Promising Child Welfare Practices for Inuit Children, Youth and Families

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Ottawa is the permanent or temporary home for a significant number of Inuit families. In addition to the various reasons that Inuit families may move to any southern community (economic opportunity, etc.), Ottawa is also a primary source of specific medical and social services not available in Nunavut.

In support of the local Inuit community, the Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre (OICC) was established in August 2005. Since that time, it has expanded its services to become a multi-service organization that provides cultural, educational, recreational and social support services to the children, youth and families of Ottawa's Inuit community. The centre serves as a major hub of early years and youth services for Inuit families in Ottawa and as a result works with Inuit families that are involved with child welfare.

As the Inuit population in Ottawa has grown over the years, the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa (CASO), has experienced increased involvement with Inuit children, youth and families. Several years ago, CASO recognized the need to develop an understanding of the Inuit culture and adjust its practices to better serve this community.

In 2007, a new partnership was developed between local Aboriginal service organizations and the CASO. Within the context of this partnership, The Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre has been working with the management and staff of CASO for more than a decade to adapt child welfare practices to reflect an understanding of the culture, traditions and history of the Inuit community to better serve Inuit children, youth and families.

While both organizations acknowledge that there is more work to be done on this front, it is felt that a number of promising practices have been developed through their work together. This report documents these promising practices along with those identified through a review of the current literature on child welfare practices for First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities.

The hope is that these promising practices can be shared within the child welfare sector and lead to better outcomes for Inuit children and youth.

Methodology

The methodology used in the development of this report included:

- A focus group and interviews with local Inuit youth involved with OICC and child welfare (9 youth consulted);

- Interviews and focus groups with Inuit parents involved with the OICC and child welfare (8 parents consulted);
- A focus group with foster and adoptive parents of Inuit children supported by the OICC (8 foster/adoptive parents consulted); and
- Interviews with managers, supervisors and frontline staff from the Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre (10 employees consulted);
- Interviews with managers, supervisors and frontline staff from the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa (8 employees consulted);
- Interviews with other organizations providing services to the local Inuit community (9 service providers consulted):
    - ~ Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (5);
    - ~ Larga Baffin (1);
    - ~ Ottawa Health Services Network (1);
    - ~ R.E. Wilson School (1)
    - ~ Tungasuvvingat Inuit (1);
- An interview with a representative of Child and Family Services for Nunavut.

Consultation Questions

The consultations with the different groups focused on the same basic themes with the language and focus adjusted to suit the different groups.

Inuit Youth & Parents

1. *In your experience, has child welfare shown an understanding of the Inuit way of doing things?*
2. *Have you found it possible to maintain connections with your Inuit community and traditions?*
3. *How could child welfare improve the way they work with Inuit youth and their families?*

OICC Managers and Staff & Foster & Adoptive Parents

1. *From your perspective, how should child welfare services be adapted for Inuit children and families?*
2. *Have you seen any child welfare approaches or practices that are well adapted for these children and their families?*
3. *What changes are required for such approaches to be used more consistently when child welfare is working with Inuit children and their families?*

CASO Managers & Staff

1. *Have you adjusted your approach to respond to the needs of Inuit children? If so, how?*

2. *What are some examples of promising child welfare practices for Inuit children and their families that you are aware of?*
3. *What conditions are necessary for such approaches to be used in working with Inuit children and their families?*
4. *What changes are required for such approaches to be used more consistently when child welfare is working with Inuit children and their families?*

Other Service Providers

1. *What kind of supports/services does your organization provide to Inuit children and their families involved with child welfare? Do you work with children/families involved with Nunavut Children & Family Services, the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa or both?*
2. *Have you adjusted your approach to respond to the needs of Inuit children? If so, how?'*
3. *What are some examples of promising child welfare practices for Inuit children and their families that you are aware of?*
4. *What conditions are necessary for such approaches to be used in working with Inuit children and their families?*
5. *What changes are required for such approaches to be used more consistently when child welfare is working with Inuit children and their families?*

Quotations

As these consultations were confidential, direct quotations from participants are not included. However, it is important to give voice to those who contributed to this project and so paraphrased quotations are included with generic references to provide a sense of the various voices heard through the consultations. Specific quotations are drawn from the literature and referenced in the footnotes.

Literature Review

A review of current literature on child welfare practices for First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities was undertaken. See the appendix for Literature Review methodology and references.

2. Context

General practices in child welfare have led to an over representation of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children in care. Research has shown that this is linked to the poverty, intergenerational trauma, family and community breakdown caused by historical factors including residential schools, the sixties scoop, racist attitudes and general lack of cultural safety of First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities[1].

The Inuit, like other Indigenous peoples in Canada, have faced significant changes to their lives resulting from their experience over the past few centuries. There has been a great deal of research on the effects that these disruptions have had on family life and current Inuit realities such as violence, family breakdown, addictions, sexual abuse and poverty can be traced directly to this impact on Inuit traditional life.[2]

There is a broad movement currently underway across the country seeking reconciliation with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's "*Calls to Action*" included specific recommendations regarding child welfare practice.[3] Those involved in the child welfare sector are seeking ways to participate and contribute to this movement. The Federal Indigenous Services Minister calling an emergency meeting and announcing $635 million in funding for Indigenous child welfare services is a facet of this reconciliation movement.

The apology offered by the CEO of the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies for "*the damage and trauma created first by residential schools, then carried forward by our participation in the Sixties Scoop*" is also part of this movement. That apology acknowledged that child welfare agencies "*saw the broken and devastated communities and were complacent in the belief that the fault was [theirs]. It was not. The actions we [child welfare organizations] participated in clearly led to this point*".[4]

This reconciliation movement has been a long time coming, and promises to change the shape, governance and practices of child welfare organizations. The reconciliation movement aims to address these historic wrongs, and while public apologies are an important aspect of this movement, the shift in child welfare must be real, concrete, and reflected in the actions of social workers, as well as the policies of child welfare organizations and the sector as a whole.

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[1] *Trocmé, Knoke & Blackstock, 2004*

[2] *See bibliography in appendix*

[3] *Truth and Reconciliation of Canada, Call to Action, Recommendations 1-5*

[4] *Ballantyne, October 3rd, 2017*

Everyone has a lot of fear about the Children's Aid. They have so much power and there is still lots of labelling and stereotypes about our people. (Inuit Parent)

This report seeks to identify those child welfare practices that the Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre and the Ottawa Children's Aid Society have developed which show promise for Inuit children, youth and families, and contribute to this broader reconciliation movement.

