

The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry-Child Welfare Initiative in Manitoba: A study of the process and  
outcomes for Indigenous families and communities from a front line perspective

by

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MSW, University of Manitoba, 2002  
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## **Abstract**

As the number of Indigenous children and youth in the care of Manitoba child welfare steadily increases, so do the questions and public debates. The loss of children from Indigenous communities due to residential schools and later on, to child welfare, has been occurring for well over a century and Indigenous people have been continuously grieving and protesting this forced removal of their children. In 1999, when the Manitoba government announced their intention to work with Indigenous peoples to expand off-reserve child welfare jurisdiction for First Nations, establish a provincial Métis mandate and restructure the existing child care system through legislative and other changes, Indigenous people across the province celebrated it as an opportunity for meaningful change for families and communities. The restructuring was to be accomplished through the Aboriginal Justice Initiative-Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI).

Undoubtedly, more than a decade later, many changes have been made to the child welfare system but children are still been taken into care at even higher rates than before the changes brought about by the AJI-CWI. In order to develop an understanding of what has occurred as a result of the AJI-CWI process, this study reached out to child welfare workers who had worked in the system before, during and after the process was put in place. Using a storytelling approach based in an Indigenous methodology, twenty-seven child welfare workers shared how they perceived the benefits, the deficits, the need for improvement and how they observed the role of Indigenous culture within the child welfare context. The stories provide a unique insight into how the changes were implemented and how the storytellers experienced the process, as well as their insights into barriers, disappointments, benefits and recommendations for systemic change.

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## Acronyms and Definitions

<b>ADPs</b>	Authority Determination Protocol - The process for determining which child and family services authority is responsible for providing services to individual families. Families have a choice in determining which agency they wish to receive services through regardless of the region in which they reside. Families may also request a change of Authority except in the case when an abuse investigation or adoption is in process.
<b>AJIC</b>	The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Committee is the committee which was formed in November, 1999 to develop a plan based on the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry (AJI) recommendations for child welfare in Manitoba.
<b>AJI-CWI</b>	Aboriginal Justice Inquiry-Child Welfare Initiative – refers to the joint initiative among the Province of Manitoba, Manitoba Metis Federation; the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs; and Manitoba Keewatinook Ininew Okimowin to work together to develop and implement plans to restructure the child welfare system in Manitoba.
<b>CBT</b>	Community Based Teams were teams consisting of local community members who acted as advisors in child welfare matters at the community level. These committees were phased out during the AJI-CWI planning.
<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer – In Manitoba each of the four authorities have a CEO who is responsible for the oversight of CFS agencies within their designated authority. The CEOs are responsible to the Board of Directors of their respective authority.
<b>CFIS</b>	The Child and Family Services Information System is a data management system that supports case tracking and reporting of services provided to children and families through CFS. CFSIS includes information on children in care in addition to information on families receiving protective services and support services.
<b>CFS</b>	Child and Family Services
<b>CICs</b>	Children in Care
<b>DIAs</b>	Designated Intake Agencies are mandated CFS agencies that are responsible for CFS intakes in specific regions of the province. DIAs conduct initial intakes and determine if there is a need for ongoing services and if services are deemed necessary, the child/family are referred to an ongoing service agency of the authority of the family's choosing.

<b>Family Enhancement (FE)</b>	These are voluntary services for families where there are no imminent risks of harm to children, but who need supports to strengthen parenting capacity or to keep children safer at home.
<b>Group 2 Resources</b>	Residential care facilities that provide specialized treatment services for children with high needs who are in the care of CFS.
<b>IRAP</b>	Individual Rate Increase Protocol refers to the process used to request special foster care rates
<b>Indigenous</b>	The term Indigenous is used throughout this study as a term inclusive of all Indigenous people who self-identify as Aboriginal, Métis, First Nation, Inuit, status/non-status and as members of their traditional ancestral territories. The term Aboriginal, which was popularized in the Constitution Act, 1982 and is only inclusive of the ‘Indian, Metis and Inuit’ peoples, will generally only be found within direct quotes. The term ‘Indian’ will only be used in a legal context or in direct quotes.
<b>Places of Safety</b>	Homes that are generally provided by extended family or other community members who agree to look after a child who requires care within their community.
<b>SDMs</b>	Structured Decision Making consists of a set of assessment forms to assess and monitor a family’s eligibility to be referred to or to stay in the family enhancement program.
<b>Support Branch</b>	This term references what was formerly called the Child Protection Support Service and which is now renamed the Child Protection Branch, (Often referred to as the Branch). It is a branch of the Manitoba Department of Family Services and Consumer Affairs. The Child Protection Branch provides programs and services including: Centralized Services, Provincial Investigations, Risk Assessment, Quality Assurance, Intersectoral Activities and Community Supports, Adoption and Post-Adoption Services, Provincial Licensing, and Core Competency Based and Information System Training.(For an organizational map please see page 13 of the Child and Family Services Division 2015-2016 Annual Report at <a href="http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/about/pubs/fsar_2015-16.pdf">http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/about/pubs/fsar_2015-16.pdf</a> )

## Acknowledgements

As I reflect on my journey down this PhD path, I visualize climbing into a well-worn vehicle and taking a long drive crisscrossing the width and length of Manitoba. You know only too well that wherever you end up, the trip will be well worth your time and you will experience beautiful places and meet wonderful people who engage with you and enrich your life. You will feel amazement, be fulfilled and intrigued and sometimes become overwhelmed, knowing from the beginning that there are going to be some rough spots and that your vehicle will need to refuel and be cared for in order to get to your destination.

Ekosani to all the storytellers who really did engage with me and enrich my knowledge and my life. Your words reflect wisdom, experience, insights, honesty, integrity, and a powerful determination to make things right for families and children in care. Your stories moved me beyond words. This dissertation would not be possible without your stories and I can only hope what I have written reflects the stories you intended to share. Thank you for trusting me with your words.

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My family is my heart and I can never find the words to express my full appreciation for all the support you have given me. I know my work has changed how and when we do things together and you have been on hold for so many years while I finish just one more step. To my life partner, Richard, you have been by my side patiently supporting, cooking, cleaning and shopping while you

waited for me to take a break. Your words of encouragement, love and endless belief in me carried me when my fuel was low and I had to stop to grieve for the precious ones who left for the spirit world. There are many great reasons for doing a doctoral program, but for me the most important reason is to role model for my children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews. You have sparked a depth of love in me that I never knew was possible – you are my joy and my future. Ekosani.

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For all the children who have been taken from their families due to colonial policies and lost their  
natural connections to family, community and culture:

*'You are not forgotten and you are loved'*

For the adults who have the care and responsibility of children:

*'Every act of unconditional love is an act of resistance'*

## CHAPTER 1

### SEARCHING FOR OUR ELDERS' WISDOM

Connecting the Dots

As I lay awake bathed in the early morning sunlight  
Streaming through my window facing east  
I'm remembering anger's face  
Her name is not important; I'm to call her "mom"

My mother's gentle spirit was never angry, only hurt  
Eight years of anger's face, smoldering with rage  
Has taught me many lessons  
Internalized so long

Hide, don't say a word  
Maybe, just maybe she won't find us  
Shhh, under the covers, quick  
Let's just play in the bush all day...

Why would you beat a child  
Did you beat her  
When she finally blessed your womb  
Does her body remember the pain of welts and countless bruises

Does her head turn to the sound of curses  
Did she learn to clean your filth  
What memories have you left her  
I was only five when you first attacked my spirit

Now, as I lay awake bathed in the early morning sunlight  
Streaming through my window facing east  
I'm remembering why anger has no place around me  
Why I surround myself with love

Yes, now I recognize why anger has no place  
As the door quietly closes  
The only sounds you hear are my footsteps walking away  
From the anger that no longer has a place in my life.  
All my relations

Osowa Askiy Iskewew

## **Introduction**

I begin this writing with a poem I wrote as I contemplated my own journey in child welfare because it represents to me the real reason for beginning this work. It also reminds me that I am only one person in many thousands who have been and who continue to be separated from families and communities through the child welfare system. I know from personal experience that social workers and foster parents may be well-intended and yet children seldom leave the system without deep scars, whether those scars are visible or internalized pain.

Long before I considered a PhD program, I felt a connection to the topic of child welfare and recognized the connection as resulting from my personal experience with the child welfare system as a child. I believe I made the decision to become a social worker the day I sat in the back seat of the social worker's car as she drove my younger brother and me to the foster home where we would spend the next eight years. It always seemed ironic to me that I chose social work and child welfare as an area of academic interest because those eight years in that foster home were not good years. As I write this I understand that I chose this area of study because I want to contribute to positive changes in child welfare, so hopefully in the future fewer children will have to experience the painful disruptions caused by going into state care, and families will be supported in their efforts to heal.

The responsibilities that society carries for the welfare of children are numerous and arduous at times, which is all the more reason that we must be constantly vigilant and ensure the decisions we make are truly in the families' best interests.

## **The State of Child Welfare in Manitoba**

The number of Indigenous children in care in Manitoba is staggering. In 1999, in an attempt to address some of the inequities, the Province of Manitoba undertook the planning for restructuring of the child welfare system based on recommendations from the Aboriginal Justice

Inquiry (AJI) report which had been published in 1991. These efforts eventually resulted in the division of Manitoba's child welfare services into four authorities with a centralized intake. The goal was to establish province wide, separate and distinct child welfare authorities for First Nations and Métis<sup>1</sup> peoples in addition to a general authority. On November 24, 2003, The Child and Family Services Authorities Act was proclaimed and case files and resources were transferred between November 23, 2003 and May, 2005 to the four authorities: First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority (Northern Authority); First Nations of Southern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority (Southern Authority); Metis Child and Family Services Authority; and General Child and Family Services Authority (General Authority). These devolution efforts became known as the Aboriginal Justice-Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI).

In spite of these efforts Manitoba Family Services reports in their 2015-2016 Annual Report the total number of children in care as 10,501 of which 9,205 are Indigenous children who represent 26% of the child population in Manitoba (Manitoba Family Services, 2017). This trend is not new to the history of child welfare in Manitoba, but what is disconcerting is that it was anticipated that the number of Indigenous children brought into care would be reduced as a result of the AJI-CWI efforts. According to statistics provided by Manitoba Family Services the disturbing trend of increasing numbers of children in care has continued despite ongoing efforts to reduce the numbers. Statistics over the fourteen year period between 2002 and 2016 indicate a steady increase of children being brought into care, with the majority of those children identifying as Indigenous. During that period, the total number of all children in care in Manitoba went from 5,495 in 2002 to 10,501 in 2016 while the number of Indigenous children in care during the same period went

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'Metis' will be accented when references are addressing the Métis people in general terms but will not be used when referring to titles of organizations or agencies that do not use it. The same is true of direct quotes.

from 4,449 to 9,205 (Brownell, Chartier, Au, MacWilliam, Schultz, Guenette & Valdivia, 2015, p. xi; Manitoba Family Services, 2017).

At the time of this writing it has been approximately twelve years since the transfer process was complete and while there have been a number of government reports related to the devolution of child welfare in Manitoba, there is limited research on Indigenous child welfare in general and research on this particular topic has been negligible (Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013).

The objective of this research project has been to develop an understanding of how frontline child welfare workers perceive the impact of the AJI-CWI devolution in Manitoba, including the benefits, the deficits, what they perceive as areas for improvement and how they observe the role of Indigenous culture within the child welfare context. I chose to research the devolution of child welfare in Manitoba because it has been a major undertaking which impacts thousands of Indigenous families and individuals who are working in the child welfare system. The relevance and timing of a research project on this topic is germane as the devolution process is considered a unique progression on existing Indigenous child welfare models and is being observed by other jurisdictions as a possible model to emulate (Bourassa, 2010).

The study is also unique in that it addresses the questions from the perspective of Indigenous frontline child welfare workers. Frontline workers bring a range of valuable experience and knowledge about the devolution process and its impact. It is critical to develop an understanding from their perspective of the devolution as it draws on their unique positions of being in the frontlines to implement the changes and observe the experiences of both the families and the agencies involved.

## **Study Background**

The devolution of child welfare services in Manitoba has its roots in two very divergent histories and worldviews. On one hand there is the Euro-Canadian perspective on caring for the

child's best interests which has emerged from centuries of residual ideology and is expressed through laws, child welfare policies and social services. On the other hand there are Indigenous perspectives which favor the traditional value that it takes healthy communities and healthy families to provide for the best interests of their children, who are viewed as gifts on loan from the Creator. That is not to say that both perspectives differ in their long term goals of healthy families and communities but rather it acknowledges that there are two very different worldviews with concurrent understanding of different approaches to caring for children. It also acknowledges the need to be responsive to cultural differences and not impose one worldview onto another worldview.

As I begin to write this I recognize that a distinctly different process is unfolding simultaneously with the academic considerations and influencing the research approach. Acknowledging that process is important as it involves understanding what I, as the researcher, bring to the process, why I chose this topic and how those factors could influence the outcomes. In other words it involves understanding who I am and my relationship to the topic of Indigenous child welfare and the application of an Indigenous methodology.

### **Locating Myself in the Context of the Study: Who Am I?**

I am Osowa Askiy Iskwew, the daughter of Minnie Halkett Paul, a Cree-Dene woman from Lac La Ronge First Nations in northern Saskatchewan. My maternal grandmother was Susan Hastings, a Dene woman who was adopted into our Cree community along with her sisters and one brother when their family perished in an influenza outbreak in 1918. My maternal grandfather was Alexander Halkett, a Cree medicine man. My father was Norwegian and I never had the opportunity to know my paternal grandparents. I am the mother of seven children, grandmother, partner, auntie, cousin, sister, friend, teacher, student, researcher, and social worker. I am

surrounded by people I love and who love me and I try to remember to walk in kindness and respect, remembering I am here because Creator has given me purpose and work to do.

I carry within me a memory of a young girl searching for the familiar, wanting to know the feelings that go with belongingness and that deep connection to family and community. I recognize that young girl as me when I was taken into care the summer I turned five and I recognize how that one act changed my life forever. It disrupted everything that was familiar; it removed me from the familiarity of family, cut me off from contact with my community and forced me into a foreign way of life. When I returned to my home community at the age of thirteen, I understood the meaning behind the saying that 'you can never really go home'. Although my aunties and uncles embraced me, I couldn't understand the language as my childhood had been shaped in a very different environment because I had spent eight years on a small farm in central Saskatchewan learning a different culture. This left me little in common with my cousins and other family members. Upon returning to La Ronge, and having lost our 'Indian' status my mother, two brothers and I lived in town and became further removed from community. Like so many other Indigenous children from the child welfare system I had become a stranger in my own community.

While I can never get those lost years and connections back I feel a connection to my home community, because I am very proud of my people and their accomplishments and as a band member I have the opportunity to go home for visits. The sound of my relatives speaking Cree is like hearing the cheerful, musical sounds of water flowing over a rocky creek bed and their laughter fills my heart. My immediate response the first time I could understand what my mother was saying to my aunt in Cree, as they planned a surprise campfire gathering for my family during a visit, was pure joy. After two years of Cree class in university, I suddenly realized I could understand my relatives. The look of surprise on my mother's face made the effort to learn Cree even more worthwhile.

Even though the child welfare system created a sense of disconnect from my home community, I have never lost a deep sense of spiritual, emotional and physical connection to the land. The drive to La Ronge is always exhilarating as we pass Prince Albert and enter the land of spruce, sand, lakes and invigorating air. It always makes me want to reach out and become one with everything. As I sit on the rocks overlooking La Ronge Lake I envision my ancestors sweeping past in canoes talking and laughing as they went about their daily activities. I remember the stories my mother shared about life and camping on the same lake where she was born. Still I have spent most of my adult life in Manitoba raising my family and living a good life.

I am very grateful for the opportunities I have had to learn about traditional culture and spirituality and to study the history of Indigenous people as it has helped me to understand the impact on my family and to begin healing the wounds caused by my time in care. My personal experience with the child welfare system has provided me with motivation to understand the system, how it impacts the people involved and to search for better ways to support families. The teachings passed down to me through my mother and elders and my educational experiences have taught me to respect diversity in cultures and worldviews. The combination of lived experience and formal education influence decisions regarding what I will research, and how I understand and interpret it.

The following chapter includes a literature review related to Indigenous child welfare with a focus on the Manitoba context. I begin by outlining three major ideological approaches to child welfare reflected in both westernized countries and in Indigenous communities. I then move to a comparative discussion of Indigenous peoples' experience with child welfare systems internationally. The remainder of the chapter reviews child welfare in Canada, specifically in Manitoba from a historical and contemporary perspective.

Chapter three provides a discussion related to the challenges of bridging worldviews in western academic settings and goes on to describe five Indigenous principles that can be incorporated into an Indigenous research approach. Using the academic literature and teachings from elders, the discussion provides insight into how the teachings relate to the political, relationality, spiritual, language, and storytelling traditions and inform an Indigenous approach to research.

Chapter 4 provides a discussion of a conceptual framework based on my understanding of the ways in which ancestral Indigenous peoples and their descendants incorporate a relational methodology based in reciprocity and respect. The methods used by Indigenous people are only now beginning to be appreciated by certain modern scientists. What is applicable to this study is appreciating how the evolving knowledge was collected, stored, applied and shared for the good of all inhabitants, all our relations. Finally in building on the values and knowledge our ancestors passed down through the centuries I draw on a personal experience picking medicine and extrapolate the values represented in the process and describe how they provide a framework for my research methodology.

Chapter five outlines the application of an Indigenous methodology which centers storytelling in both the methodology and methods and incorporates the conceptual framework described in the previous chapter. I present a detailed description of the research question, rationale for choice of topic, and discussion describing the application of a qualitative approach as a concession to westernized approaches and their fit within the Indigenous perspective outlined in the previous chapters. Chapter six describes the story telling methods, meeting with the storytellers, and ethical considerations.

Chapters seven through twelve present a discussion of the six main stories which are drawn from the 27 storytelling sessions. These stories provide a background for understanding the

implementation of the AJI-CWI process and begin where a number of storytellers began, namely in their communities remembering how families and communities cared for the children. These memories are critical as they ground us in the strengths, knowledge and values passed on from ancestors and act as a reminder of the reasons Indigenous people fight for self-determination and the right to care for their families. The story then moves into the first contacts with child welfare and the sixties scoop, and share the storytellers' accounts to demonstrate the devastation to Indigenous families living in their home territories in Manitoba. The final chapters record the storytellers' visions, and first impressions of the AJI-CWI process.

The next part speaks to the process of devolution as it moved from the pre-devolution planning phase. The process began with the physical movement of files to new and existing Indigenous child welfare agencies, the transfer of foster parents along with the children in their care and the issues that arose as a result of these major undertakings.

Chapter ten speaks to the stark realities of working in the trenches of child welfare as social workers share some of their stories about high caseloads, experiences of racism, and the trauma of loss. Chapter eleven presents the storytellers' critiques regarding the AJI-CWI and the following chapter records the storytellers' accounts of the success and the benefits of the AJI-CWI for Indigenous communities. It also speaks to storytellers' recommendations for changes. The final chapter provides an overview of the study findings; presents recommendations based on the stories shared by the storytellers; and ends with concluding comments.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **CONSIDERING CHILD WELFARE**

This chapter consists of a review of the literature describing Indigenous child welfare from international, Canadian and Manitoba perspectives. The overview of an international perspective provides a context in which to understand the different models of child welfare in a range of societies across the world while the brief overview of the experience of Indigenous peoples in countries such as Aotearoa, New Zealand, Australia, United States and Canada provides insight into the colonial influences within child welfare. The following section which focuses on the Canadian experience includes a discussion of the legacy of residential schools that continues to intersect with child welfare. The discussion goes on to describe the historical underpinnings of Canadian child welfare's treatment of Indigenous families through the sixties scoop, millennium scoop, and into the present day Manitoba experience. Finally, the chapter provides some insight the role of poverty in child welfare and looks at the challenges for the Métis peoples and for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, trans, queer and Two Spirit (GLBTQ2S) families and individuals.

#### **Child Welfare Overview from an International Perspective**

The design and delivery of child and family welfare services vary within and across countries due to differing histories and ideologies, resulting in different laws, policies and practices that are unique to each jurisdiction. Cameron, Freymond, Cornfield and Palmer (2007) have described ideological differences among the Anglo-American, continental European and Indigenous child protection systems that have influenced contemporary child welfare services and outcomes. Continental European countries (with some variation) have developed a protectionist and collectivist approach and apply principles of social solidarity and subsidiarity in order to meet the needs of families within their societies. The Anglo-American societies, which include England,

United States and Canada, are referenced as having laissez-faire and individualistic ideals and apply a threshold approach to child and family services.

Simply stated, the threshold approach in England, United States and Canada dictates “that families must meet minimum levels of “dysfunction” to qualify for formal entry into these systems” as they “function within societies that place great emphasis on individual responsibilities and rights” (Cameron et al, 2007, p. 11). The practical implications of this approach are described by Swift (1998):

Investigations take place in the private domain, with particular families as their focus...The case by case approach instructs us to see the problem as individualized; our attention is directed to the unique circumstances and behaviors occurring in this particular family and to the special effects on particular children...this way of organizing child welfare moves the social and economic issues affecting these families to the background. (Cited in Cameron et al, 2007, p. 24)

In other words, an adherence to this ideology results in a ‘blame the victim’ approach and focuses on what is often described as ‘dysfunctional’ families rather than acknowledging and addressing societal factors such as “racism, poverty and intergenerational trauma” which “often erode families’ capacity to reconnect with, invest in and reclaim their children and youth” (de Finney & di Tomasso, 2015, p. 260).

On the other hand, many contemporary European societies work from a collectivist rather than individualistic approach to the extent that “distinctions between state and society are blurred” (Cameron et al, 2007, p. 28). This means that while children are considered “an inseparable part of the biological family” their welfare is not seen as the sole responsibility of the parents (Cameron, et al, 2007, p. 29). More recently, the state’s role includes protecting the health of families, and the

focus of social welfare is on the provision of family services, therapy and prevention as opposed to apprehensions and out of home placements (Cameron, et al, 2007).

As Canada moved to provide child welfare services to Indigenous peoples, the policy of assimilation assumed that they would be treated in the same manner as the rest of society. This meant that in addition to the provision of services based on a threshold approach, Indigenous peoples were subject to child welfare's legal concept regarding "the best interests of the child" which Marlee Kline (1992) proposed is "infused with the basic tenants of liberal legality - individualism, abstraction, universalism, and impartiality" (p. 382). Not only did these values differ vastly from traditional Indigenous values of collateral<sup>2</sup> relationships, community and extended family child care, and non-interference but they provided the rhetoric and legal authority for social workers and the courts to remove children from families and communities; while in the process rendering "irrelevant or unimportant the child's cultural identity and heritage" (Kline, 1992, p. 396).

As Kline (1992) notes there are several explanations offered to explain the increasing number of Indigenous children coming into care:

Some commentators attribute the high proportion of First Nations children in care to inadequate parenting and child neglect which, in turn, are understood as resulting from the difficult socio-economic conditions in which many First Nations live. Others blame over-

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<sup>2</sup> The term collateral is being used in the context described by Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck's (1961) relational orientation that includes lineal, collateral, and individualistic orientation to others within a given society. According to these authors collateral orientation "calls for a primacy of the goals and welfare of the laterally extended group" (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961, p. 19). Boldt (1993) explains the difference between mainstream relational orientation as opposed to an Indigenous orientation in the following quote:

Whereas Western-liberal ideology defines the individual in this relationship primarily in terms of legal rights, Indian cultures defined the individual primarily in terms of duties and obligations to the collectivity. The collective well-being of the band/tribe was placed above individual self-interest. (p. 150)

zealous child welfare authorities who apply culturally biased structures and values in their efforts to “help” First Nations children. (pp. 378-379)

Others such as McKenzie and Hudson (1985) argue that “the child welfare system has been, and continues to be, an agent in the colonization of native people” (p. 129). The authors base their argument on three factors: 1) the different historical realities for Indigenous peoples related to “conquest, dispossession, institutionalization, and discrimination”, 2) the widespread racism in our society, and 3) the exclusive focus on the behavior of the client rather than on the institutions responsible for providing the services (128-129). Hudson and Taylor-Henley (1995) support the thesis that the analysis of child welfare needs to expand beyond a narrow focus on child welfare agencies and Aboriginal peoples’ involvement and incorporate a broader analysis that considers systemic issues.

