liamputtong, 2007; and Hepler, Guida, Messina & Mohamed, 2011).

city of Ottawa might be benefiting from the partnership. The absence of family voices in this report therefore is recognized as limiting the breath and scope of the evaluation.

### **Sequencing of the Report**

This report represents the narrative findings related to the evaluation of the partnership between the First Nations, Inuit, Métis and CASO. The sequencing of this report is structured in the following chapters:

*Chapter 2:* Narrative Findings - CASO Staff and Management

*Chapter 3:* Narrative Findings – First Nations, Inuit and Métis Service Providers and Management

*Chapter 4:* Lessons Learned and Concluding Remarks

The appendices contain the Evaluation Framework and Workplan and some of the data collection instruments used in conducting the evaluation of the partnership between the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers and CASO.

Exemplifying the Sacredness of Relationality:  
**AN EVALUATION OF THE PARTNERSHIP**  
Between the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Service  
Providers and the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa  
Qualitative Narratives of Significant Change

Chapter

# 2

## NARRATIVE FINDINGS - CASO STAFF AND MANAGEMENT

### 1.0 CASO INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Interviews were conducted with 13 individuals employed as frontline staff, supervisors and/or legal counsel within CASO. The following table identifies their gender, years of experience, their position within the Society, whether they answered all the interview questions and what their preferences were regarding how they wished to receive the findings as set out in the evaluation report (only 3 suggested that the evaluation findings be shared at a community information forum should it take place at some point in the future).

**Table 2: General statistics about the CASO interview participants**

Identification	Gender	Years of Experience	Position	Answered all Questions	Preference receiving report's findings
ID#00102	Female	11 years	Frontline	Yes	Email
ID#00105	Female	12 years	Supervisor	Yes	Canada Post
ID#00106	Male	3 years	Frontline	Yes	Email and Canada Post
ID#00107	Female	6 years	Frontline	Yes	Email, Canada Post and Community Information Forum (CIF)
ID#00112	Female	24 years	Supervisor	Yes	Canada Post and CIF
ID#00113	Female	3 ½ years	Frontline	Yes	Email
ID#00116	Female	10 year	Frontline	Yes	Email
ID#00120	Male	14 years	Supervisor	Yes	Email
ID#00121	Female	13 years	Legal Counsel	Q#11 missed	Email and CIF
ID#00122	Female	10 years	Legal Counsel	Yes	Email
ID#00123	Male	11 years	Frontline	Yes	Email and CIF
ID#00124	Female	6 years	Frontline	Yes	Email and Canada Post
ID#00125	Female	20 years	Supervisor	Yes	Email

The following outlines what we learned from reviewing and analyzing the narratives, which emerged from the interviews with CASO staff.

## 2.0 UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP

### What the relationship looked like before

We learned from talking to the staff and supervisors that exposure to the Aboriginal community was nonexistent prior to the community consultations that were held in 2007. We are told that trust had not been established with the Aboriginal community because there was a history that had not been acknowledged or spoken about. In the past, the relationships with the Aboriginal community were described as distant and formal. We were told that prior to the community consultation and the subsequent changes that were implemented in working with the Aboriginal community, “every case that came through the front door of CAS would be treated exactly the same, it

didn't matter where you came from, what you did, everything was the same ... The issue of child protection would most likely be applied the same way it would be applied across the board to be 'fair.'" Also, very little was known about the Aboriginal service providers within Ottawa. The predominant perspective, we are told, among the CAS staff was that the Aboriginal service providers were not to be trusted. It was expressed that CAS did not initially see value in developing relationships with these organizations. In particular, some staff noted that CAS did not quite understand that these service organizations knew their Aboriginal clients better than anyone else.

### **Shifting paradigms**

A shift in thinking in terms of how to develop relationships with the Aboriginal population and service providers of Ottawa began to emerge. We learned from talking to the staff that there was a transformational process to the child welfare system in Ottawa in 2007, which provided instructions as to how CAS should be relating to the Aboriginal community. However, we consistently heard from the staff that the real impetus behind the changes in working with the Aboriginal population came from two specific sources. The first is as a result of the community consultations in 2007. The second source of change is directly tied to the commitment of leaders both at CAS and among the leaders of the Aboriginal service providers within Ottawa. The driving forces behind these changes are briefly discussed under the two headings below.

#### **a. The reconciliation movement and the community consultations**

We learned from the staff that the reconciliation movement in child welfare played a major role in helping staff become more aware of the consequences of taking Aboriginal children away from their families and the long-term effects to both the children and their families. The consultations held with the Aboriginal community and service providers, were considered by CAS staff as a defining moment in the agency's history. The community consultations revealed how deplorable the working relationship was between the Aboriginal community and other service providers in Ottawa. At the consultations,

the Aboriginal community and service providers exerted and demanded change. The Aboriginal community also took the time to teach CAS about why the relationship with them and their community service organizations needed to be different. We learned that many of the staff with CAS did not know about or understand the history and the trauma of the past and the impact that resulted intergenerationally<sup>14</sup>. We understand from our interviews that had it not been from the pressure from the Aboriginal community and the service providers, that the Society might not have taken the time to give the Aboriginal situation a second look at this one person noted:

*I believe the community consultation was absolutely key! I think it was a revolutionary! After consultation, the staff of CAS was tasked with just hearing. No matter what our initial reaction was, we were there to hear and it was unbelievable. I think it was so impactful. It is one thing to hear about it, read about it, and have training about it, but to hear and feel that pain, it was unbelievable! I think from then on that's how it started and I think through continued learning, I won't stop. I can't even presume to believe that I know even a morsel of what I know but I'm open and I want to learn more. That's why I am able to have some of the relationships that I have. It's because I still want to learn and that's cool and that's how it is going to keep going. I think that was the start. If we hadn't heard the messages or the pain, I don't think that we would have the groups that we have today or have taken the steps forward that we have taken thus far. That is not to say there haven't been a couple mistakes made along the way. We may have taken a couple of steps back from time to time but we regroup and continue to move forward.*

Through the steps of truth telling and acknowledging we learned that CASO began to work on restoring the relationship

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<sup>14</sup> Esquimaux and Smolewski (2004), explain that trauma passed from one generation to the next is understood as one of the social problems that manifested among First Nations, Métis and Inuit people because of residential schools and other colonial practices. The etiology of the historic trauma transmission (HHT) model was developed to understand the social and cultural diffusion that devastated Aboriginal communities for many years. HHT is a cluster of traumatic events, hidden collective memories, or a collective non-remembering of trauma that are passed from generation to generation. There is no single historical trauma response: rather, there are different social disorders with respective clusters of symptoms. Social disorders are repetitive maladaptive social patterns, such as post-traumatic stress disorder that occur in a group of people and are associated with a significantly increased risk of suffering. A symptom is a manifestation of maladaptive social patterns such as suicide, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and interpersonal maladjustment. Symptoms are not caused by the trauma itself. Rather, historic trauma disrupts adaptive social and cultural patterns changing them into maladaptive ones that manifest themselves in symptoms. In short, historic trauma causes deep breakdown in social functioning that may last for many years, decades or even generations. Symptoms that parents exhibit (family violence, sexual abuse) act as a trauma and disrupt social adjustments in their children. In turn, these children internalize the symptoms and, much like a "trauma virus," fall ill to one of the social disorders. In the next generation, the process perpetuates itself and the trauma, a relentless causal agent, continues.

with the Aboriginal population and began to understand the importance of relating to and with the service providers working closest with the Aboriginal population within Ottawa. We learned from the staff that the agency was prepared to accept responsibility for ensuring that more meaningful relationships would emerge and that important changes in working with the Aboriginal community would result. The *Touchstones of Hope*, created by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, served as the guiding model that allowed for change to come about.

Listening was stated by staff to be an important and integral element in the new changes and approaches that have taken place in dealing with Aboriginal families who have become involved with CASO. Listening to what Aboriginal people said at these consultations helped CAS articulate on where and what to do next and how to move forward in taking steps to implement meaningful change across the child welfare system in Ottawa. Listening to Aboriginal people includes the incorporation of teachings and the cultural education that they received from the Aboriginal community.

### **b. The commitment of leadership**

*Change happened because there was change in the political will of individuals at the senior levels of CAS, which trickled down to the lower levels. There is a great deal of commitment at the supervisory level. Change happened because there was readiness by the leadership to ensure that change came about. There was a real understanding that it needed to be done and there needed to be commitment to make sure it got done.*

We consistently heard in our interviews with CAS staff that certain people saw opportunities and pushed for change. The commitment to change was explained by staff as coming from a “top-down” perspective. In particular it was noted that the resulting changes were because of paradigm shifts in thinking coupled with political will at both the governance and leadership levels within the CAS agency. In particular, people like Barbara MacKinnon (the Executive Director of CASO), Tracy Engelking (Senior Legal Counsel), Karen Green and Deborah Channsonneuve were cited by staff as being some of the individuals most instrumental in bringing about the desired changes. These individuals are viewed as leaders who were

instrumental in driving the changes that have occurred since the community consultation. They are well respected for their leadership in developing better relationships between CASO with the Aboriginal community and with the Aboriginal service providers within Ottawa. The staff noted that these people recognized the importance of creating stronger partnerships and relationships with the Aboriginal community and their service providers and more importantly, that they “acted” upon recognizing this.

It was also said that the relationships between the Aboriginal community and the Aboriginal service providers and CAS improved because of the foresightedness of specific champions not only within the CAS agency but that this foresightedness also existed at the leadership levels of the Aboriginal service organizations. The leadership of Castille Troy and Karen Baker-Anderson in particular was identified by interview participants as some of the champions who emerged from the Aboriginal service providers. It was noted by staff that what brought about change is the important fact that people and leaders on both sides were open to discussing, listening and being less defensive. There was a common understanding from all directions that services delivered to the First Nations, Inuit and Métis families involved with CAS, needed to be improved. Participating in First Nations, Inuit and Métis community events (i.e. OICC’s Christmas parties, AGMs, the children’s powwow, and the Forever Family picnics, among many others) were recognized as some of the many events that were important to the growth of the relationships with the First Nations, Inuit and Métis families within Ottawa.

Two of the earliest changes implemented by CASO to better understand issues for Aboriginal peoples are briefly discussed in the following section.

### **The Aboriginal forum and Liaison Committee**

The early work that initiated change within CASO started first with the development of an internal forum<sup>15</sup> and a Liaison Committee. The CAS staff interviewed for this evaluation shared with us their involvement in one of these two particular initiatives.

<sup>15</sup> We understand however that many internal forums exist within the CASO agency and have been in operational for a number of years prior to the consultations.

The forum was described as an internal forum, which is comprised of staff from within the agency that are expected to expand their knowledge about Aboriginal peoples and share it with their colleagues. Staff indicate that there is representation from all the departments on the forum. This representation includes workers from the West Pod and Francophone 1 team as well as representation from workers in other departments within the Society (i.e. foster care workers, kinship workers, and legal staff participate in the internal forum). We learned also that supervisors participate in the forums on a rotating basis when time allows. Generally, the forum is open to anyone who is interested in attending and learning more about Aboriginal peoples. Forum meetings happen once every couple of months and they usually happen over a lunch hour. The forum, we understand, provides an opportunity for staff to receive cultural training and education about Aboriginal peoples and issues. Staff identified that they participate in reviewing movies and hear presentations from various community members and a wide variety of Aboriginal organizations. Staff also have the opportunity to participate in Aboriginal community and cultural events. Some of the staff shared that they have participated in community events such as the children's powwow and have attended a three-day Aboriginal child welfare conference held in London, Ontario. We also learned there are multiple forums within the CAS agency that deal not only with Aboriginal issues, but include forums dealing with mental health, addictions, and other communities (such as ethno-cultural and rainbow communities). Many of these other forums have been in existence for quite some time now. The First Nations, Inuit and Métis Forum, the staff say, has played a part in producing change in the relationship with Aboriginal people because the training and learning opportunities have helped build awareness. It provides a venue through which staff can access information about community events and the opportunity to participate in cross-cultural training and learn from the Aboriginal teachings. The individuals that we interviewed generally were very positive about the forum. One staff member expressed her perspective about the forum this way:

*I love it! I found there was a lot of information. I really enjoyed the stories. I found that receiving that knowledge really helped me to be a lot more compassionate. I think I am actually much*

*more conscious of decisions, and things like that.*

The Liaison Committee, we learned on the other hand, is more like a formal structured decision-making body with only CAS supervisors attending committee meetings. The Liaison Committee is also comprised of individuals who work for the Aboriginal service providers within Ottawa. The Liaison Committee has provided CAS staff and the staff of the Aboriginal service organizations with an opportunity to develop deeper relationships. These deeper relationships developed within the first 6 to 8 months. Staff who indicated they have participated on this committee state that there was a lot of interaction between agency staff and the Aboriginal community and their service providers. The members of the Liaison Committee bring issues to the table and they work together to come up with solutions. We were told by staff that the members of this committee were committed to starting the meetings with good news stories. These stories were hard to find at first but over time, good news stories have begun to emerge. Liaison Committee meetings are held monthly and they are co-chaired by CAS staff (i.e. the senior legal counsel) and the Aboriginal liaison worker. The Liaison Committee members make recommendations rather than formal decisions. As with the forum, members of the Liaison Committee also participate in cultural teachings and community activities and events such as the children's powwow and other Aboriginal community events. The Aboriginal community took the time to teach CAS staff about why the relationships with them needed to be different. The building of these relationships and the development of trust led both groups to recognize they needed to work towards the same goal, which is to ensure better outcomes for children and family.

### **Education and cultural training about Aboriginal peoples**

*I think people exposed to the issues are a lot more compassionate and they can see the results. I mean people have been damaged for generations. So I think there is a larger awareness throughout the agency. We're more aware because we've been exposed to more.*

*If you don't know history, you're going to do damage. So you have to go in knowing their history and knowing our history.*

One of the other areas CASO believe that has brought about

significant change and understanding was the opportunity and openness extended to agency staff to participate in educational and cultural teachings provided by Aboriginal people. These opportunities were open to the staff involved in the internal forum and the Liaison Committee. Through education and training staff within CAS began to understand what it means to be an Aboriginal child and the connection to intergenerational issues, the 60s scoop and how CAS was a part of this history through government policies. Staff indicate that they have learned from these teachings not only how to deal with Aboriginal families, but how to deal with Muslim families, black families, Asian families, and so forth. The work with the Aboriginal community and the teachings that they have received have helped them improve their practice such that they are able to interact and work with other cultures more effectively to produce better outcomes for children and their families.

Education and cultural training has provided opportunity to staff to reflect on the importance of listening. The staff indicate that listening to what Aboriginal people share and teach has helped the agency and staff on how to proceed and move forward in taking necessary steps to implement meaningful change. Listening, they note, includes consulting and talking with Aboriginal people and services organizations from within the Aboriginal community. Education and training is also viewed as a two way street in that the Aboriginal community and service providers need to understand the Child and Family Services Act and how CAS works because the system is very complex. The more staff can facilitate and explain it to their partners, the better they can work together to ensure change for the Aboriginal community when they are engaged with child welfare.

### **How the relationship feels today**

*Any relationship has to grow and change and there is some ups and downs and we got to learn how to dance the dance with every relationship and that's what it is.*

The CAS staff that we talked to indicate that the relationships with the Aboriginal communities and their service providers have gotten better and are very positive. The relationships with the Aboriginal community and service providers are viewed by CAS staff as an ongoing relationship that is continually growing and getting better. Staff have shared that relationships in the past

were much more distant and formal. They indicate that now relationships are more welcoming especially since the Aboriginal services providers have gotten to know the staff who work at CAS. Staff indicate that there is humor and teasing. They also shared that they can call any of the staff working for the Aboriginal service providers anytime and know that they can talk openly about some of the challenges that they are facing.

The staff shared that while there are still challenges they do not mind if things get difficult now and again. They note there is still a strong commitment from the Aboriginal sector to move forward despite the challenges and that there is a commitment on both sides to maintain these new relationships. They note that they can talk about challenges, address challenges, and that together they are able to move forward to make it better for the next time. Staff were also of the opinion that there is more respect, trust and honesty in their relationships with the Aboriginal service providers. Staff shared that decisions are made in consultation with the staff of the Aboriginal organizations. The staff say that their relationships with the Aboriginal service providers better serves children, youth and families in the Aboriginal populations of Ottawa.

The relationships with the Aboriginal community and service providers however are viewed by the CASO staff interviewed as still being “a work in progress.” Staff shared that they are still learning and that they have a lot more yet to learn. But they are all of the opinion that the development of trust and the idea that they are all working together toward the same goal to ensure better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families and that this is what helped build the relationship.