There are a number of different situations that result in Inuit children, youth and families becoming involved with the child welfare system. In some cases, an Inuit family is living temporarily in the South[5] in order to access specialized services (health, mental health, etc.) not available in Nunavut and someone calls the local child welfare organization because of a child protection concern. In other cases, an Inuk child or youth has been placed in care on a voluntary basis in order to access such services in the South. There are also a number of Inuit families that have permanently moved to southern communities and in some cases, child welfare becomes involved with one of these families as a result of a reported protection concern. The issues and promising practices identified through the consultations and research undertaken for this report apply in all of these situations.

3. Promising Practices

The promising practices that have been developed by OICC and CASO fall into the categories of:

- Recognition of the uniqueness of the Inuit community within the Indigenous peoples of Canada;
- Institutional commitment and leadership;
- Partnerships with local Inuit service providers;
- Cultural Competency;
- Hiring of Inuit Staff;
- Clinical Practices;
- Admission-prevention Services; and
- Practices for Inuit Children in Care.

3.1 Uniqueness of the Inuit Community

For those child welfare organizations serving Inuit children and families, it is critically important that the uniqueness of Inuit history and culture be recognized as distinct

[5] *The 'South' is used in this report to refer to jurisdictions outside of Nunavut for the sake of brevity.*

from First Nations and Métis communities. While these peoples share some common experiences, their history and cultural traditions are quite distinct.

The current focus on child welfare's reconciliation with Indigenous peoples must avoid the assumption that approaches adapted for First Nations families (a much larger community) will be suitable for Inuit. However, many mainstream service providers take a "pan-Aboriginal" approach, often rooted in First Nations' traditions that are irrelevant to the Inuit.

Those child welfare organizations that are working with Inuit families need to invest in developing an understanding of their unique history, concept of family, child rearing practices, the role of elders and traditional approaches to addressing issues of concern within the community.

> *Telling me that I will be comfortable in their meetings because they smudge and use the medicine wheel is insulting. These traditions have nothing to do with our people.*
> *(Inuk parent referring to mainstream service provider)*

In Ottawa, The OICC has worked in partnership with the CASO for more than a decade to develop specific approaches that reflect the culture and traditions of the Inuit community. This partnership has led to the development and implementation of the numerous Inuit-specific practices noted below. OICC has also worked with many other mainstream service providers (schools, hospitals, etc.) to develop their understanding and support for the Inuit community and inform their practices related to engaging child welfare when they have concerns about an Inuk child or youth.

> *OICC helped the principal and teachers understand our community and develop cultural resources for the school and classroom which has made a big difference to our young children. (Inuit parent)*

3.2 Institutional Commitment and Leadership

Achieving any degree of reconciliation with the Inuit community requires sustained commitment and leadership from child welfare organizations and Inuit service partners over time. Changes need to be made at all levels, from policy, legislation and regulations, to local partnerships with Inuit service providers, to clinical practice.

The leadership of the child welfare sector and those on Boards and senior leadership of local child welfare organizations serving Inuit families need to make the commitment to finding new ways of working with Inuit families and provide adequate resources to support the ongoing training and development required. This commitment must go beyond the good will of specific individuals and become

institutionalized in order to be sustained over time as this is not a short journey. Without such sustained commitment, it is unlikely that substantive change will be achieved.

The consultations with the managers and staff of CASO and OICC identified the essential role played by the senior management and Boards of Directors of both organizations.

> *The initial direction came from our Executive Director following a community consultation and this leadership has been consistent over the years. We would never have seen this kind of change without that direction and accountability. (CASO supervisor)*

> *Our leadership had a commitment to developing this partnership with CASO and didn't let the challenges or any setbacks undermine that long-term goal. (OICC Manager)*

This is echoed earlier findings of an evaluation of the broader partnership between the First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers and the CASO undertaken in 2012.[6]

Such commitment is also required from the leadership of related mainstream service providers that are often engaged with Inuit families that are involved with child welfare (schools, hospitals, etc.).

> *There should be a more systemic role for organizations like OICC as there are numerous systems barriers that need to be addressed in order to serve the Inuit population better. (Health service provider)*

3.3 Partnerships with Inuit Service Providers

However, it is not possible for a child welfare organization to make the necessary changes without a committed Inuit service partner. The OICC has played that role with the CASO in Ottawa. Such a partnership is one of the most important foundations for many of the promising practices identified through both the consultations and literature review undertaken for this report. As will be demonstrated below, Inuit service providers like OICC are in a unique position to help child welfare organizations develop and implement many of the promising practices that have been identified.

[6] *Exemplifying the Sacredness of Relationality: An Evaluation of the Partnership between the First Nation, Inuit and Métis Service Providers and the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa (ASPO, CASOTT & FNCS, 2012), page 9*

Management and staff from both the CASO and OICC identified the need for this to be a true partnership that respects the mandates and experience of both the child welfare agency and the Inuit service organization. There must be a commitment by both organizations to a regular open forum to identify and resolve issues and develop approaches that are well-adapted to serve Inuit families and children.

> *The two organizations must develop the capacity for open and honest conversations about difficult issues or no substantial change will come about. (OICC Manager)*

The power imbalances identified through anti-oppression practice (see below) can easily play out in these institutional relationships if there is not a conscious effort to address them. In Ottawa, the CASO has invested significantly in the development of anti-oppression practice and this has raised the understanding and sensitivity to the dynamics of power in all of its work including relationships with community partners.

In addition to the development of cultural competency among child welfare workers (see 3.4 below), the management and supervisors of the child welfare agency and Inuit service partner must also invest time with new workers from Inuit service providers. Given the history and perception of child welfare, it is important to develop their understanding of child welfare practices and address any preconceptions that could undermine the partnership going forward.

> *It is understandable that new Inuit workers have fairly negative impressions of child welfare and we need to work with our Inuit service partners to develop an understanding of our mandate, the constraints we work under and our commitment to the safety of the child or we will have a lot of difficulty working together.*
> *(CASO frontline worker)*

These partnerships need to be supported by institutional mechanisms to achieve their full potential. In Ottawa, these have taken the form of regular bi-lateral meetings between the Executive Directors of CASO and OICC (identifying and addressing systems issues), quarterly meetings of the Executive Directors of CASO and First Nation, Inuit and Métis service providers, a monthly case management meeting in which supervisors and front-line staff from both organizations address the situations and needs of specific Inuit children and families currently engaged with CASO.

In order to avoid confusion and unmet expectations it is key that such committees have clear terms of reference that ensure a mutual understanding of respective mandates, roles and decision-making responsibilities. Within this context, it is important to respect the different roles of these organizations.

We all need to remember that the child welfare agency remains accountable for safety decisions but these decisions need to be well-informed by their Inuit service partners. (CASO supervisor)

While these formal mechanisms are key to achieving a true partnership in supporting Inuit children and youth, they must not displace the ongoing communications between workers and supervisors in both agencies that is key to successfully supporting individual children and youth.