The values and traditions of Indigenous peoples provide the foundation for child care in an Indigenous context. It is these values and traditions which provide the guidelines for the design and delivery of alternate child and family services models (Cameron et al, 2007). Indigenous peoples have traditionally been collateral or group based, egalitarian, and cosmocentric based societies (Aikenhead & Ogawa, 2007; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 2000; Ermine, 1995; Gosek, 2002; Kawagley, 1995; Knutson & Suzuki, 1992; Little Bear, 2000). What the children learned through role modeling, story-telling, teachings, and ceremony was that when the needs of the group were met, individuals flourished. The group based approach did not restrict individuality as the value of non-interference ensured that people would not interfere in the choices of another individual. It was understood that each person had a purpose or tasks to complete and direction came from Creator. Since for many Indigenous communities in the North American context the purpose became known to individuals through dreams, ceremony, dream quests, or fasting, no one

had the 'right' to interfere with a person's plans (Brant, 1990; Garrett, 1999; Garrett & Garrett, 1994; Gosek, 2002; Restoule, 2008).

Many First Nations peoples incorporated a collateral approach which relied on extended families and a clan system, which helped among other things, to delineate roles and responsibilities, determine marital unions, address disagreements and unify communities. This worked to maintain peace within and between nations (Anderson & Ball, 2016). The extended families worked together to support each other in times of need. This was a protection for everyone in times of famine or other catastrophes. It also benefitted children whose parents were not able to care for them as another family member would step in and take care of them until the parents were in a position to do so. Children were viewed as being born into a community and as a result, the community, not just the nuclear families, celebrated and cared for the children (Anderson, 2000; Gosek, 2002; Hare & Davidson, 2016). Therefore it was not considered unusual for children to live with other families either temporarily or on a more permanent basis. The reasons, as well as the customs associated with custom adoptions, were as varied as the Indigenous communities who engaged in customary adoption (di Tomasso & de Finney, 2015).

The egalitarian nature of Indigenous communities promoted fairness, less competition and therefore less conflict. This does not mean that disagreements did not occur, but rather it meant that values such as cooperation, non-confrontation, non-interference, sharing and respect limited the occurrences and provided for ways of addressing concerns. For example, elders played an important role in mediating disagreements, while ceremony and games helped relieve stress, and a restitution focused justice approach restored balance and harmony for the individuals and community. This is not to say that tensions and conflict with other communities were absent, rather it indicates that the knowledge and skills for mediating strife were built into traditional cultures in a variety of ways (Sinclair, 1994; Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba,

1999). For instance, anthropologists describe the relationship between the northern Cree people and their northern Dene neighbours as antagonistic. Yet my Cree community and family ancestors indicate a willingness to reach out in compassion to the very people many would say were their enemies. In explaining my ancestry I was told that my Dene maternal grandmother and her siblings were left without relatives when their community was stricken with influenza. At that point the Cree community stepped up and adopted the children raising them as their own.

Certainly wars and raids became more common with the arrival of Europeans and the subsequent pressure on Indigenous groups that occurred through the devastation of war, disease, starvation, and loss of home territories which uprooted entire groups as they were pushed westward. The forced westward march and great loss of life often meant two or more First Nation groups amalgamating and sharing government appointed reserves.

Egalitarianism was also evident in the respect for everyone's roles in the community. Not only were children respected as gifts from Creator and for their ability to carry on the knowledge and skills of their people but elders, both men and women, were respected for their vast knowledge, and for their roles in the communities which included healers, medicine people, ceremonial leaders, historians, mediators, and so on. Both men and women were respected for their contributions (Anderson, 2000; Barman, 2006; Carter, 1996; Wright, 2006). Although women, men and two spirit individuals took responsibility for different tasks, they were considered equals and it was not unusual for them to share tasks (Anderson, 2000). While Indigenous communities have values in common with western societies, they are in many ways in direct conflict with Canadian and American values of rugged individualism, self-reliance and family privacy which are entrenched within their child welfare laws and policies.

## **International Indigenous Child Welfare**

Indigenous peoples throughout the world have been exposed to colonial forces and although each country and group has experienced it differently, the outcomes in terms of overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in child welfare follow similar patterns across settler states. In describing overrepresentation of Indigenous children in New Zealand, Australia, United States and Canada, authors Gillespie, Whitford and Abel (2010) describe it as the “legacy of colonization, marginalization and oppression that generations of Aboriginal people have endured” (p. 2; Libesman, 2007; McKenzie, 2011; Stanley, Tomison, & Pocock, 2003; Tilbury, 2009). Libesman (2004) describes the impacts common to Indigenous peoples who have experienced colonial history:

intergenerational traumas, such as the effects of child removal; social dislocation; community dislocation; consequent or related mental health problems; marginalization from social services for health, housing, education and policing as well as from family and child welfare services; and more generally, the loss of power and community cohesion associated with colonial experiences. Common manifestations of these problems within communities include: alcohol and substance abuse, high levels of family violence and violence generally, economic deprivation, and related impacts on children's wellbeing. (p. 2)

As Green and Baldry (2008) note, Indigenous people “continue to be the victims of serious violations of their individual and collective rights” (p. 391) and the outcomes in terms of increasing involvement with child welfare systems is not abating (Brownell, 2011; Gillespie et al, 2010; Tilbury, 2009).

In addition to similarities in colonial experiences and worldviews, Indigenous peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, United States and Canada live in countries which are neoliberal

welfare states that maintain residual welfare systems and incorporate a threshold approach to child welfare (Humpage, 2010). As the following discussion demonstrates, while within each country, Indigenous peoples faced different colonial experiences, the contemporary child welfare outcomes are very similar.

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Welfare**

Unlike the other three countries under review, Australia has never developed treaties or agreements related to Indigenous sovereignty or governance in relation to their original lands (Bamblett & Lewis, 2007; Green & Baldry, 2008; Tilbury, 2009). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples' experience included "segregation on reserves and missions, removal of children from parental care on racial grounds (such as being 'half-caste') and the placement of children in domestic service, dormitories or children's homes" until the 1960s, resulting in serious loss of cultures and languages (Green & Baldry, 2008; Humpage, 2010; Tilbury, 2009).

The impacts of government policies involving "segregation through 'protection'" to assimilation can be seen in child welfare statistics (Bamblett & Lewis, 2007, p. 44). In 1993, Aboriginal children comprised 2.7 % of Australia's child population but represented 20% of all children in care (Lynch, 2001). In 2013, an Australian government report stated:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were almost 8 times as likely to be the subject of substantiated child abuse and neglect as non-Indigenous children in 2011-12, and 10 times as likely to be in out-of-home care at 30 June 2012. (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2013, Para 10)

Recent history in Australia has seen a steady increase in the number of Indigenous children who are investigated, have their reports substantiated, be subjected to custody orders, subjected to permanent placements, and experience longer placements (Tilbury, 2009).

### **The Maori of Aotearoa, New Zealand Child Welfare**

Unlike the Australian experience in which settlers claimed Indigenous lands based on their mythical notion of terra nullius, the Maori “rights to political self-determination were officially recognised by the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi and the Maori electorate seats established in parliament in 1867” (Bamblett & Lewis, 2007; Humpage, 2010, p. 236). Another significant difference was that although New Zealand had an assimilation policy in place “between 1847 and 1960, this policy did not include a program of forced removal from their families” which would have resulted in loss of culture and languages (Libesman, 2004, p. 10). It was not until the migration to urban centers beginning in the 1960s, when the child welfare system, which did not recognise the traditional roles of whanua (extended family/kin), began placing Maori children in government care with escalating numbers. By 1981, it was reported that “49.2 per cent of all children in need of care were Maori children” (Libesman, 2004, p. 10). Although there were no population statistics collected before 1991 on the number of Maori in New Zealand, the 1991 numbers indicate that they constituted 13 per cent of the population (Libesman, 2004; Wereta & Ranginui, n.d.).

Significant to the Maori experience is the revision to the 1974 *Children and Young Persons Act* which resulted in *The Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989* which addressed child protection and juvenile justice in the context of the well-being within traditional whanau (kin group), hapu (extended kin group with many whanau), iwi (descent group with many hapu) and family group and the use of family conferencing as a way to resolve child welfare issues (Libesman, 2004, p. 11). Unfortunately Maori children continue to be over represented in government care (Atwool, 2006; Tilbury and Thoburn, 2011). Recent statistics demonstrate that while 25% of all New Zealand children under the age of 18 are Maori, 58% of the total number of children in care is Maori (Children’s Commissioner, 2016; Office of the Children’s Commissioner, 2015).

## **United States Native American Child Welfare**

The Indigenous people in the United States (USA) have undergone 500 years of colonization that entailed policies focussed on extermination efforts, wars, forced sterilisation programs, rape and murder and assimilation efforts (Brown, D., 2001; Herschfelder & Kreipe de Montano, 1993; Page, 2003, Pegoraro, 2015). The colonization process incorporated a range of policies and practices including numerous treaties and agreements with different tribes, legislation, reservations, boarding schools (1850-1960), and direct administration of Indigenous people in the USA through the establishment of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in 1824. According to Long, Downs, Gillette & Konen (2006) “Forced assimilation policy required attendance at federal boarding schools, actively discouraged traditional practices, and robbed reservation communities of their youth, thus leaving these communities bereft and with a strong sense of a skipped or missing generation” (p. 290).

Self-determination efforts by Indigenous groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s concluded that between 25 to 35% of all Native American children were separated from their homes and living either in non-Native foster care or adoptive care (Libesman, 2004, p. 9). These numbers were five times greater than the rates for non-native children (Frichner, 2010). In response to the civil rights movements, Congress began an investigation that resulted in *The Indian Child Welfare Act 1978* (ICWA) “to protect the best interests of Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families” (Frichner, 2010, p.7).

The ICWA is the only national statute of its kind and while not a perfect solution, it is a federal law that overrides local laws and has been reported to result in positive outcomes for Indigenous communities and families (Frichner, 2010). Contemporary figures indicate that Indigenous children in the United States represent about 1% of the total child population and

represent approximately 2% of Indigenous children in government care (Gillespie et al, 2010; Tilbury & Thoburn, 2011).

### **Indigenous Peoples in Canada and Child Welfare**

The colonial experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada included racist policies based on protection and assimilation which resulted in forcing people onto reserves, administrating the Indian Act through the Indian Affairs Branch, which had far reaching impacts on every aspect of Indigenous life, and establishing the residential schools which were in place from 1883 to 1996 (Libesman, 2004). The mass removal of children from their Indigenous families and communities to attend residential schools was followed by the sixties scoop in which thousands of Indigenous children were removed, many permanently, by child welfare. The result has been similar generational impacts as reflected in Indigenous communities in other countries.

The Canadian child welfare system is comparable to Australia in that there is no national child welfare act or framework as each province and territory is responsible for its own legislation and data collection methods. In Canada, as in other countries such as Australia, United States and New Zealand, the number of Indigenous children in care varies across provinces, territories or jurisdictions (Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013). Nationally, the statistics indicate that Indigenous children and youth aged 0 to 17 years represent 5% of the total child population in Canada but represent 40% of all children in care (Tilbury & Thoburn, 2011, p. 298). As a brief review of the statistics reveal, the number of Indigenous children in care in Manitoba has been steadily increasing. For example, in 2002, Indigenous children represented 25% of the child population and statistics inform us there were 4,449 Indigenous children or 81% of the total number of children in care at that time. In 2011, that number increased to 8,047 Indigenous children in care or 85% of the total number in care (Manitoba Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, n.d).

In terms of comparison, while Indigenous children were represented in care at 81.0 % in 2002 and increasing to 87% in 2014, the percentage of non-Indigenous children in care went down from 19% in 2002 to 13% of all children in care in 2014 (Brownell, et al, 2015, p. 3). Using 2006 statistics the authors contrast the discrepancy between populations as “one in every 61 non-Indigenous children in 2006 had spent some time in care before their 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, compared to slightly more than one in every five First Nations children” (Brownell et al, 2015, p. 85).

In their 2015-2016 Annual Report, Manitoba Family Services reports the total number of children in care once again increased to 10,501, of which 9,205 are Indigenous children including Métis, First Nations (including status and non-status) and Inuit. This means in the fourteen year period between 2002 and 2016, the total number of children in care in Manitoba went from 5,495 to 10,510 while the number of Indigenous children in care during the same period went from 4,449 to 9,205.

In recent years studies based on the *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect* (CIS) from 1998, 2003 and 2008 have reviewed the available data in an effort to provide insight into the factors that lead to the high representation of Indigenous children in care. For example in their 2010 study based on the 1998 CIS report to determine clinical and organizational characteristics of out of home placements, Fluke, Chabot, Fallon, MacLaurin & Blackstock (2010) suggest that “one source of overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the Canadian foster care system is a lack of appropriate resources at the agency or community level” (p. 67). This finding is in line with the concerns regarding discrepancies in resources directed to Indigenous agencies and the scarce supports from the voluntary sector (Blackstock, 2005; Fallon, Chabot, Fluke, Blackstock, MacLaurin, & Tonmyr, 2013; Gosek, Wright & Hiebert-Murphy, 2007) At the case level, these researchers found three key variables that were likely to influence out of home

placement. These variables include “evidence of emotional harm, having two or more recent moves prior to the investigation, and concerns regarding caregiver functioning” (p. 65).

In 2013, Fallon et al examined variables related to clinical and organizational characteristics on out of home placements using both the 1998 and 2003 CIS reports. They found that on the individual level, in both the 1998 and 2003 reports, emotional and physical harm led to an increase in out of home placements. Interestingly, they found the child’s Indigenous ethnicity was significantly related to higher placement in the 2003 CIS report. This difference between reports may be a result of the higher number of Indigenous agencies included in the 2003 sample thereby allowing for the potential of detecting significant findings related to racial bias (p. 57). Fallon et al found that at the organizational level both reports indicated that the proportion of “Aboriginal families served by the agency may be seen as an indicator of poverty at the community level where the agency is situated. This may demonstrate that practice or resources are different in these agencies.” (p. 57).

In their exploration of agency level effects in placement decisions for Indigenous children, Chabot, Fallon, Tonmyr, MacLaurin, Fluke and Blackstock (2013) identified two agency level variables, namely education degree of majority of workers and degree of centralization in an agency, which suggest that

An agency with access to more workers with a formal social work education may reduce the likelihood that a child will be placed in out-of-home care at the conclusion of the investigation. Similarly, a centralized intake model which is likely an indicator of a standardized approach to investigating child maltreatment-related concerns may also reduce the likelihood of out-of-home placement in the presence of large Aboriginal caseloads. (p. 72)

In their analysis of the 2008 CIS report, Sinha, Trocmé, Fallon and MacLaurin (2013) describe overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in care “as particularly pronounced for investigations of neglect” and “for investigations involving children under the age of 4” (p’ 829). They also noted a “higher proportion of First Nations than non-Aboriginal investigations involved non-professional referrals” versus professional referrals (p. 829). The report also highlights the high numbers of complex family needs for families involved in child welfare. The authors make the point that it would be “extremely difficult to reduce First Nations overrepresentation in the sampled agencies at later decision points without addressing investigative-stage overrepresentation” (p. 829).

Studies also indicate that in addition to the overrepresentation in out of home care, higher numbers of Indigenous children and youth are placed in group settings (Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003), stay in care for longer periods of time (Trocmé, Knoke, & Blackstock, 2004), and continue to be placed in settings outside of their cultural communities (Blackstock et al, 2004; Bennett, Blackstock & De La Ronde, 2005; Trocmé et al, 2004).

Child welfare does not operate in a vacuum but rather must survive in an ever changing political and economic milieu. Tamburro (2013) summarizes the situation, “Indigenous peoples are over-represented in social services due to the effects of colonization including discrimination, poverty, residential schools, the removal of Indigenous children from their communities, and urban relocation programs” (p. 8).

### **Poverty and the Child Welfare Connection in Manitoba**

There are numerous and complex factors that play a role in the high number of Indigenous children in the care of child welfare. Poverty and its associated ills are recognized as leading factors. As Fallon, et al (2013) confirm, “Case factors that have been demonstrated to be strongly related to all decision points in the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system

are poverty, poor housing and substance misuse” (p. 49). While the documented reason for many apprehensions of Indigenous children is neglect, poverty would be a better descriptor in many instances.

Poverty in Manitoba is a “significant phenomenon” that has persisted for more than a decade (Frankel, 2012-2013. p. 272; Frankel & Mulvale, 2014). While Canada does not have an official poverty line, the relative Low Income Measure indicates that overall child poverty affects 1.4 out of 10 (Frankel, 2012-2013. p. 272; Frankel & Mulvale, 2014; Mulvale & Frankel, 2016). According to Frankel (2013) “In Manitoba, children were at the greatest risk of poverty with a rate of 22.4%” (p. 272). Not only do these rates demonstrate the high number of people living in poverty but when the depth of poverty is factored in it becomes even more concerning as the estimated gap ratio is calculated at 25% to 35% below the poverty line<sup>3</sup> (Canada Without Poverty, 2016, p. 2). While the reasons for poverty are diverse, government policies related to standard policies such as keeping social assistance rates at levels that fall below Canada’s Low Income Cut-Offs, and not supporting the estimated 55% of Manitobans, who work for minimum wage to increase their level of income, are two major contributing factors (Canada Without Poverty, 2016a; Willows, Veugelers, Raine, & Kuhle, 2009).

### **Poverty and Indigenous People**

According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Manitoba has the highest number of Indigenous children living in poverty in Canada with rates as high as “76% on reserve and 39% off reserve” (Canada Without Poverty, 2016a, p. 1). Poverty impacts every aspect of life from food security, to health and housing and for Indigenous communities poverty has been intimately linked to colonization efforts (Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013). Food security has been

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<sup>3</sup> Canada does not use an official poverty line but rather poverty levels are estimated using several measures.

defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations as “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life” (Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2014; Thompson, Kamal, Alam, & Weibe, 2012, p. 46) In a 2012 study investigating food security in 534 households in 14 northern Manitoba communities, the authors found three out of four (or 75%) homes experienced food insecurity (Fieldhouse & Thompson, 2012, p. 218). The level of food insecurity differed among communities and was related to the communities’ accessibility to market goods. The authors describe conditions which contribute to inaccessibility in the following terms:

Dozens of communities do not have all-weather roads, and four communities are not connected to the power grid. 30 000 people in 20 communities rely on temporary ‘winter roads’ open only for a period of 6-8 weeks each year, during which ‘season’ 2500 shipments arrive by truck. (Fieldhouse & Thompson, 2012, p. 219)

The remainder of the year these communities rely on delivery by plane which results in high costs which in turn limits the ability for families to purchase much needed fresh fruits and vegetables. The combination of lack of cost effective transportation, economic disadvantage, lack of infrastructure for food processing and food production, and high levels of unsafe potable water contribute to food insecurity for many rural and remote Indigenous communities (Fieldhouse & Thompson, 2012, p. 218).

Food insecurity has both short term and long term health concerns. Children who lack important sources of vitamins and minerals are prone to health issues such as obesity, developmental abnormalities, or compromised immune systems (Roshanafshar & Hawkins, 2015). As other research indicates, “hunger leaves an indelible mark on children’s physical and mental health, manifesting in greater likelihood of certain conditions, such as depression and asthma in

adolescence and early adulthood” (Tarasuk et al, 2014, p. 6). Manitoba also has “the highest rate of paediatric diabetes in North America” which experts suggest is related to food insecurity (Fieldhouse & Thompson, 2012, p. 218). Other food related health conditions include heart disease, type II diabetes, high blood pressure, dental caries and anemia (Fieldhouse & Thompson, 2012).

The issue of food insecurity for Indigenous communities is an urgent issue which has no simple solution as each community experiences barriers unique to their situation. While the isolation and transportation issues differ among communities so do the environmental pollution and climate change concerns that impact traditional food systems (Power, 2008).

In addition to the overwhelming health consequences due to food insecurity, Indigenous people struggle with overcrowded and poorly maintained housing which has been shown to negatively impact mental and physical health. With more than 40% of Indigenous people in northern Canada living in overcrowded housing, it is little wonder that measures of chronic and communicable diseases are higher in these communities (Webster, 2015). For example, a study by Anna Banerji from the University of Toronto found “overcrowding was associated with two and a half times increased odds of hospital admission for lower respiratory tract infections” (Cited in Webster, 2015, p. 495). In her study based in Manitoba, Linda Larcombe describes the stark reality of living conditions for Indigenous populations where 58% of homes have mould, and “Children and adults are sleeping on mattresses on the floor in living rooms, mouldy walls, broken windows, pails instead of toilets” (Cited in Webster, 2015, p. 495). While government has made some efforts to improve housing conditions these efforts have been inadequate to overcome a lengthy history of neglect and the rapidly increasing population. Social workers who work in Indigenous communities must enter the communities with an understanding and desire to support families and communities

impacted by the devastation of poverty and recognize how it impacts at the child welfare level (Wright, 2012).

### **Early Child Protection in Manitoba**

The first child protection act in Manitoba was established in 1898 and the government of that time

...merely borrowed from earlier Ontario legislation and established a child protection system based on the Ontario model. The new system was founded upon the beliefs that many children required protection from callous or inept parents, that society required protection from juvenile delinquents and future criminal and dependent adults. (Hurl, 1984, p. 1)

This legislation also provided public authority to what until that time were private orphanages and private Children's Aid Societies (CAS). For the most part, Indigenous families were under the jurisdiction of the federal government and did not become the responsibility of the provinces until after changes to the *Indian Act* in 1951.

### **Federal and Provincial Jurisdiction**

As early as 1938 the "Supreme Court of Canada held that child protection and adoption were subjects entirely within the control of the provincial legislatures", but it was not until after the 1951 amendment to the *Indian Act* that provincial child welfare interceded in First Nations' communities (Devlin, DeForrest & Mason, 2012, p. 8). Little Bear (1988) explains the basis for changes:

In Canada, sections 91 and 92 of the *Constitution Act*, 1867, allocate jurisdictional authority to the federal government and the provinces respectively. Section 91(24) assigns jurisdiction over 'Indians and lands reserved for Indians' to the federal government, and

serves as the constitutional authority for the Indian Act, a federal statute that has been used to govern Indians since early in the confederation. (p. 175)

Changes to the *Indian Act*, 1951, now included Section 88 which reads in part:

Subject to the terms of any treaty and any other Act of Parliament of Canada, all laws of general application from time to time in force in any other province are applicable to and in respect of Indians in the province... (Little Bear, 1988, p. 176)

In other words, the revisions to the *Indian Act* now provided for provincial laws of general application that would apply to Indians and reserve land within that province, provided that the provincial activity does not touch on the 'core of Indianness' (Devlin, DeForrest & Mason, 2012, p. 8). This change to the Indian Act meant the federal government was off loading their responsibility for Indigenous child welfare to the provinces that could now establish their authority for child welfare in Indigenous communities.

