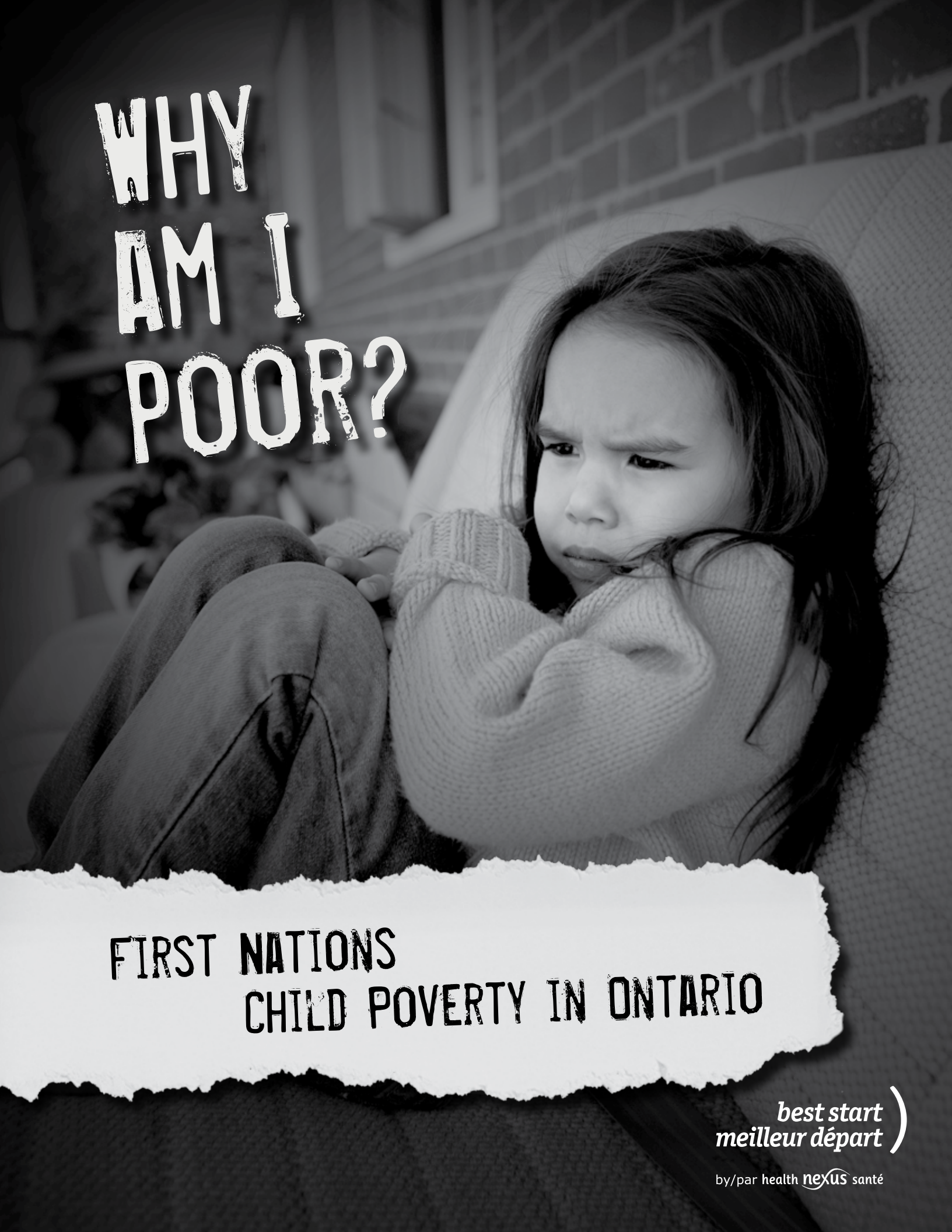


A black and white photograph of a young child with long dark hair, sitting on a couch and hugging their knees. The child has a sad or thoughtful expression. The background is a brick wall.

**WHY
AM I
POOR?**

**FIRST NATIONS
CHILD POVERTY IN ONTARIO**

*best start
meilleur départ*

by/par health **nexus** santé

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- CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION -

WHEN A FIRST NATIONS CHILD ASKS, "WHY AM I POOR?" WHAT IS THE ANSWER THAT WE, AS A SOCIETY, WILL GIVE?

Like all poor families in Ontario, First Nations children are poor because parents are unable to work or cannot get work, because social supports do not provide enough for the family to live on, or because parents can only earn very low wages. There is not enough subsidized housing available to have a decent and safe place to live for families on low incomes. In addition, for children living on reserve, there isn't funding for decent housing, access to healthcare providers, safe drinking water or equitable funding for education.

First Nations children have the added burden of racism, assimilation policies and funding inequities. They are two and a half times more likely to end up in child protective custody for neglect. Yet, once removed from their families, there is funding to pay at least \$10,000 per year for each child in care as long as they are not with a family member, and \$80,000 per year for each child in a specialized group home. As they get older, the government pays \$55,000 per year to incarcerate each person, not including administrative, court or overhead costs.

The depth and breadth of poverty in First Nations children and families in Canada is staggering. First Nations children under 6 years of age living off reserve are more than twice as likely to live in low income families as compared to other Canadians.

For children living on reserve, high levels of unemployment coupled with lower incomes put them at a significantly higher risk of being poor as compared to other Canadian children. As a result, First Nations children have:

- ◆ a higher risk of being taken into the child protection system
- ◆ an increased chance of poor overall health
- ◆ an increased likelihood of going hungry on a regular basis
- ◆ a lower level of physical activity
- ◆ an increased risk of living in overcrowded and poorly maintained homes
- ◆ an increased risk of lower school readiness
- ◆ an increased likelihood of becoming involved in the criminal justice system once they reach adulthood

(RCAP, 1996)

The level of poverty experienced by First Nations children is all the more disturbing given that Canada has a high standard of living and has been identified as one of the best countries to live in the world by the United Nations. A recent Senate report, *Children: The Silenced Citizens*, referred to a brief the committee received from World Vision Canada that noted Canada's standing would drop to 78th on the United Nations' Human Development Index if the analysis looked

at the economic and social well-being of Aboriginal people. According to an article in the November 27, 2010 *Economist* magazine, when countries are ranked according to child poverty, Canada rates among the bottom third of the richest countries in the world, at 22 out of the 31 member countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

The cost of First Nations child poverty affects everyone - from the child who has significantly fewer opportunities to live a balanced and fulfilled life and less opportunities for personal growth and development - to the single mother who is struggling to raise her children in a new city far from her home community and culture - to all Ontarians who experience the costs and the loss of human potential resulting from the impact of poverty. According to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, the cost of poor wages and unemployment in terms of lost income in the form of taxes and social assistance was 7.5 billion dollars in 1996. That amount is expected to grow to 11 billion by 2016, not accounting for inflation, the costs of children in care or incarceration.

Phil Fontaine, former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, noted that both the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the Kelowna Accord had the goals of reducing the socio-economic gap between First Nations people and other Canadians. He expressed his concerns that Canada had not yet developed a plan to meet this target. At the root of the income gap, is the impact of colonization, lack of recognition of First Nations' collective rights and interests, the intergenerational impact of the residential school system, an outdated legislative and policy framework governed by the Indian Act, and over a decade of budget caps frozen at levels below population growth and inflation (Fontaine, 2007).

The issue of First Nations child poverty cannot be understood without understanding the historical and current social contexts from which it arises. It is important for service providers to have an awareness of individual lived experience in the context of social policy, funding inequities and racism.

This report provides a hard look at the lived experiences and outcomes of First Nations children in Ontario who are poor, the factors that drive First Nations child poverty and the ways that service providers can make a difference.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to help service providers understand the context and history of First Nations child poverty. It also provides information on how to work with and advocate for First Nations families. Practical, culturally relevant and effective strategies to support families have been included to help service providers reduce both the impact and the rate of First Nations child poverty. Information is also provided on ways to support front-line staff working with vulnerable First Nations families.

METHODS

Information was collected for this report through key informants and from a review of current literature, reports, articles and news bulletins from First Nations organizations, government and other organizations. An advisory group guided the development of the report.

The key informant interviews included questions (see Appendix B) regarding effective approaches, challenges, impact of culture, substance use, mental health concerns, issues pertaining to children

in care, strategies to reduce the rate of child poverty and the challenges faced by front-line workers.

The recommendations and strategies in this report are based primarily on information shared by the key informants. Their conversations were insightful, inspiring and sometimes unsettling. The interviews took place at a time when the overall rate of child poverty was rising in Ontario.

The researcher has made all attempts to remain true to the voices of key informants and to reflect their urgency to move forward in supporting vulnerable First Nations families. In addition, the draft text of the report was reviewed by topic experts to provide additional insights.

STATUS

It is governed by the Indian Act. First Nations people are registered under the Indian Act based on blood quantum and historical policy. The Indian Act impacted status, due to the loss of status for First Nations women marrying non-Native men and their descendants for 150 years. Some people regained their status with Bill C-31 and Bill C-3. Throughout colonial history, policies removed status for veterans, people who attained a university degree and for those who were employed. First Nations people may live in First Nation communities both on and off reserve, in urban or rural areas.

COMMON TERMS

BRITISH NORTH AMERICA ACT 1867

Laid the foundation for the historical relationship between the indigenous people's of Canada and ongoing federal policy. In it, Indians and their lands became crown wards.

FIRST NATIONS

There is no legal definition for this term. It replaced the usage of the term Indian in the later part of the last century. It can refer to a community or an individual. People may refer to themselves as First Nations with or without having status.

MÉTIS

Those of mixed ancestry or First Nations people who do not have status as defined by the Indian Act. The Métis people have a distinct culture and history.

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

Are recognized in Canada's Constitution and include First Nations, Métis and Inuit people.