The case management meetings are extremely helpful but it's important that frontline workers not wait for these monthly meetings to address specific concerns. Get in touch right away and let's work it out.
(CASO supervisor)

Supervisors and frontline workers from CASO and OICC have developed ongoing relationships that facilitate this kind of ongoing informal collaboration (see 'Dedicated Teams' under 3.4 Cultural Competency below).

Many communities across the province do not have a significant numbers of Inuit families or local Inuit service providers. However, Inuit service organizations such as OICC, have provincial mandates. OICC can draw on its experience of working with the Ottawa Children's Aid Society over the past decade and support the kind of training and development required by other child welfare organizations seeking to serve Inuit families. The CASO is also well-positioned to support the development of promising practices within the child welfare sector through bi-lateral collaboration with other CAS's as well as through the work of The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies.

The lack of local Inuit service providers in a specific community does not prevent the local child welfare organization from developing the kind of partnerships required to better serve Inuit families they are engaged with. In addition, many of these practices can also be adapted for child welfare organizations working with other vulnerable populations.

3.4 Cultural Competency

Developing an understanding of Inuit history and culture, the impacts of colonization, and the history of their experience with child welfare is essential to working with Inuit families.[7] Understanding their concept of family and child rearing practices, their traditional relationship and response to child welfare authorities and their way of addressing challenges within their community are key to avoiding numerous misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

[7] *Czysewski & Tester, 2014; Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, 2014.*

The Inuit culture and traditions are very different from the mainstream culture in the South and I have seen many misunderstandings and misinterpretations regarding Inuit parents' approach to caring for their children and relating to authority. (Clinician from mainstream service organization)

Training in such cultural competency is critically important in order for social workers to engage in respectful relationships with Inuit families. OICC and Tungasuvvingat Inuit have developed and delivered this kind of cultural competency training for CASO over several years. Having such training delivered by OICC also created the opportunity to strengthen the relationships between individual supervisors and frontline staff in both organizations which serves as the foundation for ongoing partnering in support of Inuit children and families involved with CASO.

"Service providers who have skills in cultural safety and cultural competence matter to Inuit families who are seeking programs, services, and supports. These skills are essential for addressing the rights of Inuit."[8] In the Inuit community, Inuit Quajimajatuqangit (IQ) which is traditional Inuit knowledge represents "a persistent resistance to non-Inuit ways of doing things"[9] including childrearing practices. This must be understood as a strength by child welfare organizations and their staff.

The consultations undertaken in the development of this report identified numerous examples of misinterpretations of Inuit parents' behaviour resulting in interventions that escalated situations that could have potentially have been addressed in ways that would have been less disruptive and traumatic for both the child and the family. Such misunderstandings were identified by Inuit parents and youth as well as OICC staff but were also described by CASO supervisors and staff.

Developing this cultural competency requires a sustained investment in training and development. The practice of child welfare is often challenged by high rates of change in the front-line workers assigned to a child or family (changing assignments, maternity leaves, workers leaving the agency, etc.). This reality calls for an ongoing investment in training and development for new workers in order for the necessary cultural competency to be developed and maintained.

Developing such competency takes more than attending one training session. It requires ongoing practice and reflection in dialogue with the Inuit community. (OICC Manager)

[8] *Best Start Resource Centre, 2017, p. 13*

[9] *Tester & Irniq, 2008, p. 52*

Dedicated Child Welfare Teams

The relationship between the Inuit community and child welfare in Ottawa has benefitted greatly from the development of staff teams that are dedicated to serving the Inuit community. This development has resulted in several benefits:

- A smaller group of supervisors and staff to be trained and supported in developing the cultural competency identified above;
- A smaller group for the Inuit service providers to work with and develop relationships of mutual understanding and trust as a basis for effective collaboration.

Such specialized child welfare staff are more likely to invest in getting to know the Inuit community and be perceived as a positive resource rather than being feared (e.g. attending Inuit community events, being a presence as a resource and support, etc.).

> *We need to recognize that child welfare work with marginalized communities like the Inuit is not work that every social worker can do.*
> *(Mainstream service provider)*

CASO has a 'pod' (three teams of supervisors and workers), dedicated to working with the Inuit community. Efforts are made at Intake to identify any cases involving members of the Inuit community and those identified are assigned to this pod. There are challenges at Intake regarding the appropriate questions to ask regarding identify but in most cases the approach is successful. In cases where an Inuk family resists involvement with Inuit service providers, the CASO continues to work to overcome this resistance while respecting the need for consent.

> *One sees a completely different approach from child welfare workers that have worked in the Inuit pod for a while and have taken the training provided by OICC. It's like night and day compared to what it used to be like.*
> *(OICC frontline worker)*

These three teams at CASO have also experienced a very low rate of turnover for both supervisors and front-line workers which significantly enhances the ability to deepen cultural competency and effective relationships with managers and staff from OICC. It is not clear what factors are at play in this low level of turnover but some have speculated that the meaningful change that has taken place over time in working with the Inuit community and the relationships that have been developed contribute to this. Workers from these teams are encouraged to attend Inuit community events and their presence is recognized and appreciated by members of the community.

When a CASO worker or supervisor attends Inuit Days with their own family they are able to see our community at its best and our people get to know them as more than just protection workers. When this happens, we know that we're building a partnership that is real and will serve our community better.
(OICC Manager)

OICC service providers have recognized a substantial improvement in how these teams work with Inuit families and their Inuit service partners since the establishment of this dedicated pod and its investment in developing cultural competencies and working relationships. In the few cases where an Inuk family is assigned to a team outside this pod, a significantly different experience is reported. CASO continues to work on ways to ensure Inuit families are properly identified at Intake.

We find a much more collaborative approach and commitment to working with us to support the child and the family compared with workers from other pods.
(OICC Manager)

Direct Experience of the North

Many of those consulted identified the benefit of service providers from the South having direct experience of Nunavut through placements or visits. Those having had this experience report that it had significant impact on their understanding of the Inuit community they were serving in the South.

All pediatric residents studying at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario have placements in Nunavut as part of their training given the number of Inuit children served by the hospital. Some that practice at the hospital following graduation continue to visit Nunavut through exchanges and have ongoing contact providing support directly to nursing stations using a variety of communications technologies.

While this practice may be difficult to resource for some child welfare agencies, those serving significant numbers of Inuit families should look for opportunities to include this direct experience as part of their development of cultural competency. This is particularly applicable to the senior managers or supervisors of teams dedicated to serving this population. In Ottawa, the CASO Director of Service overseeing the staff teams dedicated to the Inuit community has made such an investment and reports on the positive impact.