### **Residential Schools and the Legacy of Pain**

The residential school system has a direct relationship to Indigenous child welfare in Canada due the intergenerational impacts which include domestic violence, suicides, depression, broken family relationships, sexual assaults and abuse, and alcohol and drug abuse which intersect with child welfare. Knowledge of the residential school experience should also inform the social work profession regarding the harm resulting from removing Indigenous children from families, communities and cultures.

The residential schools were not just a small government project, but rather involved thousands of Indigenous children for more than a century. Beginning in the mid-1800s until the closing of the last residential school in 1996, it is estimated that 100,000 Indigenous children, aged 6 years to 18 years of age (with some as young as 2 years of age) were removed from their families and communities to attend residential schools situated throughout Canada (Smith, Varcoe,

Edwards, 2005; Grant, 2004). The death rate for those children was shocking with estimates ranging from 24% to 75% depending on the years surveyed and number of infectious diseases being monitored during any particular year.

A study conducted by Dr. Peter Bryce, who was the Medical Inspector for the Department of Indian Affairs, demonstrates that the death rates between 1894 and 1908 ranged from 35% to 60% in the first five years of the children's admission into the schools (Akhtar, 2010, p. 115). Furthermore, the 1941 census indicates that "half of the children who entered residential schools did not survive to adulthood" (Robertson, 2006, p. 5). Although Duncan Campbell Scott, head of the Department of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932, tried to suppress Bryce's findings and went as far as orchestrating a smear campaign which succeeded in pushing him out of the department, Dr. Bryce's findings made headlines. The Ottawa Citizen ran the story under the banner, Schools Aid White Plague – Startling Death Rolls Revealed among Indians – Absolute Inattention to Bare Necessities of Health (Milloy, 1999, p. 91). The implication of this story is that the extremely high death rate of Indigenous children in residential schools was public knowledge but once again society, including social work, turned a blind eye and nothing was done to alleviate the situation.

While many of the deaths occurred as a result of tuberculosis and infectious disease, there were also numerous reports of suicides, violent deaths at the hands of abusers and runaways who perished attempting to return to their homes. The living conditions at the majority of schools were abysmal with children living and attending classes in overcrowded, unsanitary, poorly ventilated and rundown buildings (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012). Not unlike the child welfare system today, the residential schools for Indigenous children received funding based on per capita and were desperately underfunded. At a time when mainstream residential facilities were receiving \$550.00 to \$642.00 per capita, Indigenous residential schools were receiving \$180.00 per capita (Barnes, Josefowitz, & Cole, 2006).

The underfunding not only affected building conditions but it also meant the children were hungry and not getting the proper nutrition. Lack of funding also undermined the education component as students were forced to substitute for hired workers as they managed the farming, gardening, laundry and other household chores (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012; Barnes, et al, 2006). It also meant hiring unqualified staff who worked under tremendously stressful conditions and which in all probability, contributed to the violent atmosphere in many of the schools (Barnes et al, 2006; Milloy, 1999).

For many of the children who attended the residential schools, the experience was one of the worst forms of colonization possible as it removed vulnerable children from their families, communities, culture, language, spirituality, future roles in the community and positive self-identity and replaced it with a substandard education which left them inadequately prepared for either Indigenous or mainstream cultures. It also subjected them to racism, violence, sickness, hunger, loneliness, sexual, physical, emotional and spiritual abuses, self-hatred, and for far too many children it meant death while in the schools or a lifetime of pain as adults (Akhtar, 2010; Barnes, et al, 2006; Burnett & Read, 2012; Coates, 1984-1985; Engel, Kolko Phillips & DellCava, 2012; Miller, 2000; Fournier & Crey, 2006; Milloy, 1999; Robertson, 2006).

### **Sixties Scoop**

According to the Assembly of First Nations there were seventeen residential schools operating in Manitoba between 1886 and 1980 (Kozlowski, Sinha, Petti, & Flette, 2011). With the gradual discrediting and closure of some residential schools in the 1950s and 1960s, “the child welfare system became the new agent of assimilation and colonialization” (Alston-O’Connor, 2010; Johnson, 1983). Indigenous families and communities, who survived several generations of residential schools, were now faced with a system that would, in spite of efforts of First Nation and Métis leaders to halt the destructive process, continue to remove children on an unprecedented

basis. As Fournier and Crey (1997) note, the difference between attendance at residential schools and apprehension by the child welfare system was that the residential schools allowed children to maintain contact with their peer group, return home to be with their families part of the year, and maintain some aspects of culture, whereas adoption and long term care removed the children from their environment and left them without any of the familiar supports. The end result for many who have been caught up in the child welfare system has been the loss of family, community, language, culture, connection to the earth and their home territories, and sense of belongingness. These losses not only mimicked the losses experienced by residential school survivors but went even further by severing the connections completely for the children who never returned home.

The phrase ‘sixties scoop’, which refers to the Adopt Indian Metis campaign initiated by the federal government and employed by some provincial and territorial governments, was originally attributed to an anonymous employee of the Ministry of Human Resources in British Columbia. It was then coined by Patrick Johnston (1983) to describe child welfare’s role in Indigenous communities starting in the late 1950s and continuing into the 1980s. According to this anonymous employee, “provincial social workers would, quite literally, scoop children from reserves on the slightest pretext” (Johnston, 1983, p. 23). Blackstock, Trocmé and Bennett (2004) aptly describe the magnitude of the sixties scoop in their description in which in “some cases, buses were hired to remove large numbers of children from their reserves, often placing them with distant non-Aboriginal families” (p. 903).

Thousands of children were permanently removed from their families and communities and placed in non-Indigenous homes for adoption and foster care. Early estimates indicated that as many as 5,000 First Nations and Métis children were ‘adopted out’ to non-Indigenous families across Canada, the United States and Europe. As researchers continued to delve into the topic it became clear that the numbers were much higher. Carrière (2007) recognized one of the reasons

for the revised statistics of Indigenous children removed from their families was due in part because the cultural identity of children was often not acknowledged:

According to the 1996 *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, 11,000 status Aboriginal children as well as countless non-registered (namely Métis and non-status) Aboriginal children were adopted out of their families and communities. Many researchers and Indigenous people commonly refer to this time as the sixties scoop (Fournier, 1997). The popular practice of that time was for social workers to remove children from their family homes without considering extended family as an alternative option for placement. (p. 22)

More recent estimates indicate the number is closer to 20,000 children who were removed from their homes and communities and placed in non-Indigenous homes, often lost for decades or permanently displaced from their families and communities (Dubinski, 2010; Godlewska, Moore & Bednasek, 2010, p. 422; Irvine, 2009; Mayer & Schibler, 2013).

In Manitoba, Indigenous children were still being sent out of province and out of country for adoption in 1981. Johnston (1983) reported that 48.7% of the 207 Indigenous children in care in 1981, in Manitoba, were placed for adoption in the United States (p.42). Johnston's study acknowledges that there was a greater demand from the United States for Indigenous children since in their country the 1978 *Indian Act* had put a stop to the practice of adopting Indigenous children out to non-Indigenous families (1983, p. 18; Fournier & Crey, 1997).

Manitoba was not only the province with the highest proportion of Indigenous children in care, but they also had the dubious recognition for sending children to the United States for adoption long after other provinces had stopped. It was not until pressure from Indigenous leaders forced them to put a moratorium in place in mid-1982, that Manitoba stopped the wholesale transfer of children out of Manitoba (Johnston, 1983). While some adoptees made their way home as adults with varying results, many grew up with no knowledge of their families and cultural

backgrounds. The devastation experienced by the adopted children, their families and communities has been corroborated in the academic literature by authors such as Jeannine Carrière (2007, 2008, 2010), Raven Sinclair (2007), and Kim Grzybowski (2012).

### **Child Welfare Services to Indigenous Communities, Early 1980s**

By the mid-1980s some First Nation communities laid claim to fully mandated child welfare services. In 1981, Dakota Ojibway Tribal Council officially established the Dakota Ojibway Child and Family Services (DOCFS) under two separate bilateral agreements. One agreement was with the federal government for funding and the second agreement was with the Province of Manitoba in order to provide services under provincial legislation (Pompana, 2009).

In 1982 the remainder of southern First Nations achieved mandated child welfare services through Tripartite Agreements which were signed in February of that year and included First Nation communities, the Federal Government and Provincial Government. A year later the northern First Nations followed suit (Taylor-Henley & Hudson, 1992). McKenzie et al (1995) describe the Manitoba model of Indigenous child welfare:

...regional agencies, generally organized under Tribal Council authorities, provide a comprehensive range of child welfare and family support services using a decentralized community-based service model. Governance structures include an agency board comprised of representatives from participating communities, and local child and family service committees in each community. Services are usually provided by a combination of community-based staff and regionally based supervisory and specialist staff. (p. 2)

While child welfare delivery in First Nation communities had taken some important steps forward by the mid-1980s there were still concerns regarding the lack of culturally relevant services for the Métis families, for non-status Indigenous people and for those status children whose apprehensions were not consistently reported to their bands. The current arrangements also meant that child

welfare services were extended to Indigenous communities under provincial legislation and standards and federal funding thereby leaving little in the way of autonomous decision-making for Indigenous agencies.

In describing the situation in Indigenous child welfare, a federal Child and Family Task Force in 1987, echoed many similar concerns expressed by Indigenous communities and other authors such as Johnson (1983), Kimelman (1985), McKenzie and Hudson (1985):

1. Indian children predominately have been placed into care under court orders (vs. consent agreements);
2. Indian children predominately have been placed into care outside their community;
3. Indian children have remained in care longer than non-native children;
4. Indian children have more frequently moved out of care through adoption or self-care (at age 18 or 19) than through returning to their parent's home;
5. The first action by provincial child authority has been apprehension; and
6. Little, if any support and assistance has been provided to Indian parents. (Indian and Northern Affairs, 1987:9 cited in Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 2000, p.91-92)

The move to Indigenous controlled child welfare has not been without its struggles. As with any new initiative, the path was fraught with many unknown challenges such as the legacy of colonization which disrupted traditional Indigenous ways of governing and community and family coping mechanisms. Indigenous agencies continue to fight for adequate resources to meet their most basic needs and to overcome society's biased view that 'they' will never get it right. This view is reinforced in times of tragedy such as the suicide of a thirteen year old First Nations boy by the name of Lester Dejarlais who was born in 1974. Lester Dejarlais committed suicide while in the care of DOCFS. The inquiry into his death forced everyone involved to closely examine the

circumstances of a system that was charged with the responsibility for the well-being of Lester Desjarlais. According to Judge Giesbrecht (1992) who was in charge of the inquest:

It is my reading of the evidence that the aboriginal community did not have the expertise necessary to suddenly assume responsibility for child welfare. The Indian leadership had no idea of the magnitude of the child welfare related problems on reserves, and the government acted in unseemly haste in turning matters over to the aboriginal community without the necessary funds, training, and other essentials (p. 271; Cited in Pompana, 2009, p. 152)

The Indigenous agencies not only inherited all the issues associated with colonial history but they also inherited the mainstream child welfare legislation, had fewer community collateral services with whom to coordinate services and received less funding per child from the federal government for First Nations children (Blackstock & Trocmé, 2005; Gosek, Wright, Hiebert-Murphy, 2007; Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013; Strong-Boag, 2011).

### **The Kimelman Report**

In 1982 there were several important events related to child welfare that occurred in response to Indigenous peoples' objections regarding the high number of children being removed from their homes and communities and placed in foster care or adopted out of province. The first significant change was the signing of the delegated authority model agreement between the federal, provincial and southern Manitoba bands which took place in February, 1982. The second event followed in March of the same year, when Howard Pauley's NDP government put a moratorium on out of province adoptions; and the third event was the appointment of Associate Chief Judge Edwin C. Kimelman from the Manitoba Provincial Court to head an inquiry into the child welfare system in Manitoba (Kimelman, 1985; Kozlowski, et al, 2011; Taylor-Henley & Hudson, 1992).

Associate Chief Judge Edwin C. Kimelman's appointment came about as a result of concerns brought forward through the strenuous protests of Indigenous community leaders regarding the high number of Indigenous children being placed for adoption in non-Indigenous homes in the United States and other parts of Canada. In brief, Judge Kimelman's mandate included the investigation of foster home and adoption placement procedures for Indigenous children, the development of guidelines for foster and adoption procedures that accounted for cultural needs, and "to prepare a proposal for the Minister's consideration to promote awareness of the need for adoptive and foster parents, and to encourage Indian families to offer their homes as placement resources" (Kimelman, 1985, p. 6). In conducting the inquiry, Judge Kimelman drew on numerous sources of information including "public hearings, special hearings, written submissions, interviews with all child care agencies, examination of adoption files, interviews with selected group homes and organizations, and from examination of the relevant literature" (Kimelman, 1985, p. ii).

During the course of the review, Judge Kimelman faced a number of obstacles that were representative of conditions in the early 1980s. At the first meeting in May 1982, with representatives from mainstream child welfare agencies, provincial representation, and Indigenous child welfare and political organizations, Judge Kimelman determined the strongly opposing opinions at the table would not bring consensus and decided the review committee would consist of one member (Judge Kimelman) with the other members continuing on as advisors (Kimelman, 1985). The other obstacles representative of that time period were the "lack of reliable statistical data, the paucity of research, and the scarcity of pertinent literature in the field of child welfare" (Kimelman, 1985, p. 3). In spite of these obstacles or perhaps in part because of them, Judge Kimelman delved into files and policy manuals, and met with the public, agency personnel and Indigenous community people. In order to establish a baseline of the issues, he reviewed the files

from the previous year, 1981, and established that “a total of 108 children were placed out of province, 51 in Canada and 57 in the United States. Of these children, 93 were of Native descent (52 Treaty Indians, 4 non-treaty Indians and 37 Metis)” (Kimelman, 1985, p. 23).

Before submission of the final report, *No Quiet Place* (1985), which had gone beyond the original mandate and included a review of group homes and child welfare in Manitoba, six reports addressing questions regarding Indigenous foster care and adoption procedures had been submitted to the Minister. While Kimelman (1985) was determined not to repeat recommendations from the previous reports, the final report incorporated principles that remain relevant to this day. Several of the principles and observations related to Indigenous families include:

- That all children have the “right to expect that its ethnic and cultural background will be given full consideration in the plans made for care” (p.31-32)
- “The right of a child to remain within its own sibling group” and the need for a provision for reunification of siblings who had been separated through child welfare (p. 33)
- The right of the parent to be informed of custody implication in a language and manner comprehensible to them (p. 35)
- The report acknowledged custom adoptions and the ability of children to relate in a healthy manner to a number of adult caregivers (p. 36)
- Judge Kimelman recognized the issue of underfunding for Indigenous children in care (p.205)

On an organizational level, the report expressed concern regarding:

- Social workers who “tend to make idealistic judgements about family functioning and may view situations as neglect where no actual harm is likely to occur” (p. 45)

- That “bureaucratic institutions act to protect their own – to act to protect themselves rather than act in the interests of the child” (p. 45)
- “In urban areas there is a wider social gap between worker and client and the barriers to overcome are higher resulting in a “them” and “us” situation” (p. 118)
- “the larger agencies, contrary to expectations, are more intimidated by directorate guidelines” (p. 119)
- “the smaller agencies appear to be more innovative in developing new approaches to problems... (p. 119)

In regards to the Indigenous communities’ accusations of “cultural genocide” and “selling of babies”, Judge Kimelman reports that after the release of the report, he “was sharply criticized, both publicly and privately, for having stated that the native people of Manitoba had been victims of cultural genocide” but having completed the review, he “now states unequivocally that cultural genocide has been taking place in a systematic, routine manner” (Underlining in original) (Kimelman, 1985, p. 328-29). He further states that:

All available information would indicate that the Indian people were correct in their assertions that once their children entered the child care system they were not likely to ever be returned to their own families. The evidence would indicate they were correct in their claim that not only were those children lost to their own communities, the lives of the individual children were seriously and permanently impaired. (Kimelman, 1985, p. 147)

Judge Kimelman’s report not only supports the Indigenous communities’ conclusion that the child welfare system was guilty of cultural genocide (York, 1990) but also maintains that in 1981 “No one comprehended that Manitoba stood alone amongst all provinces in this abysmal practice” (p.

15). In the end, Justice Kimelman made 109 recommendations in a report that in many ways continues to echo down to the present day child welfare system (Kimelman, 1985; Kozlowski et al, 2011, p.2).

### **Outcomes from the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry**

In 1988 in response to the outcry from Indigenous communities regarding the outcomes of the Helen Betty Osborne<sup>4</sup> trial in 1987 and the death of J.J. Harper<sup>5</sup> in 1988 the Manitoba government created the Public Inquiry into the Administration of Justice and Aboriginal People, otherwise referred to as the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry (AJI) (Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, 1999; Weaver, 2009). Co-chairs for the AJI were Associate Chief Judge Murray Sinclair and Associate Chief Justice Alvin Hamilton. The Inquiry's mandate was to "investigate, report and make recommendations to the Minister of Justice on the relationship between the administration, of justice and aboriginal peoples of Manitoba" (Aboriginal Justice Inquiry Commission, [http://www.ajic.mb.ca/reports/final\\_ch01.html](http://www.ajic.mb.ca/reports/final_ch01.html)). In their investigation it was determined that the majority of Indigenous people who were incarcerated had a history of child welfare related issues.

Two central recommendations that came forward from the Inquiry and that relate to child welfare in Manitoba were the call "for the expansion of authority for First Nations Child and Family Services (agencies) to enable them to provide child welfare services off-reserve and the establishment of a province-wide mandated Metis Child Welfare agency" (Hudson & McKenzie, 2003, p. 49). The AJI report provided a summary of recommendations that would eventually influence the devolution process in child welfare:

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<sup>4</sup> Helen Betty Osbourne was a 19 year old Cree woman from The Pas, Manitoba who was sexually assaulted and murdered by four Caucasian males. The details of Osbourne's death were covered up and it took 16 years to bring her killers to justice.

<sup>5</sup> J. J. Harper was a 37 year old a member of the Wasagamack Indian Band in the Island Lake area in Manitoba who was shot to death on a street in Winnipeg by Constable Cross. The subsequent inquiry brought to light the extreme racism within the police force.

- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal child and family service agencies be provided with sufficient resources to enable them to provide the communities they serve with the full range of direct service and preventative programs mandated by the CFS Act.
- The federal and provincial governments provide resources to Aboriginal child and family services agencies for the purpose of developing policies, standards, protocols and procedures in various areas, but particularly for the purpose of developing computer systems that will permit them to communicate quickly and effectively with other agencies to track cases and share information.
- Principle 11 of the CFS Act be amended to read “Aboriginal people are entitled to the provision of child and family services in a manner which respects their unique status and their cultural and linguistic heritage.”
- The Province of Manitoba in conjunction with the Manitoba Metis Federation develop a mandated Métis child and family service agency with jurisdiction over Métis and non-status children throughout Manitoba.
- The jurisdiction of the reserve based Indian child and family service agencies be extended to include off reserve band members.
- Indian agencies be provided with sufficient resources to ensure this expanded mandate be effectively carried out.
- A mandated Aboriginal child and family service agency be established in the City of Winnipeg. (Hardy, Schibler, & Hamilton, 2006, p. 9-10)

The AJI released its report in 1991, and the 296 recommendations including the recommendations for child welfare related concerns were put on hold until a change in political focus occurred in 1999 with the ushering in of the NDP political party.

## **Indigenous Child Welfare from the Mid 1980s**

First Nations communities in Manitoba had been providing child welfare services under a delegated authority model on reserve since the early 1980s in response to concerns regarding the disproportionate number of Indigenous children in care of mainstream child welfare. By 1979 Indigenous children represented “60% of the child in care population” with a high number of these children being adopted out of province and to other countries (Timpson, 1995, p. 529). Indigenous people anticipated that taking on responsibility of their own children through this model of child welfare services would result in more culturally relevant services and resources, stem the tide of children removed from their families and communities through child welfare, and move towards self-government.

While the tripartite model benefitted First Nations communities and it was seen as a step in the right direction, it also had serious limitations. Hudson and McKenzie (2003) identify benefits of the devolution to mandated services in the 1980s to First Nations as providing 1) “new, more culturally appropriate resources for children”, 2) “better quality services, including more prevention and resource development initiatives”, and 3) “healing programs based on a circle of care philosophy and medicine wheel teachings” (p. 50). The same authors identified limitations of the tripartite arrangements as:

- The requirement for First Nations authorities to conform to provincial legislation and standards in the delivery of child welfare services;
- The lack of sufficient attention to cultural relevance or First Nations economic circumstances in the standards;
- The inconsistency between this model of child welfare services and the principles of self-government;

- The lack of jurisdictional responsibility for off-reserve services; and
- The lack of resolution regarding the needs and rights of Metis and non-Indigenous peoples to culturally relevant services (Hudson & McKenzie, 2003, p. 50).

Overall the current arrangements left major gaps in services, was lacking sufficient resources, imposed mainstream legislation and standards on Indigenous communities, and greatly underestimated the social needs in communities which were overwhelmed with the devastation from residential schools, the sixties scoop and poverty. The seriousness of the situation was reflected in the increasing number of Indigenous children coming into care.

### **Establishing the AJI-CWI**

In November 1999, in order to begin addressing recommendations from the AJI, the Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission (AJIC) was established. The AJIC was headed by commissioners Paul Chartrand and Wendy Whitecloud who were mandated to review the AJI report in order to “identify priority areas for government action, and make practical, cost-effective and attainable recommendations for improving justice programs and services for First Nations and Metis people in Manitoba” (Manitoba Government, April 17, 2000). In January of 2000 the AJIC made the following recommendation:

The Government of Manitoba seek to enter into agreement with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the Manitoba Metis Federation to develop a plan that would result in First Nations and Métis communities developing and delivering Aboriginal child welfare services. (Aboriginal Justice Implementation-Child Welfare Initiative website, n.d.)

Within a short period of time the first steps toward what became known as the devolution of child welfare in Manitoba had its start.

By July 20, 2000 the Government of Manitoba had signed three Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with First Nations and Métis communities; the first was signed on February

22, 2000 with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, who represented the Southern First Nations, the second occurred on April 27, 2000 with the Manitoba Metis Federation who represented the Métis people of Manitoba, and on July 20, 2000 the third MOU was signed with Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak who represented the Northern First Nations communities. The MOUs allowed for the development of a framework for structuring the implementation process for distinct child and family services for Indigenous peoples in Manitoba. Before signing the MOUs the Minister outlined three key principles which were to have a major influence in the planning process. The first principle stated that the reforms were to be cost neutral, secondly, new services would be offered under *The Child and Family Services Act*, and thirdly, service users would have a choice in which authority they could access (Hudson & McKenzie, 2003, p. 52).

All four parties to the MOUs signed a Service Protocol Agreement which outlined the framework and structure to guide an inclusive planning process. The structure provided for the establishment of an Executive Committee, a Joint Management Committee, an Implementation Committee, and Working Groups (Hudson & McKenzie, 2003). This structure, which became known as the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry-Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI), took on the responsibility of planning and implementing the restructuring of the Manitoba child welfare system (AJI-CWI, August 2001). The goals of the AJI-CWI were to:

- Recognize the First Nations and Métis right to control the development and delivery of child and family services to their peoples throughout Manitoba; and
- Restructure the child and family services system through legislation and other changes.