THE INDIAN ACT 1876

This Act further defined the government relationship with Canada's first people, by determining who was Indian, where Indians could live and what Indians were entitled to. Through this Act, Aboriginal people lost all autonomy, including self-determination, self-identification, traditional culture, health and education. The Act was grounded in assimilation, through the outlawing of traditional practices, traditional governments and enfranchisement.

INUIT

The people who traditionally occupied the most northern parts of Canada.

INAC

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has now been changed to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

- CHAPTER 2: MEASURING CHILD POVERTY -

HOW IS POVERTY DEFINED?

Poverty can be measured in many different ways. Poverty is often defined on the basis of income. Standard measures of poverty do not measure non-standard families, such as extended families and multigenerational families, which are seen more frequently in First Nations families.

The Ontario Deprivation Index (ODI) tries to capture real life needs and takes into consideration issues such as food quality, ability to meet health needs and housing. It was developed with input from community groups and from people living in poverty.



The Low Income Measure (LIM) considers a family to be living in poverty when their income is less than 50% of the median income, adjusted for family size.

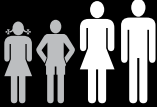
At the national level, Statistics Canada uses the Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) to identify the poverty line for Canadians. LICO is defined as the income level at which nuclear families with children under 18 or individuals spend more than 20% of the proportion of income that an average family spends on food, shelter and clothing. LICO is adjusted by community size and number of children in the family. It is not adjusted for families with special needs or disabilities. It is used by most governments and publicly funded organizations to measure poverty in Canada.

FIRST NATIONS CHILD POVERTY RATES IN ONTARIO

This section shares information about the rates of poverty in First Nations children. Data specific to Ontario is noted where available. Where provincial data was not available, national data is provided. In cases where First Nation-specific data was not found, Aboriginal-specific data was provided instead (i.e. data that is inclusive of First Nation, Métis and Inuit populations).

There are approximately 249,000 Aboriginal people in Ontario according to the 2006 Aboriginal Population Profile, of which about 65% self-identified as North American Indian, about 30% as Métis, and 0.8% as Inuit. The balance was due to multiple identity responses as well as other Aboriginal. Aboriginal people in total account for about 2% of the Ontario population and First Nations people about 1.3%.

TABLE 1 - LOW INCOME CUT-OFF

Size of Family Unit	Minimum necessary income
	\$22,229
	\$27,674
	\$34,022
	\$41,307
	\$46,850
	\$52,838
	\$58,827
	\$5,989
	added for each additional person
Source: Citizen and Immigration Canada (Effective until December 31, 2011)	

Family structure also impacts the risk of poverty. First Nations children under 6 years of age, living off reserve in Canada, were more than three times as likely to be raised by young parents between the ages of 15 and 24 years old than other Canadians (27% compared to 8%). They were also more than three times more likely to live with a single parent as compared to other Canadian children (41% compared to 13%). They were

average age of new mothers and their increased likelihood to be single parents.

The statistics associated with First Nations child poverty, and with the factors that are linked to this situation, are grim. The 2006 Canadian Census, which uses low income cut-off, showed that almost half or 49% of First Nations children under the age of 6, living off reserve, were in low-income

families, compared to 18% of non-Aboriginal children. For those who live in large cities, the Canadian statistics were worse: 57% of First Nations children are living in low-income families compared to 21% of non-Aboriginal children (Statistics Canada, 2006). According to the 2010 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Ontario, which utilized the low income measure, 15% of families are living in poverty (Maund, 2010).

In 2002-03, 25% of First Nations children

on reserve lived in poverty, compared to 16% of Canadian children (Fontaine, 2007). More recent statistics from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada indicated that income was substantially lower and unemployment substantially higher for individuals living on reserve. In 2006 the unemployment rate was about four times higher for First Nations people living on reserve compared to other Canadians. First Nations children are at substantially higher risk of living in poverty with a median income of less than half that earned by the general population (Indian and Northern Affairs, 2009).

FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE CONTINUE TO LAG BEHIND THE GENERAL POPULATION IN THE AREAS OF CHILD POVERTY, INCOME AND EDUCATION.

more likely to have larger families than other Canadians. First Nations families living off reserve in Canada are twice as likely to have four or more children as non-Aboriginal people (17% vs. 8%), (Statistics Canada, 2006). Young parents, and particularly young single mothers, are more vulnerable and face challenges related to education and employment that can lead to poverty (Pohl, 2002).

First Nations people continue to lag behind the general population in the areas of child poverty, income and education. In addition, First Nations families have higher risk factors for poverty based on the younger

49% VS. **18%**

OF FIRST
NATIONS
CHILDREN
UNDER THE
AGE OF 6,
LIVING
OFF
RESERVE,
WERE IN
LOW-INCOME
FAMILIES

OF NON-
ABORIGINAL
CHILDREN

57% VS. **21%**

OF FIRST
NATIONS
CHILDREN
IN LARGE
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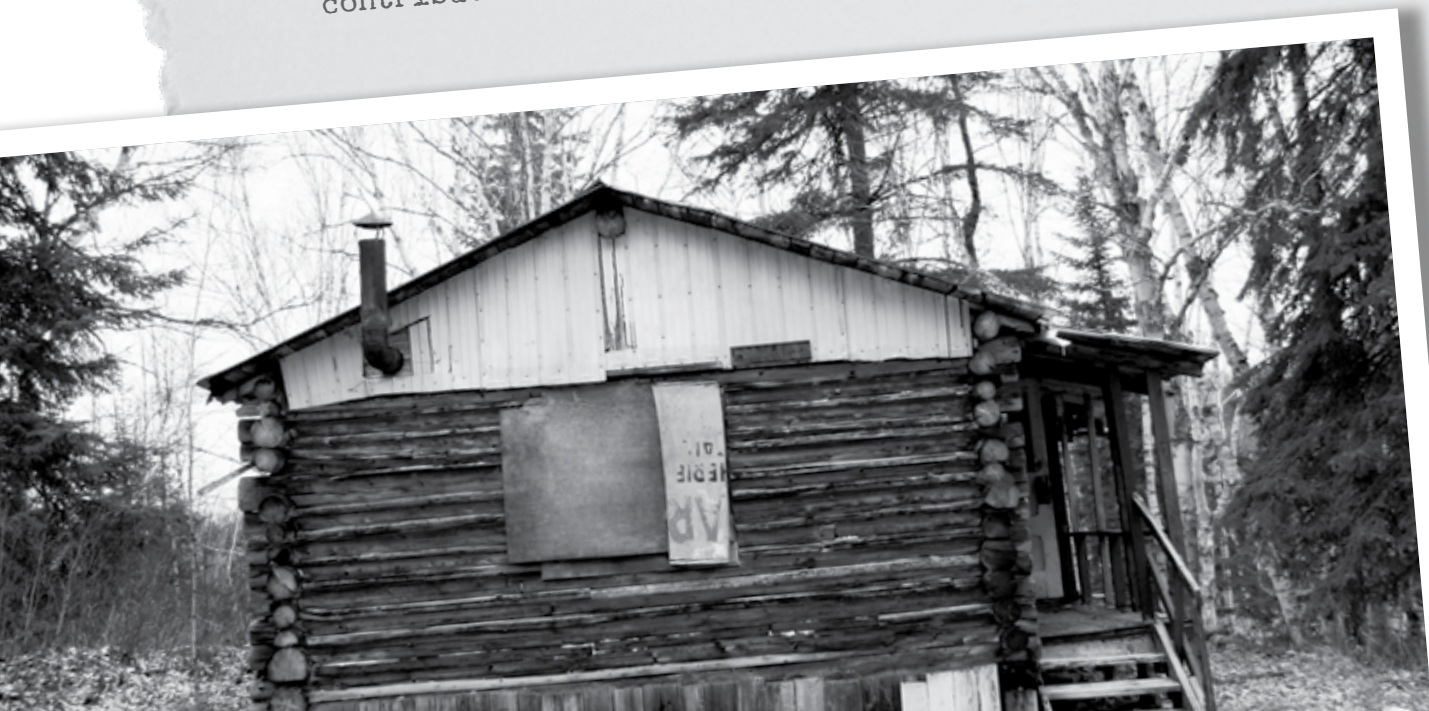
OF NON-
ABORIGINAL
CHILDREN

(Statistics Canada, 2006)

- CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS -

THE HIGH RATE OF POVERTY TODAY IS LINKED TO THE TRAUMAS EXPERIENCED BY CURRENT AND PAST GENERATIONS [...]

Disease also had a devastating impact on First Nations people. Some communities were completely decimated. There were many outbreaks throughout colonial history from small pox, influenza, polio and tuberculosis as well as the current HIV/AIDS and H1N1 epidemics. For example, during the 2009 H1N1 epidemic, First Nations people were at high risk of infection. According to Dr. Isaac Sobol, poverty, overcrowded housing and limited access to running water were the main contributors (Rabson, 2010).



The Indian Act had a profound negative impact on Aboriginal people. The Indian Act defines status, which means the Canadian government has the complete power to decide who is and isn't Indian. It was particularly devastating for Aboriginal women and their children. First Nations women who married non-status men lost status for themselves and their descendants. First Nations women were removed from the reserve and families through their loss of status. In matrilineal cultures, this disrupted the traditional balance of power and the transfer of traditional knowledge.

Policies that contributed to the loss of language and culture included the outlawing of traditional ceremonies and forced relocations from traditional hunting lands. The latter resulted in starvation and a reliance on government handouts of flour, sugar and lard, laying the foundations for the health problems seen today.

The Indian Act created reserves and the band council system of government designed to undermine traditional forms of government. It gave complete control and financial responsibility of First Nations people to the government of Canada. At the same time, Aboriginal people had less rights and their access to basic services was diminished below that of other Canadians. For example, Aboriginal people were excluded from Old Age Pensions, Unemployment Insurance, Family Allowance and Social Assistance into the 1950's and beyond (Hick, 2004).