### **3.0 DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE APPROACHES**

We asked staff to reflect on some of the approaches that CAS has taken in their efforts to work more cohesively with Aboriginal families and the Aboriginal service providers within Ottawa. Staff reflected on a wide variety of initiatives developed by CAS. There were 8 specific initiatives that were most often mentioned by the staff during the interviews. Their comments primarily reflect on the following initiatives and

approaches that have been developed by CASO in working with the Aboriginal populations:

- 3.01 *The Involvement and Support of the Aboriginal Service Providers;*
- 3.02 *Development of the Designated Teams;*
- 3.03 *The Aboriginal Liaison Worker;*
- 3.04 *Cultural Training Opportunities and Understanding Historical Aspects;*
- 3.05 *Access Visits and Maintaining Community Connections;*
- 3.06 *Kinship and Customary Care Arrangements;*
- 3.07 *Adoption and Inter-Provincial Relations; and*
- 3.08 *Alternative Dispute Resolution Processes.*

The following sections will explore these approaches briefly. These approaches are not arranged in any particular order. Neither one of these initiatives have been identified as the best or only approach. We were told that they work cohesively together as a whole to bring about difference in the lives of Aboriginal families engaged with CASO.

### **3.01 The Involvement and Support of the Aboriginal Service Providers**

*So anyway we can, we try to support and facilitate working with the community and having their input.*

The involvement and support of the Aboriginal service providers was consistently identified as an important development that has led to some very positive interactions with Aboriginal families and their service providers. Developing relationships with Aboriginal community professionals has made it easier for CAS staff to engage with Aboriginal clientele that are very reticent about connecting with CAS in any way, shape or form. Staff indicate that these relationships are used as a bridge to connect with the Aboriginal clientele. CAS staff know that presence of Aboriginal service providers give families a sense of safety and comfort and it provides them within a culturally safe environment. Aboriginal services providers are viewed as acting like a buffer for the families dealing with CAS. Staff note that the relationship with First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers has led to faster and improved services for families because the Aboriginal

service providers have been able to consult with the CAS more effectively the moment a crisis situation presents itself. Staff note that families that are connected to Aboriginal service providers tend to consistently meet their goals with CAS when compared to other families that are not connected to the Aboriginal community and/or involved with Aboriginal service agencies. Staff note that with the help of the Aboriginal service providers they are in a much better position to advocate for Aboriginal children and youth who have been placed in non-Aboriginal foster homes. CAS staff know that it is essential that Aboriginal families receive support from the Aboriginal service providers whenever CAS is involved with an Aboriginal family. The involvement of the Aboriginal community and their service providers before, during, and after is essential to ensuring successful outcomes and in the monitoring of decisions. The approaches taken to date allow CAS staff to help families make their own decisions as much as possible where appropriate with the help of Aboriginal service providers. This inclusive approach has resulted in many situations where families are more open to CAS services. We are told that there is trust now when previously there was not. Although there may be times when CAS and the Aboriginal services providers are not “on the same page” staff shared that at least they are able to talk to one another and hold one another accountable. Staff know that at times they will not always agree on the directions given by the Aboriginal services providers but “at least we are talking to each other and we are trying to sort out what’s in the best interest of the child and what needs to happen to meet the needs of the children.”

What allowed change to happen was CAS’ recognition of the importance of the role that Aboriginal service providers played in the Aboriginal community of Ottawa. One of the staff persons that we interviewed indicated that they learned a valuable lesson in the process of developing these relationships. What she learned was that not only were Aboriginal families angry about their experiences with CAS, but they were angry because CAS devalued the Aboriginal organizations that they utilized within the community. As this staff person noted, “we often devalued the organizations that they utilized because we didn’t see their services as valuable enough to involve ourselves with them.” CAS staff recognize that they have

been very fortunate to have developed these relationships because these relationships have supported a process for doing things differently with the Aboriginal community. Most of the Aboriginal service providers are child-based agencies and CAS staff indicate that these organization see a lot of common themes through the same eyes. Through the partnerships and collaborations with the Aboriginal services providers CAS staff believe they are now able to ensure better connections for children and youth to other resources in the Aboriginal community and to ensure that women in domestic violence situations, for instance, know that there are First Nations, Inuit and Métis resources in the community that will provide shelter. This approach has helped keep Aboriginal children and youth connected to their families and their communities.

### **3.02 Development of the Designated Teams**

The designation of teams within the West Pod was identified as an important development that is more appropriate for working with First Nations and Métis families involved with CAS. It was noted that the Francophone 1 team had been designated to service Inuit families several years prior to the assignment of the West Pod. The designated teams are described as being comprised of a group of between 18 to 21 child protection service providers who are organized into three teams. They get direction and support from three supervisors and support each other and that they participate in community activities, cultural teaching days, and training events. We learned from staff that there was a great deal of interest among staff wanting to work with this group with some staff noting that they specifically requested an opportunity to work with First Nations, Inuit and/ or Métis families.

Staff note that having these three designated team and the West pod makes it easier to work with First Nations and Métis families but we also learned from some staff that working in the West Pod with Aboriginal families is hard work because it “has extra layers to it, extra challenges and requires extra energy.”

Staff believe the community and Aboriginal community service providers are getting to know the workers in this pod and their services are being requested by Aboriginal families. This is exemplified in the following comment:

*I think one of the major changes is the designated pod to serve the Aboriginal families. When I call parents for my first meeting, they will say something like 'aren't you with the specialized team to serve Aboriginal families?' So she knew there is an internal arrangement here with regards to Aboriginal families and she was expecting somebody who is specialized. So I said, yes I'm from the West Pod. We are the team that's designated to serve the Aboriginal clients but we are not experts. We are just learning. People are starting to know what changes are happening here.*

Some of the staff note that further development is still required in order for the pod to improve its services to the Aboriginal community as the following comment alludes:

*This is all stuff that is not all fully articulated for us yet. So even though we've been doing it for a couple years, it's not like we've ever written it down or even put it down on a flowchart to say that we necessarily do these tasks differently in this way.*

Nevertheless, the staff view the development of the designated teams as really important to the evolution of work undertaken to solidify relationships with the Aboriginal population and their community organizations within Ottawa.

### **3.03 The Aboriginal Liaison Worker**

*A new initiative is Elaine – she's the liaison. That's new. She's only started since February or March of this year. And so she's that link – if CAS has questions, she's the go-to person. If the Aboriginal agencies have a question, they go to her. So there's a good link there. That's positive and she also works with every team, so she tries to do some workshops with the child and youth counselors. So it's going broader with what we had with the teachings, and our resources, foster care workers and adoption care workers. So she's doing some sweat lodges with them, she's picking up sweetgrass with them, she's teaching them about medicines and so forth and then she's looking at our foster parents and she's pulled them in about three times and now every two months they are going to be meeting with her about Aboriginal care of children. Like you know, those are new initiatives and I could see our foster families are thirsty – they want to know more. They're sponges, they're taking it in. And our workers that have been going to the teachings, I'm seeing the same, that they really are soaking it up. So there's a need there. There's a definite need there.*

CAS staff cited another huge change that occurred as a result of working with their Aboriginal partners was the development

of an Aboriginal liaison worker who would be stationed with the team working out of the West pod. The Aboriginal liaison worker is currently in a seconded position that will last for only one year. Many of the staff remarked that the liaison has been helpful and very important in developing the relationship between CASO and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners. CAS staff have described the Aboriginal liaison worker as being very visible within the agency and that she has been effective in providing supports to families and providing information about resources and events in the community, on the web, in print and on film. They indicate that she has been consulted on a number of matters and case management plans already.

The Aboriginal liaison worker has been described as being instrumental in a number of ways: she is seen as effective in providing staff with cultural teachings, involving staff in the experience of attending a sweat and facilitating workshops with respect to Aboriginal teachings, community resources, and connects with foster care and adoption workers to help them understand the Aboriginal children in their care. She is viewed as being very effective in helping staff get back on track when and where they might have been “totally off-base.” She has been described as approachable and appears eager to assist whenever she is consulted by staff. She has been noted to have broad connections and is creative in coming up with ideas and solutions. Staff note that while their understanding of the Aboriginal community and their resources is improving, the Aboriginal liaison worker has in been able to address some of the gaps that arise. The services provided by the Aboriginal liaison worker are valued by staff and seen as a valuable resource to the agency. They are pleased that she is housed at the offices of CASO because the staff there know they can call upon her if they need help with Aboriginal specific cases.

### **3.04 Cultural Training Opportunities and Understanding Historical Aspects**

*It is important that everyone make an effort to take advantage of the Aboriginal teachings that are available. These teachings do not hurt anyone. It is knowledge and knowledge is power. These teachings could help non-Aboriginal families too because they are for everyone. I think the more that people hear about these teachings and listen to the teachings and really soak up the teachings, there would be less problems.*

*The teachings are a fantastic. They are great. They knock the pants off my Protestant upbringing! They make sense and they are naturally engaging. So even people that say why treat the Aboriginal people any differently from the Somali or the Haitian people? I hear that question all of the time. It's a legitimate question. It's not something for us to get all defensive about but people who ask that question will go to a community event and learn about the culture, then learn about the history, and then learn about the history of the relationship with child welfare, and that answers the questions. These people come back from these events and say that makes sense.*

The teachings about the culture and the history of child welfare involvement with Aboriginal peoples, the staff say, have invited CAS, to interact differently and structure meetings differently with the Aboriginal community and the service organizations that work with them. As a result, staff indicate that CAS is beginning to understand, and has moved to plan differently in a way that appears to be more appropriate in working with Aboriginal children and families. Learning about the history of Aboriginal people (i.e. Residential schools in the 60s scoop) has contributed significantly to the changes within CASO where they are now taking different approaches to working with Aboriginal families. Because of the teachings and the knowledge of the historical treatment of Aboriginal people, staff indicate that people working within the designated teams (West Pod and Francophone 1) for instance, have become more sensitive in how they work with and advocate for Aboriginal families. The staff also stated that foster parents are beginning to benefit from information and cultural training to help them understand the importance of ensuring that the children in their care should be connected to their Aboriginal identity and culture and to the Aboriginal community within and outside Ottawa. Exposure to the history has provided some CAS staff with a greater appreciation and recognition of what Aboriginal families have experienced. Staff see the cultural trainings and the attempts to educate agency staff about the historical events in a positive light. They indicate that these events have been instrumental in helping them approach First Nations, Inuit and Métis families with far more sensitivity than was done in the past.

We also learned from staff that a culturally safe place was created for families and Aboriginal workers within the Telesat office. The Aboriginal space was envisioned in the First Nation,

Inuit and Métis Liaison Committee's work plan. The room provides a place for Aboriginal families and staff to conduct meetings and is an adaptable space where staff and families can reflect and or visit. The furniture is movable and can be organized into a circle. In addition, the room is ventilated for situations when traditional medicines are burned while performing ceremonies that may require smudging. The space is complemented by artwork and other resources that reflect the First Nations, Inuit and Métis nations.

### **3.05 Access Visits and Maintaining Community Connections**

*Since 2008 all access visits were happening at our agency. Not anymore! Access visits are happening at Minwaashin Lodge. They're happening at Wabano. They're happening at Odawa. They're happening at the Inuit Head Start day-care. ... so we are able to do access in the community, and through other organizations like the Ottawa Inuit Children's Center and Tungasuvvingat Inuit.*

Staff indicate that in the past everyone has always attended access visits at the CAS office. Working outside of the isolation of the CAS office environment and instead meeting in the home of Aboriginal parents or in the offices of the Aboriginal organizations was cited as an important methodology that was more appropriate when working with the Aboriginal community. This represents a major change in policy and practice as most of the CASO staff noted. This is something that would have been unheard of in the past. Access visits in the past were often held at the Telesat office and they were often supervised. Access visits now occur in the offices of the Aboriginal community service organizations. It is a different approach to access but it is considered by CAS staff to be much more family oriented and culturally relevant, and viewed as more natural than what was what forced on Aboriginal families previously. Staff shared that the agency and staff have had to learn to have faith in the Aboriginal community and accept that these types of visits are meant to be a typical experience for Aboriginal families involved with CASO. As some of the staff have noted, "one of the greatest struggles for staff was allowing someone else to be your eyes" during these visits. It is a positive movement and one that assists in helping the Society maintain connections to the Aboriginal community for children and their families.

Staff note that sometimes meeting with a family in their home is intimidating so they offer to meet with the family for the first time in a setting where families feel culturally safe and supported by a professional from the Aboriginal community. They note that they are making more of an effort to get a person from the Aboriginal community involved in these meetings in an effort to ensure that families feel more comfortable and more confident when meeting with CAS.

Staff indicate that they have made a commitment to ensure that Inuit children coming into care maintain a connection to community by attending either day care or the Head Start Program or the kindergarten program at the Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre. Staff also note that they have also worked to assist non-Aboriginal foster and adoptive families feel comfortable in maintaining cultural ties and connections with the Aboriginal community for the children in their care. They note that this approach is much stronger among the Inuit community than it appears with the First Nations and Métis communities but staff indicate that they are hopeful these approaches will be strengthened in the future as the relationships with the First Nations and Métis communities progress.

### 3.06 Kinship and Customary Care Arrangements

*Yeah I kind of live and breathe kinship, so. Yeah so basically – I think kinship is good because it's really working on identifying people and keeping children with their families. And it's just not specific to Aboriginal families, it's specific to all different cultures. But really looking and reaching into the community and keeping kids within their own natural families instead of being put [in formal care] – and identifying those things prior to a breakdown of a family. So for instance, if there's a protection issue that comes up, before something is gonna happen there would have to be some kind of intervention, starting kinship searches is another thing that we do. So seeking out prior – and like if mom or dad can't identify people, [it means] going to the children's school, talking to the children directly, talking to the people that are involved with [the family]. Because maybe they're not able to say right off the bat, "Oh I have a sister that's able to do this." But there are people out there that are connected with that family that might step up and do it. So we do have a specific person on our team that seeks that out which is – you know we've been very successful in a lot of cases in finding people. Cuz you know, maybe uncle and aunt from Saskatoon never knew that these issues were*

*going on, right? And they might step up, come here for a couple months or – yeah. So it's basically just doing that legwork. Which should be done, I think.*

*So it's a really creative program. We take it kind of two fold, one, a child is old enough to participate so from their perspective, mapping out who is significant in their lives from their perspective. And then also who in the family is willing to meet to discuss that? Who is willing to add to that family tree and that family tree doesn't necessarily mean blood relatives. So it's really individualized to whatever is going to work for that particular child or youth in that particular family. ... It's just maximizing this picture and getting all the information that you possibly can about this child's life and family and significant people. Which is definitely a shift from previous practice for sure.*

Some of the staff interviewed identified the kin program as an important change and initiative, which incorporates a more appropriate and promising approach to working with the Aboriginal population. Legislated changes in 2006 made it mandatory for kinship to be explored for all children that may need to be placed outside of the care of their legal guardian. In Ottawa, kinship care is understood broadly to include community, as well as cultural connections to best meet the needs of children and youth. The kinship care program is considered to be a fairly new approach. It is described as offering a flexible placement and approach where the expected demand is broader in scope than the traditional approaches required by the foster care system regarding the placement the children. It is a way to open doors and find alternative sources of placements for children and youth that were not allowed in the past (i.e. in situations where caregivers were not considered as appropriate placements because of prior criminal and/or addiction issues). In these instances it was recognized that people with prior criminal and/or addiction problems can, and do, change and grow from these experiences. These experiences may actually be their strength and so the kin program capitalizes on these strengths and offers help and support to families that take on kinship placement of Aboriginal children.

We learned that there is a distinction in the kin program between kin-in-care services and kin services. Kin-in-care services are more formal. They include the involvement of the worker and provide financial services to families caring for

Aboriginal children. In these situations the “clock is ticking”<sup>16</sup> because the child is in a formal care situation even though they are placed with kin. It is considered similar to foster care placement but within the parameters of a cultural match with immediate or extended family members. Kin services, on the other hand, involve some support from the CAS worker but no financial support is provided other than the opportunity to collect the child tax benefit allowance on behalf of the child. The clock, in these situations, is not “ticking” because the child is not in a formal care arrangement.

Kinship care is seen as something that is innovative for Aboriginal community. It provides Aboriginal parents the option to participate in the planning for their children. Staff indicate that this practice recognizes that children and youth are the experts in their own lives and they know who within their families and communities can best care for them. The staff note that, “They know their people, they know their families and they know their community.” The staff that work in this department believe that this is particularly significant change especially for youth and children because it allows them to participate in the planning of their future and it offers them an opportunity to be able to say “these are the significant people I’ve had in my life and they help in the planning.”

