



UAKN

Urban Aboriginal  
Knowledge Network

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Réseau de connaissances des  
Autochtones en milieu urbain

Atlantic Research Centre

## ***Final Report***

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# ***Let's Get it Right: Creating a Culturally Appropriate Training Module and Identifying Local Urban Aboriginal Resources For Non-Aboriginal Caregivers of Aboriginal Children in New Brunswick***

***August 2018***

***Atlantic Region***

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The Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, the UAKN, is a community driven research network focused on the Urban Aboriginal population in Canada. The UAKN establishes a national, interdisciplinary network involving universities, community, and government partners for research, scholarship and knowledge mobilization. For more information visit: [www.uakn.org](http://www.uakn.org)



Social Sciences and Humanities  
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Canada

**“LET’S GET IT RIGHT:  
CREATING A CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE TRAINING MODULE  
AND IDENTIFYING LOCAL URBAN ABORIGINAL RESOURCES  
FOR NON-ABORIGINAL CAREGIVERS OF ABORIGINAL CHILDREN  
IN NEW BRUNSWICK”**

**Final Report Submitted by the Research Team**

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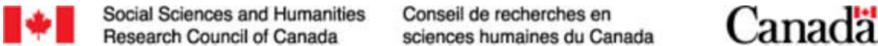
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**“Reconciliation ..... is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. This requires ‘*an awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes and action to change behavior.*’ We must change behavior, each of us. Then we must make our governments change behavior.”**

John Ralston Saul, Globe and Mail, June 6, 2015

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

May 2014, the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network Atlantic Research Centre (UAKN Atlantic) hosted a knowledge mobilization (KM) event at St. Thomas University, Fredericton, New Brunswick. Urban Aboriginal community groups, academe and all levels of government came together and shared findings from completed UAKN Atlantic funded research, gave updates on research-in-progress, and presented ideas for future research projects. A presentation that fell into the last category involved the executive director of an urban Aboriginal organization and two lawyers.

The three gave an impassioned presentation on a recent child apprehension case involving a young urban Aboriginal family. The provincial Department of Social Development settled out of court, and the child, after two years in care of the Minister, was returned to her parents but not before Justice Baird made a number of recommendations including, *“with a view to establishing a committee or inquiry into issues raised by care, including the fact that professionals involved with the mother had no training in Aboriginal culture, values or parenting. In fact, the affidavit evidence led by the Minister was unbalanced and unethical.”* The lawyers, one representing the mother and the other the father, had been brought together by the Executive Director of Under One Sky Head Start where the child attended an early childhood development program. Their collective interest in presenting at the UAKN Atlantic KM event was to spark a conversation around Justice Baird’s recommendations and hopefully initiate a research project.

Following the presentation at the KM event, many persons expressed interest in having the UAKN Atlantic host a series of meetings designed to bring the disparate parties together and unpack Justice Baird’s 10 recommendations. Over the next year, the UAKN Atlantic hosted four ‘Children-in-Care Working Group’ meetings. The sessions were charged and conversations were often difficult and painful. Discussions led to revelations about the over-representation of Aboriginal children-in-care in Department of Social Development (DSD) Region 3, and the long-standing practice and increasing need to place on and off-reserve Aboriginal children with non-Aboriginal foster parents. These two issues became focal points for the group. Everyone agreed on the need to deepen the collective’s understanding of the number of children-in-care, as well as the need to work with non-Aboriginal foster parents to maintain and foster the child’s Aboriginal identity, culture, language, kinship and community ties.

Out of those meetings, three complementary research projects emerged; one of them was Let’s Get It Right! The Executive Director of Under One Sky Head Start, and the Program Manager, Child Protection, DSD, Government of New Brunswick, both of whom had been involved in the case before the Queen’s Bench, worked together to formulate the following community-driven research questions:

1. What culturally and linguistically appropriate supports are there for non-Aboriginal parents caring for Aboriginal children?

2. What supports do these non-Aboriginal caregivers need?
3. What urban Aboriginal services, organizations and support groups are there that non-Aboriginal caregivers could be accessing in their immediate community?
4. What are the processes and protocols by which the non-Aboriginal caregivers could access these resources?

Answering these questions required a robust research team comprised of three sectors -- urban Aboriginal community groups, academe and government. Each sector had their own methodology and vested interests but all wanted to achieve the same end goal – namely, to better prepare and support non-Aboriginal parents caring for Aboriginal children. Academe thought this end was best achieved by situating social work students with the urban Aboriginal community organization and researching existing foster parent supports in off and on-reserve communities. DSD felt the best route was to create education, training materials and resources for non-Aboriginal parents. The community member on the other hand, saw providing social workers with much needed cultural safety training as a more effective path forward.

In response to the research questions, and after much negotiation, the team identified three overarching research goals:

1. to research and create a suite of culturally appropriate support materials to be packaged in a training module for non-Aboriginal caregivers of Aboriginal children-in-care;
2. to identify urban Aboriginal community-based supports for those non-Aboriginal caregivers as well as to establish processes and protocols for accessing those community-based resources;
3. to determine what community-driven advocacy looks like and how culturally appropriate advocacy can be used to support and champion the desires and needs of Aboriginal children-in-care, their extended families and non-Aboriginal caregivers.