(Bourassa, 2010, p.4)

Once the MOUs were in place a Joint Management Committee, which was generally responsible for the overall initiative, was developed and consisted of a nine person membership representative of all four signatories to the MOUs. One of their duties was the establishment of the

Implementation Committee that was assigned oversight of seven working groups. The seven working groups consisted of 1) Research; 2) Interjurisdictional/Intersectoral; 3) Financial; 4) Human Resources; 5) Service Delivery; 6) Legislation; and 7) Technology (Bourassa, 2010). These committees reviewed and made recommendations on areas specific to their committees' mandates.

The highlights of these changes include the establishment of three Indigenous authorities in addition to the general authority, thereby providing improved access to culturally relevant services for the estimated 47,000 Métis and 6,000 non-status Indigenous people living in Manitoba and whose access to child welfare services had previously been restricted to services from mainstream child welfare agencies. The four new authorities established through the AJI-CWI include:

- First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority (Northern Authority);
- First Nations of Southern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority (Southern Authority);
- Métis Child and Family Services Authority (Metis Authority); and the
- General Child and Family Services Authority (General Authority).

### **Manitoba Child Welfare Structure**

Before the changes brought about by the AJI-CWI initiative, child welfare legislation consisted of *The Child and Family Services Act* and *The Adoption Act*, which were administered by The Department of Family Services and Housing. The AJI-CWI initiative brought about significant changes in government structure as there are now two divisions under the Department of Family Services and Labour<sup>6</sup> (previously named Department of Family Services and Housing), namely, the Child and Family Services Division and the Community Services Delivery Division. Within the Child and Family Services Division, there are now two branches with program responsibilities, the

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<sup>6</sup> The Department of Family Services and Housing was changed to the Department of Family Services and Labor in 2012 and to be consistent I will use the most recent title throughout the rest of the paper with the exception of direct quotes.

Child Protection Branch and the Strategic Initiatives and Program Support (Hardy, Schibler & Hamilton, 2006).

The Department of Family Services and Labour continues to have responsibility for the administration of *The Child and Family Services Act* and *The Adoption Act* in addition to the *Child and Family Services Authorities Act* (Authorities Act), which was proclaimed on November 24, 2003. The *Authorities Act* provided for the establishment of the four authorities and their governing boards. The boards are appointed by the political bodies responsible for each authority. This means that the General Authority Board is appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council; the Southern Authority Board is appointed by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, The Northern Authority Board is appointed by the Manitoba Keewatinook Ininew Okimowin, and the Metis Authority is appointed by the Manitoba Metis Federation (Hardy et al, with 2006).

Under the previous child welfare model, there were twenty-two mandated and funded agencies which had jurisdiction in specifically defined geographic areas. Twelve of the twenty-two agencies were First Nations agencies whose services were restricted to the provision of services to on reserve communities. Of the remaining ten mandated agencies, six were part of the Department and the remaining four were private agencies – Winnipeg Child and Family Services (WCFS), Jewish Child and Family Services, Child and Family Services of Central Manitoba, and Child and Family Services of Western Manitoba.

Under the new Authorities Act, there are twenty-five mandated agencies with 130 offices and sub-offices operating throughout Manitoba (Schibler & McEwan-Morris, 2009). Agencies are managed through the four authorities and not distributed according to geographic location as in the previous arrangement. Although the changes have been monumental in terms of changes to an Indigenous focus and changes to geographical distribution, as of 2006 the changes only required the

development of two new agencies which included the Metis Child, Family and Community Agency<sup>7</sup> and Animiiki Ozoson, Inc.

The Authorities model also includes designated intake teams (DIAs) that provide families with access to any of the four authorities at the time of intake regardless of residence within Manitoba. Designated intake agencies are mandated agencies that are responsible for intakes in their respective region within Manitoba. There are DIAs located within thirteen different regions and operate on behalf of all four CFS authorities within each region. The DIAs provide 24 hour intake and emergency services and are responsible for determining if there is a need for ongoing services and for making referrals for ongoing services.

The devolution of child welfare services to four separate authorities meant each of the authorities were delegated responsibility to design and manage the delivery of child and family services within their identified jurisdictions, set their own service standards to supplement provincial standards, and provide funding to agencies that deliver services, all within the parameters of the *Child and Family Services Act* (Gough, 2006). The province continues to retain the overall responsibility to set the standards, monitor and assess the degree with which the authorities meet the *Child and Family Services Act* provisions, allocate and approve funding and provide support services to the authorities. This process of planning, developing and implementing the changes to the child welfare system in Manitoba was a lengthy, complex and demanding undertaking. The transfer of 6700 cases to Aboriginal agencies began in 2003 and the majority were transferred by May 15, 2005. (Manitoba Ombudsman, 2013).

### **Challenges**

The devolution of child welfare did not provide a panacea for the entire child welfare system as many of the issues are deeply embedded in society and the historical relationship of

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<sup>7</sup> The second agency, Michif Child and Family Services, received its mandate in October 2011.

settler/Indigenous relationships. In 2003, Hudson and McKenzie identified five areas of concern: evaluation, fiscal resources, human resources, self-government, and an ambiguous vision. The first concern identified was that in spite of requests for an evaluation process during the public consultation phase there was no built in evaluation component as part of the conceptual plan. In other words there were no plans in place to determine whether or not the changes made a difference to those receiving services. Hudson and McKenzie (2003) suggest that rather than focus on cost-benefit type evaluations it would have been more beneficial in the longer term to develop “baseline information, and methods of evaluating service quality and effectiveness...” (p. 56).

In their 2006 review of Manitoba’s child welfare system, Hardy, Schibler & Hamilton note that “the problems in the child welfare system predated the transfer to the Authorities. The transfer was neither the source of all the system’s problems, nor the means by which all of them could be addressed” (p. 12). While eventually external reviews of the child welfare system occurred, they took place after the devolution was in place and were called in response to highly publicized criticisms of the child welfare system in response to several deaths of children who had been wards of child welfare. In 2005, details outlining the cruel death of five year old Phoenix Sinclair were made public, sending shock waves throughout Manitoba and across the nation. The circumstances of Phoenix Sinclair’s death resulted in charges and convictions of first-degree murder against her mother and step father in 2008.

### **Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry**

As the shocking details were made public, government and child welfare officials reacted by conducting internal and external reviews of the child welfare system. While the reviews were conducted in order to find out as much as possible about the circumstances that led to the tragic death, questions were quickly raised about the role of the devolution process and ‘readiness of Indigenous people to have control of their own services’ (Taylor-Henley & Hudson, 1992).

The call for an official inquiry in 2006 was put on hold until the legal proceedings against the accused were completed. The first public sessions of the Commission of Inquiry in the Circumstances Surrounding the Death of Phoenix Sinclair, chaired by Commissioner Ted Hughes, began in June 2011 and concluded in July of 2013. The final three volume report was released January 31, 2014. The Phoenix Sinclair inquiry was tasked with examining:

- the child welfare services provided - or not provided - to Phoenix Sinclair and her family under The Child and Family Services Act;
- any other circumstances directly related to Phoenix's death ; and
- why her death remained undiscovered for nine months. (Hughes, 2013 vol 2, 2013)

The inquiry was the largest and most expensive inquiry in Manitoba history and involved extensive outreach and consultations:

Before the first witness was called on September 5, 2012, Commission Counsel had interviewed and often reinterviewed 177 potential witnesses. More than 70,000 pages of documents were processed and distributed to the parties participating at the hearing. In total the Commission was in session for 92 days and heard from 126 of the witnesses who had been interviewed by Commission Counsel. (Hughes, vol. 1, 2013)

The final report, *The Legacy of Phoenix Sinclair: Achieving the Best for All Our Children*, provided 62 recommendations aimed to protect Manitoba children. At the time of the report's release 31 of the recommendations had either been completed or were in the process. This left 31 recommendations that were assigned to an implementation planning team to work through (AMR Planning and Consulting, 2015).

The death of Phoenix Sinclair came at a time of tremendous change in child welfare in Manitoba as the devolution was still in the early stages of transition. As the records now show, there were many warning signs along the way as Phoenix Sinclair had 27 different child welfare

workers assigned who over the five years had very little face-to-face contact with Phoenix. Records also indicate there were 13 times when “Winnipeg Child and Family Services received notice of concerns for Phoenix’s safety and well-being from various sources, the last one coming three months before her death” (Hughes, vol. 1, 2013). The horrendous death and tragic circumstances leading up to Phoenix Sinclair’s death impacted people in all walks of life. There was no denying that society had to stop and make changes in an effort to ensure the welfare of children at risk.

### **The Métis Experience in Child Welfare**

Métis families and communities have been in existence beginning in the 1600s when Europeans fisherman and explorers engaged with Indigenous communities on the eastern seaboard (Brown, 1987). The term Métis reflects diversity in terms of relationships, histories and cultures. The question of ‘who is Métis’ has been in circulation for centuries. The controversy of politically motivated denial of the Métis people can be traced back to John A. Macdonald in the 1870s who insisted that the Métis had to be either Indian or white (LaRocque, 1986, p. 20). For more than a century the Métis have been subjected to politically motivated racism which resulted in survival tactics that included leaving the Red River area, going underground with cultural practices while others ‘passed’ for white settlers. For the many innocent Métis children lost to the child welfare system, their cultural identity was “not haphazardly “lost” but rather in many instances it was withheld” by the system (Richardson, 2016, p. 39).

The Métis have always had a strong sense of identity. As Emma LaRocque (1986) explains “In the 1800s we were a nation. We had our land, our resources, our music and dance, our religion, our folklore, our technology and architecture. We were organized. We even had a militia when required...” (p. 21). By 1870, the Métis in the Red River area numbered 10,000 compared to about 1,600 white settlers (Sawchuk, Sawchuk, & Ferguson, 1981, p. 12).

As history tells us, the Métis were a leading influence in the establishment of the province of Manitoba and until the unfortunate outcome of the 1885 North-West Resistance to the government's push to remove the Métis from their lands along the Red River, they were well established politically, socially and economically. While the Métis people have often been overlooked by government policies and programs that would benefit them, they experienced many of the same negative outcomes as status Indigenous people as they also experienced atrocities through their enforced attendance at the residential schools and through the sixties scoop (Carrière, 2017; Logan, 2015). According to Mayer and Scribbler (2013) "It is estimated that in Manitoba 15.68 percent of residential school students were Métis" (p.7).

The exact number of Métis children lost to the sixties scoop has not been documented due to the inconsistent collection of statistics across the system and apparent inability to differentiate between Métis and non-Métis children (Carrière, 2017). Judge Kimelman's (1985) report recorded the number of children placed outside of Manitoba in 1981 and of the 108 recorded placements, 37 were Métis children (Barkwell, Longclaws, & Chartrand, n.d., p. 44). The high number of Métis children identified by Judge Kimelman from one small sample provides a glimpse into the number of Métis children caught up in the sixties scoop and the resulting devastation to the children and families of Métis communities. Unfortunately, even today, "there are no comprehensive statistics available on Métis children" involved in the child welfare system (Richardson, 2016, p. 174).

Since the 1960s the Métis have been reorganizing politically and were included as one of the Aboriginal peoples whose rights were entrenched in the Constitution Act of 1982. The issue of defining Métis identity has often been used as a barrier to providing services for Métis families and children in the social services but the Métis have never forgot their cultural heritage. As Hancock (2017) explains:

...outsiders have attempted to subsume the actual experiences and aspirations of Métis identity, going so far as trying to impose outside definitions of Métis identity and community. At the same time, we as Métis people have done our own work, in our families and communities and our cultural and political organizations, to maintain the relationships that form the basis of our identities. (p. 11)

Unfortunately in Manitoba, the Métis continued to lose children to the mainstream child welfare system. This was not officially recognised until 1991 when the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry (AJI) report was released with recommendations that included changes to the child welfare system. With subsequent signing of the Memorandum of Understanding in 2000 the Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF) and Métis community began work on the establishment of Metis Child and Family Services Authority and the first of two Métis child and family services agencies (Carrière & Richardson, 2017).

According to Statistics Canada, in 2011 there were 14, 000 Aboriginal children 14 years and under who were in care in Canada. Métis children made up 13% of those children (Turner, 2016). They further identify that of the 1,800 foster children in Canada, “a little over 20% were living with at least one Métis foster parent, while 6% lived with at least one foster parent of another Aboriginal identity and 72% lived with non-Aboriginal foster parents” (Turner, 2016, p. 9/14)

A review of Manitoba Family Services’ Annual Reports inclusive of the years 2011 to 2016, demonstrates that the number of Métis children in care has gradually increased over the six year period. As Table 2 indicates, in 2011, there were a total of 877 Métis children in care and the number reported for 2016 was 1032.

**Table 1: Rates Reflecting Number of Metis Children in Care in Manitoba 2011 to 2016**

	March 2011	March 2012	March 2013	March 2014	March 2015	March 2016
All children in care in Manitoba	9432	9730	9940	10 293	10 295	10 501
Total Métis Children in care	877	924	904	988	1036	1032
Number <sup>8</sup> of Métis Children in care of Métis Agencies	695	736	723	782	825	842
Total Number of All Children in Care with Métis Agencies <sup>9</sup>	908	1000	989	1059	1111	1127

Source: Adapted from Family Services Annual Reports for the years 2011 -2016

The Métis people, who for many decades had no say in the future of their children in care, take their mandate to care for their community children seriously and strive to keep the focus on family and Métis culture.

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<sup>8</sup> The number of children in care of the Métis agencies includes Métis, Inuit and other children from other cultures who request services through the Metis Authority. So for example in 2016 where there are 1032 children in care in Manitoba, 190 Métis children are in care with other authorities, leaving 842 Métis children in the care of the Métis agencies.

<sup>9</sup> Of the total 1127 children in care of Métis agencies in 2016, 21 identified as Inuit, 204 as First Nations and 60 as non-Indigenous.

## GLBTQ Youth in Care

One of the most disenfranchised groups in society and child welfare is the young people who identify as GLBTQ2S<sup>10</sup> (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and Two Spirit). According to Meyers “LGB youth are even more likely to be victimized by anti-gay events” than GLBTQ2S adults who are known to be subjected to stressful events which induce mental health disorders resulting in depression, substance use, suicidality, verbal, physical and sexual violence, and rejection and discrimination from family, schools and social agencies (Davis, Saltzburg and Locke, 2009, p.1030; Gattis, 2013; Grace & Wells, 2007; Meyers as cited in Gandy, McCarter, & Portwood, 2013; Wingert, Higgitt, & Ristock, 2005). Grace and Wells (2007) provide an overview of risks many GLBTQ2S youth experience.

Many LGBTTTQ youth face harassment at school that leads to increased absences, poor achievement, and higher dropout rates; others may run away from home, end up living on the streets, and engage in conduct that brings them into contact with local authorities; others are chased, stalked, sexually assaulted, or otherwise abused; still others turn to drugs, alcohol and/or other substances as coping mechanisms. In the larger community, some LGBTTTQ youth are victimized because of their sex, sexual, and gender differences, sometimes through horrible crimes including assault and battery, rape, and murder. Others turn to crime themselves, sometimes as a street-survival mechanism when their families disown them and their communities ostracize them because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. (p. 2)

While “Canada lacks national data and systemic measures of youth homelessness” or a strong research focus on the life experiences of sexual minority youth, what is available indicates

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<sup>10</sup> GLBTQ2S will be used interchangeably with the term ‘sexual minority’ which is defined by Wells, Hancock & Wisneski (2007) as meaning “all youth who identify their sexual orientation as other than heterosexual, or whose gender identity differs from the gender they were assigned at birth” (p. 178).

that this group is overrepresented in homelessness (Wingert et al, 2005, p. 59). In the United States it is “estimated that between 20% and 40% of all homeless youth self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered” (Colby, 2011; Gattis, 2013, p. 38). In a Toronto based sample with 208 homeless and street involved youth, “29.6% self-identified as “non-straight” and 2.7% identified as transgendered” (Gattis, 2013, p. 38).

GLBTQ2S youth are also over-represented in the child welfare system. In her study of former foster care participants, Lenz-Rashid (2006) found that 34% of her study participants identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, or queer at intake” (As cited in Walls, Hancock, & Wisneski, 2007, p.180; de Finney, Dean, Loiselle, & Saraceno, 2011). Many of the GLBTQ2S youth who find themselves on the streets or involved with child welfare have often been subjected to parental abuse or parental rejection (Walls et al, 2007). One research study found more than 60% of violence directed at sexual minority youth was perpetuated by family members (Hunter, 1990 as cited in Walls et al, 2007, p. 180). Once the youth leave home either to live on the streets or in child welfare, their level of risk for discrimination and victimization appears to increase substantially. Walls et al, (2007) report that studies have found that sexual minority youth have increased risk of depression, anxiety, mental health symptomology, post-traumatic stress disorder and are more likely to have psychiatric hospitalization (p. 181-182). These same authors also report that studies demonstrate that between 25% and 35% of this group of youth have attempted suicide a minimum of one attempt (p. 182).

Troubling risk factors associated with homeless GLBTQ2S youth also include increased levels of alcohol and drug abuse and increased levels of survival sex compared to heterosexual homeless youth. One study indicates that slightly more than 27% of homeless sexual diverse youth engage in survival sex which places them at a higher risk for sexually transmitted diseases as well as mental health and physical risks (Walls et al, 2007, pp. 183-184).

## Two Spirit Youth

The term Two Spirit acknowledges both the male and female spirits that humans are bestowed with at conception and expressed differently as individuals (Roger Armitte, Personal Conversation). In Filice's words, "two spirit" is a translation of the Anishinaabeg term *niizh manidoowag* that refers to a person who embodies both a masculine and feminine spirit (Filice, 2015). The term was adopted at the 1990 Third International Two-Spirit Gathering in Winnipeg and reflects traditional Indigenous peoples' view regarding the fluidity of sexuality and gender, and their spiritual and helping roles within their communities (Hunt, 2016; Ristock, Zoccole, Potskin, 2011). While many now use this term, others are comfortable with using GLBTQ2S and yet others identify in their language<sup>11</sup> such as "ogokwe-nin" in Anishanaabe or "a'yahkwew" in Cree (Schein, Jackson, James, Dopler, Pyne, & Bauer, 2013, p. 108).

Before the arrival of settlers, individuals who identified as two spirit held diverse and honorable roles in many communities. Unfortunately with colonization's influences through the enactment of the Indian Act and enforced Christianity, diversity was no longer tolerated and strictly defined male and female roles were imposed (Hunt, 2016; Ristock, Zoccole, Passante & Potskin, 2017). Today the degree of acknowledgement of two spirit people ranges across communities from complete acceptance to a lack of tolerance. In a 2007 study involving 63 in-depth interviews with two spirit men and women, Evans-Campbell, Fredricksen-Goldsen, Walters and Stately explored the role of two spirit people in relation to caregiving roles within their communities. The researchers found that "Caregiving is perceived as an important and integral role of two spirit people" with some taking on specific social or ceremonial responsibilities within their communities while others identified caring for children, elderly, and sick or infirm people (p.88).

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<sup>11</sup> Hunt (2016) references Tafoya, (1997) in stating that "Two-thirds of the 200 languages spoken in North America are said to have contained terms to describe individuals who were neither men nor women.

A 2006 study involving two spirit youth who migrated to Toronto, reports experiencing prejudicial behaviors including “oppression, violence and anti-gay discrimination” as a main reason for leaving home communities (Teengs & Travers, 2006, p.21). Unfortunately many who moved to an urban setting found not only did they face discrimination for being two spirit, but they also faced racism and exploitation, as well as barriers to social services, housing and employment.

In their 2011 study, Ristock et al report on the outcomes of 25 youth and adult participants who identify as two spirit and who relocated to Vancouver BC, 14 individuals identified that they had been removed from their families as children and 16 felt they had been forced out of their communities due to their sexual or gender identity (p. 11). Participants also identified moving to a large urban center to attain education, join a larger GLBTQ2S community, for gender reassignment services, to access health services to treat HIV, or to leave a violent intimate relationship.

While research on GLBTQ issues is often relegated to the sidelines, research studies describing the current knowledge regarding two spirit youth is even more limited (Hunt, 2016). The treatment of GLBTQ2S people in Canada is atrocious. According to statistical information, half of all reported hate crimes stem from race or ethnicity while 13% are motivated by sexual orientation (Hunt, 2016). Two spirit people are subjected to double jeopardy as they experience discrimination based on their sexual and gender identities and racism due to their Indigenous culture. The situation becomes triple jeopardy for two spirit Indigenous women who are at even higher risk of racialized and sexualized violence (Hunt, 2016). Many of the same issues that impact the GLBTQ and Indigenous communities are experienced at an intensified level by two spirit individuals. Teengs and Travers (2006) report that for “young gay and bisexual men in Canada, those who are Aboriginal are more likely to be unemployed and impoverished, on social assistance, in unstable housing, and relying on sex trade work to survive” which places them at higher risk for HIV, STIs and mental health issues (p. 18). Hunt (2016) reports that in 2011, Aboriginal youth

represented 34.3 % of HIV positive youth (p.17). In a 2013 study of GLBTQ concerns which included a sub-section of 32 Indigenous two spirit individuals, Scheim et al (2013) found “almost half of participants had attempted suicide at least once”; 67% “had ever had to move”; and “43 per cent had experienced physical or sexual violence” (p. 114).

### **Services for GLBTQ2S Youth**

One American study indicates that “approximately one-half of runaway youths have spent time in the foster care system” (Walls et al, 2007, p. 179; Wingert et al, 2005). As Rosenwald (2009) notes, “When these youth become involved in the child welfare system, the barriers they face are heightened as they must negotiate a system that largely operates within a culture of heterosexism and homophobia, harassment and violence” (343). Hunt (2016) expands on this description, “Of particular concern is homophobic violence within agencies to which Two-Spirit people turn for support, including verbal abuse, gossip (lateral violence), slander and sexual assault” (p. 15).

There are few good options for runaway youth as services directed to their age group are extremely limited due to their age which disqualifies them from accessing social assistance and other social benefits. They generally end up on the streets without their high school education and the resources needed to obtain employment such as identification, a permanent address and basic interview and resume skills (Wingert, et al, 2005). While homeless shelters do exist in Canada, youth fear that accessing their services will require child welfare involvement or they will be forced to return home where many have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse. There are currently no crisis shelters, emergency services or supportive services specifically tailored to meet the needs of GLBTQ youth and the situation is even more critical in terms of culturally relevant resources for Indigenous two spirit youth (Davis, et al, 2009; Gattis, 2013; Hunt, 2016; Teengs & Travers, 2006).

In spite of the many obstacles people faced in the above studies, it was determined that supportive families and communities and “positive integration of Aboriginal identity and culture may buffer the impacts of life stressors” (Scheim, et al, 2013, p. 116). Participants were also able to identify positive outcomes such as opportunities to define self-identities, and the opportunity to begin their healing journeys on all levels - physical, emotional and spiritual (Ristock, et al, 2011). GLBTQ2S people have also strengthened their political and social alliances at the community, national and international levels. In the meantime, GLBTQ2S children and youth deserve supportive services and a safe environment whenever their homes are not an option. No child or youth should experience the destructive forces of discrimination. Rather than intolerance, the message should be one of love and acceptance as Trish Pal (2017) so aptly puts it “You are loved. You are sacred. You are perfect the way you are, and the person you are growing into is also perfect” (p. 155).

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter began with a brief discussion of an international perspective in order to provide a context in which to understand the different models of child welfare in westernized societies across the world. The experience of Indigenous peoples in countries including Aotearoa, N.Z., Australia, United States and Canada was also discussed in terms of understanding the colonial influences of child welfare in these countries.

It is evident from this review that child and family welfare services have not met the needs of Indigenous people on international, national and provincial levels and Indigenous people continue to experience devastating impacts from a system that purports to serve their needs.