3.5 Hiring Inuit Staff

A practice that has been identified as promising through the literature review is the hiring of First Nations, Inuit and Métis staff. This has proven to be an ongoing

challenge at the CASO.[10] Even in Nunavut, the "*under representation of Inuit in the social service system*" has been an identified as an issue to be addressed, not only in attempted hiring practices but also in the availability and recruitment of college and university training programs.[11]

While this may well yield long-term results, the consultations identified several additional barriers within the Inuit community that suggest an additional strategy that may create better outcomes in the shorter-term. The Inuit community in Ottawa, and in other centers outside Nunavut, is quite small. As a result, most members of the community know one another or are related in some way. If an Inuk worker was to be offered employment in a child welfare organization, this may create significant personal challenges and risk damaging their relationships within the Inuit community. The negative history and view of child welfare remains quite strong within the Inuit community and an Inuk worker would face personal challenges in making such a choice.

In addition, staff working within a child welfare organization are required to follow numerous agency policies and provincial regulations. It is well recognized that child welfare is one of the most heavily regulated fields of social work practice with very prescriptive regulations and standards. In Ottawa, an Inuk staff working in a liaison role at CASO (i.e. not a protection worker) found these quite restrictive when trying to fulfil their role. It was also very difficult to meet expectations that this one worker knew everything about Inuit culture and the local Inuit community.

An alternative strategy would have the child welfare agency contract with an Inuit service partner to provide specific services to the Inuit children and families involved with the agency. The Inuit staff would be employees of the Inuit service organization, avoid negative impacts on their relationships within the community and have more flexibility in fulfilling their role. As noted below, this is particularly true of the wide range of admission-prevention services that would help stabilize a family and avoid brining Inuit children into care. CASO acknowledges the need for funding such services and is exploring options and piloting ways to do so with OICC.

Such an arrangement could also include a form of 'cultural interpretation' service that many mainstream organizations are purchasing to better understand and serve populations with linguistic and cultural barriers to services. This kind of support, from the first contact with an Inuk family, could significantly improve the mutual understanding of the safety concerns and the family's capacity to provide for their children.

[10] *Children's Aid Society of Ottawa, 2017*

[11] *(Phaneuf, Dudding & Arreak, 2011, p. 19*

Such an arrangement must provide adequate funding for the services provided (either directly from the child welfare agency or from the Ministry). This kind of service provision is most effective when based on a long-term partnership between the two organizations (see 3.3 above) and integrated with the institutional mechanisms identified (Liaison Committees, Case Management meetings, cultural competency training delivered by the Inuit partner organization, etc.). This is the approach being adopted by OICC and CASO moving forward.

This strategy need not replace a longer-term approach that seeks to ensure educational opportunities for members of the Inuit community and acquisition of professional credentials. As a minimum, the lack of Inuit staff within Child and Family Services for Nunavut should be addressed. In the longer term, if the relationship between child welfare and the Inuit community in the South improves, the strategy of hiring Inuit staff may be more viable.

3.6 Clinical Practice

There are a number of transformative approaches to the clinical practice of child welfare organizations that have been widely researched and developed in recent years that are key to working effectively with the Inuit community:

- Anti-oppression Practice;
- Trauma-informed Practice;
- Strengths-based Practice;
- Family Group Decision Making; and
- Size of Caseloads.

Adopting a Relationship Lens

The child welfare system is extremely process intensive and the regulations and standards have a very strong influence on clinical practice. Social workers strive to meet these standards while recognizing that the crucial importance of relationships in being able to work successfully with a family in addressing protection concerns. The need to adopt such a relationship lens is extremely important in working with Inuit families as this is such a foundational feature of their culture.

Anti-Oppression Practice

The field of child welfare has recognized the importance of anti-oppression practice in addressing the power imbalances involved in their work with marginalized communities. This certainly applies to their work with the Inuit community.

As recognized in the Anti-oppression Framework adopted by the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies:

"The child welfare system has been criticized for imposing dominant values on marginalized communities, while at the same time failing to take into account the reality of the deleterious effects of inequality on families and children. The net result is that the child welfare system has the potential to reinforce, if not deepen, the inequalities already experienced by many parents and children.

The field is challenged to respond to the structural inequalities that families are experiencing while also finding ways not to replicate a history that has imposed the dominant discourse of blaming poor and marginalized parents for the lack of resources and supports that the state itself has, also, had difficulty providing and sustaining.

In addition, research (Dumbrill, 2003) on child welfare adult service users' experience documents how workers use 'power over' in their daily practice simply by following seemingly benign, neutral and fair agency policies and provincial standards that, in application, are oppressive. Such actions are in contrast to a 'power with' approach, which focuses on building the capacities and strengths of families within the constraints of limited resources offered by the state."[12]

Training and resources for developing an Anti-oppression Practice are readily available in Ontario and within many other jurisdictions. However, achieving the kind of transformation that is called for by this approach requires a long-term commitment and investment in training and the development of anti-oppression practice as the foundation of child welfare practice. In order to work effectively with Inuit children, youth and families, child welfare organizations need to adopt an anti-oppression framework and sustain this commitment and investment over time.

As one very practical change, the CASO has significantly reduced the number of supervisors and staff that attend meetings with their Inuit partner organizations and more importantly with Inuit families. This has been changed in recognition of the imbalance of power and resources that can be at play in such meetings.

We frequently heard that it was hard to work with us as partners because we always seemed 'too big'. When you put together our legal authority and large numbers of supervisors and staff in a meeting, it can become intimidating very quickly. (CASO supervisor)

When there are many more child welfare staff in a meeting than representatives of the family or their Inuit service partners, the historical power dynamics can easily be reinforced in unintended ways.

[12] *An Anti-Oppression Framework for Child Welfare in Ontario*, Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies

Trauma-Informed Practice

As mentioned above, it is essential that service providers working with Inuit families develop an understanding of the historical context and unique culture of the Inuit community. In particular, practitioners need to understand the impact of intergenerational trauma and implement trauma-informed practices in order to work effectively in supporting Inuit families.

Child welfare practices need to be informed by an understanding of the history of the Inuit historical experience of child welfare. Taking an Inuk child into care can recapitulate the experience of children being removed to residential schools. This experience can be extremely traumatic for both the child and parents compounding the health and wellbeing of all involved.

Fortunately, the child welfare sector has recognized the importance of a trauma-informed approach as critical in working with a variety of communities and has begun to develop the training and resources required to implement trauma-informed practices. Child welfare organizations that do not integrate a trauma lens within their practices are likely to have front-line workers misinterpret the actions and reactions of Inuit parents and family members. This often leads to interventions that escalate situations and undermine the ability to form the kind of relationships with Inuit families that are an essential foundation for engaging their strengths and natural resources to ensure the safety of their children.