It was a complex project but the complexity speaks to the challenges inherent in community, government and academe working together to create meaningful change.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The project's Principal Investigator (PI) was Marilyn Dupré, Director of the School of Social Work, St. Thomas University, Fredericton. Although the project had an overarching research team, each sector (community organization, academe and government), created smaller sector research teams, which broke the overarching goals down into achievable research objectives. Each sector research team had its preferred research processes and deliverables and those are captured in Table 1. below.

**Table 1. Sector Research Teams, Goals, Objectives and Deliverables**

	<b>Sector Research Team</b>	<b>Research Goals</b>	<b>Research Objectives</b>	<b>Deliverables</b>
1.	<b>DSD</b>	Goal #1. Create suite of culturally relevant education materials & a training module	1. Analyze DSD children-in-care data to determine on and off-reserve need for supports  2. Create support materials in response to identified on/off-reserve needs  3. Create training modules based on adult education principles	1. Region 3 <b>data</b> on children-in-care  2. <b>Report:</b> Analysis of on-reserve Directors and off-reserve Managers  3. Education and training <b>module</b>  4. Support materials & <b>resources</b>
2.	<b>STU SW Students</b>	Goal #2. Identify community-based supports & resources  Goal #3. Determine community-driven advocacy approach	1. Deepen their knowledge of the needs of urban Aboriginal families and children-in-care  2. Determine the need for on-reserve training for off-reserve, non-Aboriginal foster parents	1. <b>Podcast</b> , a conversation with urban Aboriginal knowledge holders  2. <b>Report</b> , on-reserve Child Welfare Directors
3.	<b>Urban Aboriginal Community Groups</b>	Goal #1. Create a suite of culturally appropriate education materials & a training module  Goal #2. Identify community-based supports & resources  Goal #3. Determine community-driven advocacy approach	1. Guide creation of the suite of tools, supports & resources  2. Liaise between sector teams  3. Inform supports and resources  4. Inform community-driven advocacy	1. <b>Podcast</b>  2. Culturally safe education & training module  3. Culturally safe support materials & resources  4. <b>Improved working relationships between community, academe and government</b>
4.	<b>Principal Investigator</b>	Goal #1. Create a suite of culturally appropriate education materials & a training module  Goal #2. Identify community-based supports & resources	1. Literature Review to inform: suite of tools, supports & resources, and community-driven advocacy  2. Determine education, training, resources and supports for non-Aboriginal foster parents	1. <b>Literature Review</b>  2. Off-Reserve DSD <b>Managers' Report</b>  3. <b>Final Report</b>

## **2.2 Sector Team Descriptions**

In addition to the overarching team of community members, academe and government, there were three in-the-trenches sector teams: the DSD team, STU's social work students' team, and the community organizations' team. Descriptions of their composition and the activities performed by these informal sector teams follow below.

### ***DSD Sector Team***

DSD identified a social worker, who was completing her Masters' degree, to be the Project Lead on the DSD Sector Team. Her job was to determine the number of Aboriginal children-in-care in DSD Region 3, and the number of children being cared for by non-Aboriginal parents. She was also tasked with developing a culturally safe education and training module, and a supports and resources package for non-Aboriginal parents caring for Aboriginal children. The DSD sector team hoped to implement the education and training module, and make the supports and resource package available across the province. After the first student graduated, a second social worker, who was also completing her Masters in Social Work degree, joined the project. Her work culminated in a focus group attended largely by child welfare professionals and advocates from government, as well as individuals from the urban Aboriginal community.

### ***School of Social Work Sector Team***

The school of social work assigned four students to the Let's Get It Right research project. This enabled the students to fulfill requirements for their social action course. Their job was to deepen our collective understanding of the urban Aboriginal community and in particular parents' lived experience of having children in care. As part of this journey, the students created a podcast with urban Aboriginal community leaders. To better understand the practice of placing on-reserve children with off-reserve non-Aboriginal foster parents, the students interviewed four on-reserve child welfare agency directors. The report resulting from these interviews helps us better understand the challenges around meeting the needs of off-reserve non-Aboriginal foster families caring for Aboriginal children from reserve communities.

### ***Urban Aboriginal Community Organizations Sector Team***

Two urban Aboriginal community organizations, Under One Sky Head Start and Friendship Centre, and New Brunswick Aboriginal Peoples Council (NBAPC) were involved in this project. NBAPC hired a community researcher to carry out a literature scan of Aboriginal children-in-care practices across Canada, liaise amongst the project partners and write the final report. Unfortunately, the community researcher was unable to complete the contract. Subsequently, the academic PI hired a recent PhD graduate to complete the literature review.

Under One Sky provided in situ placements for four Bachelor of Social Work students and worked extensively with DSD to evolve an approach for educating non-Aboriginal parents caring for Aboriginal children. But the primary role of Under One Sky was to keep the project

grounded in the needs of the urban Aboriginal community. To that end, and at Under One Sky's insistence, an urban Aboriginal community researcher was hired to interview four of DSD's off-reserve, Region 3 child welfare managers. In addition to deepening our understanding of the lived experience of off-reserve, non-Aboriginal foster families caring for Aboriginal children, the report redresses the tendency for research to focus solely on on-reserve populations.

The research project received STU Research Ethics Board approval and the project commenced the fall of 2015. The final report was completed late summer of 2018. The writing of the final report was a joint effort of the core research team. The project received 15k in funding from the UAKN Atlantic through a SSHRC Partnership Grant. This report and the five resulting products will be made accessible on the UAKN.org website ([www.UAKN.org](http://www.UAKN.org)).