The kinship approach to working with Aboriginal families represents a shift in how CAS is planning for the future of Aboriginal children. It is also presented as an approach that recognizes the importance of planning together and working together for the benefit of Aboriginal children. It is considered by staff as being a much more appropriate approach that helps agency staff in identifying other family and community members as important to the well-being of Aboriginal children and youth.

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<sup>16</sup> The “ticking of the clock” refers to the timelines associated with when children become crown wards under the Ontario Child and Family Services Act. Changes to this legislation at the beginning of the Millennium shortened the length of time a child can remain in temporary Children’s Aid Society wardship before a permanent plan is established. Previous law allowed children to remain in custody without a permanent plan for up to 24 continuous months. The clock was set back to zero every time a child left and re-entered care. The amendments shortened the time for children under age 6 to a cumulative 12 months. In addition, the planning timeline for all other children is now cumulative.

### 3.07 Adoption and Inter-Provincial Relations

Staff shared that CASO is also doing some innovative work where they are trying to accommodate Inuit families. This innovative work involves an inter-provincial component. As part of the kin services offered by the agency, staff indicate that CASO is working in collaboration with their northern counterparts to help place Inuit children with extended family living in Nunavut and some cases, Inuit children are being accommodated in custom adoptions, according to Inuit tradition as noted in the comments made by the following two individuals:

*We've been able to establish a certain rapport with the inter-provincial coordinator and specific communities up north. Some communities, even Nunavut Social Services, have no services being provided in some of these northern communities so that becomes a huge challenge because we're not able to place children in some of those communities where we can't ensure supervision ... but in those communities where we can and where there are extended family members, the inter-provincial coordinator and their services have adopted our kin home assessment and they are executing it up north and where possible, we're placing children up north with extended family, where they are supervising on our behalf but it remains our case." This work has been reciprocal in nature as well CASO also supervises placements on behalf of Nunavut Social Services, especially for Inuit children with medical needs.*

*I believe it's been extremely difficult for the Society to find adoptive homes and/or kinship homes within the Inuit community. We've had success more specifically in the north so we have sent children to Nunavut, Iqaluit or Baffin Island or whatever but in terms of Ottawa, I don't think we've had much success within the Ottawa community. I'm not aware of adoptions that have occurred within the Inuit community of Ottawa. It's a constant struggle on our part and the families' part to try finding appropriate family placements for children. That's a work in progress.*

### 3.08 Alternative Dispute Resolution Processes

*I think the Circle of Care is a good example where we're on one track and we're asking for this and obviously the parents want their kids back. We've been able to open up to other possibilities. It's been amazing how the families have been able to come up with alternatives rather than making children crown wards and pulling them from their*

*community. So I think from all these perspectives there's been some process."*

Alternative dispute resolution options like the "Circle of Care" program were cited by staff as an appropriate approach for Aboriginal families despite some of the challenges that come with the approach. It was noted that the work required to conduct a Circle with families is different, the time commitment is greater and, further, it is viewed as emotionally challenging not only for families but also for the workers involved.

The Circle of Care initiative is described briefly by staff as an approach similar to family group conferencing that engages families to come up with alternative solutions for addressing the challenging issues facing the family. CAS staff and Aboriginal services providers, along with other family members, come together in a circle to help the family but it is the family that makes decisions around solutions that will see effective changes for the family. It was further explained as a process that "brings family together and it lets families come up with their own plans as opposed to CAS imposing a plan on them." Some of the challenges are that it takes longer because healing needs to happen and that it is heavily reliant on resources. Some families are still intimidated by the approach as this one worker noted:

*... We tried to do one and it didn't really work out. The family was really put off by the process and felt intimidated by it. ... They felt very overwhelmed and very team-up against by CAS ... so now it is going to be informal ... We'll sit around, we'll talk.*

CAS staff are of the opinion that the involvement of the Aboriginal community service providers before, during and after the conclusion of a circle is essential to ensuring successful outcomes and monitoring of decisions that emerge from the circles. Aboriginal service providers are known for stepping in and offering support to families in parenting their children. They also act as a liaison and help in the communication between families, children, the foster families and CASO and they can, along with the Circle of Care facilitators, also play a role in monitoring and following up on the plans and decisions made by the family where and when necessary. Following up on the decisions and plans ensures that they are being implemented

and going well. If there are issues with the plan, staff shared that there is always the option of bringing the family back to the Circle or convening informal meetings to discuss ongoing concerns. Staff further commented that inviting Aboriginal service providers to participate in these circles to stand in as a support for Aboriginal families is creative and has been noted to be particularly appropriate, especially for Aboriginal families living in urban environments where they do not have a lot of family supports.

Nevertheless the Circle of Care is seen as valuable but is viewed as still being in a state of development as one CAS staff member recognizes:

*Our approaches to working with Aboriginal families (i.e. Circle of Care Initiative and kin placements) are still works in progress. We are learning as we go along what is appropriate for Aboriginal families. There is still a lot of work to be done to ensure the changes are appropriately benefiting Aboriginal families.*

#### **4.0 ARE THE CHANGES MAKING A DIFFERENCE?**

One of the key questions we asked staff to reflect on was whether they thought the changes that have been implemented to date by CASO were effecting change and making a difference for Aboriginal families. Their comments reflect that indeed the changes implemented to date are making a huge difference for the Aboriginal community. The following selected bulleted narratives<sup>17</sup> reflect a multitude of perspectives from staff about how the changes are contributing to positive outcomes for the Aboriginal families they work with:

- *There is a perspective that the changes implemented by CAS in partnership with its Aboriginal partners, is working because it appears as if there are less Aboriginal children that are coming into care. For instance, something must be happening because the foster care recruiter is not getting as many requests to find foster families willing to take in Aboriginal children and youth.*
- *The changes that have taken place over the last 4 years are impacting on the Aboriginal community in very positive ways. Because we have ongoing involve-*

<sup>17</sup> The comments made by staff are deliberately reproduced because their “voices” and perspectives are instructional and clearly sum up agency staff perspectives on how these changes are having an impact on Aboriginal families and within the Aboriginal communities generally.

ment with the Aboriginal community there are possibilities for openness that occurs naturally. The Circle of Care approach, in particular, is a prime example of a change that is making a difference for the Aboriginal families that we deal with. For example, I am drawing upon an experience of an Inuit mother who had a long history of involvement with CAS. All of her children were in our care, including the latest child born to her. We had a Circle of Care with this mother. I was surprised and shocked, to see within the circle two specific families that adopted, through the child welfare system, previous children of hers. The mother had asked that these families be invited to the circle. The proposed plan for her youngest child was that if the initial plan didn't work then one of the two adoptive families would take the child and proceed with the adoption of that child. It turned out that the initial plan A did not work and we were able to proceed with plan B, which was to still respect the plan that everyone in the circle had agreed to which was to have one of the adoptive parents adopt the youngest child. The mother however is still involved with her children because there has been an openness that was developed and nurtured such that she is able to still maintain contact with her children despite the fact that they have been adopted. The families supported and allowed her to maintain and to know where her children were. So that is a very different way of working with Aboriginal families, which was not done in the past.

- I believe that our approaches are making a difference for Aboriginal families. As we develop one relationship we seem to be finding that the openness is seeping to other people and has lead the Society to have a different relationship with the larger community. We have gone from having a very negative exposure in the Aboriginal community where we are being invited to every single cultural event that is being held in Ottawa.
- Our approaches to working with Aboriginal families who become involved with CAS are different from the way they were before. It's not just one worker who makes decisions about family situations. We are learning to work in partnership not only amongst ourselves at CAS, but also amongst our peers in the Aboriginal service community to effect positive outcomes for the Aboriginal families that we work with. Decisions are no longer made in a vacuum. Now that we are working with Aboriginal service providers, I have observed that there has been a bit of a backlash against the Aboriginal service organizations because of the partnerships they have developed with CAS. In one particular case, the mother at the center of investigations decided to

disengage from her community supports and pulled her child from all Aboriginal community involvement partly because of the relationship with CAS but the Aboriginal service providers did not give up on her. They each continued with outreach and no one “took their ball and went home or anything like that.” Things got back on track. They got back on track because the young child’s stepfather took on employment with one of the Aboriginal service organizations. The maternal grandmother also took on employment with the same service organization and the mother herself got involved with Odawa and received strong support. The Aboriginal community service provider understood her situation very well and they were able to encourage and support her and say, “you need to keep doing this and you need to come and get involved with us.” There was real re-engagement and the family got back on track, the children remained in the care of the family and we closed the supervision order and file less than a year later.

The people who work at the Aboriginal service provider organizations are people who are dedicated who are really on the ground working with families. Like us, they are overworked and under-resourced but they are very effective. This story is just one among many successful stories that have resulted primarily because of the openness of the relationships that we have developed with the Aboriginal community service providers.

- Families feel a bit more comfortable working with CAS than ever before because they have the support of the community now when they have to deal with us. They can see the positive relationships that we have developed with the Aboriginal service providers. It makes it a lot easier for Aboriginal families to speak with us, to meet with us, to work with us, to open up to us. This trust wasn’t there before. For instance, if I want to meet with the client, that client no longer has a problem asking if we can meet at one of the Aboriginal service provider’s locations. So they are a lot more comfortable with us.
- The support people with the Aboriginal community service providers understand our [CAS]’ mandate and they know how we work as well. We get a chance to explain to both the client and to the community service providers why we are making the decisions that we make in specific situations.
- One time I met with a mother at an Aboriginal service provider’s location for an access visit and she asked me to participate in smudging with them. That was a huge honor. Another time that I met with her, she said, “come on in, have a coffee.” So I think that it makes a difference for Aboriginal families now that Aboriginal

service providers are involved. Aboriginal families are a lot more comfortable with CAS knowing that they have the community behind them but the community also understands what we're [CAS] doing. The relationship provides more accountability and our relationships with Aboriginal people and their community supports are a lot more transparent than before.

- *I think where this new relationship is making a difference for the Aboriginal families involved with child welfare, is the fact that they feel we are listening to them. Take for instance the kinship program and the idea of legal custody outside of traditional care as opposed to adoption. The fact that we include the entire family whenever possible in the planning also makes a difference for the families. I think for these families the opportunity to collaborate in discussions and decisions that relate to the safety and permanency of their children, yet still be involved in their children's lives, is really significant.*
- *Legal custody provides another option that is different from adoption. For instance, our legislation requires that all Crown wards be referred to adoption after being in care for 2 years. There are other options besides adoption that is better suited for Aboriginal family and legal custody out of care is one of those options. It looks a little bit different legally but it is similar in terms of ensuring that children are not placed in care outside of their kinship connections. This is a significant option to the type of services that the agency can provide when working with Aboriginal families.*
- *I believe there have been less crown wardship orders amongst the Aboriginal families that we work with. The work that we have done in collaboration with the Aboriginal service providers has helped bring these numbers down. Because we are more sensitive, we have been lenient and as a result are able to extend legislative times and do provide Aboriginal parents with more leeway and more time to get their affairs in order.*
- *What is making a difference for Aboriginal families is the option of being able to reconnect with some of the Aboriginal service providers that exist within the city of Ottawa. With the help of Aboriginal service providers, families have a little more confidence that they can take control of their lives. They can turn to their community and to their social networks for support, instead of feeling like they are socially isolated like some Aboriginal families have experienced in the past when child welfare is involved in their lives.*
- *An example of where the assistance of Aboriginal service providers have proven to be beneficial to families*

can be found in a story about a mother with significant addiction issues. The mother was not able to make the changes and heal from her issues by herself within the legislative time lines, but with the assistance and support from the Aboriginal community, CAS was able to assist in linking the family with a northern band and her children [2 boys] went to live with her extended family on reserve.

- The relationships that we have with Aboriginal service providers within the Ottawa community are making a difference for the families that we are working with. For instance families will receive support from the community and the community agencies. These agencies are hands-on, they help address some of the issues and they work with CAS in moving things forward. They keep CAS on track and informed about where families are. CAS collaboratively works together with the Aboriginal service providers in caring for children and keeping them with their families whenever possible. Aboriginal families are often surprised that this partnership exists and that they are permitted and allowed to include them among their supports when working with CAS.
- What is making an impact for Aboriginal families is that CAS is approaching them with a lot more understanding. There is an awareness and sensitivity that is beginning to build and this is helpful in creating a change in terms of how CAS is interacting and working with Aboriginal families and their community supports. What is significant is that CAS workers are now thinking, "who else from the community needs to be at the table?" when we are working with Aboriginal families.
- I believe the changes that we have implemented, are making a difference for the families that we work with. I think too, that when we have our Aboriginal service community all sitting around the table together, Aboriginal families see us working together for better outcomes and they are more motivated to work with us. So we will continue to work together. We don't always have happy outcomes for some families but working together early on to develop a plan ponders the integrity of what we do and insures that the safety and well-being and best interests of the child that is at the center of the discussions. When everyone is on the same page and the right people are involved right from the beginning, and there are no surprises, and we are respecting their culture, and including them, the outcomes and the plan arising from these discussions are more palpable than they would have been in the past.
- There are lots of things we are doing now that make a big difference to the families. For instance, families are certainly more comfortable having an Aboriginal service

*provider involved and in attendance with them when they meet with CAS and they feel more comfortable when they can see that CAS is taking a cue from those community supports. Further, having meetings take place at the service provider's agency as opposed to at CAS is a huge benefit to families. We have learned that one of the most fundamental things we have to understand is that these agencies are home for Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal families feel at home and feel safe when they meet CAS in the various service providers' environments. It's about their well-being.*

- *Other initiatives that are making a difference for foster families who are caring specifically for an Aboriginal child is the opportunity to participate in support groups. The Inuit service providers for instance, hold monthly meetings with the foster parents where they get a chance to talk and learn from each other and support one another. They also bring in resource people. This is a new development. We'd like to support foster families who are caring for First Nations and Métis children in the same way.*
- *We know that we are making a difference for Aboriginal families when they can opt to call people together and sit down with an elder or a cultural teacher of their choice and talk about their case and to see if there's some way to come to some understanding about it. This is a very positive development that makes a difference for Aboriginal families. However there are still growing pains and we need to grow the program to be better. It's the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized that play into these circles. So there's a much bigger issue here and it's going to take a lot to grow to become a successful program. The fact that there are options available to Aboriginal families and they are choosing to work with us, it is making a big difference for families. Much work remains to be done with First Nations and Métis families but Inuit families have been much more open to CAS involvement and to their children being cared for by non-Inuit families, as long as there is communication, contact, interaction, an opportunity to see the children in the community.*
- *The work that we are doing in the Aboriginal community is significant because there is a high percentage of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system. For instance, the Inuit community in Ottawa, is comprised of 1000 people but if you look at the number of children in care per capita, it is astounding and we need to break these cycles. We have to somehow participate in a more meaningful way to move the child welfare system forward in way that will assist in breaking these cycles. It won't obviously happen today but the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa is more amenable*

*to making change then we have been in the past. Through Aboriginal teachings, we are more aware of some of the intergenerational issues and the trauma of the past and this has made us a bit more sensitive to the needs of Aboriginal people.*

## **5.0 NARRATIVES OF SIGNIFICANT CHANGE**

We asked the workers and the supervisors that we interviewed to reflect on some of the things they personally see as significant about the relationships they have developed with the Aboriginal community.

Working with the Aboriginal community is not just about professional commitment – the staff interviewed have told us that it is much more than that. The changes not only make a difference for Aboriginal families but have also made a difference for the non-Aboriginal professionals who work with Aboriginal families and their community organizations. For instance, one interview participant noted that she and her family have also benefited from these changes. She has many friends among the Aboriginal people and has attended many of their activities and events. She is comfortable enough to participate in community events, not always on a professional level but also on a personal level as well. She noted that the community knows her family. So while she and her family, ultimately are outsiders, the relationships that she has developed with the Inuit community has made her feel comfortable enough to be able to attend community events alongside her husband and children outside of her role as a professional in the child welfare system. The reason she does this is because:

*I was quite shocked to learn that my education was not complete. I did not know my own history and although I was educated my knowledge of history and the role of Aboriginal people in history only scratched the surface. I want to make sure my children have a better sense of who the Aboriginal community is than I did growing up. So my commitment to developing relationships with the Aboriginal community goes beyond my professional commitment.*

The narratives from the interviews held with staff reveal significant changes that they are experiencing themselves because of the changes that have been implemented by CASO for working better with Aboriginal peoples and in

developing partnerships with the respective Aboriginal service organizations of Ottawa. CAS staff report feeling more welcomed in the Aboriginal community. As one interview participant noted, “the fact that I can walk through these doors and get welcoming hugs rather than a handshake is what is most significant to me.”