The residential school era in Canada began in 1849 and ended in 1996, when the last school closed. This system removed Aboriginal children as young as four years old and kept them away from their families and communities well into their

IN SOME RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS THE
DEATH RATE
WAS AS HIGH AS
75%
FROM
**DISEASE,
STARVATION
AND ABUSE**
(MILLOY, 1999).

THE CHILDREN WHO SURVIVED
OFTEN HAD LOW LITERACY
RATES AND DID NOT HAVE
PARENTING OR LIFE SKILLS.

teens. Residential schools were designed to assimilate children into Canadian society. Children were not allowed to speak their native languages, their hair was cut and their traditional clothing

discarded. It was mandatory education with forced removal. Some estimate that 150,000 children attended the schools at the height of the residential school era. Underfunded and run by churches, the impact on Aboriginal people was devastating. In some residential schools the death rate was as high as 75% from disease, starvation and abuse (Milloy, 1999). The children who survived often had low literacy rates and did not have parenting or life skills. Many turned to substances in order to forget the trauma they experienced while attending residential school. Duran (2006) argued that the 'soul wound' that was created through the assimilation policies like residential schools created a learned helplessness and hopelessness.

In a study conducted by the Chiefs of Ontario, 35% of First Nations adults believed that their parents' attendance at residential schools negatively affected the parenting they received as children.



Additionally, 67% of the adults surveyed believed that their grandparents' attendance at residential schools negatively affected their parenting skills (2003).

The high rate of poverty today is linked to the traumas experienced by current and past generations brought about by efforts to colonize and assimilate Aboriginal people in Canada through damaging government policies. From the discussions with the key informants, it is clear that service providers who understand the impact of these past traumas are more likely to be effective in providing culturally sensitive and appropriate services to their clients.

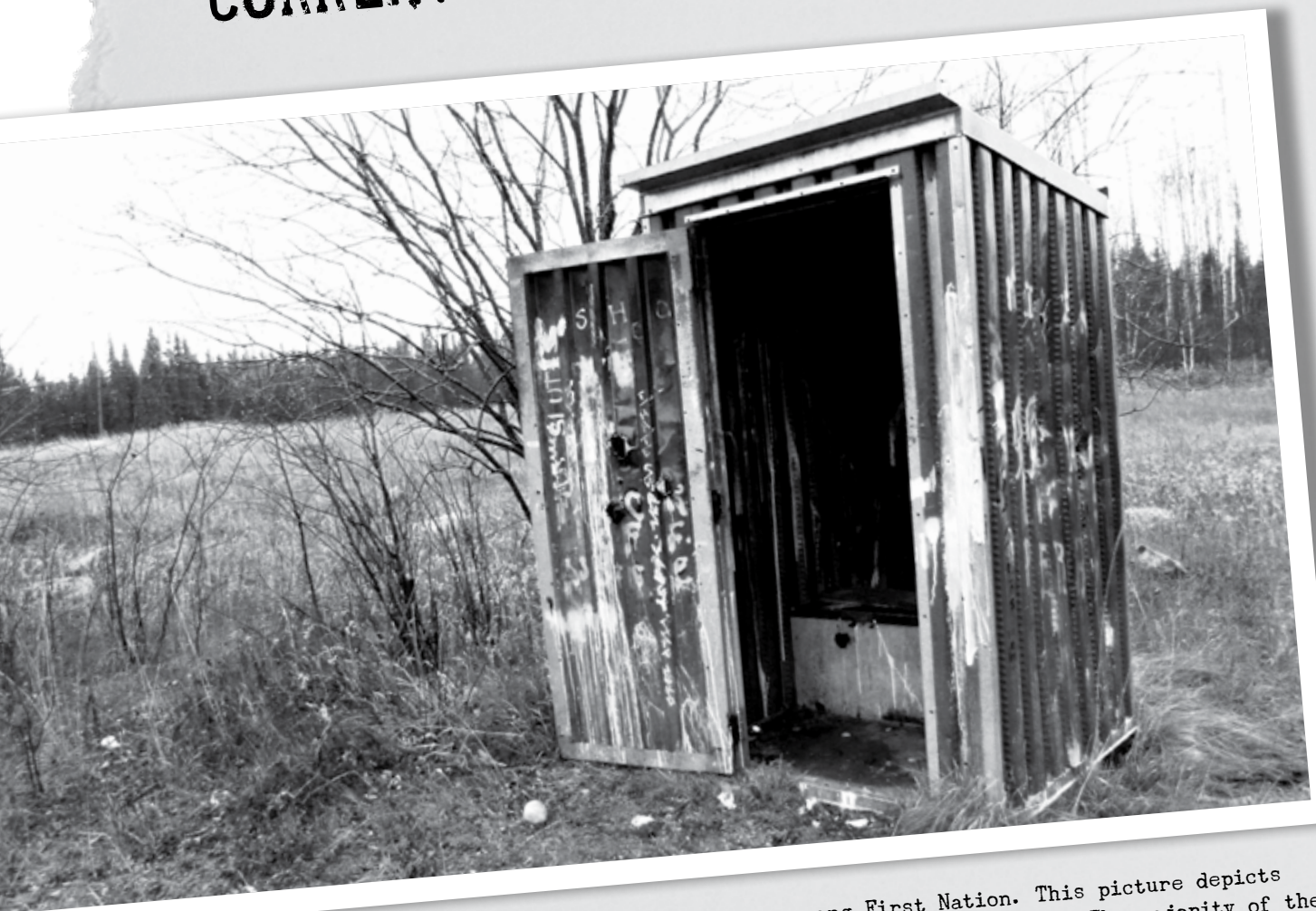
The report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (1996) was seen by many as an opportunity to break with the past and to embark on a new path built on recognition and understanding of responsibility of governments and Aboriginal people. It was seen as an opportunity to build a new and better relationship with the Aboriginal people of Canada, based on mutual respect, recognition, responsibility and sharing. Since that time there has been some progress with respect to the recognition of past wrongs. Most notable is the June 2008 federal government apology to Aboriginal people for the damage done by the residential school system to Aboriginal culture and language and the lasting impact it has had on the social, economic and cultural welfare of First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities. More recently, on November 10, 2010, Canada endorsed the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples. This non-binding document identifies the rights of Indigenous peoples globally and was not supported by Canada when it was initially adopted by the United Nations in 2007.

POLICIES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE LOSS OF
LANGUAGE AND CULTURE INCLUDED THE OUTLAWING
OF TRADITIONAL CEREMONIES AND FORCED
RELOCATIONS FROM TRADITIONAL HUNTING LANDS.

THE LATTER RESULTED IN
STARVATION
AND A RELIANCE ON
GOVERNMENT
HANDOUTS OF FLOUR,
SUGAR AND LARD, LAYING THE
FOUNDATIONS FOR THE HEALTH
PROBLEMS SEEN TODAY.

- CHAPTER 4: CURRENT CONTRIBUTING FACTORS -

IN ADDITION TO HISTORICAL FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO FIRST NATIONS CHILD POVERTY, THERE ARE NUMEROUS CURRENT CONTRIBUTING FACTORS.



One of the mandatory outhouses in Mishkeegogamang First Nation. This picture depicts the daily struggles that on reserve community members have to face. The majority of the homes in Mishkeegogamang are not up to par with regular housing standards and are not equipped with running water.

- Treena Ashnugeesha - First Nations youth

INADEQUATE HOUSING

Aboriginal families are significantly more likely to live in poor housing conditions than the general population. Across Canada, Aboriginal parents were almost twice as likely to be in core housing need compared to other Canadians (i.e., more than 30% of household income is spent on finding suitable local housing). They were also significantly more likely to live in overcrowded housing or to live in a house that needs major repairs (National Council on Welfare, 2007). In Ontario, about 15% of homes occupied by Aboriginal people were in need of major repairs (Statistics Canada, 2007).

Twenty-two percent of on reserve households lived in inadequate housing and were in core housing need, compared to 2.5% of non-Aboriginal households. Off reserve, 21% of Aboriginal households had problems affording housing and were in core-housing need, compared to 14% of non-Aboriginal households (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2009).

The housing shortage is acute on reserve, and many young mothers are forced to live in over-crowded and run-down housing. In 2006, almost 22% of First Nations housing was in need of major repair, compared to 7% of the non-Aboriginal population. Off reserve, First Nations people were more than twice as likely to live in a house that needs major repairs (Indian and Northern Affairs, 2010).

Many First Nations communities lack potable water and sewage systems. According to a national assessment by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, almost 30% of water in First Nations was potentially harmful (2003). As of November 2011, there were 131 boil water advisories in First Nations across Canada (First Nations Inuit Health Branch, 2011).

ALMOST
30%
OF WATER IN FIRST
NATIONS WAS
POTENTIALLY HARMFUL
(2003)

Poor housing is also related to poor child health outcomes including higher infant mortality rates, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, and respiratory disease (UNICEF, 2009). Other impacts include an increase in life threatening infections, injuries, mental illness and chronic illness (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2010a).

Poor housing is one of the risk factors linked to the high number of First Nations children in care due to neglect (NCCAH, 2010b). Poverty and housing issues are closely linked, and the inability of First Nations parents to obtain suitable accommodation for their children is a major concern that can lead to involvement with child protection services.

EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

First Nations people, both on and off reserve, have higher rates of unemployment, compared to the non-Aboriginal population. Across Canada, in 2006, the non-Aboriginal unemployment rate was 5.2% compared to 13% for registered First Nations people living off reserve

75%

**DID NOT BELIEVE THAT
TEACHERS EXPECTED
ABORIGINAL STUDENTS
TO SUCCEED IN SCHOOL**

70%

**OF ABORIGINAL
STUDENTS DIDN'T FEEL
WELCOME IN SCHOOL**

100%

**BELIEVED THAT RACISM
WAS A FACTOR FOR
ABORIGINAL STUDENTS
IN SCHOOL**

(SILVER, MALLET, GREEN ^A_{ND} SIMARD, 2002).

and 22.1% for those living on reserve (Statistics Canada, 2006). About 43% of the total Aboriginal population 15 years of age and over in Ontario were either unemployed or not in the labour force (Statistics Canada, 2007).

According to a study conducted by the Canadian Council on Social Development, racism had a significant impact on the ability to obtain employment and once employed, on the ability to receive equitable wages (Lock-Kunz, Milan & Schetagne, 2000). Furthermore, when education and experience are equal, the unemployment rate for Aboriginal people is still highest among visible minorities.

Incomes were lower for First Nations people, as compared to the general population who had an average income of \$26,000. The median income for Aboriginal people in Ontario age 15 and over was under \$19,000 in 2006. This was 25% lower than that of the general population (Statistics Canada, 2007). In Canada, the median income of First Nations people living on reserve was just over \$11,000 and \$17,000 for First Nations people living off reserve (Indian and Northern Affairs, 2010). According to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People's, there is a significant loss of income, 7.5 billion in 1996, which has grown each year for Canada from lost revenue from taxes, potential earnings and the costs of assistance resulting from unemployment and underemployment.

EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

Educational achievement is lower in First Nations populations. Almost 24% of non-Aboriginal people in Canada aged 25-64 had a university degree in 2006, compared to 4.3% of registered First Nations people on reserve and 9.2% who lived off reserve.

Almost 40% of registered First Nations people in Canada did not have a high school diploma, degree or certificate compared to approximately 15% of the non-Aboriginal population (Indian and Northern Affairs, 2010).

The educational profile for Aboriginal people in Ontario is similar. Approximately 38% of Aboriginal people in Ontario did not have a certificate, diploma or degree and only about 7% had a university level education (Statistics Canada, 2006).

Some of the underlying causes for educational underachievement include lower and inadequate funding for schools on reserve. Funding for First Nations schools has been capped since 1996, while need and inflation has grown 6.2% (First Nations Education Council, 2009).

Schools on reserve receive less funding per student than schools off reserve. Funding for schools on reserve does not include building maintenance, library services, technology, sports, recreation or language services, transportation costs, operating costs, student data management costs or employee benefits

(First Nations Education Council, 2009).

First Nations students experience racism and lower expectations throughout their educational lives. From kindergarten onward, First Nations children encounter a devaluing of their culture and identity. The British Columbia Teachers Federation on Aboriginal Education writes, "For years, Aboriginal students, parents, and Aboriginal representatives have complained about racism, but their complaints have been dismissed." They go on further to say that Aboriginal teachers are also discriminated against. A report released by the Canadian Teachers Federation confirms that not only do Aboriginal students experience racism in school, Aboriginal teachers experience it as well (St. Denis, 2010).

A study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that 75% of the people participating in their study did not

"MOST SYSTEMS DON'T SUPPORT THE POVERTY ISSUE AND WE STILL LOVE TO BLAME THE VICTIM." - KEY INFORMANT

believe that teachers expected Aboriginal students to succeed in school, 70% of Aboriginal students didn't feel welcome in school and 100% believed that racism was a factor for Aboriginal students in school (Silver, Mallet, Green & Simard, 2002).

STEREOTYPES ABOUT POVERTY

Key informants identified the stigma that society and service providers still attach to the poor as an underlying cause of the high rate of poverty. Breaking through the stigma of poverty, facing it, and being able to discuss it, without the impediments of judgement and re-victimizing the family, are critical to providing effective assistance.

"We as a sector have done such a crappy job of reaching out to Canadians on poverty. We have no clue about how to talk to people about poverty and the images we use are mediocre. The idea that everyone can pull themselves up by the bootstraps and succeed is false." - Key Informant

For urban First Nations parents living in poverty, issues of stigma and shame continue to affect their well-being. Parents are still blamed if they cannot feed their children. Families living in poverty continue to be stereotyped as spending their money on drinking and substances, despite evidence that shows a lower rate of alcohol use among primary caregivers in hungry families (Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, 2003).

"Most systems don't support the poverty issue and we still love to blame the victim." - Key Informant

**"WE AS A SECTOR HAVE DONE
SUCH A CRAPPY JOB OF REACHING
OUT TO CANADIANS ON POVERTY.**

WE HAVE NO CLUE ABOUT
HOW TO TALK TO PEOPLE ABOUT POVERTY
AND THE IMAGES WE USE ARE MEDIOCRE.

THE IDEA THAT EVERYONE CAN PULL
THEMSELVES UP BY THE BOOTSTRAPS AND
SUCCEED **IS FALSE"**

- KEY INFORMANT

- CHAPTER 5: OUTCOMES -

**POVERTY IMPACTS CHILD WELFARE,
ACCESS TO HOUSING, HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING, AND ACCESS TO
HEALTHY FOOD.**

These all have an impact on child health and development. This chapter discusses the serious consequences of First Nations child poverty.



HEALTH OUTCOMES

Poverty is a social determinant of health, and its impacts - food insecurity, substandard housing, and poor water quality - are linked to health disparities (The Centre for Research on Inner City Health, 2009). First Nations children suffer a greater burden of poor health than other children in Canada. The causes are largely influenced by environmental and socio-economic factors, including huge differences in income, education and employment opportunities between First Nations peoples and other Canadians. Compounding this issue are geographic isolation and lack of access to physicians and medical specialists (UNICEF, 2009).

Despite a decrease in infant mortality rates over the last decade, First Nations children living on reserve still have a higher rate of infant mortality than other Canadians at 7.2% of live births compared to 5.2% for the general population (Indian and Northern Affairs, 2004). One of the leading causes of infant mortality among First Nations children is Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). SIDS has not only been linked to environmental factors such as the mold and mildew often found in substandard housing, but to crib safety, smoking and lack of breastfeeding. First Nations babies aged 1-12 months are three times more likely to die than the general population in Canada (UNICEF, 2009).

Hungry children are more likely to get colds and viruses, to have a compromised immune system, to have anemia, sore stomachs and headaches. Food insecurity is also linked to a number of mental health issues including low self-esteem, inability to concentrate, shame, moodiness and behavioural problems (Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, 2003).

LIVING IN POVERTY OVER
EXTENDED PERIODS IS
LINKED TO AN INCREASED
RISK OF BEHAVIOUR
PROBLEMS, DEPRESSION,
EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS
AND FAMILY DYSFUNCTION

(ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS, 2006)

There are higher rates of respiratory tract infections for First Nations children living on reserve e.g. 3.6% of First Nations children on reserve had bronchitis compared to 1.4% for the Canadian population (The Centre for Research on Inner City Health, 2009).

Poverty is also linked to lack of success in school. One key informant reported that about half of poor children have early literacy and speech delay issues as well as behavioural issues. Often, staff do not have the specialized training needed to attend to the needs of these children. Their only option is to refer the child to another agency. However, waiting lists are long.

Living in poverty over extended periods is linked to an increased risk of behaviour problems, depression, emotional problems and family dysfunction (Assembly of First Nations, 2006). The impact of intergenerational trauma stemming from the residential school system continues to affect First Nations children. The many harmful impacts endured by the survivors and their children and grandchildren, including physical, sexual, emotional abuse, low self-esteem, depression, inability to form healthy

relationships, etc. These are all linked to poverty, homelessness and other negative consequences (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004).

There is a recognized association between poverty and a range of mental health issues, including stress, anxiety, depression and lack of self-esteem (NCCAH, 2010b). Poverty, combined with addictions and over-crowded housing, is a contributing factor to family violence, both on and off reserve. Children are often the direct recipients of their impact, and are at risk of repeating the cycle of abuse (UNICEF, 2009).

FOOD INSECURITY

Thirty-three percent of Aboriginal households in Canada experienced food insecurity compared to 9% of non-Aboriginal households. A total of 14% of Aboriginal households were affected by severe food insecurity, compared to 3% of non-Aboriginal households (Willows, 2009).

"It is impossible to live on what is provided through social assistance, it encourages people to lie and cheat in order to survive. If we really value children in our society, then as a society we need to provide parents with the funding and support to enable them not to just merely survive, but to be able to thrive." - Key Informant

Food insecurity is a serious issue among urban Aboriginal people. In a survey of parents conducted by the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres in 2003:

- ◆ 79% said they worried about running out of food or the money to buy food
- ◆ 35% said their children had gone hungry because they had run out of food and money

- ◆ 11% had kept their child from school because they had no food to send with them to school
- ◆ 7% said they had been involved in the child protection system because of food shortages

More than half of First Nations children are either overweight or obese and are at risk of developing diabetes, heart disease and other conditions as they get older. In 2004, the rate of obesity among First Nations children under 12 years of age was more than four times the Canadian rate. This is linked to the high rate of diabetes among First Nations youth and adults. Poverty, parental education and physical activity are linked to increasing rates of child obesity (The Centre for Research on Inner City Health, 2009). Families living in poverty have less access to healthy food and to recreation opportunities for their children. Communities have seen increases in type 2 diabetes in children (UNICEF, 2009). Child obesity is a major health concern with long term individual and societal consequences.

UNDERFUNDING OF CURRENT SERVICES

The needs in First Nation communities are increasing at a far greater rate than the funding. An issue facing all organizations working with people living in poverty is the lack of sufficient and stable long-term funding. This funding is needed for programs and services that address poverty. Key informants noted that, based on current demands for their programs, they could easily double their clientele if they had the resources to support additional programming. For example, funding for the Aboriginal Head Start program was estimated to only reach about 12% of eligible children on reserve and 7.6% off reserve (National Council of Welfare, 2007).