### **3. FINDINGS**

Each component of the research contributed to a better overall understanding of the gaps and needs around ensuring that Aboriginal children in care receive culturally safe supports and services. The literature review findings and recommendations informed the remaining research, which resulted in: off-reserve NB population data, a podcast, director's report, manager's report, and an analysis of the directors and managers' reports. The DSD social work students prepared a module for foster parents, which identified resources for foster parents and care givers of Aboriginal children, as well as a powerpoint presentation for professionals covering the same material.

#### **3.1 Provincial Aboriginal population and children-in care data**

Following below is Statistics Canada data from the 2016 Census. In Canada, 4.9% of the population is comprised of Indigenous peoples. In Atlantic Canada, Indigenous peoples make up 5.6% of the total population, and New Brunswick, that percentage is 4.0%. To summarize, 74.6% (21,915) of the province's Indigenous population live off-reserve. By way of contrast only 7,465 (25.4%) live on-reserve. Of those living off reserve, 42% (12,330) live in rural areas, and 32.6% (9,585) live in what Statistics Canada refers to as population centres.

**TABLE 2. Provincial Aboriginal population data**

Indigenous Population by Residence and Region, Census 2016						
	Canada		Atlantic Canada		New Brunswick	
<b>Total - Area of residence</b>	<b>1,673,780</b>		<b>129,340</b>		<b>29,385</b>	
<b>On reserve</b>	339,595	20.3%	20,070	15.5%	7,465	25.4%
<b>Off reserve</b>	1,334,185	79.7%	109,265	84.5%	21,915	74.6%
<b>Rural</b>	364,980	21.8%	56,590	43.8%	12,330	42.0%
<b>Population centre</b>	969,205	57.9%	52,670	40.7%	9,585	32.6%
<b>Population centre non-CMA</b>	372,545	22.3%	30,505	23.6%	5,165	17.6%
<b>Population centre CMA</b>	596,660	35.6%	22,165	17.1%	4,420	15.0%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of the Population, 2016

The Masters student was unable to determine how many Aboriginal children were in care in Region 3 because DSD does not systematically capture those data. However, at the time of this study, Anne Caverhill, formerly the DSD Child Protection program manager for Region 3 estimated that, at a minimum, 20% of the children-in-care were, **at that particular point in time**, off reserve Aboriginal children -- yet Indigenous peoples in New Brunswick only make up 4.0% of the total population. Note that on-reserve children-in-care in Region 3 are not included in this figure.

**3.2 The Literature Review**

The intent of the literature review was to focus on identifying cultural considerations for Aboriginal children-in-care by examining the literature related to trends and gaps in service delivery, and the types of tools and programs available to address key issues identified in the literature. The review highlighted the importance of language and terminology in discussing the issue of Aboriginal children-in-care. Terminology such as “cultural sensitivity”, “culturally aware” and “culturally competent” are ideologically loaded in relation to the power imbalance inherent in helping relationships based on colonial assumptions of the professional as “expert”. The term “cultural safety” addresses issues around power imbalance and colonial relationships in service delivery because the individual(s) receiving the service defines what is safe. “Further, cultural safety requires that child welfare professionals be respectful of culture, which is different from being neutral or oblivious of these aspects of a person; culturally safe practice reinforces that each person’s knowledge and reality is valid and valuable” (Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies, 2012, cited in Literature Review, p. 8).

It is not possible to provide culturally relevant services to Aboriginal children and families if the information on a family’s self-identified culture is not requested or made available to helping services. Provincial social service agencies need to acquire culturally relevant information when screening or registering individuals and families for education, health and social services. The

Literature Review identified that urban Aboriginal peoples are the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population, with 74.6% of the Aboriginal population of New Brunswick living off-reserve.

Rather than focus on preparing non-Aboriginal foster parents to care for Aboriginal children, many jurisdictions have developed systems of “in-community placements”; kinship care or customary care, and Aboriginal foster care. Customary care is an arrangement built on pre-existing family and community relationships. This approach ensures that a child receives frequent contact with parents, siblings and relatives, as well as the opportunity to participate in community cultural activities. This approach is grounded in the history, tradition and values of Aboriginal peoples, and promotes resiliency and a positive, affirming identity for the child. In child welfare, there are competing child welfare philosophies. However, a “community caring” framework builds on family support while building community capacity to assist the family. Jurisdictional control over child welfare decisions is viewed as an important component of building community capacity. Family group conferencing is an important component of collaborative, community-based practices. In New Brunswick, family group conferencing is an option provided to families when receiving child protection services. However, cultural considerations other than the need for “cultural respect” are not clearly delineated. In relation to social work practice, the literature review identifies the importance of strengths-based approaches emphasizing a holistic view of child development; recognition of the child’s connection to the land, fostering of the child’s spiritual life, and connection to their cultural community through language, song, and traditional events that the parents have identified as being important to the family and community. Social work practice with parents must include recognition and celebration of successes, sharing power, and respecting traditional practices that promote healing and collaboration. Family group conferencing is an important part of addressing the child’s needs and engaging the community in support for the family.

Despite the fact that Aboriginal children are over-represented in the child care systems of provincial governments, foster parents disclose that they are not adequately trained and supported to be able to provide culturally relevant care. Cultural resources such as Head Start programs, Aboriginal Family Resource Centres, and Friendship Centres may be able to provide cultural support when an Aboriginal child is placed in a non- Aboriginal foster home. Building on existing family connections to an Aboriginal community and kinship care may also be preferred by the family.