## CHAPTER 3

### DEFINING AN INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGY

Increasingly, Indigenous research methodologies are being articulated out of a necessity to define the parameters of methodologies which reflect Indigenous worldviews and their historical relationships with settler populations. The ontological differences between western civilizations and Indigenous peoples have historically been defined through racist and stereotypical discourse as civilized versus uncivilized ways of being (Frideres & Gadacz, 2012; Harding, 2006; Williams, Jr., 2012). The purpose of this chapter is to define a methodological approach that describes the Indigenous values and principles that guide and support the process of this study. I begin by explicating the distance between two standpoints and highlight long standing traditions and ways of being that have supported Indigenous knowledge building for countless centuries.

#### **The Role of the Academy in Working with Indigenous Epistemology**

The increasing entry of Indigenous students into the academy initiated a move to incorporate Indigenous approaches into mainstream theories and books. In more recent years there has been an increase in academic colleagues, journals, and books who support Indigenous voices and the articulation of Indigenous approaches, methods and theories, Indigenous (Gosek & Bennett, 2012; Mihesuah, 2004). Unfortunately in some faculties and schools there is still resistance to the validity of Indigenous approaches and there is continued pressure to use either a mainstream approach or a blend of mainstream and Indigenous approaches (Baskin, 2006; Kovach, 2005; Lambert, 2014; Styres, Zinga, Bennett & Bomberry, 2010; Smith, 2012).

This resistance is reflective of the long history of studying Indigenous people that has resulted in long standing harm ranging from reinforcing stereotypes of stoic savages to providing support for policies and practices which strip Indigenous individuals and communities of resources and basic human rights (Deloria, 1991). The treatment of Indigenous peoples in research efforts has

been described in terms of colonialism, imperialism, and distancing. As O’Riley explains, researchers “are expected to colour within the lines of someone else’s drawings and realities, rather than create their own research agendas from their own cultural epistemologies and methodologies” and we are expected to use the same tools that were used in the colonization of our cultures and peoples (Brant Castellano, 2004; Kovach, 2009; Lambert, 2014; O’Riley, 2004, p. 89; Thomas, 2015).

The dilemma of learning and working within a system that conflicts with cultural and personal values exacts a personal toll. Carolyn Kenny (2000) aptly describes the stresses many individuals experience as a result of their association with universities.

Though I really like the idea of the university, the possibilities which open up when we are associated with universities, I struggle to stay whole, to keep my identity intact, to feel that I “belong. The fundamental values of the university seem so different than mine, most of the time - both my beliefs as a Native person, and as an individual. (p. 142).

Lester-Irabinna Rigney (1999) describes the active roles Indigenous peoples must now engage in:

Racism will not be overcome by simply changing the attitudes and values of researchers, nor will it be overcome by simply adding Indigenous researchers to the academy of research and stirring. Indigenous Peoples must now be involved in defining, controlling, and owning epistemologies and ontologies that value and legitimate the Indigenous experience. (1999, p.114)

### **Understanding the Issues from a Worldview Perspective**

The basis for these concerns can be traced back to the philosophical differences between Indigenous and western worldviews from the first contact. While both western and Indigenous peoples acknowledge the natural world, it is at this point where perspectives diverge, in large part, because western peoples have developed a different relationship to nature based on a hierarchical

relationship to the natural environment. Estranged from a lifestyle connected to the natural world and following the biblical command to go forth and subdue the earth and all things in it<sup>i</sup>, Eurocentric thinkers have carved out a belief system in which nature is subjected to the perceived needs of humanity and therefore humankind is viewed as having a dominant position in relation to the rest of the world (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Indigenous peoples' belief systems embrace all creation as equal and this is reflected throughout a diverse array of languages, teachings, values and cultural customs.

The Western perspective is exemplified in the positivist approach in which the human mind is "understood to be a machine that analyzes sensations and combines them into categories" (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 26). For example, applying a mainstream approach to social work means teaching students to assess, recommend and implement and move on to the next case, leaving little opportunity for relationship building (Thomas & Green, 2015, p. 38). The positivist approach to research which has traditionally used standards of inference, deductive thinking, logical entailment and causality, has come under scrutiny in recent decades but has yet to 'evolve' into a meaningful understanding of spirituality and the relationship with nature. Unfortunately, considering the length of time and tremendous energy and resources invested in the exploitation of Mother Earth, it is highly unlikely that the world of capitalism and the associated greed will give way to improved relations with the environment without a fight to maintain the status quo (Turner, 2005).

Indigenous worldviews are not based on "universal, abstract theories about the way things work" but rather are based on an interactive relationship with every aspect of the cosmos (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 27). Cajete (2004) explains, "The people came to know and to express a "natural democracy" in which humans are related and interdependent with plants, animals, stones, water, clouds and everything else" (p. 46). According to the same author, if we consider that the creative spirit or spirit of the universe resides in the earth and all things of the earth, including

humans, it helps us to define our relationship to all other aspects of the world in which we live (Cajete, 2004).

This in turn explains the Indigenous peoples' intrinsic connection to their original territories and ancestors because it was those territories that nurtured and nourished each being as they came to reside on earth. The very earth and everything contained within it reproduces itself from what has existed before. Humans are no different from other life forms in that our bodies live, grow, die and return to the earth. Our very cells are made up of the matter that surround and nourish us; this means we are nourished by and connected to all our relatives including the water, air, plant life, animals, birds, and fish and so on. In that way we are connected in spirit and substance to everything in the cosmos; we each influence the other and we retain a 'living memory' and connection throughout (Gosek, 2009). Spence et al describe the depth of relationship between land and territory and Indigenous people.

Aboriginal culture cannot be understood in the absence of a people's land and natural environment; the two are synonymous as there is a deep physical, spiritual, and emotional relationship with the land that is the foundation of the self and existence and lifeblood of Aboriginal well-being. (Spence, Wells, Graham, & George, 2016, p. 303)

Cajete (2004) describes our connectedness through these relationships by pointing out that our relationships to the ecology provide us with the means to understand the world. In other words, the extent to which Indigenous people observed and came to know the "cycles of nature, behaviour of animals, growth of plants, and interdependence of all things in nature determined their culture, that is ethics, morals, religious expression, politics, and economics" (p. 46).

## Reflecting on Indigenous Epistemology

An important first step in determining the methodology for this study was to understand what Indigenous epistemology entails. Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2008) describes epistemology as:

...the study of the nature of thinking or knowing. It involves the theory of how we come to have knowledge, or how we know that we know something. It includes entire systems of thinking or styles of cognitive functioning that are built upon specific ontologies... [It addresses the question] How do I know what is real? (p. 33)

Wilson (2008) goes on to describe Indigenous epistemology as “our cultures, our worldviews, our cosmos. Indigenous epistemology is our systems of knowledge in their context, or relationship” (p. 74).

Indigenous epistemology has often been described in terms of specific cultural groups or “specific tribal epistemology” such as the Plains Cree, Nehiyaw epistemology (Kovach, 2009), or Siksikaitstapi or Blackfoot epistemology, (Bastien, 2004) or Mi’kmaq epistemology (Battiste & Henderson, 2000) as compared to “a broader discussion of Indigenous epistemologies” (Kovach, 2009, p. 63). In other words while many Indigenous people on local, national and international levels have much in common regarding values, spirituality and shared historical colonial experiences, each nation or group has their own set of knowledge based on their specific culture and connection to their territories (Michell, 2012).

So while we can describe a more broadly defined Indigenous methodology that draws on common cultural values and decolonization efforts, individual Indigenous researchers may understand and describe their research based on their specific cultural understanding (epistemology). For example, Margaret Kovach (2009) illustrates a Nehiyaw (Plains Cree) methodology by sharing a story about the buffalo hunt (p. 64) whereas someone from my home

territory in Northern Saskatchewan (Woodland Cree) may use something specific to their lifestyle such as smoking white fish or moose hunting. While the different descriptions do not necessarily change the basic methodology<sup>12</sup> it does reflect different cultures, experiences and ways of relating to traditional territories. The fact that Indigenous methodologies reflect different ways of knowing and being challenges mainstream perspectives which preference the idea of one objective reality (Carjunzaa & Fenimore-Smith, 2010; Wilson, 2008).

The first step in acknowledging and respecting divergent methodologies means understanding that the epistemology, ontology and axiology of these different civilizations have developed separately over many centuries. The ontological approaches between western societies and Indigenous societies diverge in numerous ways that are reflected in part by the five relational orientations described by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck in 1961. These relational orientations include how human nature is viewed or defined, how human beings relate to nature, how time is viewed or preferred on a continuum of past, present and future, how we define human activity based on a three point continuum including being, being in becoming and doing, and, finally, how humans relate to other humans on a continuum that includes lineal, collateral, and individualistic orientation (Gosek, 2002; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961). As societies or groups, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people differ in terms of their value orientations resulting in explicitly different worldviews.

Indigenous methodology has a number of important principles to consider. First it is political in that it intends to disrupt the corruption of colonization; second, Indigenous research is relational and benefits the communities involved; third, Indigenous methodology acknowledges spiritual relationships in all things, fourth, Indigenous methodology needs to honour the languages

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<sup>12</sup> Kovach (2009) used the story of a buffalo hunt as “an allegory for a Plains Cree conceptual framework for research – preparation for the research, preparation of the researcher, recognition of protocol (cultural and ethical), respectfulness, and sharing the knowledge (reciprocity)” (p. 65).

in which cultural teachings and traditional knowledge are embedded; fifth, storytelling is integral to research methodology. While these ideas related to Indigenous ontology, epistemology and axiology are coached in the English language using academic terminology, the ideas they represent have been available and shared throughout the centuries spoken in traditional languages and related through the stories and cultural traditions of every Indigenous community.

The following sections will discuss these five aspects of Indigenous research in more detail and while they have been separated into different headings, in reality, the discussion is often circular and overlaps as each 'topic' cannot be considered in complete isolation of the other.

### **Indigenous Methodology is Political**

A critical aspect of Indigenous methodology is the need to acknowledge, and counteract the colonial relationship. This means carving out space to discuss, define and claim our own methodologies. As Queskepow describes it, "The capacity to claim our own identity and to locate ourselves as empowered people will liberate us from Other(ness), obscurity, exoticism, and oppression, at our own terms" (Queskepow, 2013, p. 5). Defining an Indigenous methodology that reflects our cultural diversity, our history and contemporary realities is one of the most powerful tools in resistance efforts.

### **Indigenous Research is Relational**

In his book, *Research is Ceremony*, Shawn Wilson (2008) describes relationality as "the heart of what it means to be Indigenous" (p. 80). This idea is not surprising as Indigenous cultures have long been recognized as based on a collective ideology and ways of being.

The concept of relationality goes beyond our relationships with other humans as it also references the cosmos, territories and all inhabitants, human and non-human. In acknowledging the breadth of meaning in relationality, researchers such as Wilson (2008) notes the importance of "answering to all our relations" (p.177). The idea of relationships and responsibility extends to and

encompasses relationships and knowledge from the past, from the present and includes consideration of consequences for future generations (Carjuzaa & Fenimore-Smith, n.d., p. 8/11).

Having a narrowly defined idea of relationships presents challenges for mainstream research. As Margaret Kovach (2010) explains:

While certain western research paradigms frown upon the relational because of its potential to bias research. Indigenous methodologies embrace relational assumptions as central to their core epistemologies...The relational dynamic between self, others and nature is central. (p. 42)

This centrality to relationality stems from the fact that Indigenous researchers are not only related genetically but they are also intrinsically connected to their people culturally, historically, and spiritually. One of the ways this is expressed culturally is, in what researchers now refer to as locating ourselves, by way of introducing who we are and our role(s) (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Kovach, 2009). Traditionally, Indigenous people did this as protocol when they were meeting the first time. While this may differ by community, individuals will share their name, their community/territory and often their ancestral connections<sup>13</sup>. Within this introduction people begin to make connections as they identify information such as the other person's language, cultural traditions, community, and how they may be related or if they know the same people. Usually in initial meetings people in western societies would find this type of greeting intrusive and as a result relationships are forged very differently.

Indigenous researchers understand and appreciate that our ideas develop out of our relationships and combined knowledge. Indigenous researchers are responsible for collecting knowledge and sharing it communally. Therefore in research, Indigenous researchers understand

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<sup>13</sup> For many people who were a part of the sixties scoop, adopted out or otherwise separated from family and community, this process can be difficult unless they have been reconnected to family and community.

the need to develop trusting relationships before, during and after the research project which not only strengthens their own relationships but it also allows for “openness, honesty and integrity” which positively impacts on all levels of the research project (Dei, 2013, p. 32). A critical consideration for researchers is the ongoing need to be aware that research projects should provide an avenue for healing where appropriate and ensure no harm is brought to individuals and communities (Dei, 2013, p. 31).

A relational approach to doing research involves the communities in meaningful ways. It includes engaging with the community to determine their needs as defined by them and working out a research process that meets the identified needs (Struthers, 2001). Dei (2013) summarizes the relational responsibilities of research “Our approach to scientific research should be in meaningful power-sharing partnership with local communities, upholding our responsibilities to local communities and addressing questions of academic responsibility and social expectations on the part of the academic researcher” (p. 33).

### **Indigenous Research Engages with Spirituality**

Universities as secular institutions are often challenged by Indigenous approaches which incorporate spirituality. Many people experience confusion and dissonance when confronted with the idea of spirituality that does not conform to their concept of organized religion.<sup>ii</sup> Fleming and Ledogar (2010) provide a working definition of spirituality as opposed to religion. Accordingly, spirituality can be viewed as:

...the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, includes the sacred and which motivates the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose, and contribution. According to this definition, spirituality is contrasted with religiosity which is defined as one’s relationship with a particular faith tradition or doctrine about a divine other or supernatural power. (p. 48)

Speaking from a northern Cree perspective, Herman Michell (2012) clarifies the differences between religion and Cree spirituality further:

Living a spiritual existence is a *daily, minute by minute, second by second* way of life for the Woodlands Cree people. Spirituality is an inseparable aspect of Cree people. Teachers need to understand there is a difference between the Cree spirituality and religion.

Western religions are institutionalized forms of worship... (p. 26) (Italics in original quote)

There are many challenges to the learning process for Indigenous students when academic teachers and advisors are not in tune with the interconnectedness of spirituality in all areas of life and thought as Chirgwin (2010) notes:

Accepting the importance of the spiritual in Indigenous thinking, and guiding its expression in research is an even more challenging aspect of the training, particularly for those who have themselves been shaped by disciplines where spirituality has never had a place. (p. 152)

Indigenous research methods are relatively new to the academy and the inclusion of spirituality can leave these methods open to criticism, disrespect or outright rejection from individuals trained in a positivist tradition. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) explains, "Most of the 'traditional' disciplines are grounded in the cultural world views which are either antagonistic to other belief systems or have no methodology for dealing with other knowledge systems" (p. 68).

While Indigenous scholars and their allies understand that the spiritual aspect is integral to an Indigenous approach as it reflects their traditional worldviews, Indigenous people remain cautious in terms of what they share. The caution is not so much a concern about reluctance to include the spiritual, as it is a caution about sharing the sacred and the associated concern that

others will appropriate those sacred ways. Ronwanièn:te Jocks (1996) describes the theft of Indigenous spirituality in the face of inequality:

...sharing of spiritual practices and knowledge can only rightly take place among equals, in a discourse of mutual respect, with the permission of both parties. By contrast, today an entire industry has sprung up in which Indigenous spirituality is appropriated, distorted, used, and sold without respect or permission, even while physical assaults on Native people, lands, and ways of life, continue. (Ronwanièn:te Jocks, 1996, p. 416)

This quote reinforces the dilemma faced by Indigenous people in terms of both sharing cultural and spiritual information at the risk of being disrespected and having the information misappropriated.

### **Indigenous Research Values Traditional Languages**

Cordova (2004) cautions us against "...viewing different cultural perspectives as either "right" or "wrong" based on a standard which is drawn from only one culture" (p. 32), rather we need to "expand our understanding of the diversity of human thought and not to expand our own specific ways of thinking so that they encompass all others" (p. 30). Unfortunately, as Cordova (2004) notes, many individuals continue to work from the assumption "that non-Western peoples are a less complex form of being, less developed than Westerners" and as a result many continue to view the ideas and work of Indigenous people as inferior (p. 31).

An example of this view is evident in Western society's reliance on the written word and distrust of oral traditions. Western civilizations have relied on the written word to record their historical knowledge and experiences, while Indigenous cultures have relied on their oral traditions which required people to maintain thousands of years of historical, cultural, political and scientific knowledge which was passed on to successive generations. What many do not understand is that the languages developed along with their knowledge so that evolving ideas and concepts were incorporated into languages in very complex ways. Understanding the languages provides insight

into the intricate relationships among all inhabitants of a territory, including all manner of life (Henderson, 2000, p. 259).

Struthers and Peden-McAlpine (2005) explain that in addition to maintaining oral histories, Indigenous people communicated ideas and culture through mediums such as storytelling, paintings, carvings, dance, architecture, songs, and narratives. These forms of expression were not relegated to strictly aesthetic art forms but rather were valued for the practical purpose of maintaining and sharing complex spiritual, cultural, historical, political and scientific knowledge.

Unlike the western languages, which are noun based, most Indigenous languages are verb based (Kovach, 2009) and are descriptive of intricate relationships to all forms of matter. Cree language also uses intransitive verbs as opposed to adjectives (i.e. in English “It is a fine day” becomes “It fine days” which is a single verb form in Cree). The emphasis is therefore on action and doing.

Cree also relies heavily on word building through the use of pre-fixes and suffixes on both verbs and nouns. For example in James Bay Cree, “ciman” meaning ‘canoe’ in English becomes kiciman meaning ‘your canoe; “cimanihk” meaning ‘in the canoe’; cimanihkew translates ‘he makes a canoe’; and cimew translates ‘he goes with him in a canoe’ (Ellis, 1983). Daniels-Fiss (2008) sums it up by explaining “The language is complex: multiple prefixes and suffixes, animate and less animate gender distinctions, and no masculine and feminine genders as in English” (p. 235). This flexibility in language construction compliments an oral tradition as it incorporates descriptive action and ideas into the language in a manner that both conveys the ideas and embeds the concepts, which are passed on through oral tradition.

The flexibility of the languages also supports Indigenous people’s recognition that everything in the universe is in flux and environments and ecologies are dynamic and therefore capable of change (Henderson, 2000, p. 258). The oral traditions which carry with them the

histories, laws, scientific knowledge and understanding of these intricate relationships are therefore critical to the understanding and transmission of Indigenous philosophy and worldviews. As Cree scholar Willie Ermine (1995) admonishes, “Our Aboriginal languages and cultures contain the accumulated knowledge of our ancestors and it is critical that we examine the inherent concepts in our lexicons to develop understanding of self in relation to existence” (p.104).

Indigenous people understood the significance of passing on knowledge that was vital for the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual survival of future generations. Contrary to Eurocentric beliefs that the Indigenous people were unorganized with no formal systems of political organization, laws or education, The First Peoples of Turtle Island were very organized with every family and clan having specific responsibility for looking after and passing on the laws, history and traditions of their peoples. Children began their training to carry on the sacred knowledge at a very early age. A Dakota elder explained to me how her community protected and passed on their spiritual practices after they were outlawed in Canada. She said her parents were told when she was born that she would be one of the select few people in her community to learn the ceremonies which were still practiced in secret away from the community. The elder explained that when she was eighteen months old the elders in the community asked her parents to have her brought to the place where they were doing ceremony and she explained that that was her first Sun Dance ceremony. She continued to attend all the ceremonies and over the years was immersed in the teachings and ceremonies, which she still participates in and shares today (Personal communication, L. McEvoy, 2001).

As Smith (2004) relates “Language itself had a power, a sacred potency to it, which awarded power to the words. Therefore, language had an inherent spirituality to it, as it was viewed as a gift to humans from the spirit world” (p. 118). Consequently the languages,

storytelling, teachings and daily application of knowledge and skills were imbued with sacredness and worked harmoniously to keep the knowledge alive.

Integral to the languages is the notion of the animate, holistic and spiritual nature of all creation. As Michell (2012) explains, Cree peoples view the spirit or spirituality as an integral part of all creation "...for Cree people, life in the physical world is inseparable from Spirit. Everything in the natural world is infused with Creator's spirit" (p. 22). The connection of land, spirit and language is explained by the understanding that languages "are derived from the land" and are therefore considered sacred by the elders (Kawagley, 2000, p. 101). This is supported by a Cree individual in Kouritizin's 1999 study in which the relationship among spirit, earth and language is described:

The soul or the spirit, the Cree spirit, is sustained by the earth which is sustained by the language of the earth. It speaks to you, the trees, the animals, the putting of those things together, makes a language, and that is where language emits from, everything in Cree comes from the earth... (Cited in Daniels-Fiss, 2008, p. 241)

Scientists are only now corroborating earlier studies that confirm plants communicate among themselves and with other organisms (Karban, Baldwin, Baxter & Laue, 2000; Slep, Brown & Faure, 2006;). As Robbins and Dewar (2011) sum it up, "Indigenous lands and languages provide the foundation for Indigenous traditional healing, spirituality and knowledge systems" (p. 5).

Writing in 1994, Marie Battiste supports the sacredness of language, "Aboriginal languages are sacred to Aboriginal people. They speak the voice and lessons of a sacred place, and Aboriginal homeland. Our oral tradition gives us strength, guidance and a place to belong" (Cited in Bighead, 1996, p 50). Little Bear (2000) borrows from a western philosophical method to further describe the animate nature of relationships which is embedded in Indigenous languages and how that connects us to all creation, "If everything is animate, then everything has a spirit and knowledge. If

everything has spirit and knowledge, then all are like me. If all are like me, then all are my relations” (p. 78). The belief that all of creation is related and are therefore “all our relations” is integral to traditional teachings and ceremonies.

Unfortunately, this understanding of the relationship of land (place), spirit and language was disrupted by the Western colonial approach. Disruptions began when settlers arrived in a new territory and replaced all Indigenous names of people and places with names and terminology from their language thereby attempting to erase the original meaning and histories. Among the many devastating attempts used to disrupt and destroy Indigenous cultures were the efforts to convert people within that territory to the settler’s language and religions which would further ensure the loss of connection to places and territories. The use of language was and continues to be a powerful tool in colonization with the privileging of Euro-Canadian languages over the languages of the First Peoples. This makes language reclamation even more critical to the contemporary decolonization work. This work continues for many people as Battiste and Henderson (2000) explain:

In most situations, the Europeans terminated Indigenous languages and beliefs-but they never destroyed the human need for harmony that tied language and belief together...After the imposed dark ages, all the Indigenous peoples struggle with memory and forgetting.

Still we intuitively seek the sacred realms, cultural restoration, and integrity. (p. 81)

It is this intuitive seeking that has produced a return to cultural spirituality and the search for cultural and ecological understanding (Stewart, 2009). A number of years ago I had a conversation with a Mi’kmaq man while doing a workshop in Nova Scotia. He explained that they had ‘lost’ many of their traditional ways since they had experienced the longest period of contact with settlers in Canada but gradually teachings are coming back through ceremonies and dreams. This idea is supported through the following quote:

This stems back to another thing that Lee Brown said to me one time. He said, “We don’t have to worry about losing our ceremonies, our languages, our everything because it exists permanently in the spirit world. It can come back after ten generations separation”. You can have a child that was raised in the city, completely isolated from the original indigenous community of their birth or their ancestors for a long time and that information can come back to that child in ceremony; especially through fasting ceremonies. (Makokis, 2005, p. 84)

Many communities across Turtle Island have established successful efforts to regain their languages and reconnect with their cultural ways. An increasing number of Indigenous people, who have been separated from their cultural languages, are learning them as a second language and there are increasing efforts at all levels of education from secondary to post-secondary to increase language knowledge and acquisition (Daniel-Fiss, 2008). Researchers can contribute to this effort through incorporating the use of communities’ languages into their research planning (Gonzalez y Gonzalez & Lincoln, 2006).