Others have noted that building trusting relationships has had significant impact and they note that having the trust of Aboriginal partner agencies means that CAS has the trust of Aboriginal families as well. As one person shared,

*We're not just getting called about children; we're getting calls about all kinds of things. For example, they will call us even though we do not have an open file with our agency and they will ask us, would you consider helping us out with this?*

Staff indicate that there were huge impediments to Aboriginal service organizations about calling CAS because there previously was no trust. There was a real fear that if they called CAS for assistance that they would take children away. Staff indicate that they now have a much more solid relationship with Aboriginal service providers and that “they have an understanding now that we’re [CAS] here to work with them, not against them.”

That staff have demonstrated that they understand the importance of learning and listening as well as the importance of incorporating and operationalizing Aboriginal teachings into the way they practice and interact with the Aboriginal community. As one supervisor remarked “the employees within our organization are open to learning and they’re open to ‘hearing’ as much as that is sometimes hard to do.” Another interview participant also remarked,

*The biggest learning is the experiential learning from attending the teaching days, being involved in the sweat, the stories of people and feeling their pain. The history and stories shared gave me an understanding of how I should approach my work with Aboriginal people. The history of the residential schools and a strong argument that child welfare has taken over where residential schools left off is particularly concerning to me. I don't want to be a part of perpetuating that. Because of the knowledge and experiences I have gained over the last couple years I know I can be instrumental in making change. I have direct influence over staff and it is my responsibility to be able to mentor*

*them in a culturally appropriate and supportive way. How I view the world changes how I'm going to respond to the world. Change from within is the most powerful and the most significant of the changes.*

The commitment to the idea of changing and developing relationships with the Aboriginal community and their service organizations was cited as a significant factor. As one person simply remarked: "the most significant change is the change in the mentality toward working with the Aboriginal population in Ottawa."

The fact that trusting partnerships were developed with numerous Aboriginal organizations was also considered a significant change by all the staff. This acknowledgement is reflected in the following narrative:

*Partnerships among the Aboriginal service providers and CAS it is from my perspective the most significant change. Working with other agencies cooperatively and getting to know them and building trust is important to the well-being children, youth, families, and the community. There have been bumps in the road but through the development of our relationship we are beginning to break down some of the walls that previously existed. Building trust, implementing programs like the kinship program, having access occur in the community, the development of the Circle of Care ... and things like that ... are really dependent upon our ability to develop trusting relationships with our Aboriginal service provider partners.*

Others have stated that the creation of the designated teams and particularly the Aboriginal liaison position were most significant as reflected in the comment below:

*What is also significant is the liaison position that Elaine is now doing. This position is vital because it is staffed by someone with a connection to the Aboriginal community who we can speak directly to about issues when they arise. It's really helpful to have someone to go to that is open and willing to share. Having access to a person in her position is invaluable. We can count on her perspective in helping us to make decisions that will lead to culturally appropriate outcomes. And even if people are not comfortable going to see her, at least they know she's there and that that position exists. They may need to draw upon her at some point in the future. This is a step in the right direction and significant for sure!*

Other staff clearly see the ability to be creative in how they work with Aboriginal families as being the most significant

experience they see arising from the changes implemented by CASO. For instance, having access visits occur in the community is considered to be a huge leap forward and a very positive development for workers and Aboriginal families as this one worker remarked:

*What is significant for me is the ability to be creative in how I work with Aboriginal families. For instance I was involved with a young mother who was raised by a white family. She had difficulty relating to her Aboriginal background although she was very connected and sensitive to a lot of things. I was able to take a different approach in working with her and her family. I tried to be more creative so I took her to the park where we talked in general. It was wonderful to see the way that she parented her children in a different environment. I could see that she was very attentive to them. I found that being in a different environment I was able to reach her in a way that I would not have been able to just sitting across the table and talking. I might not have seen those parental skills but they were evident when I witnessed her interacting with her children in that environment.*

Others note that they are still bound by legislation but the chance to be creative in their approach to working with Aboriginal families is a significant change as this person noted in her remarks about customary care:

*Customary care here is not nearly built into the legislation but I was able to talk to our head lawyer and she's come up with a couple of creative ways in order to make this happen. It's very exciting to be creative but know that you still have to follow bureaucracy. We still have to adhere to the legislation but we are still able to think a little bit outside of the box.*

## 6.0 REFLECTING ON FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS

Staff was asked to reflect on where further changes and improvement needed to occur. The responses were brief and we note that the recommendations for improvements offered by the CASO interview participants are similar to those reflected in other evaluations reports. The staff interviewed made the following suggestions for improvements:

- Encourage more education about Aboriginal people and the history of colonization. This needs to start at the university level for those pursuing social work degrees. Staff note that other non-Aboriginal community collaterals also need to be educated as they often draw upon these resources in helping Aboriginal families.

- Aboriginal families need to be educated about and connected to other community services within Ottawa (these were identified as mental health services, drug and alcohol treatment facilities, among others, etc.)
- Foster parents should receive more training about Aboriginal people and the history of colonization.
- Expand the partnership to include other workers from within CAS in order to facilitate best practices in working with Aboriginal clientele are engrained across the agency and not just in the West Pod and Francophone 1 team. “Continue growing the partnership and Liaison Committee because there is so much that needs to be done.”
- The agency and the service providers need to find a way to ensure that all First Nations, Inuit and Métis families are linked up to community services and able to receive ongoing services (there is a big difference in outcomes for families that are engaged with Aboriginal services providers versus Aboriginal families who are not engaged with the Aboriginal service agencies).
- Improve current programming and services – the Circle of Care was mentioned as a program that requires improvement.
- Ensure that the CASO collects better statistics about the Aboriginal families being serviced across the agency. In particular improve upon the processes for identifying Aboriginal families that become engaged in services.
- Some staff noted that they also need to have a better understanding around the number of Aboriginal children and youth being placed in residential facilities and non-Aboriginal group homes by other child welfare agencies that operate from outside of Ottawa.
- Hire more Aboriginal staff and hire more people to work in the liaison position (i.e. there should be representatives from the Métis and Inuit community in these positions).
- CAS needs to consider recruiting and employing First Nations, Inuit and Métis staff.
- Ensure more training opportunities and be open to having staff attend Aboriginal specific child welfare conferences. As one person noted, “If you want us to be doing this, you need to support us, and give us the training, give us the opportunity to go to these trainings.”
- Consult frontline staff more often – as some staff noted the Liaison Committee should involve them in some of the decision making and include them in meetings

because “no one really knows the work they are doing out in the community.” They are on the ground working directly with families and they are the ones developing the relationships and consulting with frontline staff would ensure that the Liaison Committee knows what is working and what is not working.

- Address workload issues – staff note that working with Aboriginal families and organizations takes time, energy and resources, especially because Aboriginal families tend to have larger families. “Human resources need to match the reality of the caseload.”
- CAS should increase its representations in the community by attending more community events because it increases the agency’s exposure in the Aboriginal community.
- Address gaps in services for Aboriginal youth between the ages of 12 and 18.
- Planning for First Nations, Inuit and Métis children in care needs to be more inclusive and youth should be consulted and engaged in the process.
- Recruit for more culturally appropriate kinship/foster homes for First Nations, Inuit and Métis children.
- Aboriginal service providers need to change their attitudes when working with CAS. Too often the Aboriginal services providers come from a place of anger which CAS staff understand but now that there is a partnership in place, this needs to change because they are all working to ensure the safety, well being and best interests of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and youth.
- Further, frontline staff need assurance that when they make mistakes they can talk openly about their mistakes and learn how to fix them. “We need to ensure that we can work through assumptions and mistakes and talk about how to resolve them.”
- Lastly, CASO needs to strategize for the future – a strategic plan for evaluating programs and services offered to the Aboriginal community was cited as some of the areas that need further planning and strategic direction.



Exemplifying the Sacredness of Relationality:  
**AN EVALUATION OF THE PARTNERSHIP**  
Between the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Service  
Providers and the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa  
Qualitative Narratives of Significant Change

## Chapter

# 3

## NARRATIVE FINDINGS – FIRST NATIONS, INUIT AND MÉTIS (ABORIGINAL) SERVICE PROVIDERS AND MANAGEMENT

### 1.0 ABORIGINAL INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

We interviewed twelve<sup>18</sup> individuals employed at the following seven First Nation, Inuit and Métis community service organizations within Ottawa:

- Makonsag Head Start
- Minwaashin Lodge - Aboriginal Women's Support Centre
- Odawa Native Friendship Centre
- Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre
- Tewegan Transition House
- Tungasuvvingat Inuit
- Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health

The following table identified their gender, years of experience, the agency they are associated with, whether they answered all the interview questions and what their preferences were regarding how they wished to receive the findings as set out in

<sup>18</sup> Most of the interviews took place in person however one interview was conducted by email. This individual's responses were brief and short on details.

the evaluation report (4 suggested that the evaluation findings be shared at a community information forum which should take place at some point in the future).

**Table 3: General statistics about the First Nations, Inuit and Métis interview participants**

Identification	Gender	Years of Experience	Community Agency	Answered all Questions	Preference receiving report's findings
ID#00101	Female	16 years	OICC	Yes	Email
ID#00103	Female	4 years	OICC	Yes	Email
ID#00104	Female	13 years	OICC	Yes	Email
ID#00108	Female	11 years	Minwaashin Lodge	Yes	Canada Post, Email and Community Information Forum (CIF)
ID#00109	Female	14 years	Minwaashin Lodge	Yes	Email
ID#00110	Female	6 years	Minwaashin Lodge	Yes	Email and CIF
ID#00111	Female	1 year	Wabano	Yes	No response
ID#00114	Female	6 years	Makonsag	Yes	Email and CIF
ID#00115	Female	8 months	Makonsag	Skipped Question #9	Email
ID#00117	Female	15 years	Odawa	Yes	Email
ID#00118	Female	6 years	Tewegan Transition House	Yes	Canada Post
ID#00119	Female	20+ years	Tungasuvvingat Inuit	Yes	Canada Post and CIF

Here is what we learned from reviewing the narratives that have emerged from the interviews held with staff employed by one of the seven Aboriginal service organizations involved in this evaluation.

## 2.0 UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP

### How the Relationship was Previously Perceived

*There was a lot of mistrust. We did not trust each other.*

*So we realized that there was a lot of broken things going on and we kept saying, "we're sick and tired of saying the same thing, why do we have to tell this worker and this worker, all of them, that a woman wears a traditional jacket and we carry kids on our back."*

*Back then we were trying to figure out how to help our parents when they would be involved [with CAS]. We didn't know who to talk to then because there was no email and*

*there wasn't really good communication set up with the community, so it was sporadic and frustrating ...*

There were huge numbers of First Nations, Inuit and Métis families involved with CAS and Aboriginal staff indicate that they were spending copious amounts of time talking with CAS workers and found themselves having to explain things over and over again about cultural practices and what would be considered normal in the Aboriginal community/environment. They felt that they constantly had to educate workers about the Aboriginal families they worked with without seeing any real understanding from the workers. They indicate that CAS staff often “clumped” First Nations, Inuit and Métis families into one group without any understanding about the real differences between the groups or the diversity within each group.

Aboriginal service providers indicated that it was “very much a battle to do things the way they wanted.” Having access visits occur in the community for instance was virtually unheard of until a few years ago. Some of the Aboriginal service providers were outraged to learn that the Society had gone ahead and created the West Pod to deal with First Nation, Inuit and Métis families without having first consulted with them. As one participated noted,

*I was ticked cause they didn't even tell us. The Liaison Committee didn't even tell us. They just created this division, which was great but again, they [CAS] say they want communication yet this was done? I asked, “How many Aboriginal families have you ever worked with? Have you ever worked in the Aboriginal community? Who are you, where did you come from?”*

The Aboriginal service providers we spoke to indicate that previously no one questioned CAS about the decisions they made or why they forced Aboriginal mothers to take addiction-counseling programs absent evidence of substance abuse concerns. They note that many of the decisions made in the past were based on racism and a lack of knowledge and understanding of Indigenous cultures and the role of colonialism and the intergenerational impacts of residential schools and the sixties scoop. Aboriginal service providers also indicate that what CAS considered abuse often was not considered as abuse within the cultures of Aboriginal people (i.e. fasting and the red willow teachings). Many Aboriginal

service staff struggled with the fact that Aboriginal parents were often evaluated using a risk assessment model that focused more on weaknesses rather than strengths and often without sensitivity to the parent's culture.

### What Does the Relationship Look Like Today?

*Yah, we're not in the dark as much. We're not, "who do we talk to next?"*

*We find we can call up anybody in the Inuit pod and say, "what's going on with this file?" and they [Society staff] will listen.*

*Well I think in 17 years a relationship has to change and to be different right? I think when I first started doing this work, I was really angry with CAS. I'm still kind of angry at them but not as angry with them and some of the decisions they make. My experience has changed in that I'm now in a position to speak to people who can authorize and facilitate change. I can call up someone within CAS and say, "what's going on with this?" and get inside information. Before I didn't have the connections to do that. So my experience with CAS has changed. ... I have access to information and decisions and the reasons for decisions that I might not have had before. So I'm able to pass that onto the women that are trying to deal with them or work with them.*

The movement toward reconciliation and the community meetings where Aboriginal people and their community advocates talked openly with the staff of CASO has really helped in changing how Aboriginal service agencies viewed CASO and their staff. They believe there is more trust and a commitment to change by staff within the Society to work a better way with Aboriginal families and the advocates who know the Aboriginal community best. Aboriginal staff believe that the Society now understands the important role that their service agencies play in advocating for Aboriginal families and meeting the needs of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities in Ottawa. They indicate that they believe CAS recognizes that the Aboriginal service providers can be useful and can actually help Society staff do their jobs while advocating and helping families to move forward.

The Aboriginal staff believe that the changes implemented thus far by the Society is creating better reception among Aboriginal families. The development of stronger relationships with staff in the Society is beginning to bring walls down and trust is

slowly being established. As a result Society staff are now more familiar with Aboriginal cultures, communities and what Aboriginal services exist within Ottawa. CAS staff are more sensitive when dealing with Aboriginal families and more willing to work with Aboriginal service providers. However there were still concerns expressed by Aboriginal staff regarding specific issues that need to be addressed. The timelines associated with when Aboriginal children become crown wards, for instance, was highlighted as an outstanding concern that is not yet addressing the loss of Aboriginal children,

*It was during the timeline that we started saying, "this isn't ok ... that you can keep a child who is under 7 years for a year then it's an automatic wardship! Whereas before we had 3 year cases, 4 year cases ... working with the addicted, working with the homeless, working with housing, working with whatever and it was voluntary, apprehension, access ... it was long time cases that were working. And the children were safe and they were coming into the community but then the timeline came in and that's where we started loosing a whole bunch of kids and we're like "what is this, all over again, we're doing this all over again?"*

The fact that children are becoming crown wards and still being removed from the community is seen as a huge loss and difficult to accept for many of the Aboriginal service organizations. At the same time there is a recognition that CAS is trying to find more foster parents from within the Aboriginal community to take on the responsibility of caring long term for Aboriginal children and youth.

### **What Made Change Possible?**

*Things are changing from the top down as well as from the community up. So it is a little bit of both where the leadership at CAS is telling all of their workers that this needs to be done but it's the community, the grassroots that are saying to the leadership, change this and this. So it is a little bit of a top-down and bottom-up solution.*

*I think what made it possible is leadership. I think Barbara MacKinnon and having people at the Society willing to be open and listen. And people within Aboriginal agencies willing to put the past behind them and take some steps forward. It's about trust. Because we recognize that there are more kids in care now than ever before and we have to do something. We can't just sit and be inactive as we lose our kids. I think the timing was right. I think the leadership is right. I think that people did the work really carefully.*

The community consultation was considered a defining moment in the development of a better relationship with CASO. Acknowledgement of past wrongs and the offering of a genuine apology offered by the CAS agency that was stated by Aboriginal staff as some of the activities that brought the relationship a huge step forward. The Aboriginal community and their service providers were clear on what they wanted and supported the changes proposed and developed by CAS staff. Aboriginal staff note that Society staff were willing to listen to the Aboriginal community and they were committed to looking at the issues with fresh eyes. And CAS was open to working with the organizations that advocate for Aboriginal families. They indicate that it was the leadership within the Society and within different Aboriginal service organizations that made change possible. They indicate that the lines of communication are becoming more open and transparent. As one Aboriginal interview participant shared, "I find CAS staff are always willing to come out and participate and sit on committees with us." The Liaison Committee was recognized as one among many changes that have helped in building a stronger bridge between the Society and the Aboriginal service agencies within Ottawa.