79%

FOOD INSECURITY IS A SERIOUS ISSUE AMONG URBAN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

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of food shortages

"Right now the majority of First Nation people aren't successful. But if I were to walk down to Ottawa and go to one of the mainstream schools and cut their funding back by \$2-\$3K per student, put them in portable trailers where the heat goes off every couple of weeks, reduce the money I provide in child welfare, and cut out all the voluntary sector services, nationalize their parent's property and make them subject to the Indian Act, in a couple of years they wouldn't be doing very well either." - Key Informant

For families with mental health and substance use issues, the lack of locally available services means that parents must access treatment away from their home. Many have to place their children in care while they are in treatment. Waiting lists for treatment programs are long. Children

and parents are often unable to access needed services. Front-line workers may bear the responsibility of supporting families as well as considering options to provide safe environments for children.

In Ontario, the majority of Aboriginal people live off reserve. Funding for programs and services needs to be placed where the people are living including both on and off reserve situations.

"We have this stereotype that the poor can't manage money, but there are also cases where the rich can't manage money, but we don't stereotype the rich on the basis of a minority, and we shouldn't do that to the poor either." - Key Informant

Support is also needed for agencies to do research and to advocate for the needs of their clients.

THE LACK OF ADEQUATE FUNDING RESULTS IN:

- ◆ Programs turning families away that need and want help
- ◆ Families that cannot afford transportation to the program
- ◆ Programs that don't have the funding to cover transportation costs for families
- ◆ Inability to provide evening workshops to families who cannot come during the day
- ◆ Insufficient parenting classes to accommodate the different schedules and needs of families
- ◆ Not being able to provide traditional programming to clients
- ◆ Inability to hire professionals when needed (e.g. registered nurses) to run programs
- ◆ Aboriginal service providers who have worked for 10 years without a salary increase

CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

The term 'children in care' is used throughout this report to refer to children who are under the care of child protection services. The term can also refer to children who are in foster care or in a group home setting.

Although data on the number of First Nations children in care in Ontario is incomplete, First Nations children appear to be 2 to 3 times more likely to be in care than the general population. At least 12% of the children in care in Ontario were Aboriginal, although Aboriginal people made up about 2% of Ontario's total population (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Society's, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2007).

Neglect, based on poverty, is the primary reason for First Nations children being reported to child protection agencies (NCCAH, 2010c). The rates of substantiated cases of physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and exposure to domestic violence were lower for First Nations children in comparison with non-Native children. Yet, First Nations children are more likely to receive the most intensive and costly intervention; out of home placement (Troc  , MacLaurin, Fallon, Knoke, Pitman & McCormack, 2005).

Six percent of children living on reserve were in care in 2002-03, compared to an estimated national rate among non-Aboriginal children of less than 1% (Indian and Northern Affairs, 2004;

Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2007). Despite accounting for only 5% of Canada's child population, Aboriginal children represented approximately 25% of children admitted to care in 1998 and 2003 (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2006).

Children from First Nation communities are more likely to be placed in care away from their home communities, and risk being disconnected from their extended families, culture and community (OACAS, 2010). This is often seen as the continuation of decades of removal of First Nations

"[child welfare] needs to set aside the arrogance that we know what's best for you and embrace other ways of knowing and looking at the world in terms of Indigenous children. It also means understanding that the current system is not working and is culturally loaded. People assume that the child welfare system is culturally neutral but it's only neutral to the British and the French because it's based on that worldview."

(Cindy Blackstock in National Council of Welfare - First Nations, M  tis and Inuit Children and Youth: Time to Act, fall 2007)

children from their families, communities and culture. This includes the residential school system and the '60's scoop', so named because the highest number of adoptions of First Nations children to non-Aboriginal families took place during the decade of the 1960's, sometimes without the knowledge or consent of the family or community.

OFF RESERVE, THERE ARE A NUMBER OF CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS TO BRIDGE THE GAP FOR FAMILIES IN NEED. [...] ON RESERVE, THESE SERVICES OFTEN DON'T EXIST.

homes and professional expertise. Children who were apprehended were likely to be taken out of the community, away from their homes and culture and placed into care. In areas of the north where Cree may be the language spoken at home and in the community, there are many children who have difficulty with English. Caregivers may not be able to support the children to keep their language and culture, adding to the difficulties for children who are sent south for services.

The outlook for children in the child protection system is dimmer than for other children. Children in the child protection system are more likely to have poor health as adults, achieve less success at school, which has implications for future employment, and are more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system (National Council on Welfare, 2007).

Underfunding is a particular concern in the north and in remote areas of the province. In one case an Aboriginal child protection agency was forced to close its doors because of substantial underfunding and the agency's inability to comply with the legislation for child welfare. The agency, whose geographic area of responsibility included very few other support services for vulnerable families, identified underfunding as impacting every area of need for First Nations families, including child welfare, community supports for families, child mental health services, foster homes, group

"The severe lack of services in the region, and the absence of child mental health services, means there is no way to help or intervene in the lives of children at a young age."

- Key Informant

In areas of the north, there is often a lack of local child mental health services to deal with serious issues such as FASD, depression, autism and behavioural problems. In one area of the province, a key informant spoke of being on a waiting list for one and a half years to get a child diagnosed, after which, there was no local service provider available to work with the child and the family. The only alternative was to take the child outside of the community for critical services. In the home community, there are often no community supports available for children or families.

Off reserve, there are a number of charitable organizations to bridge the gap for families in need, such as food banks, United Way, Salvation Army, Friendship Centres and others. On reserve, these services often don't exist.

The lack of housing in First Nation communities is an additional barrier faced by child protection services. It makes it difficult to approve foster homes or customary care homes for children given the smaller home sizes, lack of potable water and the substandard conditions found in many of the homes on reserve.

Some people in child protection services may understand the issues facing First Nations families and the need for a unique approach to meet needs, but this information does not reach all front-line workers who are called in to respond to family needs.

"The majority of protection workers are straight out of university and are armed with the best intentions. They go into a First Nations home and see overcrowding for example, or that there may not be a lot of food in the home, and the worker immediately sees neglect. The worker is evaluating the situation from their own perspective and not from that of the family or culture." - Key Informant

One of the major blocks to providing supports to First Nations families is that service providers often interpret poverty as neglect. The disproportionate impact of poverty-induced forms of neglect has been noted by the Assembly of First Nations as a key factor to the high number of children in care.

"If a young First Nation mother is living in a home with her mum, grandmother, and maybe other members of her family, it may not be the best situation, but if these people are providing her with support, then this can be a good thing. The child protection worker, however, may not understand or appreciate the importance of this outside support and see only overcrowding and neglect."

- Key Informant

Aboriginal workers may make suggestions to families that differ from the directions of non-Aboriginal child protection workers. Families involved with child protection services may be afraid to follow the directions of Aboriginal workers for fear that this might increase the likelihood of their children being taken away. Non-Aboriginal child protection workers may believe they are better equipped to determine the needs of the child than the Aboriginal workers.



9x

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE
WERE ALMOST NINE TIMES
MORE LIKELY TO END UP
IN THE CRIMINAL
JUSTICE SYSTEM
THAN OTHER CANADIANS.



ALL OF THESE FACTORS HAVE HUGE
IMPLICATIONS FOR FIRST NATIONS
CHILDREN, SINCE THE MAJORITY OF
INMATES WERE PARENTS AND IN
MANY CASES, SINGLE PARENTS

(ELIZABETH FRY SOCIETY, 2003-2011).

Across Canada, there was a lower level of funding provided to First Nations child protection agencies compared to non-Aboriginal agencies (approximately 22% less per child for First Nations child protection services than for non-Aboriginal agencies). As noted in the 2008 Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies report, *Your Children's Aid*, "There were serious shortcomings in the funding and administration of services for Aboriginal children in Canada, including those in Ontario."

In 2007, the Assembly of First Nations and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society filed a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission on the basis that the federal government is discriminating against First Nations children by providing less child welfare benefits on reserves.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Aboriginal people were almost nine times more likely to end up in the criminal justice system than other Canadians. The prison population consisted of 20% Aboriginal men and 29% Aboriginal women, although Aboriginal people comprised only 2% of the population in Canada. The rate of incarceration of Aboriginal women into the federal prison system increased 37% compared to that of Aboriginal men of 5.5% (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2007). During the same period, rates of incarceration for non-Native women increased 2.8% (Correctional Service of Canada, 2002).

Aboriginal people were more likely to get a public defender and to plead guilty (Canadian Criminal Justice Association, 2000). They were more likely to get the maximum sentence for the offence committed and less likely to get probation or early

release. The number of people remanded into custody awaiting trial was higher than those being sentenced. All of these factors have huge implications for First Nations children, since the majority of inmates were parents and in many cases, single parents (Elizabeth Fry Society, 2003-2011).

The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission of Manitoba succinctly described why the child protection system and criminal justice system are intertwined.

"The available evidence indicates that the apprehension of Aboriginal children by the child welfare system tends to set a pattern of multiple foster home placements. The evidence also indicates that this pattern often leads the children into young offender institutions and, ultimately, to "graduate" to the adult correction system (2001)."

Aboriginal people were more likely to be questioned by the police during the course of daily activity and charged for crimes. Once charged, Aboriginal people were incarcerated at more than six times the national rate and denied parole at a higher rate than non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal women were especially at risk for incarceration with rates exceeding men (Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.). This often leaves Aboriginal children more at risk for poverty and involvement with child protection services.

- CHAPTER 6: SUPPORTING FIRST NATIONS FAMILIES -

THE CHILD IS NOT VIEWED IN ISOLATION BUT IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE BROADER NETWORK OF FAMILY, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE.