In conclusion, the literature review finds that improved child welfare outcomes for Aboriginal children come from greater involvement and control over child welfare policies and services by Aboriginal peoples. Non-Aboriginal child welfare workers need to be educated in best practices related to cultural safety, rather than focus on becoming “culturally competent” in a culture that they are not familiar with and have not experienced.

1. Legislation and policy should be reviewed for language that maintains and perpetuates colonial relations and perspectives.

2. Legislation and policy should reflect better understanding and collaboration between government programs and services and Aboriginal communities in relation to child welfare and other social services. This includes a review of Standards and Protocols to ensure that Aboriginal decision-making and knowledge systems are included and used when working with Aboriginal children and families.

3. Demographic information on the Aboriginal population on NB, including geographic location, household membership, and self-identified relationship to a cultural community should be registered in provincial data bases to better target resources and services to Aboriginal children and families.

4. Social work “best practices” must include education on strengths-based, holistic child welfare practices in working with Aboriginal families, and access to information on Aboriginal organizations, agencies, and services that are available to provide support to Aboriginal people.

### **3.3 Podcast and On-reserve Child Welfare Agencies' Director's Report**

As part of a field placement at St. Thomas University School of Social Work, social work students interviewed social workers and Directors of child welfare agencies on-reserve, in the Fredericton health region (Region 3). "The interviews sought to explore different understandings and knowledge of the processes involved in placing Aboriginal children in the care of non-Aboriginal foster parents" (Discussions with Child Welfare Agencies on Reserve Communities in New Brunswick: An Effort to Better Understand the Needs of Aboriginal Children in Care). A major finding of the study was that, rather than remaining "culturally sensitive", social workers need to provide for the cultural safety of the child. This finding is congruent with the findings in the literature review. The students also produced a Podcast in which they spoke with Patsy McKinney of "Under One Sky" and her friend and mentor Gary Gould, General Manager of Skigin-Elnoog Housing Corp. The product was a conversation, in which they discussed critical topics such as the barriers faced by urban Aboriginal peoples in accessing services, as well as the Provincial/Federal split in the funding of these services.

### **3.4 Region 3 DSD Program Managers' Report**

Community researcher, Lisa Jodoin, provided a report of her discussions with child welfare program managers within Social Development, Region 3. These key informants identified that provincial foster parent training program, Parents' Resource for Information, Development and Education (PRIDE) does not do enough to cover Aboriginal issues and needs. One informant recommended that there should be a core module of PRIDE dealing with Aboriginal children and youth. Non-Aboriginal foster parents require training on Aboriginal cultural and education of available cultural resources for Aboriginal children in their care. The lack of available foster homes in New Brunswick was viewed as a systemic problem for child welfare, generally, and social workers are reluctant to move Aboriginal children in care from a non-Aboriginal foster home to an Aboriginal home after the child has adapted to being with a foster family. Jurisdictional issues between accessing resources on-reserve and off-reserve make it difficult to collaborate between child welfare agencies in relation to the "best interest" of the child. The lack of demographic information on Aboriginal families and children was also viewed as problematic. Informants believe that non-Aboriginal social workers need to be educated about Aboriginal history and systemic racism. The need for inter-agency collaboration between government and Aboriginal organizations was viewed as crucial to accessing cultural relevant support systems and resources. Protocols for working with Aboriginal children and families would assist social workers with developing culturally sensitive best practices. The findings of this study are generally congruent with the findings of the literature review in relation to the need for a collaborative approach between government child welfare agencies and Aboriginal child welfare agencies, the need for demographic and statistical information on the number and location of Aboriginal children receiving child welfare services, and access to culturally relevant resources. The need for protocols for social workers working with Aboriginal children is also identified within the literature review.

Specific recommendations from the interviews include:

1. Ensure the provincial government's priorities and actions in relation to the province's off-reserve populations are aligned with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's "Calls to Action".
2. Develop an immediate response to the lack of Aboriginal foster homes.
3. Educate social workers on cultural safety and provide them with information on the historical trauma associated with colonization.
4. Create an electronic library of resources for social workers to draw on to deepen social workers' understanding of the province's Aboriginal communities.

### **3.5 Analysis of the Directors' and Managers' Reports**

Two dominant themes emerged from an analysis of the reports wherein Managers from Social Development and Directors from First Nations communities were interviewed and asked about the challenges they face when Aboriginal children are brought into the care of the Minister.

First Nations Directors expressed their grave concern about the removal of children from their parents and subsequent placement off-community with non-Aboriginal foster families. An ongoing issue reiterated repeatedly throughout all of the interviews was the lack of foster families generally and Aboriginal families specifically, resulting in Aboriginal children losing their culture.

Social Development Managers focused on the negligible system-level infrastructure and support to respond to this over represented and growing population within the provincial Child Welfare system. The systemic assumption that these families live only in FN communities and the lack of prioritization of Aboriginal families off-reserve means their highly specialized needs are not being met. Furthermore, the requisite data on Aboriginal populations living off-reserve are not being collected. Finally, as expressed by leaders from both service systems, interventions and care are being provided by foster parents and social workers who have no understanding of the impact of colonialism, inter-generational trauma, or the need for culturally safe environments and services.