### **Indigenous Research Acknowledges the Role of Storytelling**

Most people engage in storytelling on a daily basis, whether it is listening to others or telling someone about your day or an incident that happened on the way to work or school. We all have stories to tell. What stands out about Indigenous storytelling is the recognition of all the different roles stories and the oral tradition have played throughout the millennia that Indigenous peoples have walked on earth. Stories have served as mediums to share sacred teachings such as creation stories, and to teach and maintain historical knowledge related to plant life, medicines, hunting, and knowledge that would be categorized today as legal and political information, to teach children and adults about the animals and natural world, to illustrate proper behaviours with people, the natural world and spirit world, to provide meaning for life stages and natural

occurrences such as birth, childhood, aging and death, as well as stories to impart values and to entertain (Bell, 2013; Doerfler, 2013; Ladner, 1996; Long, 1988; Ryan, Van Every, Steele, & McDonald, 2013; Stark, 2013) . Wilson (1998) summarizes some of the advantages and benefits of storytelling as they provide

...moral guidelines by which one should live. They teach the young and remind the old what behaviour is appropriate and inappropriate in our cultures; they provide a sense of identity and belonging, situating community members within their lineage and establishing their relationship to the rest of the natural world. (Cited in Thomas, 2005, p. 241)

Storytelling also has its spoken and unspoken guidelines. For example the Anishanaabe peoples distinguish between the Aandiskaanan, traditional sacred stories such as creation stories, and Dibaajjimowin, personal stories. The Aandiskaanan stories are only told in the winter season and by those who have had the stories passed down to them (Simpson, 2011). The following quote explains the importance of respecting the process of telling certain stories which

Can only be told by persons who have the authority to do so, during the proper season, and under the proper conditions...Keeping constraints on the telling of these stories is for a purpose. It may be said that all of the stories form a huge and complex fabric. The stories cannot be understood unless they are told by persons who know (1) how to put the specific narrative within the context of all the other possible narratives in that complex fabric; (2) how to fit the way the story is told to a specific audience at the specific time; (3) the system of metaphor that is used or adapted in the story; (4) the authority under which the story is told. (Walter Lightening cited in MacIvor, 1995)

Describing the parameters around the telling of sacred stories ensures that those stories remain sacred so that they continue to impart the meaning and values intended.

I have also been told that personal stories are told only by the person who experiences the story unless they pass that story to you. For example, when I am teaching I can talk about the history and impact of residential schools and how it connects to social work practice or how it impacts me personally as the daughter of a survivor but since I have never experienced attending these schools, I invite an elder who has direct experience to talk to my students. His story is very powerful and the listener becomes engaged on many levels as he describes events, allowing the audience to see, hear and feel along with him. His ability to speak to the painful memories and the lifelong healing journey teaches my students more than I ever could by attempting to tell his story. Even though I have heard the elder speak many times, I would never presume to 'know' his story and tell it for him as that is his experience, and his story. He also explains that telling his story is a part of his healing journey as well as a teaching tool.

Healing is yet another benefit of storytelling as noted in this quote:

The old folks said the stories themselves had the power to protect us and even to heal us because the stories are alive; the stories are our ancestors. In the very telling of the stories, the spirits of our beloved ancestors and family become present with us. The ancestors love us and care for us though we may not know this. (Silko 1996 as cited in Victor, 2012)

This quote also brings us back to the cautions around story telling as we are reminded that the ancestors are present and supporting us even as we are engaged in storytelling. The other reason we need to be cautious in storytelling is "Because stories come with responsibility to tell them accurately so the foundation of the moral remains intact" (Ryan et al, 2013, p. 35).

Traditional storytellers shared their stories in a respectful way taking care not to offend the ancestors or the characters about which the story was describing (Simpson, 2011). The humbleness with which elders and storytellers related their stories is captured in a quote from an elder, Jim Kanipitehtew:

An elder doesn't think of himself as better than anyone else when he or she speaks. It's only the elders who have long since gone that speak through them. It is an echo of a wonderful time a long time ago (McLeod, 1999, p. 73)

### **Storytelling: Linking the Past to the Present**

One of the questions we can turn to now is "How does storytelling fit with a contemporary society?" Cree writer, Neal McLeod, describes how being a Cree person is connected to lived memories through stories and relationships which evolve naturally over time:

Nehiyawiwin, Creeness, is a lived memory which is held in stories and relationships... Nehiyawiwin involves the spiritual world and dimensions of reality beyond the immediate world of physical experience. Nehiyawiwin is more than a collage of facts and dates, but rather it is a living tradition which evolves through time as an organic process...linking the past to the present. (n.d., p. 37).

We learn about who we are as Cree people when we learn the language and hear the stories. In turn the stories give us insight into our individuality within a collective consciousness that stretches back to the beginning of time.

Just as the languages have the ability to expand and adapt to accommodate change, stories and storytelling have also adapted and expanded to capture a changing history and circumstances that require accommodation. This does not mean that storytelling has less relevance but rather that it continues to connect us to the past, our relatives, as well as to our knowledge base, cultures and spirituality. The traditional ways of sharing stories continues and grows stronger with renewed interest and energy. The lived stories which record our individual and collective experiences throughout history remain a critical part of understanding our ongoing journey. The stories about surviving residential schools, the sixties scoop, the millennium scoop, racism, and poverty become woven together to form a web of consciousness and validation of survival in the face of

colonization. It is one way we can record our own histories and use them to answer back the stories written into mainstream history that have been used for centuries to denigrate our cultures and existence. The power of remembering and relating our Cree-ness is supported in a quote from Neal McLeod, “Every time a story is told, every time one word of an Indigenous language is spoken, we are resisting the destruction of our collective memory” (In Roy, 2013, p. 21).

### **Storytelling as Theory, Methodology and Research Methods**

I am told that winter was the time for storytelling in Cree communities. The stories, while entertaining, were rich in meaning and were not meant to be fairy tales told only to children (Cornthassel, Chaw-win-is & T’lakwadzi, 2009). In telling a story, a ‘moral’ was not identified or the ‘real’ meaning revealed as everyone hearing the stories brought their own life events which influenced their interpretation and as a result each person took away with them the meaning most germane to them at the time the story was being told. In this way stories could be retold countless times and each time individuals would find significant meaning.

As Simpson (2011) explains “Storytelling is an emergent practice, and meaning for each individual listener will necessarily be different...It can take many years after hearing a story to know the meaning of that story in one’s heart...” (p. 104). This process is elaborated on by Dyck (1992) when he explains that his grandfather “never said what the point of his stories were; he forced the listeners to discover this for themselves” (quoted in McLeod, n.d., p. 42).

While the forces of colonialism have disrupted the centuries old stories of many people, many more have retained both the stories and appreciation for the art of storytelling and listening. Settee (2007) speaks to the need to adapt to ongoing change:

Honoring the oral is an essential part of storytelling. For those fortunate to be able to speak their original language, they have the added dimension of nuance, meaning, and context, but non-Indigenous speakers’ experience with stories are no less important and instructive.

Culture is always changing, adapting, and rebirthing to add new cultural, linguistic, and transformative experiences. All of these adaptations and transformations must be included in storytelling, especially in cases where the culture has been deeply impacted by social, political, and economic forces (p. 87).

### **Storytelling, Narratives or Theory?**

The concept of storytelling as a research method is described in different ways that reflect different cultural and ideological perspectives. For example, narrative research methodology has been framed within a mainstream qualitative approach and according to Maria Joyce:

The concept of narrative arrives from a long history of literary tradition and Silverman (2006:164) discusses narrative in relation to Saucerre's science of signs and Semiotics. This science views linguistics as language made up of groups of words each with culturally relevant meaning attached to it. Polkinghorne (1988) describes narrative as personal and social histories, myths, fairy tales and stories which are made up to explain behaviour. (2008, p.2)

According to Connelly and Clandinin's 2006 definition of narrative inquiry:

...the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (Cited in Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p.2)

The historical development of narrative inquiry in a mainstream milieu leads to the question of fit with an Indigenous perspective. In positing that the "study of narrative forces the social sciences to develop new theories, new methods and new ways of talking about self and society" Denzin (2004) infers that narrative inquiry is challenging established epistemologies and methodologies while illuminating the emergence of others from the margins (p. xiii). On the other hand, Hawaiian

scholar Maenette Benham (2007) describes Indigenous narrative in the context of traditional storytelling of her ancestors and the narratives as “evocative accounts of sovereignty and loss, as well as identity and home” (p. 512).

In describing the importance of Indigenous narratives to the recovery of “a collective memory that raises social consciousness” Benham (2007) provides three politically based benefits:

First, recognizing a collective memory that is different from the dominant texts requires that history is reconstructed. Hence, the indigenous narrative presents a political discourse that asserts alternative realities and advocates for native/indigenous sovereignty, indigenization of the narrative. Second, indigenous narrative is about personal/family and societal healing – that is, illuminating native knowledge and wisdom, collective memory, which makes possible recovery from the effects of generations of oppression and systemic racism. Third, native/indigenous narratives of native resistance and cultural resurgence can have powerful pedagogical implications. (p. 529)

Benham’s (2007) quote reinforces the link between storytelling and political resistance in research. As Thomas (2005) notes, the telling of these stories “is a form of resistance to colonization” and “simply must be told” (p. 242). Million (2011) concurs by saying:

Story has always been practical, strategic, and restorative. Story *is* Indigenous theory. If these stories are couched in narratives, then narratives are always more than telling stories...They serve the same function as any “theory” in that they are “practical action”. And last but not least, Indigenous narratives are almost most often emotionally powered. They are informed with the affective content of the colonial experience. The felt experience of colonization is in our narratives, and that has made them almost unrecognizable to a western scholarship that imagines itself “objective”. (p. 322)

Whether one uses terms such as, storytelling, truth-telling, re-storying, yarning, storytelling circles, conversational method, talk story, or Indigenous narratives in relation to research methodology they have common goals and processes including: honouring the traditional storytelling traditions of their communities, recognizing the relational aspects of communication, respecting the equality of their research relationships, understanding the need to accommodate community needs, giving voice to people in the margins and regaining the collective stories (Baskin, 2005; Benham, 2007; Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Canada, 2017; Corntassel, Chaw-win-is & T'lakwadzi, 2009; Kovach, 2009; 2010; Kundoqk, 2013, Thomas, 2005; Thomas, 2011; Wilson, 2008).

Simpson and Manitowabi (2013) draw a connection from creation stories to theory, which is simply defined as the “explanation of why we do the things we do” (p. 286). The authors explain that “these stories set the “theoretical framework” or give us the ontological context from within which we can interpret other stories, teachings, and experiences” and “Our elders tell us everything we need to know is encoded in the structure, content, and context of these stories” (p. 280-281). In situating stories as theory we are acknowledging that as Indigenous people we locate our “identities in an alternative knowledge system built within different ways of learning” (Battiste, 2013, p. 184). We are also empowered by the natural power in stories with their ability to disrupt the colonial dialogue and connect us to the wisdom of our ancestors and to our spirituality. Understanding that our epistemology and cosmology is contained in the stories, it follows that our methodologies and research methods must reflect this knowledge. As Anishinaabe elder, Niizhoosake Copenace stated “Our research is really our stories,” (University of Manitoba, June 24, 2014).

## Chapter Summary

This chapter began with a discussion of the challenges faced by Indigenous academics as they tread cautiously through the halls of academia. The discussion then moves into an explanation of how basic tenets of an Indigenous worldview guide an Indigenous approach to research methodology. Five important Indigenous research principles to guide research decisions and methodology which satisfies an Indigenous approach undertaken in a western academic institution are explicated. These include: 1) the need to be political; 2) the importance of relational bonds which work to benefit communities; 3) the acknowledgment of the spiritual; 4) the importance of language; and 5) the use of storytelling as being integral to the process.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONNECTING THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight Indigenous knowledge and the application of that knowledge as relevant and reliable methods of progressive inquiry. I incorporate both a historical example of applied research and a contemporary example involving medicine picking as the basis of the discussion. By applying the teachings explicit in these examples I describe five key concepts that inform the Indigenous approach I use in this research study.

Intuitively we understand that human beings are born with a natural curiosity that leads us on a search for knowledge. How we respond to that need to satisfy our curiosity is reflected in our worldviews. Indigenous peoples' ability to survive for many centuries and especially through the onslaught of colonization can be attributed in a large part on the accumulation of knowledge gained through centuries of research and sharing of knowledge (Brant Castellano, 2004). As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) notes "Research begins as a social, intellectual and imaginative activity...it begins with human curiosity and a desire to solve problems" (p. 203). In order to appreciate the diversity of research approaches, we need to step outside of the mainstream perspective and recognize that numerous ancient cultures evolved independently of western cultures for thousands of years. In so doing they developed distinct epistemological and ontological understandings of their world, which guided their day to day lives.

In discussing Indigenous science, Cajete (2004) reassures us that, "...the method of research always stems from a cultural orientation; a paradigm of thinking that has a history in some particular tradition" (p. 46). Western society, for example, has a preference for scientific based methodologies which is based in a "question-asking and test construction method" (Burkhart, 2004, p. 22) and which traditionally incorporates a four step scientific method including, 1) observation;

2) formulation of a hypothesis; 3) use of the hypothesis to predict the existence of other phenomena; and 4) experimental testing.

Indigenous peoples have also used observation, hypothesis, prediction and experimental testing but in ways which reflect their worldviews and historical relationships to the environment. As Ryan et al (2013) note “Indigenous knowledge was based on a holistic, integrated system, rather than an analytical, reductionist view of isolated parts; it was based on acquiring wisdom over time rather than short term predictability” (p. 35). Indigenous people developed a knowledge base through centuries of patient observation and by developing an intimate relationship with their environment (Burkhart, 2004). Their astute observations working in tandem with their interconnected relationship to the environment lead to hypothesis building, prediction of outcomes, and experimental testing. The knowledge they gained was embodied or lived knowledge that reflected not only their understanding for the need to maintain their “interdependence with plants, animals, stones, water, clouds, and everything else” but it also reflected the degree of cooperation, harmony and balance necessary to maintain these relationships (Cajete, 2004, p. 46). The extent and sophistication of their knowledge building skills and ability to transfer the knowledge down to each successive generation through millennia was based in values and principles, which are still in use today and are available to provide signposts for modern Indigenous research methods.

### **Acknowledging Ancient Indigenous Research Methods**

Indigenous people have always understood the nature of research and incorporated disciplined scientific observation and experimentation in the development of food crops and interactions within their environments (Lambert, 2014; Dei, 2013). Their ability to flourish did not occur as a result of haphazard and accidental discoveries but rather it occurred through the use

of intelligent, focussed processes that were recorded through oral means and passed on to future generations through the use of language and other cultural mediums.

As new evidence comes to light regarding the early domestication of valuable food sources by Indigenous peoples throughout the world, contemporary scientists continue to debate and struggle to comprehend “how and why this happened” even in the face of scientific evidence (Price, 2009, p. 6427). For centuries scientists believed there was only one center or cradle of civilization in Mesopotamia from which all modern forms of life flowed. It has only been in the last twenty years that North America has even been considered in terms of inclusion in the now expanded list of ten agricultural cradles (Price, 2009; Smith, 2006). To date scientists have identified four plants including squash, sunflower, marshelder and chenopod, which have been domesticated in North America and these discoveries have been restricted to researched areas of the eastern United States. The discovery of these domesticated plants has provided further incentive for scientists to look more intently at North America’s Indigenous contributions using improved methods and a willingness to accept that ancient Indigenous peoples of North America were more than capable of understanding the complexities of life, including plant life throughout all of the Americas.

Modern dating techniques have determined that many domesticated plant species can be traced back to the end of the Pleistocene era around 12,000 to 20,000 years ago (Price, 2009). A number of these plants, which were domesticated in the Americas, have contributed widely throughout the world as basic food crops for numerous centuries. While the list continues to grow into the hundreds of food items, some of the most commonly known plants are maize, potatoes, squash, beans, quinoa, barley, cotton and sunflower seeds, many of which had dozens if not thousands of variations. What appears to surprise many scientists is the range and diversity of domesticated plants that have originated in the Americas.

The ability to share these important food crops speaks to Indigenous relationships based on trading and sharing of valued information throughout South and North America. Using one brief example of ancestral knowledge involving a recent study in which scientists tested the difference in length of time for maize to flower from its original domestication in a tropical environment, to an environment farther north with longer daylight hours illustrate the complexity of ancestral knowledge. According to the study's authors:

Flowering time in maize is a complex trait affected by many genes and the environment...Indigenous farmers of the Americas were remarkably successful at selecting on genetic variation at key genes affecting the photoperiod response to create maize varieties adapted to vastly diverse environments despite the hindrance of the geographic axis of the Americas and the complex genetic control of flowering time. (Hung, Shannon, Tian, Bradbury, Chen, Flint-Garcia, McMullen, Ware, Buckler, Doebley, & Holland, 2012, Para 1)

This brief example involving maize illustrates Cajete's description of how Indigenous peoples' knowledge was developed through their relationship to everything in the cosmos and in turn was transferred to ongoing generations through languages which grew in complexity with the evolving information. It serves to demonstrate the connection between languages and all that the territories/land encompassed and it also serves to provide us with a very brief glimpse into the complex knowledge base Indigenous peoples developed over the millennia and their willingness to share widely to the benefit of others.

The advanced degree of knowledge based in ancient cultures is beginning to be acknowledged in the contemporary scientific community. Cochran, Marshall, Garcia-Downing, Kendall, Cook, McCubbin, Mariah and Gover (2008) acknowledge that "Multiple examples exist in which Indigenous knowledge and the use of Indigenous ways of knowing within a specific context

have produced more extensive understanding than what might be obtained through Western knowledge and scientific methods” (p. 24). In a study in which traditional ways of knowing were compared to “current neurobiological and epigenetic scientific understanding” (p. 53), the authors concluded:

In some ways, science is catching up with traditional practices that have been passed down from generation to generation for hundreds of years. That is, the perspectives of the Indigenous community, their traditional practices and techniques, are now being borne out by modern neuroscience. (Pazderka, Desjarlais, Makokis, MacArthur, Steinhauer, Hapchyn, Hanson, Van Kuppeveld & Boder, 2014, p. 62).

While these modern scientists concede that Indigenous knowledge in specific contexts has produced more extensive knowledge than their own cutting edge methods, they appear unable to recognize how Indigenous knowledge was obtained or distributed when in fact, Indigenous ethics of communal sharing and support ensured that they not only shared the produce but they also shared scientific knowledge to guarantee the well-being of future generations within and beyond their own groups (Nadasdy, 2003; Pazderka et al, 2014). Modern societies continue to flourish from Indigenous contributions but seldom acknowledge the contributions as coming from ancient Indigenous societies.

The contributions of Indigenous ancestors were not accidental discoveries but rather developed out of disciplined research which was based in ethics that valued a respectful interaction/relationship to the environment, included sharing of knowledge and material outcomes, and honoring the spirit of all creation which in turn worked to the benefit of all inhabitants (Knudtson & Suzuki, 1992; Reddekop, 2014).

## **Traditional Values in Research**

It is essential that research whether it occurred many millenniums ago or occurs in today's society must be based in values that benefit everyone involved. In the following discussion I will describe a personal experience involving picking medicine and relate some of the values I learned from that experience and how that experience reflects the research skills employed by Indigenous ancestors. This experience of picking medicine demonstrates a contemporary example of Indigenous science based in ancient values and practices provides the basis of the research methodology for this study. I will begin by describing how I experienced picking this particular medicine under the tutelage of an elder who drew on cultural traditions related to medicine picking.

### **Medicine Picking**

A number of years ago I was working with an elder and during one of our discussions she told me about a medicine for which she carried responsibility that was related to a medical condition I was experiencing. In keeping with protocol I offered her tobacco for the medicine and she agreed to teach me how use it. Before going out to find the medicine she asked me to come to her home so she could teach me about the medicine. Once I arrived we sat together and had tea while she talked to me about the medicine and explained how that particular knowledge had come to her and described the four spirit keepers who looked after the medicine.

Once she finished with the teaching we drove out to a place where the medicine grows and she showed me how to identify the plant, which part of the plant we needed and how to choose and harvest the plant. As each plant was picked a prayer was offered to acknowledge the plant's spirits, to express appreciation and to ask for healing. Tobacco was also placed in each of the four directions to acknowledge the spirits in those directions for each plant and to the earth. The elder was careful not to select plants that were too close in proximity to each other. When sufficient

medicine was picked we went back to the elder's home where she showed me how to prepare the medicine which involved identifying and peeling a thin inner layer which lay beneath the first two layers of the plant. The elder named each part of the plant in her language. Directions were given for how the medicine was to be measured and how long it was to be boiled and how to look after it. These directions took into account the different seasons in which it would be picked as it was more potent in the spring and summer months. The use of separate utensils ensured no cross contamination or reaction with other foods. The parts of the plant that were not used had to be put back out on Mother Earth in a clean place. The preparation of the medicine followed a respectful step by step process which included protocol and prayer.

This example of medicine picking, which describes one particular teaching and method, illustrates some basic yet complex information Indigenous medicine people employed in their work with plants. McIvor, Napoleon, and Dickie (2009) describe an Indigenous healer's relationship to plant life.

From time immemorial there have always been specialists in herbal and plant medicines but even these healers used a combination of ritual and prayer, often to specific spirits.

According to the Cree oral tradition, not only was each plant considered alive, it might also have connected to the spirits that would have to be acknowledged by the healer...A healer had to be given the "guidance" to use certain plants and it was widely recognized that this spirit power is what gave healing life to the herbs being utilized. (p. 14)

Clearly Indigenous peoples value an intimate relationship to their environment and in harvesting plants they ensure:

- The plants are being harvested for a good purpose whether it is for medicine or food
- They take only what is needed and never over harvest
- They follow protocol such as the use of prayer, song or tobacco to show appreciation

Their knowledge base includes:

- How to identify the specific plants with the specific properties they require
- How to identify each component of the plants
- Which season and time of day to pick them
- How to prepare them and preserve them
- How to administer them, and most importantly
- How to communicate with the plant's spirit

Whether it was harvesting food or medicine or other necessities there were basic principles that were considered sacred and which guided the process. The principles that were described previously can act as guides for both harvesting medicines and doing research. For example both activities are political acts of resistance. Every time we offer tobacco whether it is to a person for knowledge or medicines or offer it in ceremony or to mother earth we are acknowledging the ways of our ancestors. This in effect is saying we remember and believe in the benefits of our cultural ways of being and doing. Every time we act on the cultural teachings, we are resisting centuries of assimilation and colonialism which strove to extinguish all things Indigenous.

The process of medicine picking is relational in that the work the healers and teachers do for the people connects them to each other, to community, to the plant world and to the spirit world. It is spiritual work because it is understood that the knowledge for the medicines is from the ancestors and the whole process is infused with prayer and words of appreciation and acknowledgement. The language is integral to the process as the teachings are expressed through the language, and the teachings about the medicines originate in the language of the territory it comes from and it is the ancestors' language that has carried the teachings for centuries. Finally, unlike the medicines we buy from the pharmacy which are handed to us over the counter, each medicine has a story which the traditional healer passes on to the person it is meant to benefit. In this way we not only build a relationship to the person who provides the medicine, we also build an

appreciative relationship to the medicines, the spirits who look after the medicine, the earth and environment that produces it.