### 3.0 REFLECTING ON THE CHANGES

We asked the Aboriginal staff to reflect on some of the approaches that the Society has taken in their efforts to work more cohesively with Aboriginal families and their organizations. Aboriginal service providers reflected on a wide variety of initiatives developed by CAS. There were 9 specific initiatives that were most often mentioned by the Aboriginal staff during the interviews. Their comments primarily reflect on the following initiatives and approaches that have been developed by the Society in their attempts to change the working relationships with the Aboriginal populations:

- 3.01 *The Role of the Liaison Committee;*
- 3.02 *Relationship Building with Society Staff and Management;*
- 3.03 *Development of the Designated Teams (West Pod and the Francophone 1 Team);*
- 3.04 *Creation of the Aboriginal Liaison position;*
- 3.05 *Community Meetings and Access Visits;*
- 3.06 *Maintaining ties in and to the Community;*

- 3.07 Kinship Services and Adoption;
- 3.08 The Circle of Care; and
- 3.09 Cultural Sensitivity, Training and Education.

The following sections explore the Aboriginal staff's reflections briefly. The reflections are not arranged in any particular order and none of them have been identified as being the best or the only approach. The interview participants acknowledged them as all being necessary in working cohesively together as a whole to bring about difference in the lives of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis families engaged with the Society.

### 3.01 The Role of the Liaison Committee

*And that's the thing behind the Liaison Committee is that you've got a bunch of heads that can brainstorm together and problem solve ... my favorite part, is the positive stories. Again, we deal with some pretty heavy stuff so the fact that we're actually coming at it from a strength-based approach is really important to me. I think that's the direction that I'm getting from CAS. It's not, "all of these poor people they've got 25% more in care then the rest of the population and it's getting worse." Instead they're saying, "okay, we recognize the numbers are high. We're not going to downplay anything but there are things that we can do to improve things. What are those things? And that's what I'm seeing. This approach to be more inclusive of traditional ways and practices and saying "yes, we have all these laws and we're bound by regulation, we have to do things this way, who cares if you're supposed to smudge or who cares if you're supposed to have a feasting ceremony when someone adopts." They've actually said, "okay, that's what we need to do, that's what we have to do." So okay this whole process has been a learning process for all of us. I know what the traditions are, but the idea that the Aboriginal community as a whole can work together with CAS is really neat too.*

The Aboriginal agency staff identified the Liaison Committee as an important element in the development of relationships with the staff at CASO. It was one of the first developments that arose from the community consultations held with the Aboriginal community and service providers. They were quick to point out that the development of this committee came about solely from CAS staff but at the request of leaders from Aboriginal community organizations like Minwaashin Lodge and Wabano, among others. However, it is generally acknowledge that the development of such a committee

needed the commitment from both parties in the partnership to come to fruition.

We learned from the Aboriginal staff that the Liaison Committee meets on a regular basis and has been doing so for over 5 years now. We were told that meetings generally occur every other month and usually last an afternoon. The meetings offer participants an opportunity to socialize, share a meal, brainstorm and discuss developing issues but they do not make decisions. The creation of the Liaison Committee has resulted in the development of personal relationships between the Aboriginal community staff and management staff within CAS. Aboriginal staff note that since the Liaison Committee started they are seeing an openness and respect by CAS management in working with Aboriginal service organizations and genuine attempts to understand and incorporate, where feasible, traditional cultural knowledge into practice when servicing and working with the Aboriginal population. The Liaison Committee meetings also provide an opportunity for the Aboriginal organizations to get together and learn about how CAS operates and in turn they provide CAS with an opportunity to learn about their services and how they work and advocate for the Aboriginal community. The Aboriginal staff describe the people who sit at this table as being sincere and 100% dedicated to the idea of working to ensure change in the way First Nations, Inuit and Métis families are treated by CAS. The Liaison Committee, we are told by the Aboriginal staff interviewed, has been instrumental in developing the Circle of Care program which provides Aboriginal families with an opportunity to make decisions within a safe “cultural space” where their voices can be heard and they can receive supports from the Aboriginal organizations involved. The Liaison Committee is also credited with the creation of a half-time seconded Aboriginal Liaison position within CAS and similarly it was instrumental in hiring a number of facilitators for the Circle of Care Program. The Liaison Committee is described as being essential in ensuring communications are open and up to date between CAS and Aboriginal organizations.

Many of the staff we spoke to shared that they been previously involved with the Liaison Committee but have since stepped away from this committee because the work they do within the

Aboriginal community is emotionally exhausting. For instance, one individual noted that the Inuit community within Ottawa is very small but since they are also a part of the community, they are working with their own family members, which adds to their exhaustion making it difficult for them to participate on committees such as the Liaison Committee. As one interview participant shared, “if you have to go home and tell your aunt her child has been taken, you approach it quite a bit differently than if it’s something you can leave at the end of the day and go do something different.” We learned that many of the Aboriginal organizations involved with the Liaison Committee have identified alternates from within their organizations who participate in meetings on a rotating basis. This is to ensure that participants are not overextended and so that there is overlap and back up when needed. Others indicate that their workload is demanding such that they participate on and off, and consequently, fall behind in the discussions and developments that occur at these meetings.

Aboriginal service providers feel that the work of the Liaison Committee is being felt in the community to a certain degree however the Aboriginal participants we interviewed indicate that despite this development, it hasn’t lowered apprehension rates among First Nations, Inuit and Métis families. While a lot of good things have come out of collaborative work of the Liaison Committee there is still a sense of “being at another cross road of where to go now.”

### **3.02 Relationship Building with Society Staff and Management**

The relationship with CAS workers has improved significantly say the Aboriginal staff interviewed for this evaluation. Part of this improvement they say is because of better communication. The Aboriginal participants interviewed indicate that if they need to communicate with CAS staff they know they can call them not only at their offices but most indicate that they also have access to the personal cell phone numbers of their CAS partners. They note CAS staff respond fairly quickly and are open to strategizing on solutions. An important development that we learned about is the fact that CAS is open to meeting in the community when requested.

The fact that there are now stronger relationships between CAS staff (both frontline and management) and Aboriginal service providers was identified as a positive development. The following narrative captures this perception nicely,

*I think the most significant is the relationship. I think that's what it boils down to ... is having relationships with a common goal. When you have the history that these two sides have, you have to take your time. You have to do it in a thoughtful, meaningful way. You have to share experiential learning. You have to hear peoples' stories. You have to be a leader. You have to be a leader at CAS and you have to be a leader within our communities and agencies to do this kind of work. But that's been the number one thing, is the change in relationships and people willing to work through the crap because there is a lot ... and having those meaningful relationships, that's really what's key!*

Aboriginal service providers and management have observed that CAS staff have a better understanding of some of the issues facing Aboriginal families. Aboriginal service providers note that there is more trust and understanding from CAS staff. CAS staff have demonstrated to their Aboriginal partners that they are sincere, open and willing to work with the Aboriginal community and committed to ensuring change. There is recognition from CAS that the Aboriginal service organizations that exist within Ottawa play an important and significant role in the lives of Aboriginal families and that they can be quite useful to CAS. They note that they can help CAS workers do their job and that they can and will do everything in their power to help families move forward.

*They see us celebrating the good times now ... whereas previously we were only seeing CAS when they were coming to apprehend kids.*

CAS staff participation in Aboriginal community events such as graduation ceremonies, pow wows, AGMs, Christmas parties and other events within the local First Nations, Inuit and Métis community is viewed by Aboriginal service staff as a positive development as opposed to "being seen in Aboriginal homes taking children away." The Aboriginal service providers who we spoke to, indicate that as of late there is a movement away from the taboo of involving CAS workers in community events. As they indicate it was unheard of in the past to invite a CAS worker to community events. This has changed and CAS is now participating in community events in a good way but the

community does not yet view CASO as a partner however we are told that the partnership is viewed as moving them positively closer in that direction. It was also brought to our attention that some people in the community are concerned about the presence of CAS staff in the community as was noted by this Aboriginal participant, who said, "I don't like CAS coming to our powwows or doing this and doing that. They don't go to the Greek Festival. They don't go to the Somalian community center. So why are we still being centered out?" Their presence in some cases is circumspect and viewed as inappropriate and is seen as a continuation of the monitoring of Aboriginal people.

### **3.03 Development of the Designated Teams (West Pod and the Francophone 1 Team)**

The creation of the designated teams was cited by many of the Aboriginal service providers and management as a significant development that is more culturally appropriate. They note that the designed teams have helped in reducing their frustration levels because there are clearer boundaries and the development of relationships means that they can have key contact ("go to") people within CAS that they can communicate with. As one Aboriginal worker notes, "I think it's kind of a natural way of working because it just makes sense to me to go to the person who is most likely to be able to answer your question or will point me in the direction that I need to go." Aboriginal staff report having increased confidence knowing that the staff associated with the West Pod and Francophone 1 team are there to work together with them to address problems and issues quickly. Aboriginal community workers especially like the fact that they are working with fewer CAS workers as opposed to many different workers, which they had to juggle and navigate through in the past as these two Aboriginal workers, noted:

*Well, the pods ... they've created pods specific for Aboriginal – well First Nations, Inuit and Métis. I think it is really positive to have that because you can keep a much closer eye on what is happening, when it's happening across the three different groups as opposed to it being all over the full organization. It is much easier to keep track of the behaviour of 20 workers than it is 200 workers.*

*And,*

*Nothing is more confusing than working with different clients that have CAS involvement and they all have different workers and you've got to develop relationships with all those different people! This way [with the West Pod] we may still have 30 clients but you might only have 3 workers that you actually have to relate to. And that's the biggest thing that I've noticed.*

The CAS staff in the West Pod and Francophone 1 team are seen as being better trained and have some understanding of cultural traditions and an understanding of what the different values are for the First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. This has reduced the need to explain things over and over again. Furthermore, the Aboriginal staff and management say that CAS is more familiar with the services offered by Aboriginal service providers now which lends to a better understanding of how they can work together to come up with mutually acceptable outcomes to ensure for the safety and wellbeing of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth, and families.

### **3.04 Creation of the Aboriginal Liaison Position**

*One of my favorite developments is that we now have a liaison worker. And although she's available to all the different organizations, she's supervised by [the ED of Minwaashin Lodge] and also by the staff at CAS. She's done some amazing work with the community and has been building trust—and she's done it in a really balanced way by inviting CAS to gatherings where they really can't harm people, but they can be seen and they can be seen with us, so that they [community] can see that there's some relationship there. I really love that. We need to have more workers like that.*

*So it kind of grew from the Liaison Committee meetings that it would be nice to have someone who could do that kind of buffering, providing the Elders, providing the connections ... and asking, ok, you've got a new client, do you know all the services? Do you know this time line? ... and she provides the information. So I think as time goes on her role will just keep kind of developing.*

This position is described as being a position that requires “bridge building” and “linking” between the Aboriginal service agencies and CAS. This position, at the time of the interviews, was fairly new and there was a lot of speculation by some Aboriginal service providers about what should be required by the person in this position. The Aboriginal staff support the idea of an Aboriginal liaison position however there is confusion

among the Aboriginal service organizations about her role and whom the liaison worker should be reporting to. The Aboriginal service providers we spoke to indicated that the position should not be one that perpetuates the removal of Aboriginal children from their homes.

*She's the liaison person between the Aboriginal agencies and CAS. So she's employed by CAS but she's that link and I'm sure we're the only one of three out of all of Ontario that has one like her. So we're all kind of figuring what exactly it is. Like I've been to places where people from the community who are actual workers that go in and remove kids and stuff. I don't think that that's necessary. I've seen how detrimental that actually is. I was up in Thunder Bay and half of the community was yelling at the workers and saying, "You just like coming and stealing our kids. Didn't our grandmother teach you?" And it became just like "whoa!" I don't see the need for Inuit workers. We just need to make sure they are respectful and understand the culture and stuff. So that's where I kind of come from on that. So I think for me some confusion as to what exactly Elaine will be and is doing and to kind of facilitate that. I think that will kind of work it's way out.*

Some of the Aboriginal staff and management interviewed are of the opinion that this particular position should be evaluated and further, stable funding should be established to ensure that the position is permanent or at least extended beyond the designated one year.

The Aboriginal staff indicate that the Aboriginal liaison has been instrumental in providing training to CAS staff and connecting them to the services that exist within the First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. She is credited as well with providing CAS with opportunities to participate in cultural ceremonies, gathering medicines and sweetgrass including the experience of participating in a sweat.

### **3.05 Community Meetings and Access Visits**

*... The policy that they have now is that Aboriginal women whose children are in care should have meetings and visitations within their own communities. It's a CAS policy.*

*No more meetings happen at CAS anymore. We fought for them to be in our community, not theirs!*

*It took a long time to negotiate even the consideration that they would bring the kids into the community to even do an access.*

Another area of significant development, which Aboriginal service providers have seen, is the opportunity to hold meetings in the First Nations, Inuit and Métis community environments and the allowance of family access visits to take place there as well. The evolution toward having access visits at Aboriginal community service organizations is less formal and recognized as being much more comfortable to many Aboriginal families. Staff indicate that in the past when visits occurred at the Telesat office, they would often be formal, supervised and were viewed as intimidating and judgmental to Aboriginal parents. Aboriginal staff tell us that, "visits that happened at the Telesat office often induce fear in mothers as soon as they walk in the door." Similarly, an Inuit service provider remarked that,

*Inuit tradition is an oral tradition and a lot of Inuit don't write things down as a natural way and so having a visit with their child and having somebody sitting in a corner writing everything they say and do was very intimidating for our parents.*

Access visits now take place in the community and Aboriginal service organizations try very hard to accommodate families who wish to have access visits take place in their respective organizations. The Aboriginal staff indicate that the move to allow this to happen took a long time to negotiate but it is a move that is seen as a huge step forward for CAS. The access visits and meetings that take place in the Aboriginal service organizations are considered to be a much more culturally safe and comfortable environment for Aboriginal families than having visits take place at the Telesat office. However Aboriginal staff believe there is still resistance from CAS staff about meetings held in the Aboriginal community.

### **3.06 Maintaining Ties in and to the Community**

*It is still very hard to hear that a child is a crown wardship. I think a lot of us have a hard time grasping that. In the Inuit culture, the children are precious. We have customary adoption where it is open, where you kind of share the child as a biological parent who is adopting that child out. Traditionally, children were very much protected by the adults ... so it is still very difficult to hear that a child has been taken again.*

As was noted elsewhere, the Aboriginal service providers and management expressed concern with the loss of Aboriginal

children to families outside of the Aboriginal community. Maintaining a child's connection to their families and communities was expressed as an important factor in the well-being of children who become involved with CAS. Aboriginal staff interviewed note that CAS is working to implement more kinship placements (formal and informal) and are becoming more receptive to the idea of open adoption practices but a lot more work is required to ensure that children who are adopted maintain connections with their families and communities of origin as the following two individuals opined,

*Yup, the whole adoption side of things has changed quite a bit for us also. Adoption in the Inuit community is an open thing. Most families that I know of, adoptive mothers know where their children are, and there's an open relationship. So that was one of the things that I struggled with from when we had children going in Crown ward and having them go into their forever families ... the struggle, we struggled with kids that go into adoptive families, they're losing ties to their communities and part of that is that whole bureaucracy of not requiring adoptive families to keep that connection open. I think now that the minds are different, not that they're legally able to say, "you have to keep your children in OICC." I think the way things are approached, we look more for families that are aligned with that same philosophy where the idea of having an open adoption, having the possibility that the birth families very well likely could be part of your family ... I think that's what changed. Whereas a lot of kids went to Crown ward and got adopted we never ever saw again. That's one area I know I would love to see a lot more improvement on, especially after hearing some of the work they do in BC around adoption. I know there is a lot of work that can be done there but it has been a big improvement. And I think it will with this whole 'let's change the way we do things.'*

*And,*

*I wish they [CAS] had some sort of provision where when kids are adopted by non-Inuit that they have to keep them involved in the community because we do have some cases where kids during the six month probation period and before the adoption they'll go "oh yah, definitely, oh this is great, I'd love to bring my kids here." But as soon as six month is done, they are gone. We don't see the kids anymore. And no matter how many times we call, or how many times we email the parents, they are just not coming. And I wish that CAS could say to them, "you have to." But they can't because they become the legal parents, CAS doesn't have a say. That would be my suggestion in a perfect world.*

### 3.07 The Circle of Care

The Circle of Care is cited by staff and management as being a one of the significant changes that has occurred since the relationship between CAS and the Aboriginal services was forged. It is seen as a positive event that gives everybody in the family a voice.