### **3.6 DSD Education, Training and Resource Materials**

The goal of the first Masters of Social Work student was to develop a training module for the foster parents in Region 3 that could potentially be implemented province-wide. However, many barriers arose while trying to make this goal a reality, not the least of which is the all-consuming pressure on Social Development to find foster parents. Given the challenges securing safe placement, matching Aboriginal children with Aboriginal families, or placing an Aboriginal child in a culturally safe home were viewed as luxuries the department couldn't

afford. Moreover, Social Development's central office viewed the proposed training module initiative as more of a regional, than provincial endeavor.

Understanding Social Development's reality, foster parents caring for Aboriginal children can be woefully unprepared. In meetings with both the Provincial Foster Parent Association (Winter 2016), and at a meeting of the National Association of Foster Parents in Saint John, NB, (September 2016), foster parents were frank when describing their experiences fostering, and in some cases adopting, Aboriginal children without any knowledge of Indigenous culture or how best to support it. Despite these challenges, foster parents emphasized their openness and willingness to learn how to create culturally safe environments for children in their care. Foster parents also spoke of the need for more resources and information and cited the need for the social workers to assume a leadership role.

The belief that social workers and their supervisors should assume a leadership role around additional education, supports and resources for non-Aboriginal foster parents was not priority generally shared by DSD. Again, the department's primary focus was finding foster homes. Further, demonstrating the need for these supports and services was almost impossible because DSD does not require their employees during the intake process to note if a client self-identifies as an Aboriginal person. There is a pull-down menu designed to capture these data but intake workers are not required to use it. Without these data, it's impossible to quantify the need for a support or service. During the course of this research project, and possibly in response to repeated requests for data, in one regional office, DSD instituted the practice of determining if families had an Indigenous background, but only if formal meetings between DSD and the family were to take place. Identifying Aboriginal clients and collecting data on Aboriginal populations needs to become policy and the policy needs to be enforced.

Early on in the project, the first student realized that developing a training module for non-Indigenous foster parents wasn't a priority, not only for the Foster Home Unit but also the front line social workers and their supervisors. Simply put, they were unable to add yet one more thing to their already overflowing 'To Do' lists. In response to this lack of uptake, the student pulled together a number of resources from other provinces and developed presentations to be shared with foster parents. However, in the process of developing and testing the resources and training materials, systemic issues were exposed. The research team soon realized that the focus of their training efforts needed to shift from the foster parents to the social workers and their supervisors. The solutions needed went far beyond a training module for foster parents.

In response to this realization, the second social work student then concentrated on educating adult learners about white privilege and the history of colonization. She led a focus group January 2017 composed of an eclectic group from both inside DSD (trainers, front line social workers/managers, consultants); and outside to include a former youth-in-care worker; representatives from the Child and Youth Advocate's office; and the Aboriginal community. Focus group participants provided strong experiential feedback on the systemic changes required in order to meet the needs of Aboriginal children in care and their caregivers.

Moreover, they confirmed it critical that DSD take the lead and embrace a more pragmatic approach when educating and supporting foster parents caring for Aboriginal children. As importantly, DSD needs to integrate in-depth cultural safety training into professional social work practice.

After much discussion, the research team elected not to include the resources and training materials as appendices in this report. They were concerned that these products would be inappropriately deployed by DSD as ‘band-aid’ solutions.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

Following the completion of the research phase, members of the research team met on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018, to discuss the findings from the various activities undertaken as part of “Let’s get It Right” project. The team now understood that there were significant systemic barriers to achieving their goals. Following is a synthesis of the major themes that emerged during a robust discussion of the research findings.

### **4.1 DSD’s Multiple Response System is negatively impacting Aboriginal families**

DSD’s Multiple Response System (MRS) may not working as originally intended. The Structured Decision-Making (SDM) Tool is a decision-making assessment tool which streamlines families referred for child welfare services into one of two streams: Family Enhancement Services or Child Protection Services, depending on the level of assessed risk. Although Family Enhancement Services was initially introduced to provide prevention services to families at moderate risk of becoming involved with child protection, the SDM assessment tool has evolved to screen in only those families assessed as high risk. The literature review identifies the Differential Response Model (similar to the Multiple Response Approach) as having two tracks or streams; a high-risk track to handle serious situations of child abuse and neglect, and a “community” track which is preventative and strengths-based. The philosophy of a multiple response model is that early intervention can prevent children at risk from coming into care. Ontario and Alberta have both implemented Differential Response Models in their child welfare systems. British Columbia has taken it one step further and introduced a Family Development Response Model, which embraces a concerted shift towards providing a range of community-based services and supports designed to keep children at home, and a corresponding move away from investigations and apprehensions as a default response.

Based on the evidence generated by this research, in the province of New Brunswick, Aboriginal children are currently over-represented within child welfare protection services, and there is a corresponding need for the system to adopt collaborative, strengths-based community responses when working with Aboriginal families. The provinces’ multiple response system needs to be reviewed both in terms of how Aboriginal children and families are being assessed for risk, and how each of the two child welfare streams address the needs of Aboriginal families. Now is the time for the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate to include an

examination of how Aboriginal children and families are being treated within the child welfare system. This examination needs to be incorporated into the current overall review of New Brunswick's Child Welfare Services being conducted by Nova Scotia-based consultant George Savoury.

Finally, with the Indigenous Bachelor of Social Work degree program, offered by St. Thomas University, the government has the opportunity to hire Aboriginal social workers who are trained in Aboriginal approaches to social work. The number of Aboriginal hires should be commensurate with the percentage of the off-reserve Aboriginal population in the system. For example, if 20% of the children-in-care in Region 3 are Aboriginal, then at least 20% of DSD's social workers would self-identify as Aboriginal.