### **Connecting Indigenous Values to Research Principles**

In the following section I incorporate ancient methodologies used by early ancestors in cultivating and producing food, medicines and household needs from their environments and the values that continue to guide harvesting plant life for making medicines to elucidate the principles that guide my research. The research principles based on the above discussion are represented in Figure 1 in the following section. The foundation for these research principles is the value of respect that is in keeping with Daniels-Fiss' observation, "The concept of respect is key in the Cree language" and represents the foundation of our culture (Daniels-Fiss, 2008, p. 238; Letendre & Caine, 2004).

Research Reflects Relational

*Research principle 1: Create research to benefit all*

Research acknowledges the spiritual

*Research principle 2: Respect the sacred and be mindful of the spirit of all*

Research is political

*Research principle 3: Respect the limitations and political potential of research to ensure the process and outcomes can be put to good use*

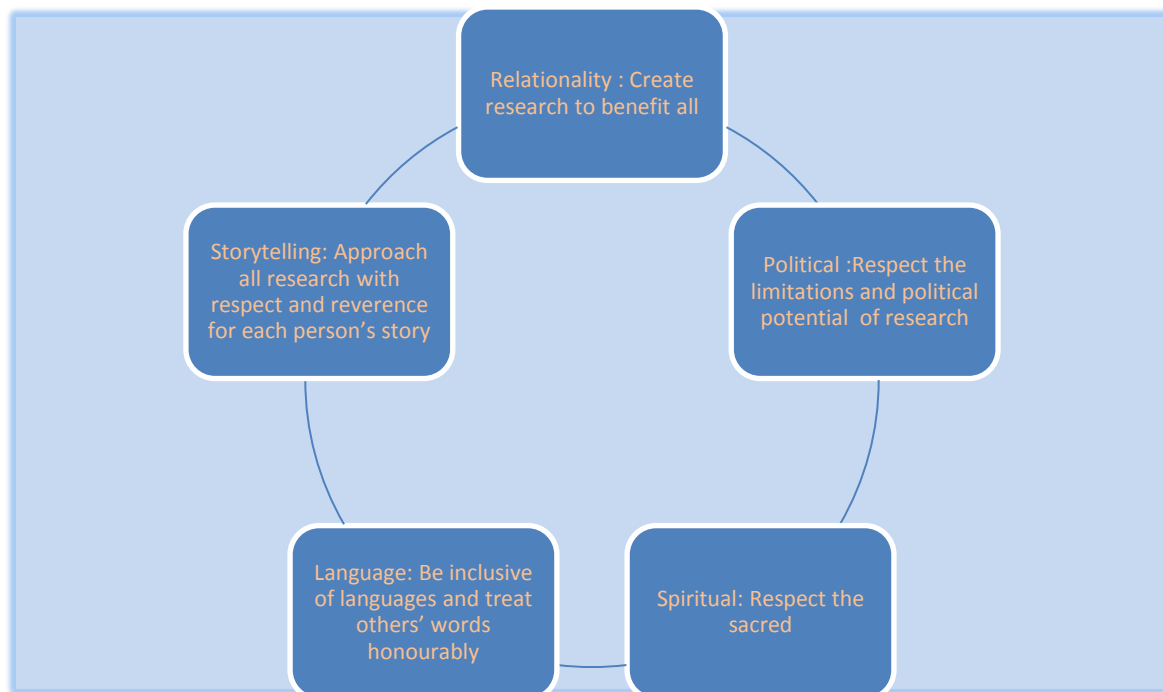
Research is storytelling

*Research principle 4: Approach all research with respect and reverence for each person's story*

Research honors language

*Research Principle 5: Be inclusive of languages and treat the words of others honourably*

**Figure 1 Research Principles Based on Respect**



### **Research Reflects Relationality**

*Research principle 1: Create research to benefit all*

In applying this principle to research we need to appreciate that the foundation value is respect for all things and recognize the interconnectedness of the world in which we live and conduct research. Michell (2012) concurs in stating “Using traditional protocols allows a researcher to conduct a study in a “good way” guided by respect, truth, and honesty” (p. 4). As Styres et al (2010) advise us “if we do not walk out that respect, we will become people we are not, and we will hurt all life” (p.626).

One way we can show respect is to begin by acknowledging our relationship to the territory and the caretakers of the territory in which we are wish to conduct research. In doing this it is important to acknowledge our personal location and explain our relationship to the research and the people with whom we are doing research. As Absolon and Willett (2005) explain:

As Aboriginal researchers, we write about ourselves at the onset of our work because the only thing we can write about with authority is ourselves. When it comes to research by/about Aboriginal peoples, location is an essential part of the process. The actual research cannot take place without the trust of the community, and one way to gain trust is to locate yourself. (p. 97)

### **Research Acknowledges the Spiritual**

*Research principle 2:* Respect the sacred and be mindful of the spirit of all

From an Indigenous perspective, all creation is sacred, as are the relationships that result from the interactions within creation. Posey (2002) describes the sacred relationship that confirms the interconnectedness of all creation including the visible and invisible worlds.

All creation is sacred, and the sacred and secular are inseparable. Spirituality is the highest form of consciousness, and spiritual consciousness is the highest form of awareness. In this sense, a dimension of traditional knowledge is not local knowledge, but knowledge of the *universal* as expressed in the local. In indigenous and local cultures, experts exist who are peculiarly aware of Nature's organizing principles, sometimes described as entities, spirits, or natural law. Thus, knowledge of the environment depends not only on the relationship between humans and Nature, but also between the visible world and the invisible spirit world. (p. 3)

This has significance for research in that we need to recognize the spiritual on every level and especially in our relationships to the people we encounter on our research journey.

### **Research is Political**

*Research principle 3:* Respect the limitations and political potential of research to ensure the process and outcomes can be put to good use

In practicing responsible ecological management and respectful harvesting of materials to be used in their survival, Indigenous people demonstrated an understanding of the short and long

term effects to the environment and all its inhabitants. As Tays (2000) instructs, Indigenous people “practice conservation by taking only what they need, paying respect, and leaving the rest” (p. 188).

As we engage with Indigenous peoples in research projects we need to apply similar values that demonstrate that we do not engage in research strictly for the sake of research but rather demonstrate concern and act in the best interests of others. Instead of applying disdainful practices wherein researchers go into a community to extract information for personal benefits, we need to ensure that communities are acknowledged as the owners of their knowledge and experience.

Researchers have a long history of entering Indigenous communities in a disrespectful way, completing their research using biased lenses and processes that result in outcomes that are harmful for the people and communities (Cochran et al 2008). Engaging in respectful research means we need to ensure that everyone involved in the research is not harmed and benefits as a result of the experience.

We can begin by examining our motivations for conducting the research, asking who will benefit from the process and outcomes, and ensure we do not impose our views on individuals and communities with whom we wish to engage. If the motivation comes from a desire to promote our careers as experts in Indigenous knowledge rather than to benefit the community then we need to step back and reconsider our motivations and the research goals if Indigenous people are to flourish as a result of the research efforts (Letendre & Caine, 2004).

As Cora Weber-Pillwax notes, respectful research involves “accepting responsibility and accountability for the impact of the project on the lives of community members” who are involved in the research project (2004, 85). Herman Michell (2012) describes a respectful process:

In our Cree belief system, we conduct research for the good of the collective. It is the community that supports the hunter and his family. Community-based research requires

community-involvement. Community members identify their own issues and solutions... We determine how research can help achieve our collective vision. (p. 3)

It is also critical to explain the purpose for the research and the process along with limitations imposed on researchers by their institutions. To merely assume people understand the requirements institutions place on researchers puts everyone at a disadvantage. One way we can ensure we do not overlook these important discussions is by including community people as our research partners and by disclosing the restrictions we are working within whether it involves research ethics, financial/funding policies or research methodologies.

Whenever we enter into a research partnership we need be respectful of diversity in terms of cultures, languages, spirituality, experiences and perspectives (Archibald, 2008; Bartlett, Iwasaki, Gottlieb, Hall & Mannell, 2007). In other words in order to learn from the storytellers we need to put aside our stereotypes or preconceived ideas regarding how we believe Indigenous people will respond to the research questions. We need to be open and respectful of a range of responses since individuals are diverse in terms of their life experiences, how they perceive the issue being discussed, and their personal self-identity.

When we enter into a research relationship with the goal of giving back to the community, we are demonstrating our understanding of the political potential for Indigenous based research, both the positive and negative potential, and with good planning we are contributing to the well-being of individuals, families and communities (Wilson, 2007).

We also need to build genuine, respectful relationships, which include planning a respectful entry into the community and respectful closures. Many Indigenous communities have developed protocols related to research involving their community and as researchers we need to respect those protocols in our work in the communities. Each community also has their own way of conducting gatherings (or meetings) and these can range from opening with Christian prayers or

using traditional ceremonies specific to their community or words of welcome from a community elder or spokesperson. It is important to remember that unless we are from that particular community we are outsiders even though we may self-identify as an Indigenous person or ally. Therefore it behooves us to be respectful of community norms and ways of conducting meetings whenever we enter a community (Sinclair, 2003).

When planning to do research in a community the band office is the logical place to begin in determining community research policies, protocols and community customs and practices. If the research is to occur in urban centers researchers could determine which organization such as Friendship Centers, Metis Associations, and so on would be able to provide direction regarding the research project and community expectations.

Working for the best interests for everyone involved, means engaging in respectful research, which includes taking a community based approach and involving communities in planning, implementation and dissemination (La Fromboise & Plake, 1983; Kovach, 2005; Nicolls, 2009; Schinke, Smith, & McGannon, 2013; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). According to Edwards, Lund, Mitchell and Anderson (2008) this means:

Establishing equality among research partners early in project design through open discussion of differences, full disclosure, and participation in all planning stages enables team to enhance communication and collaboration, and positions the community as full research partner, rather than an advisor or consultant. (189)

While researchers may be the experts on university requirements and methodologies, Indigenous people are the experts of their lives.

### **Research is Storytelling**

*Research principle 4:* Approach all research with respect and reverence for each person's story

It is important to understand that as researchers we cannot own someone's words or stories. At best researchers can act as intermediaries to relate the stories if they have been given permission to share them with others. McLeod (n.d.) describes how traditional storytellers viewed their role as storytellers:

While the Old Ones are the true carriers of Nehiyawiwin, they were very humble about their knowledge. A lot of the old people would begin their stories with "Moy mistahi e-kiskeyihtaman"/"I know not very much". This simple phrase is important in understanding Cree narrative memory. People did not believe they had power over the narrative. Rather they believed they were the conduits, that there was a balance between individual and tradition. (p. 51-52)

Even though they had been given the responsibility as caretakers of the information they were sharing, they expressed in a humble way that as the storytellers they were not taking credit as experts but rather the story and all those who participated, contributed and carried it before them were to be honored in the telling of the story. They understood that the story they were sharing was a part of the collective memory that had been carried forward through centuries of storytelling. Similarly in our research, we need to ensure the community voices are privileged. In essence this means ensuring we have their permission to use their words, that we use the words in a respectful manner and that they have the option of using their names in final reports or remaining anonymous.

### **Research Honors Language**

*Research Principle 5:* Be inclusive of languages and treat others' words honourably

Indigenous people across the world and including Canada have experienced the loss of their traditional languages with many languages extinct and others on the verge of extinction. As

academics it is important that we do not contribute to the ongoing loss of languages by ignoring the issue or insisting on doing research in the official European based languages. In research, an important way to respect the sacredness of languages is to encourage people to express their ideas in their own languages. Researchers can decide to include a copy of direct quotes in both the person's language and the English translation. While the use of translators may increase research costs, the benefits of honoring the ideas embedded in language makes it an important part of the research process and outcomes. Even though we may not understand the language being spoken, we are still privileging the language, the essence of the message, and the individual who is speaking her or his language.

In recognition of the spirit of respect, we need to be cognizant that our voices, whether in oral or written forms, are the mediums for transmitting respect for the spirit embedded in the information we are entrusted with through our research efforts. This fits with the teaching that our languages are sacred and reflects our relationships to all of creation and as a result we are cautioned to carefully consider our words before speaking and ensure we take our time because once the words are spoken, we cannot take them back. The elders also caution us to speak from the heart as our words can be very powerful and can either build up individuals and communities or tear them down (Kovach, 2005).

We need to recognize that the people we engage with in research are not just 'test subjects' who are not impacted by the research process and who we can distance ourselves from. Rather when we view the person or persons we are speaking with as sacred, we will develop a different relationship and are more apt to focus attentively as they speak. Being a good listener is an important way of showing respect and reverence for our research partners.

One of the concerns expressed by Indigenous researchers is the need to respect that the sacred and spiritual do not belong to the public (Absolon & Willet, 2004). When interviewing

Indigenous people and community elders. it is often helpful to simply state any concerns about what people want shared publically at the beginning of the research relationship. As a result people will enter a dialogue about what they are comfortable sharing publicly. When someone shares a teaching or information the researcher is not sure is appropriate to record the best approach is to discuss it with the person who is sharing the information. Raising the concern at the beginning of the discussion helps people to be aware of what they want to share within a research context. Finally, sharing the transcriptions, drafts and final copies with participating storytellers not only allows them the opportunity to identify what is sensitive information and not intended for publication but it also ensures that their voices are heard throughout the research process.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a discussion of a conceptual framework based on my understanding of the ways in which ancient Indigenous peoples applied a relational methodology based in reciprocity and respect and a personal experience of picking medicine and which applied the values and principles to the research process. The chapter also incorporated a discussion relating the intricate dynamics of political resistance, spirituality, storytelling, language and relationships that work to benefit all our relations in all aspects of life including research

## CHAPTER 5

### APPLYING THE METHODOLOGY

Determining the best fit for methodology from a personal perspective was a long journey. In order to arrive at good decisions, our elders admonish us that “the longest journey a person can make is the journey from the heart to the head” (Mitchell, 2012, p. 33) and I find writing it out in a poetic measure helps me make that journey. The following words describe part of my process.

*Musing about walking in two worlds*

How do you walk in two worlds  
 Or on two paths at the same time  
 How do you travel in two canoes  
 Or acknowledge one way but not the other  
 Is there really only one path, one you

One world represents ancestors of the earth  
 The other bent on owning our mother  
 Who carries the blood of our ancestors  
 Their spirits calling out for peace and reconciliation  
 Still one revels in their conquests, the other in world peace

Two grandmothers, both loving and mine  
 One from our territory, the other not  
 Each left a legacy; how do I choose  
 How do I bring those worlds together  
 To form a balanced me

Suddenly, Cree voices singing Christian hymns  
 Visions of forced conversions running through my head  
 Yet I get it, I understand the need  
 Then I hear the sound of drums and singing  
 And my spirit is at peace, as one  
 Besides, there is no bicultural; the world will not yet allow it  
 Osowa Askiv Iskew

The pressure to ‘fit’ in two worlds or walk between two worlds is a complex topic simply because the discussion must span a diverse range of circumstances related to self-identity, life experiences and structural barriers such as racism, white privilege and inequality, all the while

contemplating the implications of trying to bridge different worldviews. Individuals respond differently to the dilemma, depending on their life circumstances.

For example, Henze and Vanett (1993) explain it is assumed that walking in two worlds reflects the notion of the existence of bicultural life ways in which people walk comfortably in two distinct, readily identifiable worlds that are simply defined in rigid and static terms (p. 119). This perspective negates the reality of individual “distinctiveness based on ethnicity, family, geographical location, language, social and familial relationships, knowledge, spirituality, philosophy and aspiration” (Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 205). There is also an assumption that walking in two worlds provides individuals with the ‘best’ of two worlds (Henze & Vanett, 1993, p. 126). The obvious difficulties with this assumption are that many people do not feel comfortable trying to navigate distinctly different worldviews as there are natural boundaries created through linguistic diversity, values and community norms that differ from and often conflict with other worldviews, in addition to issues of racism which need to be contended with in order to navigate through a milieu of worldviews. Furthermore, in order to benefit from the ‘best of two worlds’ individuals would need to feel accepted and confident that their acceptance allows for meaningful participation (Fitzgerald, 2006).

In reality many Indigenous people who live, work or go to school in urban centers must negotiate life in the face of different worldviews on a daily basis. Not surprisingly the literature indicates that people cope in different ways. Some people try to fit into the mainstream and maintain their Indigenous self in their ‘off time’. A participant in Dodgson and Struthers’ (2005) study describes the struggle for individuals who believe they must lean towards a mainstream way of doing things if they are to survive:

Because we walk two roads, it’s hard to lean toward one more than another one. Living is hard and a lot of people don’t see the Indian people are traditional but still have to survive

and live and succeed in this world. And some [Indian] people see that to succeed in the White world, you have to be White, act White, do White, you know everything. Only on your time or at powwow time, you can be Indian. You can't do both and survive and succeed. (p. 342)

Others try to compartmentalize by wearing different hats at different times with “varying degrees of comfort in order to minimize their marginalization within the mainstream culture” (Dodgson & Struthers, 2005, p. 342). In a study by Kathleen Sadeo (2003) a participant describes how growing up she learned to adapt and walk carefully between two “completely different sets of expectations” to the point of “probably not even realizing or thinking about it at the time” (p. 412). She further describes what was required of her in that “I was able to walk very carefully along, walking on all the broken eggshells or glass depending on the situation...also being able to adapt” (p. 412).

Another individual describes a process whereby “she re-invented herself in an attempt to overcome the dual challenges” (Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 210).

Still others chose to live in their home communities to minimize their contact with mainstream society while others chose to acculturate to mainstream society (Dodgson & Struthers, 2005). Regardless of the individual circumstances or coping mechanisms walking between two (or more) worlds is a dilemma as individuals struggle to find a solution to ‘fitting in’. The solution is not denial of your identity and culture as Dodgson and Struthers (2005) explain our cultural identity will always be a part of who we are:

All Indian people have something in their heart and their spirit whether it comes out when you're younger or older. It's there and it's always going to be there. You have to find it and feel it and just go along with it and forget about what else is out there. [Some are] not listening to it. (p. 342)

The concept that people have only one ancestry through one tribal group is not based in reality as Indigenous people have traditionally allied themselves with other Indigenous groups through marriage creating a great deal of overlap among cultural groups. McLeod (2000) describes it as “multilayered, ambiguous genealogies” (p. 439). This concept of making allies and forging relationships to benefit everyone involved was extended to the European traders. The shaming that comes with having mixed ancestry does not come from Indigenous values of acceptance and respect but rather from an imported, misinformed ideology related to purity of race.

I recognise that my approach may not mirror the same understanding as other Indigenous people or even other Cree people because Cree peoples represent historical and contemporary diversity; diversity which is expressed through their cultures including languages, stories, ceremonies, and traditional knowledge related to their different territories, as well as through their personal experiences within colonialism. Having acknowledged this conflict I recognize that I can still contribute by drawing on the experience and knowledge gained from my particular vantage point.

Benham (2007) acknowledges research as a difficult and complex process that is situated at the intersection of two worldviews and for “native/indigenous researchers, positioning ourselves somewhere within and between the contrasting worldviews of the indigenous and the discipline is an itchy proposition” (p. 519). In acknowledging these apparent contrasts in worldviews, Ermine (2007) moves beyond the notion of an either/or dichotomy in describing the distinct possibility of relationships between diverse cultures. He describes this possibility as an ethical space<sup>14</sup> which encompasses “the notion of a meeting place, or initial thinking about a neutral zone between

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<sup>14</sup> Willie Ermine’s description of ethical space incorporates Roger Poole’s discussion of the topic in *Towards deep subjectivity* (1972). Poole uses a photograph reflecting a time in which Russia had invaded Czechoslovakia as a way to illustrate the space between two men sitting on a bench with one man dressed in army fatigues representing the dominate occupying forces while the second man dressed in peasant clothing represents the ‘occupied’.

entities or cultures” (p. 202). As Ermine, Sinclair, and Jeffery (2004) explain, “The ethical space provides a paradigm for how, at the ‘confluence and chance’, people from disparate cultures, worldviews, and knowledges [sic] systems can engage in an ethical/moral manner as we work toward giving substance to what the ethical space entails” (p. 20).

In an effort to engage with the concept of an ethical space the following discussion intends to describe how I incorporated a mainstream exploratory qualitative research methodology and research design and the ethical considerations required by academia while relying on Indigenous axiology and storytelling to ground the research in Indigenous ontology and epistemology. As Margaret Kovach (2009) notes, “within any methodology is both a knowledge belief system (encompassing ontology and epistemology) and the actual methods” (p. 25). This study was based in Indigenous values and worldviews that provided guidance in terms of the choice of methods that demonstrate a ‘best fit’ with Indigenous epistemologies as I understand them.

Holding the space  
 The Sacred space  
 Ermine’s sacred space  
 Where possibilities meet  
 Two cultures sitting  
 Side by side  
 In peaceful co-existence  
 Wrapped in mutual respect  
 Tentatively holding each other up  
 Not tangled in confusion  
 Or fighting to be THE one  
 Co-existing to understand  
 From within the sacred space  
 Lives interwoven through centuries  
 So much loss and struggle  
 So much yet to consider  
 How long can we hold the space  
 The sacred space of possibility  
 Or pass it on to others  
 Will they laugh and scoff

Yelling 'there is no possibility'  
 But no, the sacred space exists  
 Reflected in the mutual smiles  
 In cheers of 'you can do it'  
 We can do it,  
 Yes we must do it  
 Who knows what will come forth  
 From holding sacred space  
 For within the openness of sacred space lies  
 The magic of possibility  
 The space to dream  
 The dreams for future generations  
 Osowa Askiy Iskewew

### **Research Questions**

The main objective of this study was to gain insight into how child welfare workers perceive their experience of the devolution of child welfare services in Manitoba. The target group was child welfare workers who have had frontline experience working with Indigenous families both before the devolution process and after the establishment of the four authorities and the transfer of families to designated agencies. Frontline workers bring a range of experience and unique knowledge about the devolution process and its impact. Their contributions are important in developing an understanding based on their unique positions of working in the frontlines to implement the changes.

The research questions addressed in this study sought to determine how frontline child welfare workers experienced the devolution of child welfare services in Manitoba. More specifically:

- 1) How do front line child welfare social workers perceive the impact of the devolution of child welfare services, commonly referred to as the AJI-CWI Initiative, in Manitoba?

Sub questions include:

- a. What do front line social workers perceive as the benefits of the devolution process to Indigenous families in Manitoba?
- b. What do front line social workers perceive as the deficits of the devolution process to Indigenous families in Manitoba?

- c. What changes do front line social workers perceive the child welfare system in Manitoba could implement in order to benefit Indigenous families in Manitoba?
- d. How do frontline social workers perceive the role of Indigenous culture in child welfare?

### **Rationale for Choice of Topic**

In applying the value of doing all things with respect, it was important that I took the time to carefully consider my personal motivations for conducting this research because I understood that in order to do research in a good way, I needed to begin with asking “why this topic”? The journey to this point in my PhD program has taken many twists and turns along the way that can only be described in terms of spiritual, mental, physical and emotional growth. The choice of methodology and research questions gradually defined itself over the months as I researched, wrote, and took the time to go inside myself and contemplate questions of self-identity, asking who am I; Is this part of the work I was intended to do; Will this research make a difference for future generations; Will it be of value or benefit to the communities involved; and Can I complete the work in a manner that is respectful of everyone involved? In essence it meant turning self-doubts into self-confidence, painful memories into teachings and connecting with my inner self and my ancestors.

I chose to research the child welfare devolution process in the province of Manitoba because the devolution of child welfare has been a major undertaking which impacts thousands of Indigenous families and the individuals working in the system. While there have been numerous government sponsored reviews of the devolution process there has been negligible academic research regarding the actual outcomes in recent years.