Some child welfare organizations hesitate to adopt trauma-informed practice because they are concerned that this implies they will be taking on clinical counselling roles that are beyond their mandate.

> *This is not what is intended. The training and resources for trauma-informed child welfare practice focus on the application of a trauma lens to the regular day-to-day work of supervisors and front-line workers.*
> *(CASO manager)*

The field has recognized that many, if not most, of the families that become involved with child welfare suffer the results of multi-generational trauma and this needs to be understood in order to work with Inuit families constructively.

Strengths-based Practice

Child welfare practices that are strengths-based and focus on the whole family as a way of ensuring child safety are well-aligned with Inuit culture[13] in contrast to those that focus exclusively on the safety of the child.

[13] *John, 2016; Walken, 2015, Caslor, 2011*

Many child welfare organizations across Ontario have adopted the '*Signs of Safety*' [14]model of strengths-based practice and this has been reported as being an effective way of working with Inuit children and families. While some research has questioned the generalizing of the assessment of results achieved through this approach[15], other researchers have noted the openness to the inclusion of Indigenous culture of a strength-based approach like Signs of Safety.[16]

Such strengths-based approaches are ideal for developing Integrated Service Plans which are key to developing adequate understanding of the safety concerns and engagement of the family's natural support system, local Inuit service providers and other mainstream supports.

> *Everything depends on a good integrated service plan. This way everyone involved, including the Inuit community knows how best to support the family and child. These plans also help our families get access to services and supports that are often unavailable otherwise.*
> *(Inuk parent)*

Safety plans that reflect a harm reduction approach are most appropriate and effective for Inuit families as they reflect a recognition of the impacts of intergenerational trauma (e.g. Less rigid with respect to substance abuse while still achieving safety for the child).

'*Family Finding*'[17] has also proven to be an approach to kinship services that can align well with the Inuit concept of family which is broader than the traditional view of mainstream society.

While these approaches are well-suited to working with Inuit children and families, they are best implemented with adaptations that make them more appropriate and effective.

> *We have found it important to slow the process down and address a smaller number of issues at each meeting. This has resulted in much better mutual understanding and safety plans that are more sustainable.*
> *(CASO supervisor)*

CASO and OICC have worked together to adapt the traditional application of these models to allow for more effective communications, mutual understanding and

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[14] *Signs of Safety: A Solution and Safety Oriented Approach to Child Protection Casework First Edition, 1999*
[15] *Practice and Research Together (Lwin, 2016)*
[16] *Caslor, 2011; John; 2016.*
[17] *Campbell, Kevin A. Family Finding, http://www.familyfinding.org*

engagement of Inuit families in developing effective safety plans. The number of issues and questions explored through family group conferences is reduced in each session and more time is taken to ensure mutual understanding.

While this creates challenges for meeting the timeframes identified in provincial standards, this has been found to be a more effective way of addressing the safety concerns identified. In considering such adaptations, it is also helpful to recognize that most child welfare organizations across the province do not meet the time requirements of these standards 100% of the time when working with other families that do not have such cultural and linguistic barriers.

Family Group Decision Making (Circle of Care)

Many of the strength-based child welfare practices involve forms of family group conferencing and decision-making and these models have been evaluated as best practice for all families engaged with child welfare. This practice has been demonstrated as successful in preventing child maltreatment and apprehension by child welfare organizations.[18]

The process involves scheduling a conference, and ensuring the participation of extended family and community members, as well as community service providers. At the conference, family should outnumber professionals.[19] These conferences provide opportunities to engage the family's natural support system which is particularly helpful in working with Inuit children and families given the communal character of their community and their broad concept of family. This approach supports the identification and engagement of community members and resources in building safety plans and agreements that help avoid bringing Inuit children into care.

This process is very much aligned with the IQ principle of tajiitaqiingniq, whereby everyone in a family or community who may be affected by the outcome of a particular decision should be involved, first in providing their perspective on the issue, followed by a comparison of different perspectives, before finally "*integrating the contrasting perspectives to identify common goals to shape the final decision*".[20]

In Ottawa, family group decision making is called Circle of Care, and this alternative dispute resolution process is funded by CASO and hosted by the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health.[21] OICC often refers Inuit families to these services. Wabano ensures that there is an Inuk facilitator.

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[18] *Pennell and Burford 2000*

[19] *Pennell & Burford, 2000*

[20] *Arnav, 2002, GN Dept. Of Health and Social Services 1999, in Wihak & Merali, 2003*

[21] *http://wabano.com*

Size of Case Loads

As noted above, in order for child welfare organizations to work effectively with Inuit children and families, more time needs to be taken to ensure mutual understanding of safety concerns, safety plans and the Inuk family's capacity to provide for their children. In order to make this possible, worker's caseloads need to be adjusted to allow for the additional time required or they will not be able to take this additional time with the families.

Within the literature, reports and recommendations highlight the need for funding calibration to implement lower caseloads for social workers working with Inuit families (as well as First Nations and Métis). The reasoning for lower caseloads includes cultural considerations, geographic realities, the complexity of cases in Inuit communities, as well as the greater demand for time to build relationships when working in a strength-based prevention approach. Allowing for lower caseloads is therefore key to many of the promising practices identified.[22]

3.7 Admission-prevention Services

As has been widely recognized in broader child welfare practice, support for admission prevention services early-on can stabilize some families and avoid the situation deteriorating to the point where the child/youth needs to be brought into care.[23] Finding alternative strategies to address safety concerns without apprehending a child is certainly preferable to avoid the disruption in family, community and cultural relationships that is inherent in such an intervention. [24] This is particularly important in light of the very limited availability of Inuit placements (foster or group homes) in both Nunavut and the South.

Many child welfare organizations such as CASO have implemented admission-prevention strategies even though the funding model has not always aligned well with this approach. Although such services are significantly less expensive than bringing a child into care, they are often under-resourced, not available or adequate.

Many such services have been developed and evaluated for Inuit families including the Inunnguiniq Parenting Program developed in Nunavut which is "*focussed on the strengths of Inuit culture to engage and build parenting skills*"[25]. OICC has developed Inuit Head Start programs[26], 'on the land' family camps, mom and dad healing circles,

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[22] *ASPO, CASOTT & FNCS, 2012; Johnston, 2014; Phaneuf et al, 2011; Richard, 2017*

[23] *Shangreaux's (2004) discusses the continuum of prevention services which can support families*

[24] *Trocmé et al (2004) and Grand Chief Ed John (2016).*

[25] *(OICC, 2017, p. 10).*

[26] *Benzies et al, 2010, John, 2016; Phaneuf et al, 2011; Richard, 2017*

Saturday drop-ins, support group for adoptive and foster families, monthly cultural nights for families, and dad's breakfast groups.