#### **4.2 Indigenous on and off-reserve organizations are ready to serve their communities**

Research carried out by this and other UAKN Atlantic research projects has firmly established that Aboriginal families do not use mainstream programs and services – those programs, services, agencies and organizations that the general population would turn to for help. Aboriginal populations do not reach out to DSD, even when the circumstances are dire because of DSD's, and the provincial and federal governments' reputations and bad track records with Aboriginal peoples. At the top of the list is child apprehension. Regardless of there being any grounds for child apprehension, Aboriginal families do not engage with the system for fear of losing their children. The practice of taking children out of the family, and too often out of their community, be it on or off reserve, only exacerbates their fear and avoidance of the system. Coupled with this fear of child apprehension is a lifetime of lived discrimination, judgement and systemic racism. To date, DSD has not given on and off-reserve Aboriginal peoples in the province of NB any reason to trust them.

The "Let's Get It Right" research team has identified the underlying problem in the system – no investment in prevention, but it has also unearthed the solution. Urban Aboriginal organizations such as Under One Sky Head Start and Friendship Centre, Skigin-Elnoog Housing, and Gignoo Transition House are deeply involved supporting and nurturing urban Aboriginal families, as well as helping Aboriginal families transition on and off reserve. (New Brunswick Aboriginal Peoples Council is also peripherally involved but its mandate is political representation rather than the delivery of programs and services.) Collectively, Under One Sky, Skigin-Elnoog and Gignoo have been meeting the needs of urban Aboriginal families in Region 3 for close to a century. Moreover, having been funded by Federal agencies, such as Canada Mortgage and Housing, and the Public Health Agency of Canada, these Aboriginal organizations have well established track records when it comes to fiscal responsibility. But most importantly, these Aboriginal organizations know their population and are a trusted resource that families turn to in times of need. However, because of the lack of government recognition, limited infrastructure, and insufficient operational funding, these Aboriginal organizations are not always able to play a preventative role.

The literature is very clear on how to meet the needs of this difficult to engage population, fund urban Aboriginal organizations, which are ideally positioned to hire staff and deliver culturally safe programs and services. DSD's hiring of the occasional Aboriginal case or intake social worker isn't a sufficient response to the issue, because those Indigenous workers are working within existing systems that are dysfunctional from an Indigenous perspective. Social work positions need to be developed from within Aboriginal organizations. These positions would realize a collaborative, preventative, community-outreach approach that is supported by the literature and is already working well within other jurisdictions with large urban Aboriginal populations. The provincial government could easily second DSD social workers to a host Aboriginal organization like Under One Sky Head Start and Friendship Centre or other service organizations in the broader urban Aboriginal community. To be clear, the seconded DSD social workers would not be reporting back to the department because that's the link in the system that's broken. Evidence of the failure of the government's existing mainstreaming and forced assimilation model include no reduction in poverty and suicide rates, and no increase post-secondary education attainment and employment rates for urban Aboriginal populations. A precedent for a community-based approach – putting the social workers back into the community, is the STAR Program, where DSD took social work positions and put them out into the community to work with youth.

Another key role for the seconded social worker would be that of the service navigator. Urban Aboriginal clients, especially if they have recently moved from a community to the city, have little or no understanding of the DSD, health or educational systems. The seconded social workers would help Aboriginal clients navigate these systems. These same seconded workers would also be ideally positioned to inform urban Indigenous service and program providers about DSD practices, policy and legislation. Similarly, the service navigators could inform DSD of the urban Aboriginal communities' needs, aspirations and required changes to policy and legislation.

#### **4.3 The Federal/Provincial jurisdictional divide places Aboriginal families at risk**

The colonial on/off reserve divide, whereby on-reserve populations are the responsibility of the Federal government, and off-reserve Aboriginal populations are the responsibility of the provincial government, is an example of on-going systemic discrimination that puts Aboriginal families at risk. In NB, three quarters of the population that self-identify as Aboriginal live off-reserve and are expected to access mainstream programs and services offered to the general population. By way of contrast, on-reserve communities have their own education, health and child welfare systems funded by the Federal government, albeit at an inadequate level. When families transition back and forth across these two very distinct systems to access community supports, as they do for housing, health, education and employment, many families fall outside of agency mandates for eligibility.

It shouldn't matter if an Aboriginal family is living on or off-reserve, the historical trauma resulting from residential schools, the sixties scoop, cultural genocide, systemic racism, and escalating child apprehension and incarceration rates mean that urban Aboriginal populations

need special accommodation. To reiterate, it's the Urban Aboriginal organizations that are best positioned to develop and deliver programs and services using inclusive, nonjudgmental, collaborative approaches that accommodate this priority population's unique needs.

#### **4.4 Cultural safety training and Indigenous data collection are top priorities**

It's not clear if DSD and the provincial government are generally unaware of the province's off-reserve Aboriginal populations or have patently chosen to ignore them. Historically, the media has focused on on-reserve populations resulting in most Canadians having the erroneous impression that all Aboriginal persons live on-reserve. In NB and the rest of Canada, this is simply not the case. Historically, the off-reserve population has been poorly understood because they are largely invisible, and unlike the reserve communities they are rarely consulted. Research, such as "Let's Get It Right", is one of several 'first step' UAKN Atlantic research projects designed to close this knowledge gap. That being said, all levels of government and front-line workers delivering education, health and social services need to commit to accurate, systems-wide data collection, analysis and interpretation with off-reserve Aboriginal populations. Without these data, the government cannot accurately assess the funding needed to support the programs and services provided by urban Aboriginal organizations. In addition, government policy-makers and service providers need to share the findings to better educate their professionals and the general public. Finally, given that Aboriginal families are over-represented in the child welfare system, the Family Services Act must be updated to include an Aboriginal perspective.