*The Circle of Care has been very positive because it gives everybody a voice, everybody has a voice. When a parent is really struggling with addiction and issues, then they all work together to come up with a plan and it's worked well in some cases but when a parent is still not ready to make those solid changes, then it falls apart again. But I believe it's a lot better than where things were a year ago, two years ago. It wasn't that long ago that we didn't have this. I'm very hopeful about the Circle of Care.*

There were various opinions expressed about the Circle of Care program by the Aboriginal staff we interviewed. Some feel that it is appropriate, more conducive and palatable to Aboriginal families because it put some control back in their hands by allowing them to choose who they would like to have in their circle and how they will resolve issues and concerns rather than have CAS control the outcomes. The narratives below highlight positive perspectives about the program from the perspectives of two Aboriginal staff interviewed,

*This initiative has proven successful in that our community has a "safe cultural space" where their voices can be heard, and they can receive supports from the Aboriginal organizations involved. ... It offers a resolution process in a traditional way. By using Aboriginal circles, clients are more comfortable and trust that their voices will be heard in a good way. They also know that the Aboriginal community will support them.*

Staff of the Aboriginal service organizations report that there have been some successes for Aboriginal families who have used the Circle to resolve their issues. Most expressed a satisfaction that such an option exists for Aboriginal families as this person alluded:

*I know if I was involved with CAS, I would much rather go through the Circle of Care route than go through court. That's how we explain it to our clients and that's why clients are "oh ok that makes more sense, let's do it that way." I can honestly say every single client I've have given the option of "do you want to go to court or do you want to*

*do a Circle of Care?" they've chosen the Circle of Care, simply because it is much more in line with, I think, personal values for people. I don't think it is so much about our culture but as a person, it is much easier to sit around a circle and negotiate together than have a judge make the decision for you. So that's how I explain it. "You can have a judge decide or you can decide" and that's a really simple way of putting it. I've never had a client say, "Well I'll let the judge decide." So I'm really happy with the Circle of Care.*

On the other hand, others note that Aboriginal families still feel vulnerable and scared to attend these circles because it is seen as something that is not chosen by them but rather as something that once again has been imposed on them by CAS. In other cases, staff note there are situations where a Circle of Care is not considered appropriate for some families. Aboriginal staff note that not all Aboriginal families follow the traditional path or know much about their culture or rely upon Elders or know about the different Aboriginal communities and services within Ottawa. It was said that very few First Nations, Inuit and Métis families have healthy family supports residing in Ottawa. In some cases the Circle of Care can bring out the dysfunction within the family making it unsafe process that family can rely upon when trying to resolve family issues. In those instances, support and attendance by Aboriginal community advocates and service providers is considered key to ensure that some balance is brought into the circle process when strong and healthy family ties are absent.

### **3.08 Cultural Sensitivity, Training and Education**

*We know our history very well but we don't know if they know our histories as well as we know it ... I don't know how you can train someone that's already gone to school for so many years. I always wonder why didn't they learn about that [Aboriginal/Canadian history and relations] in school? But I have to be patient with that!*

Aboriginal staff admit that many opportunities for cultural training and education have been extended to non-Aboriginal staff working for the Society and to foster and adoptive families. As a result, they have seen openness and respect for the teachings and knowledge. The cultural sensitive training, teachings and education provided by the Aboriginal service providers to staff employed at CAS has contributed significantly

to better relationships and communication between the two parties. Training and education has reduced the negative judgments by CAS staff. While CAS workers see value and worth in the training and education provided by the Aboriginal community the Aboriginal staff are quick to remind CAS that this knowledge does not make them “experts” on the lives of First Nations, Inuit and Métis families, communities and their agencies. On the other hand, some Aboriginal staff point out that no matter how much training is provided, some just don’t understand the purpose behind the training:

*I think that there are a lot of workers and supervisors that still just don't get it. And I don't think that it's because they don't – they just don't get it. Like they've done lots of training – it doesn't matter how much cultural training, how much work you do, some people just aren't going to get it, right? They're never gonna have the ability to look and see the impact that their community or their race has had on Aboriginal people without feeling guilty and without taking that on. And as long as they're taking that on, then it's really difficult to move on in a real and genuine way, I believe. So I think there could be a better understanding that we're not blaming them, we're just saying this is what happened and this is what needs to change.*

It was also noted by the Aboriginal staff that they are frustrated that they are still providing cultural sensitivity training even though the partnership is well over five years old now. In particular, staff indicate that it surprises them that staff within CAS still do not receive education on the true history of Canada. And furthermore, some Aboriginal staff are reluctant to continue providing training because they feel they are not adequately compensated for providing this training. It is seen as a cultural appropriation and extraction as this participant highlights:

*I don't want to be really negative because there are a lot of positive things. I would just say that one of the things that I would like to see is continual training in place for the workers as they come on because they change so quickly and they go onto different units. So I'd like to see training, and I'd like to see financial compensation for the time that is put into training. Because we'll do full morning trainings or full afternoon trainings and not be financially compensated in any way. And we'll send two or three staff because some of the exercises we do, the workers get really upset. Like they get crying, because they've never heard a lot of the stuff before, so they're crying. And we set them up as if – it's a psychodynamic type thing where some of the people are children, some of the people are the parents, some of the*

*people are the Indian Agents – and they all know each other, right? They're all friends. So then we take some of the children away, and we're taking families away and so we set up it like that so that they can really feel what it would be like. Not that that fully shows them but it gives them something tangible. So they're crying and they're upset, so we spend a lot of time on that and they don't – I don't know of anybody else who does training for that long for free. It's not really in our budget. We don't have trainers. We have counselors and we have children's workers and stuff, we don't get paid to do training it's just what we do because we feel that it's the responsible thing to do, right? But it's something that we're going to have to build into – see it's another example of how Aboriginal knowledge is given away. And when you give something away then it's, like it's, not as valuable or there's not any value to it. If they went to another place to get training you would be paying a trainer like \$1500 a day for a consultant to come in. And yet we'll go, they expect us to go in for free. Well our knowledge is just as valuable as the training! It's just as important but they'll pay \$1500 for somebody who's an expert and they'll expect us to do a training on the experience of the historical to current implications of residential school and they won't offer to pay anything for it? So I think that's something as Aboriginal organizations and as peoples we need to start charging for because yeah we are the experts and yeah this knowledge is valuable. So you need to pay for it, right? I mean I think we're past the point of just wanting to get the information out there to people. And now it's time, ok, well we've given enough away. Now you need to – if it's really important or worth anything to you – let's talk money.*

The Aboriginal staff we interviewed also specified that much more training and education must be extended to non-Aboriginal families that foster and adopt First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and youth.

#### **4.0 NARRATIVES OF SIGNIFICANT CHANGE**

We asked the Aboriginal service providers and management to identify which of the changes were the most significant change and why. The responses were varied.

- The fact that CAS is ensuring that staff are becoming more culturally aware was stated as a significant change. Having knowledge and information about First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and an understanding of the issues First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples have faced for generations is the key to this understanding.

Culture awareness and having an understanding about our people and the issues that our people have faced for generations. We have to keep raising that awareness with CAS workers.

- CAS is open to exploring creative solutions when working with First Nations, Inuit and Métis families. More Aboriginal children are staying with their families and adoption of some Aboriginal children is being done in a way that is open and inclusive.
- Relationship building not only with Aboriginal families who are engaged with CAS but relationship building with the staff employed within the Society. In particular staff note that they are getting the knowledge in advance that CAS has to meet with a family and now allow Aboriginal service providers to be a part of these meetings and discussions as a way of supporting Aboriginal families. Aboriginal families no longer feel alone when dealing with CAS and value the support they received from the Aboriginal service providers.
- Others note that fact there is now an Aboriginal liaison worker from the Aboriginal community working within CAS at the Telesat office is the most significant of the changes implemented.
- The West Pod and Francophone 1 team which was created by CAS to deal specifically with First Nations, Inuit and Métis families was also identified as a change of significance because it helps streamline services to the First Nations, Inuit and Métis population and reduces the number of CAS staff that Aboriginal service agencies must deal with.
- Others indicate that acknowledgement of past wrongs and mistakes coupled with getting a genuine apology is really the most significant change as it is the one major event that spearheaded systemic change

## **5.0 IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES AND AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT**

The Aboriginal service providers interviewed for this evaluation were asked to reflect on some of the challenges and areas needing improvement. One of the biggest challenges noted by some of the Aboriginal service staff is the fear that when the Aboriginal organizations starting planning, talking and participating in the Liaison Committee meetings and working

with CAS that the Aboriginal community might think they are siding with the Society as the following quote implies:

*I think we try to inform the women—I mean when we first started sitting on the committee there was a 50/50 chance that they [the women] would think we were not on their side anymore, that we were working with CAS. You have to be real careful when you tell them that ‘I sit on this committee because I want to change the way that things are going. And that if I call CAS and I have personal numbers, it’s not because we’re friends, it’s because I’ll get something done quicker.’ Because there is still a huge mistrust in our communities with CAS. So we really, really have to be careful on how that works because—like I won’t go to dinner with any of them because, not that I don’t think they are good—some of them are really good people but I won’t risk my clients seeing me or not trusting me. And I need the trust and I’d rather have the trust of our women.*

This presents as kind of double-edged sword for Aboriginal service providers and their management because they need to have the trust of CAS but they also need to maintain the trust of the Aboriginal people they advocate for. Throughout our interviews, Aboriginal participants were adamant that having the trust of the Aboriginal population is paramount to the partnerships they have developed with the Society.

The following suggestions for improvement identified by the Aboriginal participants include:

- More effort needs to be put into recruiting foster and adoptive homes from the First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. In particular, it was noted that the paperwork needs to be minimized and somehow streamlined to be more supportive of and accommodate First Nations, Inuit and Métis families that may be interested in fostering or adopting. Make the process less intimidating for Aboriginal families.
- The time clock and the time frames within the CFS legislation need to be amended.
- Consideration should be given to the idea of developing a family healing center where entire First Nations, Inuit and Métis families can attend. Because of the history with residential schools and then losing children to the Society, there are layers upon layers of unresolved issues within the families. More healing opportunities need to be extended to parents so that they can move on.

- Foster parents who adopt Aboriginal children should be required to maintain Aboriginal children's connections to their community and culture of origin.
- Ensure that foster parents are aware of the community events that are happening in the First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities of Ottawa. So it means making foster parents aware of Pow Wows, if there are regalia to make for the children, and simply making sure that families that have Aboriginal children are ensuring that the children and youth in their care are maintaining connections to their cultures and their communities of origin.
- The Liaison Committee and Aboriginal liaison coordinator need to report back to the larger Aboriginal community about what is currently happening, what has changed and what hasn't, and highlight some of the failures and successes related to the various changes that have been implemented in developing the partnership with the First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities and their service organizations.
- CAS needs to identify the number of First Nations, Inuit and Métis families that are involved with CAS. Aboriginal service providers state that it is important to know exactly how many children and youth are being apprehended, in care and/or adopted. The statistics coming from CAS do not appear to be accurate or helpful. Aboriginal service providers know there are a lot more Aboriginal children youth and family engaged in CAS than what is being reported (there appears to be high numbers reported for the Inuit population but the statistics appear to be extremely low for the First Nations and Métis populations). As one worker noted, "I always tell them to identify who they are and declare their nation because they are only starting that now."
- CAS needs to implement a way in which Aboriginal families can self identify as being Aboriginal should they become involved with CAS as a way of improving their statistics about the First Nations, Inuit and Métis clientele served. Families can then be directed to the appropriate First Nations, Inuit and Métis resources that exist in the community who will help them advocate for their needs.
- More Aboriginal liaison positions need to be hired and established inside of CAS or housed across the Aboriginal community organizations.
- The Aboriginal liaison position needs to be evaluated for effectiveness and how she is fulfilling her role within

- CAS. There needs to be feedback to the Aboriginal community organizations about how effective and far reaching this position has been for the First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities.
- Aboriginal service providers and Aboriginal parents need to learn more about CAS, the legislation and processes.
  - The Circles of Care program need to hire and include more Aboriginal facilitators.
  - Aboriginal staff identified the need to evaluate the Circle of Care program separately from the partnership. They expressed curiosity around statistics such as how many have taken place, which Aboriginal community organizations are participating and they want to know more about outcomes and what factors contribute to success and/or failure.
  - CASO should consider and explore the idea of housing CAS staff to work from the offices of Aboriginal service organizations.
  - It was suggested that CAS should send letters to Aboriginal families and their service organizations advising when they have closed a family's file. The letters need to come out quicker.
  - Aboriginal service providers suggest that CAS should advise them of Aboriginal children and youth who have been apprehended in other provincial jurisdictions and transferred to residential and group home facilities in Ottawa.
  - CAS sensitivity training needs to be improved and it needs to be continuous to match the turnover of staff within the CASO agency.
  - Aboriginal training and education for foster and adoptive parent also needs to be improved.
  - Aboriginal service organizations need financial compensation for providing training to CAS staff. Aboriginal agencies should not be expected to provide training and education for free. Aboriginal knowledge needs to be recognized and respected.
  - Ensure that the voices of First Nations, Inuit and Métis families are included in future evaluations.
  - CAS and the Aboriginal service providers need to consider long-term planning strategies for the future for the partnership and for the Aboriginal liaison position. "What are the next steps? Where do we go from here? We need a 10-15 year strategic plan to guide us into the future."

Exemplifying the Sacredness of Relationality:  
**AN EVALUATION OF THE PARTNERSHIP**  
Between the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Service  
Providers and the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa  
Qualitative Narratives of Significant Change

Chapter

# 4

## LESSONS LEARNED AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

*Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.*

*Helen Keller*

**T**he findings from this evaluation reflected upon four objectives that were identified at the beginning of this report. They are summarized as follows:

**1. Render a preliminary evaluation on the effectiveness of partnership initiatives, activities and/or outcomes.**

Both CASO and the Aboriginal service providers report a general satisfaction with the way the relationship has been built and staff from both parties appear pleased with the changes that developed. The activities implemented thus far are viewed by the Aboriginal service providers as working to benefit First Nations, Inuit and Métis families. In addition parties on both sides of this partnership believe that the work undertaken through the partnership should continue. The comments and

narratives made throughout this report by the two parties to this partnership reflect this perspective.

The primary element that emerged from conducting this evaluation was the importance and sacredness of the friendships and relationships that have emerged thus far. Developing and maintaining relationships is the heart of all partnerships. The spaces between people, or “relationships” as they are more commonly known as, are important because the strength of the relationship establishes strong bonds between people, which can be used to help uplift others and bring them into the center of the circle. As Shawn Wilson (2008) recognized, “rather than viewing ourselves as being *in* relationship with other people or things, we *are* the relationships we hold and are part of” (p. 80). By reducing the space between Aboriginal people and the work that CASO and the First Nation, Inuit and Métis service organizations are required to provide, the relationship that is shared between them is strengthened. Relationship building is important in the everyday lives of Aboriginal peoples<sup>19</sup> just as it is to the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social service agencies that work everyday to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, youth and families in Ottawa.

The First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers along with the CASO staff shared narratives of significant change. The stories identified and incorporated into this report are in keeping with the narrative approach in understanding the beneficial impacts that have accrued to the Aboriginal community because of the significant relationships that exist between the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers and CASO. The strength of these relationships is an important component of this partnership because it has helped to overcome some of the distrust that is often evident when First Nations, Inuit and Métis people become involved with child welfare systems. The evidence of relationship building between CASO and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service

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<sup>19</sup> In an Indigenous context relationships are sacred (Wilson, 2008) and hence the reason this report has been titled as such as it essentially reflects on the sacredness of relationality. Maintaining the sacredness of any relationship is important for its continued success. Wilson notes that through maintaining accountability to the relationships that have been built, an increased sense of sharing common interests can be established. It is important to honour these relationships and the strength and learning they have brought to the partnership.

providers is probably the most significant outcome of the partnership. Interview participants seemed to indicate that while the community might not observe/notice changes in CASO conduct, the service providers do – and that sense of trust/relationship is often the biggest factor in creating better outcomes for families because CASO is now willing to listen to the Aboriginal service providers and do things differently. Relationships build upon a different context in which new relationships can form.

Reconciliation is not an event but a movement. From what can be seen from the findings of this evaluation, this partnership has opened the door to reconciliation and participants appear to be on board with continuing to form stronger relationships with one another. Further, even though there may be challenges along the way, reconciliation is also about learning – about ourselves and one another – and being respectful in doing so. At the end of the day, reconciliation is really about the children and it is satisfying to know that this partnership was formed with that purpose in mind.