Materials aimed at preventing abuse, or promoting online safety have been created by the Inuit Women's organization Pauktuutit and are available in English and Inuktitut. [27] The importance of not only making such resources freely available, but available in the traditional language cannot be over-emphasized.[28] The involvement of participants and elders in planning and designing such programs is in itself a best practice.[29]

In community consultations the following were some of the programs requested of the Nunavut Social Services, "Violence prevention, substance abuse programs, children's mental health, suicide prevention, bullying, sex education, cultural awareness, community wellness, nutrition, family wellness".[30]

However, given the Inuit community's historical experience with the child welfare system and the power imbalances identified earlier, it is not ideal that these services be provided by the child welfare organization itself. The ability for parents to acknowledge the need for such support and the willingness to effectively engage in capacity building involves a certain degree of disclosure that can be threatening to parents when the service provider is the child welfare agency.

Optimal models of service delivery for many of these kinds of support are for them to be provided by an Inuit service organization[31] as part of a safety plan developed with the local child welfare organization. The partnership between OICC and CASO provides a strong foundation for ensuring that Inuit families have access to effective admission prevention services provided by their own community if they are adequately funded. It is important to recognize that Inuit service organizations like OICC cannot be expected to provide these services at adequate levels without specific funding.

Having these support services provided by an Inuit service organization also creates more opportunity to strengthen the family's relationships with the local Inuit community. Given the more communal character of the Inuit community and broader concept of family, this is an additional opportunity to strengthen the family's capacity to ensure the safety and wellbeing of their children.

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[27] *(https://www.pauktuutit.ca/abuse-prevention/children-and-youth/im-happy-because-im-safe/*

[28] *Phaneuf et al, 2011*

[29] *John, 2016; Shangreaux, 2004*

[30] *Phaneuf et al, 2011, p. 30 - 31*

[31] *John, 2016*

Experience has demonstrated that the most promising approach is to "apply an Inuit way of healing and support that is strengths-based, holistic and family-centred. Inuit families need to be proactively and concretely supported in a way that builds on their strengths, reflects the importance of the extended family and kinship ties, and supports delivery of family services by Inuit organizations whenever possible. The Inuit culture and community bring great strengths and yet Inuit families face many challenges and barriers as they seek to provide a good life for their children.[32]

When a family is in crisis, or when children are at risk of being removed from their family, more intensive services are often required.[33] These family preservation services can include access to mental health counsellors, parent mentoring programs, addiction counselling or shelter from violence. In some cases, a worker (coach - homemaker - advocate etc.), is placed right in the home depending on the level of family crisis and the specific program model.

> *There are very few mental health resources for our children though many of them have experienced their own trauma in addition to the generations of trauma our community has suffered.*
> *(Inuk parent)*

Counselling an Inuk parent in crisis, who may themselves have been abused or removed from their family, cannot be done without cultural sensitivity. A qualitative study reviewed some of the adaptations that non-Inuit counsellors made over time when working with Inuit clients in Nunavut.[34] Adaptations included taking on dual relationships[35] and participating in community activities. A mainstream approach to counselling discourages counselors from seeing their clients except in professional circumstances, but participating in community activities was important for credibility and Inuit clients expected to be acknowledged at public events.[36] The importance of these adaptations to mainstream clinical practices has been demonstrated in the experience of CASO in working with Inuit families.

3.8 Promising Practices for Inuit Children & Youth in Care

The practices identified above reflect the recognition that better long-term outcomes are achieved with children when their natural family can be stabilized and develop the capacity to provide for their children's safety and welfare. However, this is not

[32] *Tungasuvvingat Inuit, 2018*

[33] *Shangreaux, 2004; John, 2016*

[34] *by Wihak & Merali (2007)*

[35] *Dual relationships refers to holding multiple roles with a client, such as being a neighbour who says hello, as well as a counselor to that neighbour.*

[36] *Wihak & Merali, 2007*

always possible to achieve and as noted above, in some cases Inuit children are voluntarily placed in care in order to access services in the South.

The lack of placement resources in Nunavut, resulting in the need to place Inuit children and youth in the South adds numerous additional stresses for the children and their families compounding situations that are already difficult. When children are temporarily placed, child welfare organizations must consider that temporary can become permanent, and that immediate choices have lasting impacts on later outcomes.

Kin Placements

As has been recognized in broader child welfare practice, the best alternative to staying with their family is to place children with kin. The Inuit concept of family aligns very well with this as the preferred approach when children cannot be adequately cared for in their own home.

> *We should always look first within the local Inuit community when a child needs to be brought into care.*
> *(OICC Manager)*

Given the systemic barriers faced by Inuit families (as well as First Nations and Métis families), the screening and recruitments of kin should not rely on the same tools as those used for non-indigenous foster families.[37] CASO has adapted the standard tools to make them more suitable when working with Inuit families and these have been shared with their counterparts in Nunavut.[38] Taken together with the preferred placement of children with their extended family and community either in Ottawa or in Nunavut, this is a highly promising practice.[39]

Maintaining Connections with the Inuit Community

The temporary placement of children with kin or within the community can also help maintain connection to Inuit culture and language. As plans of care are developed for Inuit children in care especially in the South, strategies must be included that support ongoing participation and belonging to the Inuit community and culture. "*Knowledge of one's own language and culture is an essential part of establishing a strong sense of identity, and it has been proven that having a strong cultural identity as a child and adolescent leads to improved outcomes in education, employment, and health and wellness in adulthood*".[40]

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[37] *John, 2016; Richard, 2017*
[38] *ASPO ET AL, 2012*
[39] *Richard, 2017; Walkem, 2015*
[40] *John, 2016, p. 148*

Inuit children and youth in care must receive support for maintaining their connection with their culture and community (i.e. transportation support to attend Inuit community groups/events, support for learning/maintaining the language of their community, connection to Elders, teachings, stories, games, country food, etc.).

The groups and programs at OICC have been really great since I got connected to them. Support for learning the language has been really important. Cities can be scary when you first come down from the North. It is a real help to meet local Inuit who can show you around and help you get settled. I felt much less alone once I met some Inuit kids my age here.
(Inuk youth)

The absence of Inuit culture in foster or group homes can lead to the child/youth becoming ashamed of their culture and community causing them to push away from it.
(OICC frontline worker)

Child welfare agencies must pay particular attention to the importance of maintaining these connections for young children brought into care as they may not recognize and advocate for this on their own. If these relationships are disrupted for an extended period, it becomes increasingly difficult for Inuit children to overcome the barriers that have develop over time and reconnect to their community and culture.