Also related to the importance of data collection, the Federal government pays on-reserve communities to provide health, education and social services for their Band populations – but over 50% of status Indians in NB live off-reserve. This means that through the delivery of its mainstream programs and services, the Provincial government is covering the cost of health, education and social service services for status community members living off-reserve. The provincial government should recoup these costs from the Federal government and redirect those funds to the urban Aboriginal organizations providing the preventative programs and services.

#### **4.5 Aboriginal organizations have a key role to play educating social workers and foster parents**

DSD social workers already in the field, and non-Aboriginal parents, and Parenting Associations may have a vague understand the theory behind cultural safety but are challenged to create it at home or in the workplace. By way of contrast, this hands-on information is lived day-to-day in Aboriginal organizations like Gignoo Transition House, Skigin-Elnoog and Under One Sky. Non-Aboriginal parents caring for Aboriginal children and Parenting Associations are hungry for information and training. Through a revenue-generating social enterprise initiative, already successfully rolled out by the St. John's Native Friendship Centre in Newfoundland and Labrador, Under One Sky is poised to deliver cultural safety training in New Brunswick. Presently, DSD child protection social worker employees only receive two days of mandatory

cultural awareness training but the focus in on on-reserve populations. There is no information or training on off-reserve populations. In the words of this project’s community partner, *“social workers and parents have to understand how we, the Aboriginal population got here: we have the highest rates of poverty; lowest employment rates; five times the national average for suicide; and we’re over-representation in the justice system – it’s not just the history – it’s how our history has resulted in our lived experience.”* In addition to formal cultural safety training, the research team proposes that non-Aboriginal foster parents meet for one-on-one conversations with Aboriginal foster parents and share their experiences around creating cultural safety in the home and out in the community.

**4.6 Where are Aboriginal children and families in NB’s Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) Model?**

Despite the fact that off-reserve Aboriginal populations are experiencing the highest population growth rate in the province, and that Aboriginal children are significantly over-represented in the child welfare system, the off-reserve Aboriginal population was not consulted during the development of the ISD model and roll out. Furthermore, there do not appear to be any Aboriginal professionals on the regional ISD teams. How can this be when there is an Aboriginal Bachelor of Social Work program at St. Thomas University? Once again, is it because people working in government assume all Aboriginal persons live on reserve. In the age of reconciliation, this type of all too common oversight is no longer acceptable. It is a living example of the systemic racism and marginalization that’s rife within the Government of New Brunswick.

**5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are evidence informed and realize the TRC calls to action.

**5.1 Federal Government**

5.1.1 Consult with off-reserve Aboriginal community organizations on child welfare programs because these organizations, namely Head Start, Friendship Centre and Family Resource Centres are serving band registered children and families.

5.1.2 Mandate the Public Health Agency of Canada to provide a Head Start placement for every off-reserve child or Aboriginal child-in-care in the province.

**5.2 Federal and New Brunswick Governments**

5.2.1 Review government standards and protocols to ensure that Aboriginal decision-making and knowledge systems of on and off-reserve Aboriginal peoples, are included and used when working with Aboriginal children and families.

5.2.2 Address federal/provincial jurisdictional ambiguity. When families transition back and forth across these two very distinct systems, as they do for housing, health, education and employment, many fall outside agency mandates for eligibility. Address this gap by providing timely and an equitable provision of services for all Aboriginal children and families regardless of where they reside.

5.2.3 Make the off-reserve Aboriginal population visible. Collect data on Indigenous persons and families accessing federal and provincial government services. All levels of government, and front-line workers delivering education, health and social services, need to commit to accurate, systems-wide data collection as well as the analysis and interpretation of off-reserve Aboriginal population and children-in-care data.

5.2.4 Fund a Jordan's Principal service coordinator position at Under One Sky Head Start and provide program funding commensurate with the percentage of off-reserve Aboriginal persons in the province.

### **5.3 Government of New Brunswick**

5.3.1 In recognition of and in response to the historical inter-generational trauma resulting the residential schools, the sixties scoop, cultural genocide and systemic racism, formally designate off-reserve Indigenous populations as priority populations.

5.3.2 Invest in prevention. Provide operational funding for off-reserve organizations, for example, Under One Sky Head Start and Friendship Centre, so they can develop their own infrastructure and deliver culturally safe wrap-around social, health and education programs and services to off-reserve Aboriginal children and families who are at risk of child apprehension.

5.3.3 Include an Indigenous perspective in all relevant government legislation, including the NB Family Services Act. Consult the off-reserve Aboriginal community on any changes to the NB Family Services Act. Note, the New Brunswick Aboriginal People's Council is mandated to fulfill this consultation role.

5.3.4 Task the Child and Youth Advocate to include an examination of how off-reserve Aboriginal children and families are being treated within the child welfare system. Incorporate those findings into the overall review of New Brunswick's child welfare services being conducted by George Savoury.