Chapters 6 and 7 provide recommendations for working with First Nations families based upon the information provided by the key informants. Key informants emphasized the need to work with the whole family as central to the success of strategies to reduce the impact of poverty on First Nations children.

First Nations families may include extended family members, multiple generations and close friends. In addition, strategies for First Nations families must include connections to the community and to culture. This is consistent with First Nations approaches to healing and wellness in which the child, family, culture and community are seen as interconnected and linked.



THE FOLLOWING DIAGRAM PORTRAYS A FIRST NATIONS APPROACH TO SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES LIVING IN POVERTY.

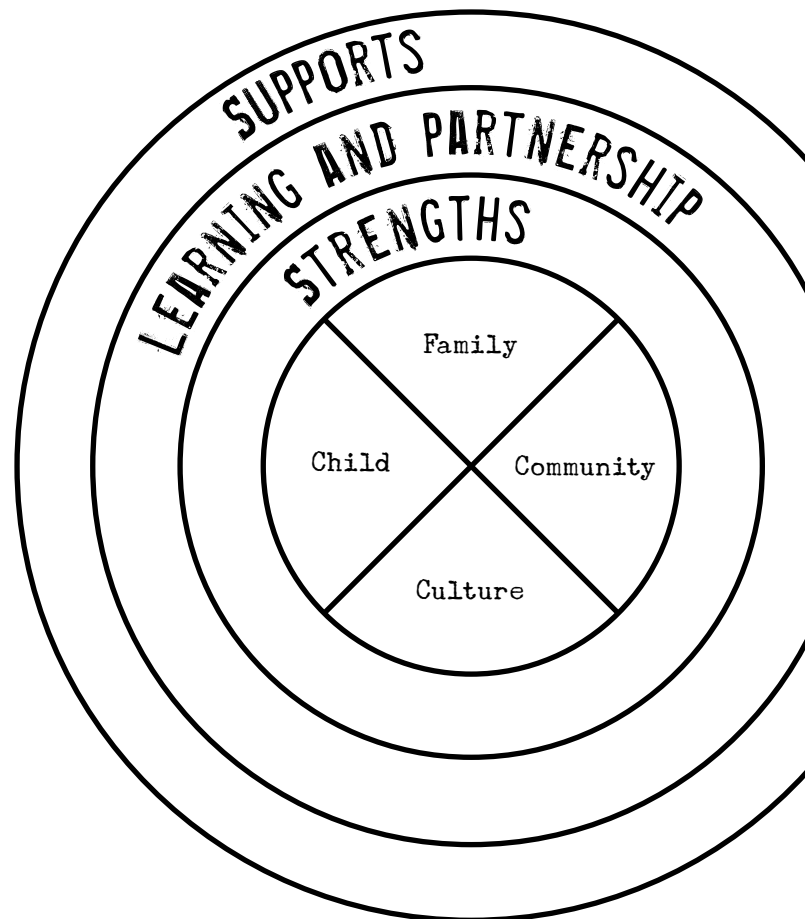
The inner circle - child, family, community and culture - represents the holistic, integrated perspective of First Nations people in Ontario. The child is not viewed in isolation but is an integral part of the broader network of family, community and culture.

The outer rings represent the broad areas of support needed to provide First Nations parents and young children affected by poverty with the assistance they need to move forward in their lives.

STRENGTHS: Strengthen the family unit. Listen to what parents identify as their needs. Tailor programs to respond to parents' priorities. Build on parents' strengths and provide opportunities for them to develop their skills.

LEARNING AND PARTNERSHIP: Recognizing biases and preconceptions about the poor and about First Nations people. Learn from each other. Increase knowledge of social service workers of the unique history and circumstances of First Nations people. Work together across organizations and jurisdictions.

SUPPORTS: Provide funding for programs and approaches to support First Nations families and children. Recognize that it takes time to see the impact of programs and support for families and to measure results accordingly. Increase the social supports provided, under programs like Ontario Works.



STRENGTHEN THE FAMILY UNIT

Underpinning the approaches that are effective in working with First Nations families is the need to stabilize the family, strengthen the family unit and avoid focussing on the needs of the child separately from the needs of the family. The First Nations approach is to consider the perspective of the

SUCCESS STORY

"We were introduced to a young family. The father was a student and the mother stayed at home. There was difficulty with his funding, and at times there was very little money coming into the house. It looked like he was going to have to quit school. Mom would do odd jobs to make ends meet. We offered parent relief and regular programming that provided social structure for their young son and mom. We also provided cultural support as the dad is an adoptee. We continued to support mom and dad through the rough patches by providing emergency food and emotional support. We were able to connect the dad with an employer where he is working full-time. His employer needed a temporary employee and mom stepped up to fill the spot. Stuck for child care we made referrals where the son was successfully enrolled. Mom now works for the daycare where her son attends. They keep in touch and look forward to participating in evening events." - Key Informant

family, not of the individuals in the family, and to identify what the family needs to help them succeed. There needs to be recognition that there is a long history and current realities behind the immediate family problems and that it will take time and support for the family to change.

COMMUNICATE success stories in the community and share how families were able to surmount personal obstacles in their lives.

SUPPORT parents to return to school for further education and training through employment and training circles and supports to build the family's life skills.

PROVIDE assisted housing for families to provide stability and security and support to help move the families out of the poverty cycle.

RECOGNIZE the specific challenges to accessing training and employment for families living both on and off reserve, including the lack of local employment and training, and the need for transportation to reach the nearest town where there may be employment or training opportunities.

ESTABLISH family centres for First Nations families that focus on efforts to rebuild the family, support connections between the family and the community and look after the best interests of the child, in order to rebuild the family.

INCREASE the number of subsidized daycare spaces, especially for babies less than 18 months, to enable mothers to take training, return to school, or participate in the workforce.

BUILD A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CLIENT

"A six week program isn't going to give enough time to build a trust relationship with the client and the staff and peers and to reach goals."

- Key Informant

Key informants spoke of the need for a long-term approach with families in order to build a relationship with staff and peers. It is a mistake to force the relationship before the client is ready. It is important to take the extra time with parents to gain their trust. Service providers should maintain contact with parents as they work their way through the system. Parents need support from service providers, not just referrals. They need someone to be with them throughout the process.

Key informants spoke of working with parents and children, moving them through programs, providing opportunities for parents to gain confidence by volunteering at the agencies, and of seeing families move forward to employment and stability. This requires a long-term investment in the families.

For families that need help but aren't ready, key informants recommended letting them know that the program is there when they are ready. When families do decide to come to the door, they need to know that the program is prepared to help them in the way that they want to be helped, not in the way that the worker thinks they need to be helped. It is also important to welcome clients in a non-threatening, non-judgemental manner.

EMPOWER THE CLIENT

It is important to ask mothers what they need, what their goals are and then to tailor the program to meet those needs. It is empowering to listen to what clients believe they need. If the workers and organizations dictate the programming, the services may not match the needs, issues and approaches of the participants. Parents need to be involved in each stage of program development and evaluation. Programs need to be parent driven. There should be opportunities for parents to get involved in program delivery as volunteers when they are ready, and to be able to share their stories and their traditions with other families. This approach is effective in helping clients to believe in themselves, to be empowered, and to begin to trust their own judgement.

SUCCESS TOOL BOX

One key informant commented that their participation on a local committee resulted in the group working together to identify and solve systemic issues facing the families. Brain-storming helped to move them away from the silo-thinking that hinders effective service provision to clients. The committee supports broad thinking about their clients and services, opportunities to network among different organizations, and education of service providers about the issues facing First Nations clients.

Clients also benefit from creating their own networks among their peers. This can reduce the sense of isolation that many First Nations families feel in a new city or small isolated community.

PROVIDE supports that focus on the process of working with clients, based on the need to provide long-term support to the child and family. Avoid measuring success based on short-term goals.

EMPOWER the client by tailoring the programs to meet the specific goals and needs of the people in the program. Involve the parents in program development and provide opportunities for the parent to volunteer in program delivery.

USE A CULTURALLY RELEVANT APPROACH

Culture is fluid, dynamic and yet specific. First Nations families have had 150 years of cultural assimilation programs including the residential school system, enfranchisement, the Indian Act, the child protection system and more. For some, traditional culture remains strong. For others, it barely exists, leaving a gap in identity that people may be looking to fill. Each First Nation has a unique culture, which varies from community to community, sometimes even within the same community. It is important to recognize that the term culture, as used here, comes from the families and children. There is not a singular First Nations culture, but a diversity of cultures.

When undertaking cultural programming, be aware of the need to acknowledge and respect the different cultures that may be represented by the parents or children in a program. Programs note success in this

area by being able to respect all cultures in the group and by sharing the different perspectives and approaches taken by the different nations. One program identifies the child's First Nation when the child begins the program, then, highlights different First Nations throughout programming.

Cultural programming is at the heart of services provided to First Nations children and families. It includes teachings related to traditional family values, traditional parenting, using the medicine wheel as a teaching tool, and working with children to inspire in them the importance of culture and their own cultural teachings. It is important to get back to traditional skills such as living off the land and gardening. Sending children to camps where they learn about traditions has been very effective. One key informant described how a program taught mothers about their role in the family, taking women back to understanding what their role was before the arrival of the Europeans. As parents begin to be exposed to the teachings, they may decide to move further and participate in ceremonies.

Some First Nations people have issues in their life that cause them not to be open to cultural programming. It is important for workers to understand that some clients may not wish to move towards participation in ceremonies or cultural activities. Let the parent decide when or if they want to start participating in ceremonies.

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NOT A SINGULAR FIRST NATIONS CULTURE,

BUT A **DIVERSITY** OF CULTURES.