When I was brought into care at seven years old I didn't know how important it would be to stay connected to my community. It was very hard when I started attending Inuit events when I was older because I hadn't been there for so long. It made it much harder for me to become involved again. I have never been back up North and now I don't think I could because it has been so long I don't know anyone anymore.
(Adolescent Inuk youth in foster care)

My white foster parents weren't comfortable attending Inuit community events so I only attended one in eight years. I had to find my own way there later and it has meant a lot to me and has given me a lot more confidence in my life. Things are getting better though as my younger sister is in foster care with a family that has helped her stay connected.
(Adolescent Inuk youth in foster care)

The recognition of the rights of the child in the new legislation in Ontario reinforces the importance of supporting their desire of Inuk children and youth to maintain connections with their community.

Access Visits

When a child is taken into care, it has been recognized that frequent and early visits with parents and family are predictive of continued visits, and the potential for family reunification.[41] This practice is most effective where flexibility and trust allow visits to occur away from child welfare offices in community settings, as is seen in the current practices of CASO and OICC.[42] This of course, requires the kind of partnership between child welfare organizations and community service providers mentioned earlier.

Group Homes

There are no group homes in the South that are solely focused on supporting Inuit children and youth placed in care by child welfare agencies. This prevents the development of the necessary cultural competency identified above and limits partnerships with local Inuit service organizations.

> *When there is no recognition of your Inuit history, food or language in a group home it is very easy to become ashamed of your culture.*
> *(Inuk youth)*

> *There is little to no awareness of the Inuit culture and community in many group homes. They don't know about OICC's groups and programs so don't support the kids connecting to the local Inuit community.*
> *(Inuk parent)*

Given the number of Inuit children and youth placed in group homes, particularly in the Ottawa region, Nunavut Child and Family Services and local children's aid societies should develop strategies to work with these privately-operated homes to strengthen their capacity to provide better support to Inuit children and youth. There are currently no definitions of this responsibility or accountability mechanisms within the service contracts with these group homes.

Liaison Between North and South

When a child or youth in Nunavut is placed in care, due to protection concerns or to access medical services, an effective approach is for Nunavut Child and Family Services to engage the local child welfare agency to provide direct supervision. The local child welfare organization is in a good position to monitor these placements in foster or group homes. CASO undertakes this role in some cases but in many others, it is unaware of such placements and unable to identify shortcomings in the placement or support the child's connections with the local Inuit community during their time in Ottawa (which can be an extended time).

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[41] *California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse, 2016*

[42] *ASPO et al, 2012*

In the situation where the child or youth is in care to access specialized services in the South, some service providers have designed their earliest treatment plans to include strategies for returning to the child or youth home to Nunavut, their family and community as soon as possible. The Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario has adopted such an approach in recognition of the negative impact of extended disruption to these critical relationships for Inuit children.

4. Child Welfare Engagement with Foster/Adoptive Parents of Inuit Children

In light of many of the promising practices identified above, it is evident that the screening and assessment of foster or adoptive families of Inuit children and youth must integrate the determination of the family's willingness to support ongoing engagement and connection with Inuit history, culture and community.

Training for potential foster and adoptive parents for Inuit children must include Inuit history, cultural competency training and ideally training related to understanding the impacts of intergenerational trauma. Early on in the process, child welfare organizations need to ensure Inuit parents have a clear understanding of expectations regarding the importance of maintaining connections with the local Inuit community. Ongoing support groups like those provided by OICC have proven extremely important to foster and adoptive parents of Inuit children and youth.

Cultural Safety Agreements

OICC has worked with to develop such training as well as 'Cultural Safety Agreements that identify the particular plans prospective foster parents agree to when caring for an Inuk child or youth. These plans identify specific commitments the foster families make to ensure the Inuk child or youth has opportunities to participate in the life of the local Inuit community. While these Cultural Safety Agreements are an important mechanism to support the child's connection to their Inuit culture when in care, they must not be seen as a preferred alternative to returning the child to their birth family if their capacity to provide safety and wellbeing for their child can be restored.

Similar cultural agreements have also been developed for parents seeking to adopt an Inuk child or youth. While these lack legal standing or enforcement mechanism, they serve to increase an adoptive family's awareness and understanding of the importance of maintaining these connections and contribute to the assessment of the suitability of prospective adoption families.

Child welfare organizations need to understand and address the power imbalance when they are working with such prospective adoptive parents. In some cases,

parents can feel pressured to agree to terms that are not realistic as they have often waited a long time to adopt a child and don't want to jeopardize their chances by trying to negotiate more realistic terms. This has significant impact on the development of Cultural Agreements that will be maintained in the long-term.

> *Some of the expectations seemed unrealistic, like ensuring the child was in the Inuit Head Start program 5 days a week when there was only space open one day a week, but I didn't want them to think I wasn't committed to maintaining connections with the community so I agreed.*
> *(Adoptive parent of an Inuk child)*

The preferred practice would be for the child welfare agency to work with an Inuit service organization to develop a template for such agreements. The Inuit service organization can then work directly with the prospective foster or adoptive parents to develop an agreement that reflects the needs of the specific child, the opportunities within the local Inuit community, supports available (e.g. transportation to Inuit programs and events) and the realities of the foster/adoptive family. This agreement can then be reviewed and refined with the child welfare agency. Agreements developed in this way are likely to be more realistic and sustainable, better serving the interests of the child over time.

Child welfare agencies should also work to make effective referral of foster/adoptive parents to local Inuit service providers. Simply providing the name of the Inuit service organization doesn't recognize the short-term challenges mainstream families may experience in trying to connect with this new community.

> *Being given a general phone number for OICC wasn't very helpful. Going to the first Inuit event as a total stranger was pretty intimidating when I was so aware of their history with child welfare and here I was as a foster parent of an Inuk child from their own local community.*
> *(Foster parent)*

It would be more effective for the worker to accompany the foster/adoptive parents to an introductory meeting with the Inuit service organization and ensures they receive complete and accurate information regarding the variety of opportunities to support the child's connections with their community and culture.

Ongoing support groups for foster/adoptive parents of Inuit children provided by OICC have proven very effective in supporting the development of cultural competencies, connections with the local Inuit community, problem solving and general support.

This group has provided so much emotional and practical support as we found our way through all these challenges. It has been tremendously helpful to have this connection with other adoptive parents of Inuit children and the workers from OICC. (Adoptive parents of Inuk child)

5. Recommendations

In summary the following have been identified as promising child welfare practices for working with Inuit children, youth and families.

