



UAKN
Urban Aboriginal
Knowledge Network

RCdU
Réseau de connaissances des
Autochtones en milieu urbain

RESEARCH PROJECT SUMMARY

Atlantic Research Centre

Name of Project:

Urban Aboriginal families with children in care: Understanding the experiences and needs of parents living in Fredericton and Halifax

Research Start-up Summary and Abstract:

Aboriginal children, youth and families across Canada face multiple and persistent disadvantages, central among which is the disproportionate number of children in out-of-home care. This overrepresentation has increased in the last four decades to the point that the number of Aboriginal children in child welfare services today is approximately three times higher than the number placed in residential schools at the height of their operations in the 1940s (Bennett and Auger 2013). The underlying forces driving this growth are well known: out-of-home placements of Aboriginal children result primarily from cases involving child neglect, which is ultimately linked to factors such as poverty, poor housing, domestic violence, substance abuse and other structural inequalities stemming from colonialism and assimilationist government policies (Blackstock et al. 2004; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996; Sinha et al. 2011; Trocmé et al. 2004).

Engagement Objectives:

The main objective of the proposed research project is to promote the wellbeing of Aboriginal families living in Atlantic Canadian urban contexts by considering the point of view of parents with children placed in out-of-home care. It seeks to give importance to the voices and concerns of the primary caretakers themselves and to better understand their day-to-day lived experiences, challenges and needs, both as parents and in their dealings with the mainstream child welfare system.

This project is not an end in itself, but a means to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care and help urban Aboriginal mothers and fathers care for their own children. It is the first of many steps in a research process that will ultimately take into account the views of service providers – including front line state social workers and foster families – and seek to translate the gathered knowledge into a community action plan. It is expected that results produced by this research process will help design family or community-centered child welfare practices, programs and policies that are both more effective and more respectful of the distinctiveness and resilience of urban Aboriginal families. These results will be especially relevant to community and government partners in answering key questions such as to whether the mainstream child welfare system should be amended, as was the criminal justice system

along the lines of the “Gladue principal” (Roach and Rudin 2000), or whether self-governed urban Aboriginal agencies should be created instead, as the idea has been discussed in the past in both provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

Collaborating Friendship Centre and/or other urban Aboriginal organization:

Mi’kmaw Native Friendship Centre
Under One Sky – Monoqonuwicik Neoteetjg Mosigisig

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