## **2. Reflect on the partnership between CASO and Inuit, Métis and First Nations service providers and identify ways to build on and strengthen this relationship.**

The partnership between CASO and the Aboriginal service providers is unique in that no Aboriginal specific child welfare service agencies exists within the City of Ottawa to service Aboriginal families compared to what exists in other provincial jurisdictions (i.e. Manitoba, Saskatchewan). Through the use of the *Touchstones of Hope's* guiding principles, CASO and the Aboriginal services providers of Ottawa have promoted the idea of reconciliation through the building of positive relations at the local level to better service Aboriginal children and families living in Ottawa.

In order to understand the effectiveness of the changes that have been implemented to date, the parties to this partnership need to celebrate the successes that have resulted since this partnership was created. What greater way is there to honour the sacredness of the relationship than to host a one or two day conference to highlight the successes (and perhaps

challenges) in creating this partnership? Staff involved with CASO in particular, commented about wanting to attend conferences where there are opportunities to learn from other organizations who work with and on behalf of Aboriginal families residing in other urban environments. CASO has created a unique reconciliation approach to partnering and working with the urban Aboriginal population in Ottawa and therefore can share ideas and best practices about how the development of their partnerships with the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers was reconciliatory in process. This conference should build upon how the community consultations spearheaded change as well as highlight the work of the designated team and the creation of the Circle of Care Program. Other potential areas of growth might include discussions on developing one or all of the following:

- Develop a joint bi-annual newsletter highlighting activities, events, stories, successes, etc. about the work of the partnership;
- Develop a website highlighting the goals of the partnership and highlight the work done to date;
- Develop videos explaining the partnership, the work that has been done collaboratively for the Aboriginal community and some of the gains made to date;
- Develop a yearly award in recognition of CASO staff, Aboriginal service providers, community members and other collaterals whose service record exemplifies the essence of the partnership.
- Publish an article in an evaluation journal on the successes and the sacredness of developing partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service organizations.

### **3. Facilitate discussions on improvements or adjustments to the partnership activities, initiatives and/or outcomes.**

Each of the parties to this partnership identified numerous areas needing improvement. There were five common suggested areas of improvement identified by the staff of CASO and the Aboriginal service providers. They were not necessarily worded the same by all the participants but generally the common areas requiring further improvement were identified as:

- Hiring more Aboriginal staff representatives from the First Nations, Inuit and Métis populations to work in liaison positions housed either at CASO or within Aboriginal service agencies;
- Solidify strategies for collecting and reporting on the statistics regarding the Aboriginal families serviced by all departments, not just within the designated teams;
- Consider developing long-term strategies which plans for the future of the partnership, the Aboriginal liaison position(s) and the Circle of Care program;
- Ensure that the Circle of Care program is evaluated for effectiveness;
- Ensure that the voices of Aboriginal families are included in future evaluations;

Additionally, the following recommendation should also be noted:

- Strengthen relationships with the Métis families and community service organizations that may exist within Ottawa.

#### **4. Promote learning from the changes implemented by CASO and identify implications for future development in the agency's work and relationship with the Aboriginal community in Ottawa.**

##### **Key Elements of Good Partnerships**

Today there is simply no way that goals can be accomplished in building healthy, vibrant communities without having strong partnerships and working together to encourage positive changes. No matter how one looks at things, partnerships are critical and the relationships that are forged in the process of building partnerships, are sacred. We learned that the following key elements exist from reviewing the narrative findings evident throughout this report. These key elements are important to the ongoing maintenance of the partnership between CASO and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners of Ottawa:

- Maintain honesty and trust
- Ensure ongoing and open communication
- Listening leads to understanding
- Be flexible

- Promote team work and collaboration
- Share resources
- Accept that change is part of growth
- Know when to compromise
- Grow the partnership (this requires ongoing revision and renewal)

Continued application of these elements will ensure that the relationship between CASO and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities along with their respective service providers can and will become stronger as they learn to “walk together in a good way” over time.

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**APPENDICES**

Appendix A = Original Framework (without appendices)

Appendix B = Interview Schedule

Appendix C = Consent Form

Appendix D = Data Management Tracking Form

# **REVISED EVALUATION FRAMEWORK, WORKPLAN AND RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS for the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa**

## **INTRODUCTION / UNDERSTANDING THE SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION**

*In order to provide services in a manner that recognizes their culture, heritage and traditions, and their concept of extended family, non-Aboriginal child welfare service providers have to learn about and understand those things. In order to learn about and understand those things, we will need to listen to those in the know.*

(Engelking, 2009, p. 4)

The Aboriginal service organizations in Ottawa recognized the need for reconciliation in child welfare for the Aboriginal children, families and communities they work and engage with. The Aboriginal service organizations subsequently approached Ottawa Children's Aid Society (CASO) to begin a dialogue on implementing changes in the way they work with Aboriginal populations. As part of this dialogue, an ongoing process of truth telling, acknowledging, restoring and relating (Blackstock, Cross, George, Brown, & Formsma, 2006), was undertaken by CASO to strengthen its relationship with urban Inuit, Métis and First Nations community members, and to improve linkages with Inuit, Métis and First Nation service providers. This work is guided by the Touchstones of Hope principles for reconciliation in child welfare (Blackstock, et al.). Developed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders in child welfare, the Touchstones of Hope principles embody a community-based philosophy to re-visioning child welfare practice for Aboriginal children and families.

In the winter of 2007, CASO hosted two community consultation sessions—one with service providers and one with community members—inviting a “full and truthful accounting” (Blackstock, et al., 2006) of child welfare practice as it is experienced by Aboriginal families in Ottawa. Challenged with “anger” and “palatable pain” (Engelking, 2009) the consultations created space for CASO to acknowledge these truths and begin the work of restoring relationships and relating in a new way to the Aboriginal families residing in Ottawa.

The consultations in 2007 resulted in two committees—an internal Forum of CASO staff (members responsible for learning about the histories, practices and cultures of Aboriginal peoples and sharing this knowledge with fellow employees) and a Liaison Group (comprised of representatives from CASO and First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providing organizations). The Liaison Group consists of the following community partners:

- Makonsag Head Start
- Minwaashin Lodge - Aboriginal Women's Support Centre
- Odawa Native Friendship Centre
- Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre
- Tewegan
- Tungasuvvingat Inuit
- Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health
- Children's Aid Society of Ottawa

CASO has since undertaken a variety of actions to change how the agency and its staff work with Aboriginal families, most notably, the implementation of an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) program called Circle of Care. The development and implementation of the Circle of Care Initiative was (and continues to be) guided by the Liaison Group, and is derived from traditional practices.

The scope of the evaluation is based on the activities and relationships that evolved from the community consultations. Specifically, this evaluation will encompass:

1. A review of the partnership between CASO and Inuit, Métis and First Nations service providers.
2. Whether the actions taken by CASO are meeting the expectations of community partners.
3. Isolating and understanding of the impact of these actions on the community, from the perspective of CASO and its community partners.

## PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The findings from this evaluation will serve to satisfy a number of objectives:

1. Reflect on the partnership between CASO and Inuit, Métis and First Nations service providers and identify ways to build on and strengthen this relationship.
2. Engage with those who work with families (CASO clients) to render a preliminary evaluation on the effectiveness of the Liaison Committee's ADR/Circle of Care initiative.
3. Facilitate discussions on improvements or adjustments to the Liaison Committee's ADR/Circle of Care initiative and its outcomes.
4. Promote learning from the changes implemented by CASO and identify implications for future development in the agency's work and relationship with the Aboriginal community in Ottawa.

## RESEARCH EVALUATION TEAM

Acknowledging that reconciliation is both an ongoing and intergenerational process, CASO has asked the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society (the Caring Society) to facilitate an evaluation of the agency's work to date. The following individuals are responsible for carrying out evaluation activities on behalf of the Caring Society:

Marlyn Bennett (Director of Research / Coordinating Editor) – Lead Evaluator  
Jennifer King (MSW student) – Research Assistant  
(NOTE: Jennifer's involvement with this project will end in August 2011)

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for this evaluation is based on a *modification* of the "Most Significant Change" or MSC technique<sup>1</sup>. The MSC technique is considered both a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation. It is *participatory* because stakeholders are involved in deciding the sorts of change to be recorded and in analyzing the data. It is a form of *monitoring* because it occurs throughout the pilot/program cycle and provides information to help people manage the pilot/program. It contributes to *evaluation* because it provides data on impact and outcomes that can be used to help assess the performance of the pilot/program as a whole.

The MSC methodology was chosen for several reasons:

- To use qualitative methods rather than quantitative
- To use a method which would elicit impacts which the agency may not have anticipated
- To use a method which would be appropriate and respectful of Indigenous oral cultures
- To utilize stories in understanding the impact of change. The advantage of stories is that people tell them naturally (indigenously). In addition, stories:
  - Can also deal with complexity and content and can carry hard messages that people remember;

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<sup>1</sup> **What is the Most Significant Change (MSC) Technique?** The MSC process systematically analyzes stories to focus on impacts. Essentially,

... the process involves the collection of significant change (SC) stories emanating from the field level, and the systematic selection of the most significant of these stories by panels of designated stakeholders or staff. The designated staff and stakeholders are initially involved by 'searing' for project impact. Once changes have been captured, various people sit down together, read the stories aloud and have regular and often in-depth discussions about the value of these reported changes. When the technique is implemented successfully, whole teams of people begin to focus their attention on program impact (Davies & Dart, 2005, p.8).

MSC involves the collection and systematic participatory interpretation of stories of significant change from the field – stories about who did what, when, and why, and the reasons why the event was important. It does not employ quantitative indicators. In a nutshell, MSC is a story-based, qualitative and participatory approach to monitoring and evaluation.

- Provide an early understanding as to whether the changes and expected outcomes envisioned by CASO are being achieved (or not);
- Provide stakeholders an opportunity to be involved in deciding the changes to be recorded
- To encourage dialogue on the actions taken by CASO to restore relationships with Inuit, Métis and First Nations service providers and community members
- To understand the impact of the Liaison Committee's ADR/Circle in Care initiative

### MSC Process

Central to the MSC technique is the collection and systematic selection of reported changes by means of purposive sampling with a bias in favor of success. The MSC approach is not about identifying the 'average experience.' Rather, it is about highlighting the work of the agency at its best. The focus is on "exceptional circumstances, particularly successful circumstances" (Davies & Dart, 2005, p. 69). As explained by Davies and Dart, "identifying what the program can achieve when it is at its best should help move the program towards achieving more of these positive outcomes" (2005, p. 70). The MSC approach encourages inspiration, possibility, vision and hope by emphasizing what has been achieved while also creating space to discuss challenges and the work yet to be done.

The MSC process seeks to make visible change as it is experienced by those most directly involved. The evaluation will elicit anecdotes from agency staff and Aboriginal community partners and service providers focusing the most significant changes occurring from CASO partnerships and the ADR/Circle of Care initiative. The process asks storytellers to consider why they think the change occurred and why it is important. These stories are then passed to a review committee which selects the most significant stories—narratives that describe real experiences, reviewed, defended, and selected by people charged with the success of the project or program. This selection process involves a discussion as to why these stories are selected—what is it that makes these stories so significant?

As noted above, stories are collected from those most directly involved, such as CASO staff and the Aboriginal service providers who work collaboratively with CASO and their families. The stories are collected by asking a number of simple questions<sup>2</sup>, such as:

*"Looking back over the past three months, in your opinion, what do you think was the most significant change that took place as a result the Liaison Committee's Circle of Care Program?"*

To collect a few more details for the story, follow-up questions can be asked such as:

- *What happened, who was involved, where did it happen, when did it happen?*
- *Why is the change the most significant out of all the changes that took place in the [time period]?*
- *What difference did it make already, or will it make in the future for you, for your community?*

There are usually ten steps to carrying out the MSC technique<sup>3</sup>. As time is of the essence and for the purposes of this evaluation, the process will involve only on those steps considered core or fundamental to the MSC technique. These include:

1. Defining the reporting period.
2. Collecting Significant Change (SC) stories via narrative interviews.
3. Selecting the most significant of the stories.

The MSC technique has different strengths and weaknesses to conventional methods of program evaluation. It should be noted that MSC technique is **NOT** a standalone technique and should be combined with other processes to meet full evaluation requirements. As such, the evaluation framework goes beyond an open-ended discussion of change to explore the evolving partnership between CASO and Inuit, Métis and First

<sup>2</sup> These are example questions only. See Appendices C and D for more specific questions developed for the different target stakeholders (participants) to be interviewed for this evaluation.

<sup>3</sup> (1) Raising interest at the start; (2) Defining the domains of change; (3) Defining the reporting period (data collection period); (4) Collecting Significant Change (SC) stories; (5) Selecting the most significant of the stories; (6) Feeding back the results of the selection process; (7) Verifying the stories; (8) Quantification of data and other related data; (9) Secondary analysis and meta-monitoring; (10) Revising the system.

Nations service providers, expectations and broader themes of reconciliation (as defined by the Touchstones of Hope process).

## **SELECTED TECHNIQUES FOR GATHERING DATA**

The techniques for gathering data will be conducted over two phases. Phase 1 will see the collection of narrative interviews conducted with 25 individuals from targeted stakeholder groups. Phase 2 will involve the participation of CASO staff and Aboriginal community partners in reviewing the stories emerging from the narrative interviews and choosing those which exemplify the changes that CASO has sought to implement through new ways of relating with the Aboriginal community, and particularly through the ADR/Circle of Change program. The details of the two data gathering phases are outlined below.

### **Phase 1: Collecting Narrative Interviews**

Narrative interviews will be used to explore issues, experiences and perceptions as to what changes have occurred (or not) as a result of CASO's partnerships and the Liaison Committee's ADR/Circle of Care Initiative. Twenty-five narrative interviews will be held with the following targeted stakeholders:

1. CASO staff – designated teams that work with Inuit, Métis and FN families and members involved in CASO's internal Forum (up to 13 interviews)
2. Aboriginal community partners (Liaison Group members) and service providers (up to 12 interviews)

The narrative interviews with CASO staff and the Aboriginal community partners and service providers will take place as soon as is mutually agreed upon. CASO will take the lead in identifying all persons who will participate in these interviews.<sup>4</sup>

The stories gathered from these interviews will be transcribed into a one-page synopsis for each story. A committee will assist the Research Team in reviewing the narratives for identifying the most significant change stories.

### **Phase 2: Selecting Significant Stories of Change**

A committee comprised of members of the Liaison Committee, CASO staff, and the Research Team will meet to review the stories emerging from the interviews. This committee (comprised of no more than 7-9 people, but flexible) will be tasked with deliberating on the most significant change stories emerging from the interviews and articulating the reasons for their choices. It is important to emphasize that the selection process is about more than simply choosing the 'best' stories. The MSC approach looks beyond activities or outputs to explore the meaning and significance of change. In this context, evaluation is not just about *what* is happening, but rather *why* these changes are important. Special attention is given to why the review committee is drawn to certain accounts, creating space to revisit (and in some cases adjust) the goals pursued by the agency.

The committee will meet to review the stories and choose 2-3 that exemplifies the most significant changes. The time associated with reviewing all 25 narratives is approximately four to six hours—this could involve two separate meetings, or one longer session. The Research Team will be responsible for preparing the material for this activity and facilitating the discussion. The date and location is yet to be determined. CASO will arrange for the location to hold this meeting session.

See the attached Workplan (Appendix A) for more details regarding activities and timelines associated with the phases outlined above.

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<sup>4</sup> Narrative interviews with the families were originally identified as a target stakeholder however it was decided that CASO should undertake to conduct interviews with families separately or after a university-based ethical review has been conducted. An ethics proposal should be prepared and submitted to Carleton University. Vetting an ethics proposal through the university ensures that the family interviews undertaken by CASO respect the understanding that there may be liability in undertaking research with vulnerable populations.

## RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The Research Team will develop the following research instruments to support the data collection activities required for phase 1 under this methodology:

### **Set 1:**

1. Simple consent form (for CASO staff and Aboriginal community partners and service providers) – Appendix B.
2. Questions for CASO staff (designated teams that work with Inuit, Métis and First Nation families and members involved in the agency's internal Forum group). Questions will be geared to process, outcomes/identified changes and other emerging issues – Appendix C.
3. Questions for Aboriginal community partners and service providers. Questions will be geared to process, outcomes/identified changes and other emerging issues – Appendix D.