1. **Recognition and Reflection of the Uniqueness of the Inuit Community**

   The development of cultural competency and child welfare practices for Inuit children, youth and families must reflect their unique history, culture and traditions. Child welfare organizations must not assume that practices that are appropriate to other Indigenous peoples are appropriate for the Inuit community.

2. **Sustained Institutional Leadership and Commitment**

   Developing appropriate practices for working with Inuit children, youth and families requires a sustained commitment from the leadership of child welfare agencies at all levels. This commitment needs to be institutionalized and not rely on the good intentions of individual Board members, managers or staff.

   A corresponding commitment to developing partnerships with child welfare organizations is required from the leadership of Inuit service organizations working with child welfare organizations. This is a journey and not a short-term initiative which will include setbacks and challenges with systemic barriers.

3. **Partnership with Inuit Service Providers**

   Child welfare organizations need to develop a long-term partnership with an Inuit service organization in order to develop and implement many of the promising practices identified (cultural competency, adaptations of clinical practices, provision of effective admission prevention services, cultural safety agreements, etc.).

   These partnerships must be characterized by mutual respect, recognition of respective mandates, the recognition and addressing of institutional power imbalances and the ability to have open and honest communications about difficult issues. Relationships and mechanisms need to be developed at all levels (senior management, supervisors and frontline) to support this partnership in achieving real change and results for Inuit children, youth and families.

   The lack of Inuit service organizations in a particular community does not prevent the development of such a partnership and these promising practices. Inuit

service organizations have a provincial mandate and approaches developed in Ottawa are available for others to use with support from OICC and CASO.

4. **Cultural Competency**

   An investment must be made by child welfare organizations to develop and sustain the cultural competency of managers, supervisors and frontline staff working with the Inuit community.

   When the related training and development is undertaken collaboratively with a partner Inuit service organization, this provides multiple opportunities to strengthen the relationships between the two organizations at all levels and supports the ongoing work with specific Inuit children and youth involved with the child welfare organization.

5. **Dedicated Teams**

   The development of dedicated teams of child welfare supervisors and workers engaged with the Inuit community supports many of the identified promising practices. The development of cultural competency, effective working partnerships with Inuit service organizations and relationships with the Inuit community are difficult to sustain without such continuity.

6. **Direct Experience of the North**

   Wherever feasible, child welfare organizations serving the Inuit community should endeavour to find opportunities for relevant managers and supervisors to gain direct experience of the North.

7. **Hiring Inuit Staff**

   A long-term goal is ensuring Inuit youth have access to the educational opportunities to obtain the credentials required to work in child welfare.

   A shorter-term strategy is for child welfare organizations to enter into purchase of service agreements with Inuit service organizations to deliver support and admission prevention services to Inuit children, youth and families.

8. **Clinical Practice**

   Several clinical practices developed within child welfare are appropriate (with adaptation), and essential for working effectively and appropriately with Inuit children, youth and families. These include Anti-Oppression Practice, Trauma-informed Practice, Strength-based Practice (e.g. Signs of Safety), and Family Group Decision-making (Circle of Care).

   Collaboration with an Inuit service organization is key to identifying the adaptations required for these mainstream practices.

The size of workers caseloads needs to reflect these clinical practices and the cultural and linguistic complexity of working with members of the Inuit community.

9. Admission Prevention Services

A wide range of support services should be available to support the family in order to avoid bringing an Inuk child or youth into care while safety concerns are being addressed. Such services are best provided by an Inuit Service partner and need to be adequately funded to ensure effective and timely access.

10. Children and Youth in Care

When an Inuk child or youth needs to be brought into care, every effort should be made to find a placement within the Inuit community in collaboration with an Inuit Service partner organization.

The approach to kin placements and related practices (e.g. Family Finding) should reflect the broader concept of family within the Inuit community.

In cases where this is not possible, every effort must be made to maintain the child or youth's connections with their biological family and the broader the Inuit community. This is key, particularly for younger children, to maintaining their sense of identity and wellbeing.

Access visits should take place at an Inuit service organization wherever possible.

Where the number of Inuit children and youth in group homes make it feasible, child welfare and Inuit service organizations should incentivize local group homes to develop the cultural competency and practices necessary to appropriately serve these children and youth.

When an Inuk child or youth from Nunavut is placed in a group home in the South, Nunavut Child and Family Services should engage the local child welfare organization to provide supervision and support in meeting the cultural needs of the child and her/his connections to the local Inuit community.

11. Recruitment and Support for Foster and Adoptive Parents

The recruitment, screening and training of foster and adoptive parents needs to reflect the unique history, culture and traditions of the Inuit community. This training should include an understanding of the impacts of inter-generational trauma. The screening tools used for these parents need to be modified to reflect the systemic barriers faced by Inuit families.

Child welfare agencies should ensure effective referral of foster and adoptive parents to Inuit service organizations recognizing the challenges they may face in connecting to this new community in their new role.

Realistic Cultural Safety Agreements support the clarification of expectations of foster and adoptive parents of Inuit children and youth and have demonstrated promise in supporting the maintenance of their connections with the Inuit community. These agreements are best negotiated with the parents by the Inuit service organization (based on templates developed with the child welfare agency) and then reviewed, refined and agreed to with the child welfare agency.

Ongoing support groups for these parents are key to maintaining successful foster placements and adoptions.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the consultations and review of the literature undertaken in preparation of this report have identified a number of promising practices for child welfare agencies working with Inuit families. Fortunately, the work undertaken by the Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre and the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa over the past decade provides support and resources for other child welfare organizations that are becoming engaged with a growing number of Inuit families living within their jurisdictions.

Application of these practices can be understood as part of a larger reconciliation movement that includes changes to funding, legislations and control over child welfare services.

Literature Review Method & References

The literature review was conducted using the electronic databases EBSCO and ProQUEST to search for peer reviewed articles using the search terms “Inuit” and “Child Welfare” and for lack of many relevant results, was expanded with the term “Indigenous”. Reports, resources and recommendations that were published by Inuit organizations such as Pauktituut, the Ottawa Inuit Children’s Centre were also reviewed. Further searches were done looking for relevant information or evaluation of practices like Signs of Safety and Family Group Decision Making.

The resulting selection of literature includes peer-reviewed journal articles, reports, evaluations and guidebooks. The variety of materials compensates for the dearth of information available regarding Child Welfare practices specific to Inuit families. There was also a lack of peer-reviewed research available regarding best practices by Child Welfare organizations working with Indigenous and Métis families. Nonetheless, this literature review found many promising and recommended practices, and further research will be needed as these are implemented.

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