- CHAPTER 7: RECOMMENDATIONS -

SIMPLY CHANGING HOW WE VIEW OR JUDGE FAMILIES IN POVERTY [...] CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE ON SUPPORTING FIRST NATIONS FAMILIES

In order to move forward in responding to the issue of poverty among First Nations children and families, we must look within our organizations and at the broader society. Small changes such as simply changing how we view or judge families in poverty to larger societal changes can make a difference on supporting First Nations families living in poverty.

This section provides a summary of key recommendations to address First Nations child poverty at an individual, program, organizational and a government level.



WORKER

There is a tremendous burden for frontline workers dealing with impoverished First Nations families: underfunding, lack of subsidiary services, low pay and the depth of complex issues, such as HIV/AIDS, drug use and suicide. In northern or in isolated communities, there may be few or no program/service supports, lack of peer support in the community and the pressure of multiple demands contributing to worker pressure and burnout. A key informant noted that one of the reasons for high staff turnover is that they are expected to be an expert on everything, from child development, nutrition, budgeting, domestic violence, health issues, and so forth, but are not paid accordingly.

The key informants identified a number of strategies they use to support front-line staff. They hope these strategies have an impact on their ability to be effective in their roles, and also on their own overall well-being. Suggestions for providing support for program staff include:

- ◆ Develop reward and recognition strategies for staff.
- ◆ Promote and practice good relationships between employees and management.
- ◆ Provide regular opportunities for staff to share ideas and debrief with other workers, in either a formal or informal structure. Use debriefing sessions to interact with professional staff when dealing with specific issues.
- ◆ Provide time-off for workers to compensate for lack of monetary benefits.
- ◆ Provide education and culture days to provide training and other supports for workers.

- ◆ Support the worker to stay healthy and to rejuvenate themselves by providing opportunities for ceremonies at the workplace and by supporting the worker to be self-aware of their own needs and issues.
- ◆ Act on the belief that poverty is everyone's responsibility, not just the worker's or the client's. Relieve the burden of responsibility felt by the front-line workers.
- ◆ Support an environment where the issues of shame and stigma often associated with poverty are addressed in an open and respectful manner.
- ◆ Acknowledge and support Aboriginal front-line workers, regardless of level of formal education. They bring lived experience and cultural knowledge to the work that mainstream workers may need in order to work effectively with First Nations families.

PROGRAM

PROVIDE CULTURALLY BASED SUPPORTS

Key issues and approaches that are considered essential to providing effective supports for First Nations children and families and/or that would serve to reduce the impact of poverty include:

- ◆ Build a coordinated and integrated network of support programs for First Nations families. These programs will help young children to develop to their fullest potential and will help parents to increase their confidence and awareness as parents. These programs will provide cultural and economic supports to help families move out of the poverty cycle.

- ◆ Use a flexible approach that is tailored to specific cultural beliefs, social needs and priorities identified by the First Nations families.
- ◆ Include the use of more Aboriginal workers, Aboriginal terms and language.
- ◆ Start to understand the huge deficit in publicly funded resources for children who live on reserve, including education and child welfare, and also the meagre amounts that are directed into the voluntary sector on reserve.

WORK COLLABORATIVELY WITH OTHER AGENCIES

Programs should link with all programs in the community in order to make good use of resources and staff skills. Without these connections, resources may run out

very quickly and staff may burn-out. In order to maximize the services provided to support families, develop relationships and protocols with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal agencies, including local and regional community agencies.

One benefit of partnerships, collaboration and protocol agreements is that these may provide an opportunity for the community to participate in local cultural events and ceremonies. This may help service providers to start to understand the issues and approaches that Aboriginal agencies use with their clients, and may act as a vehicle for greater understanding among the partners.

- ◆ Develop on-going relationships and protocols, both locally and regionally, among Aboriginal and non-aboriginal service providers to increase awareness, sharing and understanding of the issues they face in providing support for First Nations children. This will improve the working relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service providers, strengthening collaboration, services and referrals.
- ◆ Consider developing formal Memorandums of Understanding with other agencies, local police and the municipality to promote effective working relationships and opportunities to support First Nations children and families.
- ◆ Invite non-Aboriginal agencies to participate in cultural events and ceremonies as a way to increase cultural awareness and build relationships. Invite Aboriginal agencies to come into non-Aboriginal agencies to present on culture, agency services, practice and successful interventions.

SUCCESS TOOL BOX

One local Aboriginal service provider developed a protocol with the local police force to refer First Nations women to their service if they were involved with the justice system. Another provider developed a partnership with the city to work collaboratively together. For the first time, the Aboriginal service provider was able to sit down with the city's senior managers and talk about gaps and where money was needed.

- ◆ Asset mapping - identifying where all services a family would need are in the community and sharing the information with all organizations. Each organization shares their calendars and assets with all other organizations creating a map of all assets.

SERVICE PROVIDER NETWORKS

Service provider networks offer the chance for local providers to connect and to bring First Nations parents' needs, issues, and programming ideas, to a broader table. They can provide key information about mandates, services and limitations. The information gained through networking can help workers develop programs that are more responsive to client needs.

- ◆ Develop local networks between Aboriginal service providers and between both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal service providers to enhance communication, share ideas and concerns related to the clients' needs, to inform and educate each other about services, and to provide the opportunity to strategize and advocate on behalf of their clients.

Some networking committees are formed to address a specific issue of concern, and others address child and family issues in general. Racism remains a problem in many communities. Establishing an anti-racism committee can help in dealing with this issue. Identifying and understanding the subtleties of racism, when setting up the terms of reference, provides an opportunity to develop a strong foundation for committee work

PROGRAMMING

- ◆ Support programming that will take children onto the land. Provide children's cultural camps as a form of therapeutic intervention.

- ◆ Provide transportation and child care services for families who participate in programming.
- ◆ Offer programs in the evenings to provide greater flexibility for parents.

ORGANIZATION

CHILD WELFARE

Previous reviews of the Child and Family Services Act identified issues for Aboriginal people related to the insufficient use of customary care, the need to incorporate Aboriginal approaches to alternative dispute resolution, and the need to develop formal agreements for child welfare between child protection services and Aboriginal communities.

- ◆ Create policies which mandate that Aboriginal child and youth services from the child's community of origin are involved in every aspect of case management. Develop terms of reference in collaboration with an Aboriginal advisory committee to guide, review and regularly evaluate that process.
- ◆ Use Alternative Dispute Resolution techniques as a standard of practice for child protection workers and families. ADR is described as a traditional method of dispute resolution, including circle processes, which have been established by First Nation communities or Aboriginal organizations (ADR-LINK, 2008). Provide ADR training to both Aboriginal and mainstream workers.
- ◆ Develop forms, tools and assessments which reflect Aboriginal realities and culture.
- ◆ Ask questions in a culturally appropriate manner, and allow flexibility to provide appropriate

responses to the needs of the child and family.

- ◆ Address barriers to engagement of parents and community in discussing local child welfare issues in remote northern communities, including high costs of transportation, limited local services, language barriers and poverty.
- ◆ Expand the definition of native community to include Aboriginal service provider organizations.

- ◆ Guide front-line child protection workers in assessing their own biases and misconceptions about First Nations people.
- ◆ Implement a consistent approach for child protection workers across the province that would ensure that First Nations children are referred to their community or an urban Aboriginal agency for services. Implement this approach as a standard and provide training to all front-line child protection workers.

SERVICE PROVIDERS ARE MORE EFFECTIVE IF THEY UNDERSTAND THE TEACHINGS, THE SUPPORTS, AND THE STRENGTHS OF THE COMMUNITIES.

- ◆ Direct child protection services to work with Aboriginal front-line service providers. Direct all First Nations clients to these Aboriginal agencies for support and services as a matter of course.

TRAINING

- ◆ Identify the importance of culturally appropriate health and social services as key to supporting children and families and to providing opportunities for healing.
- ◆ Assist the courts in better understanding and implementing the provisions of the Child and Family Services Act in First Nations families (MCYS, 2010).
- ◆ Provide all front-line workers with training in the areas of First Nations cultural awareness, history and current circumstances of First Nations people (cultural, social, economic), understanding about the different histories, cultures and practices of First Nations, and understanding of the lived culture of First Nations

who help support and are a social network in the community.

people today that includes beliefs, values and perspectives regarding family and community.

- ◆ Make cultural awareness training about First Nations people a necessary and important aspect of the broader training, education and ongoing professional development provided to front-line service providers.
- ◆ Ensure that all front-line service providers learn about the First Nation and Aboriginal-specific organizations, programs and supports that are available for First Nations people, including for those with status and those without.
- ◆ Teach front-line workers about the practice of customary care among First Nation communities and provide practice guidelines and tools.
- ◆ Provide training to front-line child protection workers about the link between poverty and the high rate of First Nations children in care. Include training about service provider biases related to poverty.

FUNDING IS A KEY AREA
FOR BREAKING THE CYCLE
OF POVERTY AND FOR
MEDIATING THE OUTCOMES
AS A RESULT OF POVERTY.

KEY INFORMANTS WERE
CLEAR ABOUT THE NEED FOR
EQUITABLE, APPROPRIATE
AND LONG-TERM FUNDING

GOVERNMENT

JURISDICTION

- ◆ Take into account the cost of providing supports to children and families against the loss to the broader society of the potential skills and talents.
- ◆ Amend the definition of Indian/native person under the Child and Family Services Act to include all Aboriginal children, as defined under section 35 of the Constitution.
- ◆ Collaborate across ministries and governments to address the issue of poverty and its impact on child welfare, health, educational achievement and other areas of impact with policies and funding attached.
- ◆ Facilitate discussions between government and Aboriginal leaders on Aboriginal child welfare issues.
- ◆ Provide advice to the government from Aboriginal leadership on child welfare issues, including the Child and Family Services Act, the Tripartite Table, and the designation of Aboriginal children's aid societies (Government of Ontario Newsroom, 2010).