Additional documents that need to be developed to assist the Research Team (and CASO staff and Liaison Committee) in carrying out the activities slated for Phases 2 include:

### **Set 2:**

1. Terms of Reference for the members of the review committee who will participate in choosing the MSC stories – (to be developed after interviews have been conducted).
2. A group process for determining MSC stories and debriefing sessions for choosing the MSC stories. This will include a PowerPoint presentation outlining the different ways the group can choose MSC stories. The criteria for selecting MSC stories can be either: (a) majority rules; (b) iterative voting; (c) scoring; (d) pre-scoring and then a group vote; (e) secret ballot; and/or (f) group – (to be developed after interviews have been conducted).

## INFORMED CONSENT AND PRIVACY

All stakeholders involved in evaluation activities will be engaged in an informed consent process before participating in the evaluation. Target stakeholders (also identified as participants) will be informed that their participation is voluntary. Where appropriate, target stakeholders will also be assured that anonymity will be maintained. Answers provided to questions will not be associated with participants' names in any evaluation reports that are written. The responses that are provided will only be reported in aggregate, and although individual responses from various stories may be used as quotations, participants will not be personally identified. All raw data associated with the evaluation will be stored in locked filing systems (in both the Ottawa and Winnipeg locations) to ensure confidentiality of all participants.

## LIMITATIONS

The following perceived limitations were observed:

- Budget for all evaluation activities is limited to \$25,000 and as such required the need to modify the MSC technique to fit the budget and timeframe in which the Research Team has to collect data.
- Distance of the lead evaluator from the location of the data collection. However this is offset by the involvement of a Caring Society student placement from the Ottawa area that will be involved in assisting with collecting and transcribing some of the data (this individual's role in the evaluation project will end in August 2011).
- Due to ethical considerations, the evaluation does not encompass the perspective of families (clients) that have or are currently receiving services from CASO. While participants will be asked to reflect on their observation/understanding of families' experiences with CASO and the ADR/Circle of Care initiative, these voices cannot be assumed to speak *for* families or to know the truth of how families experience these systems. The absence of family voices is recognized as limiting the scope of the evaluation.
- As with many initiatives, this evaluation framework strives to collect enough useful data, while respecting that organizations have limited time and financial resources available to engage in evaluation activities. Much of the data collection will rely on voluntary participation of stakeholders (CASO staff and community partners). At times this can result in an incomplete review of all stakeholders' perspectives, as segments of various populations and organizations can be missed.

Furthermore, such evaluation often relies on the same stakeholders offering feedback on multiple issues. As much as is possible, the evaluation strives to minimize burden on stakeholders, limiting requests for them to respond to multiple data collection instruments.

## COST BREAKDOWN

PROJECT MILESTONE	NUMBER OF DAYS	RATE PER DAY	TOTAL	BALANCE DUE (INCLUDES HST)
<b>Conceptual framework and research tools (Invoice # 2011-5)</b>				
i. Conceptual Framework Development	10	\$650	\$6,500	\$7,345
ii. Framework Development				
iii. Workplan				
iv. Tool Development				
<b>Data Collection</b>				
i. Interviews	11	\$650	\$7150	\$8079.50
ii. Transcription of narratives				
<b>Preliminary Report</b>				
i. Preparation of stories and analysis of narratives	9.5	\$650	\$6175	\$6977.75
ii. Preliminary report writing				
<b>Final Report</b>				
i. Meeting to select stories and receive feedback	8	\$650	\$5,200	\$5876
iii. Final report				
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$38.5</b>	<b>—</b>	<b>\$25,025</b>	<b>\$28,278.25</b>

## TIMELINES

(These are estimates only)

Conceptual Framework Development (3 days):

January 2011 (completed)

Framework Development (3 days):

May 2011 (completed)

Workplan (2 days):

May 2011 (completed)

Tool Development (2 days):

May/June 2011 (completed)

Interviews (5 days):

July/August 2011

Transcription of narratives (6 days):

August 2011

Preparation of stories and analysis of narratives (4.5 days):

August/September 2011

Preliminary Report Writing (5 days):

September 2011

Meeting to select stories and receive feedback (1 day):

September/October 2011

Final Report (7 days):

October/November 2011

**TOTAL DAYS: 38.5 (-/+ days)**

## REFERENCES

Blackstock, C., Cross, T., George, J., Brown, I. & Formsma, J. (2006). Reconciliation in child welfare: Touchstones of hope for Indigenous children, youth, and families.

Davies R. & Dart, J. (2005). The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) technique: A guide to its use.

Engelking, T. (2009). Reconciliation in child welfare: Relations between non-Aboriginal child welfare agencies and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

## APPENDIX A – EVALUATION WORKPLAN for the Children’s Aid Society of Ottawa

Prepared by the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada (FNCFCS) – June 2011

CASO = Children’s Aid Society of Ottawa RT = Research Team (comprised of Marlyn Bennett and Jennifer King - NOTE: Jennifer’s placement with the Caring Society expires in late August 2011)

IDENTIFIED ACTIVITIES		RESPONSIBILITY	ESTIMATED TIMELINES	EXPECTED DELIVERABLES	COMMENTS
<b>INITIALIZATION OF FRAMEWORK, WORKPLAN, TIMELINES AND RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS and ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS</b>					
1.	Develop a conceptual framework of evaluation approach for CASO	Marlyn Bennett (Director of Research)	28 January 2011	Conceptual Overview	Conceptual diagram shared with CASO staff for feedback. Methodology – Most Significant Change (MSC) technique. <b>COMPLETED</b>
2.	Preparation of draft evaluation framework	Marlyn Bennett and Jennifer King (Research Team = RT)	18 May 2011	Framework outlining the approach to evaluation	Draft Evaluation Framework (outlines scope of the evaluation, Research Team, methodology, target participants, techniques for gathering data, research instruments, informed consent and privacy, limitations, timelines and references) incorporating touchstones. Methodology will focus on a modified approach to the MSC technique. <b>COMPLETED</b>
3.	Workplan with timelines	RT	24 May 2011	Workplan with timelines	The workplan identifies activities, responsibility for activity, estimated timelines, identification of deliverables and any corresponding comments associated with the activities. <b>COMPLETED</b>
4.	Research Instruments	RT	24 May 2011	Research tools (Set 1)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Simple consent form.</li> <li>2. Questions drafted for CASO staff (designated teams that work with Inuit, Métis and FN families and member(s) involved in the agency’s Forum).</li> <li>3. Questions drafted for Aboriginal community partners (members of the Liaison Group) and service providers.</li> </ol> <b>COMPLETED</b>
5.	Feedback on draft framework and workplan	RT and CASO staff (Yvonne, Barbara, Tracy, Elaine and	July 2011	Feedback and Finalized Documents	Teleconference to discuss the framework and workplan. Revisions and/or additions made to the framework,

		possibly others)			workplan and timelines where needed. Date to initiate research activities agreed upon. <b>REVISED VERSIONS FORWARDED TO CASO ON JUNE 8, 2011</b>
6.	Sign contract to initiate research activities	Cindy Blackstock	31 July 2011	Contract signed	The Contract between CASO is to be signed by the Executive Director of the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society (Caring Society). The Executive Director is the only one with the power to bind the Caring Society in research activities. A date to begin research activities mutually agreed upon.
7.	Attend meetings / teleconferences	RT and CASO staff	Ongoing dates from May to October 2011	Minutes of Discussion and other Administrative matters	A number of teleconferences have been held to date. A record and/or minutes of discussions to be prepared and shared between CASO and Research Team (RT). Agreement on calendar of upcoming meeting dates and teleconferences (Purpose: RT to provide updates on research activities/issues related to each of the data collection phases). <b>ONGOING</b>
<b>PHASE 1: COLLECTING NARRATIVE INTERVIEWS</b>					
8.	In collaboration with the Liaison Group, CASO to identify CASO staff and Aboriginal community partners and Service Providers who will participate in narrative interviews for this evaluation	CASO staff	July/August 2011	Contact list	List of names, dates and identification of locations where interviews will take place. CASO to share its process for identifying who will participate. <b>COMPLETED</b>
9.	Collected significant change stories from CASO staff	RT	July/August 2011	One-on-one narrative interviews conducted with CASO staff	Up to 13 narrative stories in total collected from designated teams that work with Inuit, Métis and/or First Nations families AND members involved in CASO's Forum (those responsible for learning about the histories, practices and cultures of Aboriginal peoples). CASO will identify and contact the staff to participate in these interviews. CASO will also arrange the location where interviews will take place. <b>COMPLETED</b>
10.	Collect significant change stories from Aboriginal community	RT	July/August 2011	One-on-one narrative interviews conducted with Aboriginal community	Up to 12 narrative stories collected from Aboriginal community partners (Liaison Group) and service providers. Participants to be determined in collaboration

	partners and service providers			partners (Liaison Group) and service providers	with the Liaison Group. Interviews to be arranged by CASO and will take place at the location of the Aboriginal community partners. <b>COMPLETED</b>
11.	Transcribe and code interviews with CASO staff, and Aboriginal partners/service providers	RT	August 2011	Transcripts of all interviews	Transcripts of all 25 narrative interviews. All transcripts also coded for emerging themes. Transcripts to be shared and verified by those interviewed. <b>COMPLETED</b>
12.	Preparation of stories (1 page each) for meeting with MSC Review Committee	RT	August/September 2011	Synopsis of Stories	Stories should be 1 page in length. The transcription of the stories will also capture the following information: Name of person recording story, stakeholder group, date of recording, and location, and any other pertinent information. <b>REMOVED FROM LIST OF TASKS</b>
13.	UPDATE TO CASO	RT	End of August 2011	Update	Update provided on status of Phase I activities and issues (Workplan updated). <b>COMPLETED</b>
<b>PHASE 2: SELECTING SIGNIFICANT STORIES OF CHANGE</b>					
14.	Terms of Reference for MSC Review Committee	Marlyn and CASO staff	September 2011	Terms of Reference (Research Instruments - Set 2)	Terms of reference will identify the composition of, purpose, focus and objectives, procedures and process for choosing stories that exemplify MSC. <b>REMOVED FROM LIST OF TASKS</b>
15.	Identification of individuals to participate on the MSC Review Committee	CASO staff	September 2011	Identification of individuals participating in the review of MSC stories	This committee should be comprised of no more than 7-9 people. Suggested composition: the Research Team (Marlyn), CASO staff and one to three members of the Aboriginal community partners (however composition is flexible). <b>REMOVED FROM LIST OF TASKS</b>
16.	Process for determining MSC stories	Marlyn	September 2011	PowerPoint (Research Instruments – Set 2)	The PowerPoint will outline methods for choosing the best MSC stories. <b>REMOVED FROM LIST OF TASKS</b>
17.	Meeting, agenda, date, and location to review MSC stories that emerged from the narrative interviews	Marlyn and CASO staff	September/October 2011	Meeting date, agenda, and location of meeting agree upon	The MSC Review Committee will mutually agree upon the stories that best exemplify the change and impact of CASO's work and partnerships. Discussion as to why these stories are selected--what values and objectives do they embody? Meeting date and location yet to be identified. CASO will arrange for the location of this meeting. <b>REMOVED FROM LIST OF TASKS</b>
18.	UPDATE TO CASO	Marlyn	September 2011	Update	Update provided on status of Phase 2 activities and issues (Workplan updated). <b>REMOVED FROM LIST OF TASKS</b>
<b>WRITING DRAFT, FINAL REPORTS AND WRAP UP</b>					

19.	Draft Report	Marlyn	<del>October 2011</del> January 2012	Draft Report	Draft report shared with CASO and Aboriginal community partners for feedback. <b>COMPLETED</b>
20.	Final Report	Marlyn	<del>October/November 2011</del> February 2012	Final Report	Incorporate feedback and develop final report. <b>COMPLETED</b>
21.	Professional design and layout final report	Marlyn	February 2012	PDF for web and print	PDF of the final report professional laid out for web and printing purposes. <b>COMPLETED</b>

## Appendix B = Interview Schedule

<b>Interview Schedule for the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Partnership Evaluation</b>					
<b>Date</b>	Wednesday, August 10	Thursday, August 11	Friday, August 12	Monday, August 15	Tuesday, August 16
<b>Location</b>	<b>Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre (OICC)</b> 230 & 224 McAuthor Ave 613.744.3133	<b>Minwaashin Lodge (ML)</b> 424 Catherine Street 613.741.5590	<b>Minwaashin Lodge (ML)</b> 424 Catherine Street 613.741.5590	<b>Makonsag</b> 12 Stirling Avenue 613.724.5844	<b>CASO – Ottawa Room</b> 1602 Telesat Court 613.747.7800
<b>Contact Person</b>	<b>Karen Baker-Anderson</b>	<b>Elaine Kicknosway Mary Montgomery</b>	<b>Elaine Kicknosway Mary Montgomery</b>	<b>Angela Bush</b>	<b>Yvonne Gomez</b>
9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	FNCFCS meeting off-site	CASO	/	Makonsag	CASO
10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.	FNCFCS meeting off-site	CASO	/	Makonsag	CASO
11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	OICC	ML	CASO	CASO	/
12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.	CASO	ML	CASO	Odawa	CASO
2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.	OICC	/	CASO	Tewegan	CASO
3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.	OICC	ML	CASO	Tungasuvvingat Inuit	CASO

\* This interview took place via email response to the questions

## Appendix C = Consent Form

### Consent for Participation in CASO Evaluation Project

I volunteer to participate in an evaluation project conducted by Marlyn Bennett of the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada (FNCFCS) on behalf of the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa (CASO). I understand that the project is designed to gather information about CASO's ADR process Circle of Care and the effectiveness of the changes implemented by CASO. I will be one (1) of approximately 30 people being interviewed for this evaluation project.

1. My participation in this evaluation project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
2. I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
3. My participation involves being interviewed by The Principal Researcher, Marlyn Bennett or Research Assistants contracted by her. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. **An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made.** If I don't want to be taped, I will not be able to participate in the study.
4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this evaluation project will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies, which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
5. Social workers or other staff from CASO or Aboriginal community partners may be present at the interview if I choose. If I prefer to be interviewed alone, no social workers from CASO or staff from the Aboriginal community partners may be present.
6. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
7. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
My Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Marlyn Bennett Principal Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**APPENDIX D = DATA MANAGEMENT TRACKING FORM  
FOR RESEARCH TEAM**  
(posted in the file)

**Project Title:** Evaluation of the partnership between CASO and Inuit, Métis and First Nations service providers  
**Duration of Study:** August 2011 – November 2011  
**Research Team:** On behalf of the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society: Marlyn Bennett (Principle Investigator), and Jennifer King (Research Assistants)

**To be completed by Research Team:**

Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

File's Identification No: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

**Required Documentation to be given to all Interview Participants:**

\_\_\_ Consent Form – 2 copies (requires signature)

\_\_\_ Copy of Evaluations Questions

\_\_\_ Receipt Form (requires signature)

\_\_\_ Thank You Card

\_\_\_ \$10 Tim Horton's Gift Card

**Personal Contact Information (of Interview Participants):**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (home): \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (work): \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's preferred method of receiving *copy of transcribed interview*:**

- a. Canada Post (via mail)
- b. Email

**Participant's preferred method of receiving *final report on study findings*:**

- a. Canada Post (via mail)
- b. Email
- c. Attend Community Information Forum

**Checklist (to be completed after interviews):**

- \_\_\_ Interview completed
- \_\_\_ Recording saved on device
- \_\_\_ Audio files saved and uploaded electronically
- \_\_\_ Handwritten notes (if any) posted in the file
- \_\_\_ Transcript typed and completed (Date: \_\_\_\_\_)
- \_\_\_ Transcript mailed to participant (Date: \_\_\_\_\_)



Tungasuvvingat Inuit  
[www.odawa.on.ca](http://www.odawa.on.ca)



MINWAASHIN LODGE  
ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S SUPPORT CENTRE  
[www.minlodge.com](http://www.minlodge.com)



Odawa  
Native Friendship Centre  
[www.odawa.on.ca](http://www.odawa.on.ca)



Tewegan  
Transition House  
[www.urbanaboriginal.ca/tewegan](http://www.urbanaboriginal.ca/tewegan)



Wabano Centre for  
Aboriginal Health  
[www.wabano.com](http://www.wabano.com)



Ottawa Inuit  
Children's  
Centre  
[www.ottawainuitchildrens.com](http://www.ottawainuitchildrens.com)



[www.makonsag.ca](http://www.makonsag.ca)



La Société de l'aide  
à l'enfance d'Ottawa | The Children's Aid  
Society of Ottawa

[www.casott.on.ca](http://www.casott.on.ca)



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