### **5.4 Department of Social Development**

5.4.1 Following the lead of Ontario and Alberta, implement a Differential Response Model, designed with a "community track", which is preventative and strengths-based. Alternatively, follow British Columbia's lead and implement a Family Development Response Model, which

focuses on providing a range of community-based services designed to keep Aboriginal families intact.

5.4.2 Review the social workers' role within the new model (Differential Response or Family Development Response), and confirm it's congruent with current social work practice.

5.4.2 Place social workers back in the community. Second social worker positions to urban Indigenous organizations. The social workers will work on site as either social workers or system navigators. The social workers will be hired by and report directly to the urban Aboriginal organization.

5.4.3 Require all DSD staff to take cultural safety training from an off-reserve urban Indigenous organization.

5.4.4 Hire Indigenous social workers. The number of Aboriginal hires should be commensurate with the percentage of off-reserve Indigenous children in the system. For example, if 20% of the children in care are Aboriginal, 20% of DSD's social workers would be Aboriginal.

## **5.5 Schools of Social Work and Professional Social Work Associations**

5.5.1 Require all social work students to become knowledgeable about the importance of their clients' Aboriginal history – *"The story of how we got here!"* and *"why we are where we are today."*

5.5.2 Create an electronic library of resources for social workers to draw on to deepen their understanding of the provinces' Aboriginal on and off-reserve communities. Include materials such as the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Social Workers' presentation to the Canadian Association of Social Workers, titled "Aboriginal community social work: committing to anti-oppressive practice".

[https://www.casw-acts.ca/sites/casw-acts.ca/files/attachements/angel\\_compton-osmond\\_sep\\_26.pdf](https://www.casw-acts.ca/sites/casw-acts.ca/files/attachements/angel_compton-osmond_sep_26.pdf)

5.5.3 Lobby the government for the development of an off-reserve child welfare system that is not under DSD. British Columbia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan all have independent off-reserve child welfare systems in place.

## **5.6 Foster Parent Associations**

5.6.1 In addition to having non-aboriginal foster parents meet with Aboriginal foster parents, provide foster parents with the opportunity to also meet with Aboriginal Elders who may be able to offer insight on how to create cultural safety for Aboriginal youth. Reaching out may open the door to connecting with an Aboriginal community.

5.6.2 Partner with organizations like Under One Sky to provide on-site training for non-Aboriginal foster parents caring for Aboriginal children. Through conversations and shared narratives, foster parents can be mentored and build relationships with off-reserve communities.

## **5.7 Child & Youth Advocate**

5.7.1 Partner with urban Aboriginal organizations and develop an off-reserve lens to be incorporated into all aspects of the Advocate's work, especially around data collection and reporting.

5.7.2 Advocate for off-reserve children and their families, and the need for government to invest in prevention – namely, operational funding for Under One Sky Friendship Centre.

5.7.3 Lobby DSD to replace their Multiple Response System with the Family Development Response Model.

## **5.8 NB Integrated Service Delivery**

5.8.1 Appoint Indigenous representation to the planning committee commensurate with the percentage of the student population that self-identifies as Indigenous.

5.8.2 Hire Indigenous professionals commensurate with the percentage of the student population that self-identifies as Indigenous.

5.8.3 Partner with NBAPC and Under One Sky Head Start and Friendship Centre.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This research study had its genesis in the spring of 2014, when a judge's decision regarding the care status of an Aboriginal child in the Minister's custody raised significant concerns related to the Department's lack of consideration for Aboriginal culture, values and parenting. Initially, the focus of the one-year, community-driven, research study was to determine the cultural supports needed to assist non-Aboriginal foster parents to care for Aboriginal children placed in their care. The research study required input from three important sectors – community groups, academe, and government child welfare services. As the study unfolded, there were many opportunities for discussion regarding the case that initiated the study and the reasons why the social workers, foster parents, and service providers were completely unaware of, or did not consider, the family's Aboriginal identity and culture.

The situation of one Aboriginal family highlighted a long-standing and invisible issue in New Brunswick regarding the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care, and the resulting practice of placing Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal foster homes, away from kinship and

community ties. The systemic nature of the problem became evident when the DSD research team undertook the development of a culturally relevant training module for non-Aboriginal foster parents. They found that foster parents were generally supportive of the need for training on how to create culturally safe care environments for Aboriginal children. However, the actual magnitude of the issue, including the number of Aboriginal children placed with non-Aboriginal foster families, remains unknown because the province does not keep data on the off-reserve Aboriginal families and children accessing services. As a result, the province does not have any policies, standards, or protocols in place for working with urban Aboriginal families.

The collaborative nature of the research study and its inclusion of various sectors involved with providing child welfare services and services to urban Aboriginal families generated a number of recommendations, including: changes to legislation and policy; improved education of social workers and foster parents in relation to systemic discrimination against Aboriginal people; and the development of preventative services aimed at reducing the number of Aboriginal children in care. The research team believes that the current provincial review of the child welfare system in New Brunswick **must** include examination of the needs of Aboriginal children and urban Aboriginal families.

Future research projects have the potential to further understanding and address these needs:

- Interview Aboriginal Elders and adults who have lived in non-Aboriginal foster homes in New Brunswick about their experiences.
- Create a list of funding sources that urban Aboriginal organizations can apply to, to support the development and distribution of culturally relevant information on services and resources designed for off-reserve Aboriginal families.
- Develop a website of the services and resources available to Aboriginal families living off and on reserve, along with information on the mandates and eligibility criteria.