FUNDING

Funding is a key area for breaking the cycle of poverty and for mediating the outcomes as a result of poverty. Key informants were clear about the need for equitable, appropriate and long-term funding for Aboriginal organizations.

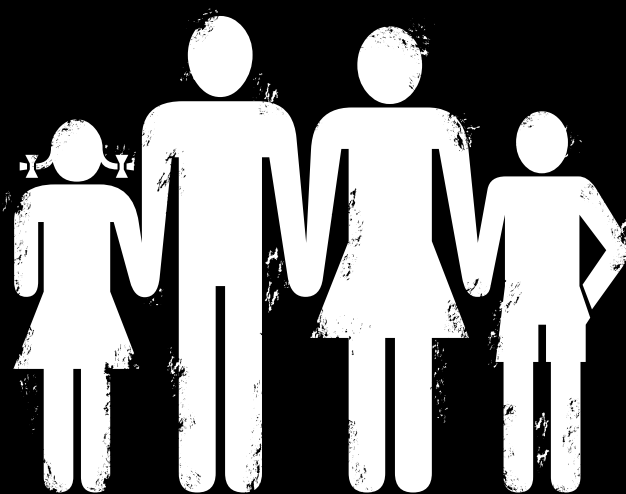
- ◆ Ensure that the program funding is equitable with the level of funding provided to non-Aboriginal programs that provide similar services in Ontario.

- ◆ Ensure that funding for First Nations services on and off reserve reflects the needs of the community, taking into consideration the lack of subsidiary services, location, historical implications and racism.
- ◆ Acknowledge the additional costs associated with providing cultural programming for First Nations families and children due to assimilation policies. These costs should be reflected in the funding formula provided to First Nations and Aboriginal organizations.
- ◆ Establish family-based treatment services for families where substance use may be a concern, so that mothers will be able to be with their children as they undergo treatment. This will help to reduce the fear that child protection services will apprehend their children while they are in treatment.
- ◆ Change regulations that penalize people for getting jobs. If the amount of income the family receives is taken away dollar for dollar the family may be better off not working because their prescription allowance may be taken away and the income from work is not likely sufficient to make up for this loss. There are also costs associated with working (transportation/ clothing/ work boots, etc.) that must be borne by the family.
- ◆ Gather information about the number of working poor First Nations families in Ontario.
- ◆ Consider options to provide affordable credit to the poor. One option is the Grameen model. The Grameen model provides affordable microcredit loans which support small business utilizing peer review of credit activities. More options can be found online at: www.grameen-info.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=43&Itemid=93

INCOME

- ◆ Increase the rates provided through Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program.





WORKER PROGRAM GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION

- CHAPTER 8: ASSESSING YOUR SERVICES -

**QUESTIONS FOR HELPING
ORGANIZATIONS WORKING
WITH FIRST NATIONS
FAMILIES LIVING IN POVERTY**



DOES OUR ORGANIZATION:

1. Know how effective are we at supporting First Nations families and young children affected by poverty? What do we need to do to become better?
2. Know about the extent and impact of poverty with First Nations people in the community and amongst all of our clients?
3. Provide information, training and support to front-line workers to support them in their work with First Nations families and young children affected by poverty?
4. Support front-line workers by providing supervision, culture days, health breaks, stress leave and lieu time?
5. Know about the history and impact of colonization, including forced relocation programs, the residential school system and removal of Aboriginal children?
6. Provide information and training to front-line workers about First Nations people, their worldviews and issues, especially issues that are linked to poverty and young First Nations children?
7. Have effective relationships and partnerships with local service providers, organizations and communities who serve First Nations families living in poverty? This includes having regular meetings and formalized agreements, such as memorandums of understanding (MOU).

- CHAPTER 9: CONCLUDING REMARKS -

**THE BENEFITS OF SUPPORTING
FAMILY SUCCESS ARE FAR
GREATER THAN THE COSTS OF
CONTINUED FAILURE.**

We need to start looking at First Nations poverty not as a personal failing, but as the result of generations of underfunding, neglect, racism and assimilation that leaves First Nations children at the bottom of society and programs struggling to keep up with the demand for services.



The high rate of poverty among First Nations families is linked to historical factors as well as a number of factors that face all families living in poverty in Ontario, including the low social assistance rates that make it difficult for children to thrive. There are restrictions about earning extra money to augment the meagre monthly social assistance allowance. This limits movement of families towards self-sufficiency and in acquiring needed employment skills and experience. Issues pertaining to substance use and mental health further impact people's ability to secure and retain a job. Recent changes to Ontario Works, such as not penalizing families for receiving non-cash gifts such as gift cards for food, are a start in the right direction, but much more needs to be done to help families out of the poverty cycle.

First Nations people face additional hurdles in attempting to move out of the poverty cycle that are linked to the impact of colonization, racism, discomfort or unease in approaching mainstream service providers for help, the isolation of many First Nation communities, the lack of employment opportunities in many communities, underfunding of social services and education, and the almost non-existent non-profit and voluntary sector in First Nation communities.

The benefits of supporting family success are far greater than the costs of continued failure. Equitable and long term funding supports the health and wellbeing of First Nations families both on and off reserve. Universal standards are needed for infrastructure: schools, water, sewage and housing. The costs of incarceration and the continual removal of First Nations children are high - investments in addressing First Nations child poverty are critical to families and communities.

FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE FACE ADDITIONAL HURDLES IN ATTEMPTING TO MOVE OUT OF THE POVERTY CYCLE THAT ARE LINKED TO...

- ◆ the impact of colonization
- ◆ racism
- ◆ discomfort or unease in approaching mainstream service providers for help,
- ◆ the isolation of many First Nation communities
- ◆ the lack of employment opportunities in many communities
- ◆ underfunding of social services and education
- ◆ the almost non-existent non-profit and voluntary sector in First Nation communities

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KEY RESOURCES AND SERVICES

BEST START RESOURCE CENTRE

A range of resources on Aboriginal prenatal and child health.
www.beststart.org/resources/aboriginal_health.html

ABORIGINAL HEAD START

Federal early child development and school readiness program available on and off reserve. Provides support for learning and development needs of young children and provides support to the parents. The six components of the program include:

- ◆ Education
- ◆ Health promotion
- ◆ Culture and language
- ◆ Nutrition
- ◆ Social support
- ◆ Parental/family involvement

For more information on Aboriginal Head Start:

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/famil/develop/ahsor-papa_intro-eng.php

COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN AND CANADA PRENATAL NUTRITION PROGRAM - CAPC/CPNP (OFF- RESERVE)

Community-based program provides support programming to children and their families using culture as the basis.
cpnp-pcnp.phac-aspc.gc.ca

BRIGHTER FUTURES (ON RESERVE)

Community based program promotes healthy child, family and community development programming including child development, parenting and healthy babies.
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/promotion/mental/brighter_grandir-eng.php

ABORIGINAL HEALTHY BABIES HEALTHY CHILDREN (ON/OFF RESERVE)

Pre/post natal program provides support for parents and children through services including home-visiting, pre/post natal screening and assessment, service coordination and support for service integration.
www.ahwsontario.ca/programs/ahbhc/ahbhc_top.html

ABORIGINAL FASD/ABORIGINAL CHILD NUTRITION (ON/OFF RESERVE)

Provides supports for children, youth, families and communities who may be affected by FASD, including information and education, family support and activities focusing on healthy nutrition.
www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/aboriginal/fasd.aspx

AKWEGO (OFF RESERVE)

www.ofifc.org/programmes/Akwego_Urban_Aboriginal_Childrens_Programme.php

FIRST NATIONS NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT REINVESTMENT INITIATIVE (ON RESERVE)

Supports projects, primarily in the areas of child care, child nutrition and parent support activities.
www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/hb/sp/ncb/index-eng.asp

APPENDIX B:

KEY INFORMANT QUESTIONS

- ◆ Can you tell us about a program, service or approach that you have direct experience with, or know of, that has been particularly effective in reducing the impact of poverty in the lives of First Nations children and their families? Can you describe the elements or aspects that make it so effective? What has been its impact? Do you see a role for community development in lessening the negative impact of First Nations child poverty? Please describe.
- ◆ The lack of adequate funding and resources are often identified as the main challenges to providing effective program and service support to First Nations children and families living in poverty. What are the challenges or barriers your organization faces in providing support to First Nations children and families living in poverty? Can you describe the approaches or strategies you've taken that have been effective in overcoming these barriers/challenges? Are there other approaches you would recommend?
- ◆ The loss of culture, and in particular the impact of the residential school system, is generally recognized as a key contributor to the issues faced by First Nation communities and people, including the high rate of child poverty. Could you describe how culture is linked to your organization's efforts to address the impact of poverty on First Nations children?
- ◆ Aboriginal people experience a higher rate of mental health issues, including FASD, compared to the general population. How does this impact on the way your organization responds to the needs of First Nations children living in poverty?
- ◆ The number of First Nations children in care has risen dramatically over the last decade and Aboriginal children are over-represented in the child welfare system. Researchers have identified poverty as a risk factor for this situation. What do you see to be the challenges faced by the child welfare system in responding to the needs of First Nations children in care? What is needed in order to better meet the needs of vulnerable First Nations children at risk of getting involved in the child welfare system?
- ◆ Could you describe any policies, strategies or initiatives in Ontario that have been effective in reducing the rate of First Nations child poverty, i.e. helping to move First Nations families out of the poverty cycle? What recommendations do you have for reducing the overall rate of First Nations child poverty?
- ◆ Front-line workers face challenges on a daily basis to provide support for First Nations children in poverty. Issues of burn-out and high turnover can be attributed to the high demands placed on front-line workers. How can workers be supported to meet those needs and issues? What would you recommend?
- ◆ Do you have any other comments you would like to make?

*best start
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