The study is also unique in that it addresses the topic from the perspective of frontline child welfare workers. I chose to interview individuals who have worked in the front lines as I respect that child welfare workers enter the field with a desire to support children, families and

communities. I also understand that many Indigenous social workers choose child welfare because they often have an awareness of the system through personal family circumstances and once employed in the system find that the experience can be overwhelming. Also as front line workers immersed in the day-to-day work with families and communities they have distinct understanding and insights that are often not solicited.

The relevance and timing of a research project on this topic is germane as the devolution process is considered a progressive step in existing Indigenous child welfare models and is being observed by other jurisdictions. It is anticipated that the documentation of the AJI-CWI process as experienced by child welfare workers who played a critical role during the devolution process will provide insight for future endeavors. The study is also timely in terms of recording the events from the perspective of people who were involved both pre and post devolution.

### **Storytelling as the Data Collection Method**

For the purpose of this study, I incorporated storytelling as my information collection method. In following Robina Thomas' (2005) example my role was to honour the storyteller as the expert of their experience. My direct roles include "learner, listener, recorder, and facilitator" (p. 246). In this role it is important for the researcher to respect the sacred and be mindful of the spirit of everyone involved. This includes viewing the people and their stories as sacred and recognizing that our own voices, whether in oral or written forms, are channels for transmitting respect for the spirit embedded in the information we are entrusted with through our research efforts. This principle was critical throughout the research and writing process.

In using the storytelling approach I met with social workers who worked in child welfare in Manitoba and experienced working in the field before, during and after the transition to the four authorities' model of child welfare which occurred between 2003 and 2005. This included social

workers who would have been in the field before 2003 and who are still working in child welfare or recently retired.

The recruitment of storytellers included two criteria: 1) individuals who identified as child welfare workers who had frontline experience working with Indigenous families both before the devolution process and after its completion and 2) Individuals who were not students in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba during the storytelling process<sup>15</sup>.

### **Rationale for Methodology Choice**

The choice to incorporate a qualitative approach as a best fit with Indigenous epistemologies is what Kovach (2009) describes as a “strategic concession” (p. 35) in that it acknowledges qualitative research as having its roots in western thought. In recognition of qualitative research’s westernized beginnings, Denzin and Lincoln (2008) describe qualitative research methodology as a “metaphor for colonial knowledge, for power, and for truth” (p. 1) and further elaborate that “From the very beginning, qualitative research was implicated in a racist project” (p. 2). In viewing qualitative research in this context, Caxaj (2015) provides insight into the lack of fit between mainstream and Indigenous approaches:

Thus many postmodern approaches, as currently practiced, may hold little relevance to Indigenous communities as they reflect the values of relatively privileged populations, in Grande’s words “a theory of property holders”. And more generally, even critical theories that account for material realities and contexts reflect a different ontological viewpoint that does not fit neatly with diverse Indigenous realities of interconnectedness, historical legacy, and spirituality. (p. 2)

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<sup>15</sup> I made the choice not to include current students at the University of Manitoba as I teach in the Faculty of Social Work and did not to influence the opinions of students who perceive our professional relationship in terms of power relationships.

It is this historical legacy of colonialism that presents challenges in defining a methodology which truly represent Indigenous ontology, epistemology and methodology whether it is coached in quantitative or qualitative terms. Incorporating both a qualitative approach and Indigenous methodology represents a balancing act that calls on the researcher to understand the applicability of both theories and how both approaches intersect. It is at this junction between western and Indigenous knowledge that Ermine's (2007) sacred space occurs.

In order to elucidate an Indigenous approach within the confines of an academic environment, this qualitative research project uses an Indigenous framework which is guided by Cree values and worldviews as described in the previous chapters and that utilizes storytelling in order to best approximate a method most conducive to Indigenous ways of being. As Caxaj (2015) notes "Indigenous teachings and epistemologies can uniquely guide research activities ...and can shed light on ethical and methodological considerations outside the purview of standard academic institutes" (pp. 1-2).

### **Respect for Diversity**

One of the important deliberations in choosing the methodological approach for this study on Indigenous child welfare was the need to be inclusive of diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural perspectives and experiences. The rationale for this is that the topic not only impacts across all Indigenous peoples residing in Canada (and beyond), but diversity is also reflected in the families involved in child welfare, the social workers who have worked with Indigenous families and informed this study, the authors who have contributed to the literature resources, and the intended audience. Being mindful of diversity in this research project has been integral to all stages from the planning to the final report and includes practical steps such as hearing from a diverse range of voices, encouraging the use of Indigenous languages, being cognitive of the interconnectivity and diversity among communities and individuals in terms of cultures, languages, spirituality,

experiences and perspectives. There is a need to recognise that the historical and contemporary influences are deeply complex and diverse. Respect for diversity is reflected in the principles which guided my research. The practical application of these guidelines for research is described in more detail in the previous chapter and will be referenced throughout this chapter.

### **Qualitative Research Methods**

In choosing to do an exploratory qualitative research approach I was mindful that “the main strength of qualitative research is that it yields data that provide depth and detail to create understanding of phenomena and lived experiences” (Bowen, 2005, p. 209). Polit and Beck (2010) concur by saying “The goal of most qualitative studies is to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of human experience through intensive study of particular cases (p. 1452). In considering which research approach I would use I recognized that the research topic I had chosen had not been explored academically so it was fitting to apply an exploratory qualitative approach which would elicit important details that would contribute to an understanding of how the AJI-CWI devolution process was experienced by social workers involved in the child welfare system. It was also important to use methods that aligned with the values of respect. In keeping with that intent, Creswell and Miller (2000) describe a qualitative approach that relies on collaboration “is to respect and support participants in a study, not further marginalize them” (p. 128).

### **Credibility - Good Storytelling**

In qualitative research there are numerous ways to demonstrate credibility including prolonged and varied field experience, peer debriefing, triangulation, member checking, negative case analysis, and persistent observation (Anney, 2014). The following section will look at the qualitative methods for demonstrating credibility in the context of an Indigenous methodological approach.

### **Prolonged Engagement - Research is Relational**

Prolonged engagement in the community allows for time and immersion in the storytellers' environments thereby building trust and increasing the listener's understanding of the context and day to day realities of the storytellers (Anney, 2014; Creswell & Miller, 2000). This approach fits with the relational and community based values of the Indigenous approach used in this study as a) I engaged in relationship building with the intent to give back to the community; b) I sat respectfully with the storytellers until they indicated they had finished telling their stories; and c) I engaged in relationship building as I maintained contact with the storytellers after the first meeting as I returned transcripts, copies of the final results, and followed up with each person for feedback.

### **Peer Debriefing - Research is Relational**

Another method for enhancing credibility of the research is the use of peer debriefing in which the researcher seeks out peers to provide feedback as they proceed through the various stages of research, data analysis and writing (Anney, 2014).

Feedback throughout the study was sought out in different ways including through my PhD committee who provided feedback at pertinent times during the research and writing, as well as from faculty colleagues who volunteered their time to respond to my requests for feedback.

Another important process that took place during the months of researching and writing were the opportunities to meet over tea or coffee with friends, family members and colleagues who are engaged in the field of child welfare to discuss our common interests and concerns about the child welfare system. These conversations gave me insight and motivation to move forward and most importantly they acted as an informal group that I could turn to for feedback and clarification as I worked through the different stages of research and writing. Again these activities reflect relational

connections as they involve community connections within which to discuss, receive feedback and to socialize.

### **Triangulation – Research is Political**

Triangulation is defined by Anney (2014) as involving “the use of multiple and different methods, investigators, sources and theories to obtain corroborating evidence” (p. 277). Anney (2014) recommends that “qualitative research should include one or two triangulation techniques” (p. 277) One such technique used in this study is “methodological triangulation which is the use of two or more research methods or approaches in one study” (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). In addition to the storytelling sessions, I also relied on written documentation which included online news items, annual reports and other documentation provided by participating storytellers to cross reference and seek out additional details related to the information they had shared. Incorporating additional information sources contribute to a more detailed picture of the research focus and support the stories. Given the political implications of this study, supporting and corroborating the stories was an important step.

Another technique is space triangulation that involves the collection of stories about the same issues in two or more community settings to investigate the consistency of the storytellers’ experiences under different circumstances and locales (Curtin & Fossey, 2007, p. 91). This aspect of triangulation was pertinent to this study since I spoke with social workers across Manitoba and included individuals who worked in urban and rural communities, from all four authorities situated in different areas of Manitoba, as well as people who represented different Indigenous communities and settler ethnicities. Reaching out to diverse communities across Manitoba was a demonstration of a relational approach as it provided people, who became aware of the study, the opportunity to voice their story. The decision to respond to a call for storytellers was also a political decision as individuals understood they were contributing to the discussion of a topic that has political

implications for the field of child welfare in Manitoba. The storytellers were engaging in a political activity as they shared their personal observations, experiences and recommendations regarding the devolution process, knowing the stories would be made public.

### **Member Checking – Research is Storytelling & Honoring Language**

Member checking has been described as “the heart of credibility” as its purpose is to eliminate researcher bias (Anney, 2014, p. 277). Curtin and Fossey describe member checks as simply the involvement of storytellers in how their stories are represented by providing opportunities for them to read, comment on and contribute to the final outcomes (2007). Member checking was integral to this study as it fits with a respectful, relational approach. In part, this was done by assuring each individual that they would have the opportunity to review their transcripts and make any changes they felt was appropriate in terms of maintaining their confidentiality and accurately representing what they intended to share publicly. I also made it a condition to share the final draft of the report with each person in order for them to review and provide feedback before it was published. All transcripts were returned to the storytellers and while not everyone made changes, nine transcripts were returned with changes or they simply indicated their approval through return email. This process not only gave storytellers re-assurance of confidentiality and control of their stories but it also provided me with assurance that their stories were being transcribed accurately (Poland, 1995; Poland, 2003). Once the first draft of the stories was written, I sent them to the storytellers for feedback and made the changes they requested. I believe taking the time to do member checks not only contributes to the study’s trustworthiness but it also fulfills the Indigenous research principles articulated in chapter four regarding relationality and respecting the storytellers’ words (language). Member checks represent respectful conversations with the people who are sharing their stories; it is recognizing and respecting that their stories carry the spirit of the experiences they have lived; it ensures some control over their stories and how the

stories are reported within the confines of the university ethics protocols and; it offer the opportunity for the storytellers and the researcher to contribute to the wellbeing of the people involved and the individuals impacted by the research.

### **Negative Case Analysis - Research Honors Language**

Negative case analysis occurs when the emerging stories contradict “the researcher’s expectations” and when analyzed in the context of other stories does not negate earlier findings but rather strengthens credibility through accounting for the diversity in the reporting of experiences (Bazeley, 2009). In this research it was evident that not all individuals experienced the devolution of child welfare in Manitoba in the same way and there were times when divergent explanations for different aspects of the devolution were expressed. One example of this was the reoccurring explanation regarding the transfer of files from Winnipeg CFS to Indigenous agencies; many found the transfer process inadequate while two people remember having a well-planned process in place. These differences in perspective not only added to the richness of the storytelling but it also informed my understanding of how the devolution of child welfare was viewed and experienced from different perspectives.

Acknowledging divergent views not only strengthens the credibility of the overall outcomes but it also works to build respect and relationality with the storytellers by honoring their words (language) and the spirit in which they shared their ‘truth’.

### **Persistent Observation – Research is Relational**

In Bitsch’s (2005) words, persistent observation, “poses the question as to whether the researcher or the research team has done an in-depth study to gain detail” (Cited in Anney, 2014, p. 277). This is similar to prolonged engagement in which the researcher spends an extended amount of time in the community becoming immersed in the setting and building relationships. With persistent observation the focus is on gaining an understanding of the setting and the

storyteller's worldview. The time spent in the field for this research involved 37 hours and 20 minutes of recorded interviews which once transcribed resulted in 540 single spaced pages of transcription. This reported length of time does not include phone calls; time spent getting acquainted or re-acquainted, or sharing food or coffee. Whether it was in the individual's office or in another environment, the meetings provided an opportunity to interact with the storytellers and become immersed in their stories. Out of the 27 completed interviews<sup>16</sup>, 16 interviews were held in their agency offices while the remaining sessions was held in other locations. This provided the opportunity to observe everyday work environments and I was often given tours and introduced to their colleagues. In those instances it was obvious that they not only had their agency support to engage with the research but they were comfortable being associated with me in the role of researcher as they often encouraged others to participate as I was introduced. This was not the situation for all respondents.

While the qualitative term, persistent observation, may not fully capture the spirit of relationality and the political implications of building respectful relationships as we plan our entry into Indigenous communities, if done in a thoughtful, focused manner, the process itself can reflect these principles.

### **Reflexive Journals – Research is Spiritual & Political**

One of the strengths of qualitative inquiry is the requirement to be self-reflexive and aware of potential biases inherent in the researcher. Horsburgh (2003) describes reflexivity as “active acknowledgement by the researcher that his/her own actions and decisions will inevitably impact upon the meaning and the context of the experience under investigation” (Cited in Lietz, Langer, Furman, 2006, p. 447) This process begins by identifying who we are in relation to the research

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<sup>16</sup> I interviewed a total of 28 individuals but one person requested to withdraw from the study.

study, storytellers, their stories, and written conclusions in addition to being explicit about our assumptions, biases and values (Curtin & Fossey, 2007; Creswell & Miller, 2000).

The need for reflexivity begins in the initial stages of planning the research and continues throughout the process (Lietz et al, 2006). Tracy (2010) refers to the early stages of defining the study as the 'spring season' which is "an intensely subjective and spiritual process, rather than a rational weighing of costs and benefits. Questions to ask include "Why am I doing this study?" "Why now?" "Am I ready for this?" (p. 842). One of the methods recommended for use in tracking reflexive considerations is the use of journaling. According to Anney (2014) journals reflect the storytelling process including personal reflections and moments "such as the 'ah' phenomenon" that arises during the storytelling and while reviewing the stories (p. 279).

As an Indigenous social worker I understand the importance of reflection. First reflection is a means to understand how and why we do social work and how it impacts us personally. Second, it reflects our elder's admonition for us to go inward to seek understanding of how and why we are connected in every aspect of our lives.

Willie Ermine explains that a legitimate way to construct knowledge in Cree world view is through subjective inward exploration. He names it "mamatowisowin" and explains that "is the capacity to tap the creative force of the inner space by the use of all the faculties that constitute our being – it is to exercise inwardness." (Mackay, 2014, p. 356)

Therefore my reflexive journey began long before the planning stages of the research process. My reflections were captured in the beginning pages of my research proposal, in the poems I wrote as I experienced the process and in journaling along the way. For me, journaling and poetry writing are a means for making sense of the process and connecting the pieces as I move from stage to stage. Some of the poems have been incorporated into this report because I believe they provide some insight into my role as an Indigenous woman who experienced the child welfare system as a child

and my process in researching and recording the findings. The topic of child welfare is a highly public and political topic in Manitoba and as a result every step along the way was engaging in a political process.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter represented the juncture at which the Indigenous values and principles meet a western exploratory qualitative methodology. In essence the chapter provides an overview of the research methods which include a description of the qualitative criteria applied to the study and the ethical considerations as they relate to Indigenous research principles.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **DESCRIBING THE RESEARCH JOURNEY AND THE STORYTELLERS**

This chapter begins by describing the preparatory work for engaging with the child welfare communities in Manitoba and arranging to meet with the storytellers who had indicated their willingness to share their experiences. The chapter goes on to describe the meetings and outcomes, and provides an overview of storytellers' demographics using the information they shared on an information collection sheet prior to the storytelling sessions. Finally, I review ethical considerations as prescribed by the University of Victoria's institutional protocol which includes informing storytellers regarding risks, benefits, right to withdraw from the study, anonymity and confidentiality, storage, and disposal, feedback, compensation and dissemination.

#### **Choosing the Storytellers: Purposive Sampling**

As Tongco (2007) indicates, the sampling method for connecting with storytellers relates directly to the question the researcher is interested in exploring. In other words, applying a qualitative approach means the research question "will decide the objectives on which the methodology will be based" including the sampling strategy (p. 147). As its name indicates, purposive sampling involves intentionally selecting individuals, groups, or institutions who are knowledgeable about the issues being investigated (Anney, 2010). Purposive sampling was chosen as the most appropriate sampling method for this study as I was interested in hearing the stories of frontline workers who experienced the impact of the AJI-CWI on the child welfare in Manitoba (phenomenon) and selected child welfare workers (experts) who have worked before, during and after the devolution.

#### **Entry into Communities**

Since different agencies representing different communities were involved it was important to plan a respectful entry into the communities. While I have already established relationships in

the child welfare community through work, research, teaching and friendships, I wanted to ensure I had reached out to child welfare workers from across Manitoba. I began the recruitment process by sending letters to the Chief Executive Officers of the four authorities which included the Northern Authority, Southern Authority, Metis Authority and General Authority (Appendix A). In the letter I introduced myself and briefly described the research plan including research questions, participant criteria and research purpose. I also offered to meet with CEOs and their staff to discuss the research process to get their insights and ensure that the research met the needs of the community. This resulted in one response from the CEO of the Northern Authority who invited me to a meeting to talk about my research plans. During the meeting the CEO expressed support for the research.

The next step was to send a letter addressed to all executive directors of child welfare agencies in Manitoba and to all mandated child welfare sub offices which had addresses listed on the Government of Manitoba Family Services web page (<https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childfam/cfsagencies.html>) (Appendix B). Of the 142 letters mailed, nine were returned and marked undeliverable (Appendix C). The letters contained similar information as the one sent to the CEOs describing the research study and an invitation to meet to discuss the research plan and included a copy of the research poster for distribution within the agencies (Appendix D). In response to the letters I received four emails from executive directors of Indigenous agencies stating their support in terms of distributing the poster and encouraging their staff to participate in the study during work hours. Two of the executive directors represented the Southern Authority, one from the Metis Authority and one from the Northern Authority. Other than unsolicited feedback from five individuals that the poster had been distributed through staff email, posted in offices and staff lunch rooms, it is difficult to know how widely it was distributed.

### **Arranging Meetings with Storytellers**

In approaching community agency people and the individuals who agreed to share their stories, it was crucial that the research principle which states that we need to respect the limitations and political potential of research to ensure the process and outcomes can be put to good use, was applied. This included explaining the purpose for the research and the research process along with limitations imposed on me as an academic researcher through the university in terms of confidentiality and research ethics. As researchers we need to be respectful of diversity in terms of cultures, languages, spirituality, experiences and perspectives. This includes being prepared to encourage people to speak in their languages and have the interviews transcribed and included in the final report. In this study, all storytellers were comfortable speaking English.

In accordance with the ethics criteria, inquiries to participate by sharing their stories were responded to by email or phone incorporating either the email or phone script (Appendices E and F). This included determining their eligibility to share their stories, explaining the research questions and our respective roles in the process as well as explaining the confidentiality process. If the individual fit the criteria, I emailed documents outlining the research goal and questions, including the Information Collection Form and the University of Victoria Participant Consent Form (Appendices G and H),

One of the considerations in meeting with child welfare workers in Manitoba is the reality that many carry large caseloads and some would find the time required for sharing their stories challenging. In order to assuage inconvenience I was committed to arranging a meeting with them at a time and place suitable to their needs. I offered to meet with individuals where they felt most comfortable including their offices, my office at the university, their homes, office space I borrowed in the community or a restaurant. I also offered to meet for interviews at the convenience of the storyteller which included interviewing during work hours if it was identified by

the individual as appropriate or alternatively, evenings and weekends. Of the 27 storytellers who agreed to share their stories, the majority (n=16) agreed to meet at their agency, five interviews were completed in a restaurant, three were conducted in a community office after work hours, two were conducted by phone and one individual came to my home. The length of time for the actual recorded interviews varied between 56 minutes and 2 hours and 13 minutes. This did not include the introductions and time spent reviewing the ethics documents and discussing the purpose of the research. Overall, there were 37 hours and 20 minutes of recorded interviews.

### **Meeting with Storytellers**

The initial meeting began with an explanation of the goals and research questions, and review of the informed consent form which was signed before beginning the interview (Appendix H). A copy of the consent form had been emailed to individuals before the first meeting in order for people to have an opportunity to review and bring forward any questions when we met. Storytellers were assured that they would be sent the final transcripts and drafts of the final report. The final transcripts were emailed to everyone who participated with the exception of one person who does not use private email. To ensure approval by the storyteller I provided a form which they could sign to indicate their agreement to the final revisions and included a statement that noted that all previous copies were destroyed and will not be referenced in any future written work (Appendix I).

The use of audio recording was explained and permission requested before the storytelling sessions began. The stories began after they completed the information collection form which collected statistical information such as age range, cultural identity and education level and after all their questions were answered.

The approach I took to storytelling was to introduce the research topic at the beginning of each session and I found people were open to talking about their experiences in child welfare and in

particular the AJI-CWI devolution process. They often talked for long periods of time without pausing. At that point if I needed clarification or felt they were looking for feedback I spoke. In the meantime I gave them my full attention and did not take notes until after the storytelling session was over. In the storytelling tradition, the storyteller has the freedom to share what they believe is relevant and not feel pressured to answer specific questions. Whether it is in storytelling, conversations or counseling sessions I believe it is important to trust our auditory and visual senses to really 'hear' what the person is relaying to us. For me, note taking is disruptive to both to my listening ability and to the speaker who might wonder what is being written and if they are saying it properly. Being fully present for the person requires full concentration and the use of our observation skills as we focus on their story.

### **Saturation**

I met and heard the stories of 28 individuals but have only included 27 stories in the final discussion as one person requested to withdraw from the study. According to academic literature, clear description of the concept of saturation in qualitative studies is elusive with “no practical guidelines for estimating sample size for purposively sampled interviews” in spite of the fact that estimating the ‘appropriate’ number in samples is generally required for planning, proposal writing and budgeting research projects (Guest, Bunce & Johnson , 2006, p. 60; Bowen, 2008). O’Reilly and Parker make the argument that while saturation can be helpful with qualitative studies, it “was originally tied to grounded theory with a specific and theory driven meaning” and therefore not necessary in all qualitative studies (2012, p. 191). According to Mason (2010) qualitative research methods are not interested in how many people say the same thing but rather are concerned with meaning (p. 1).

This thought fits with the Indigenous belief that many people can observe an event or hear a story but each person will take away different meanings and applications. One does not question

what someone speaks of as their experience or truth because each person is different and experiences the world differently. In other words each storyteller who shared their story or perspective added information and together the stories built the meta-narrative. While I found that a significant number of individuals included similar storylines, they did so from different perspectives and thereby contributed to the overall story. I also had the sense that "...because each life is unique and in this sense data are never truly saturated as there will always be new things to discover", I could continue learning indefinitely (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). This quote is especially relevant in this study because knowledge from diverse sources and perspectives related to the complex field of child welfare in Manitoba will continue to grow.

The difference between asking a set number of people the same questions versus asking them to share their stories fits with the purpose and meaning of storytelling. For example if you approach a teacher/elder with a question that falls within their expertise, it would be considered disrespectful to continue to ask other people the same question. For instance, if you ask for the meaning of a dream from someone who has a gift for understanding dreams, but you weren't satisfied with the interpretation because it was not what you wanted to hear, it would be considered frivolous and disrespectful to approach other people looking for a different interpretation of the same dream. Therefore asking people to share their stories is a respectful way of learning as opposed to posing the same questions repeatedly to different individuals. The goal of storytelling is not to reach saturation but rather to gain an understanding of peoples' experiences and insights.

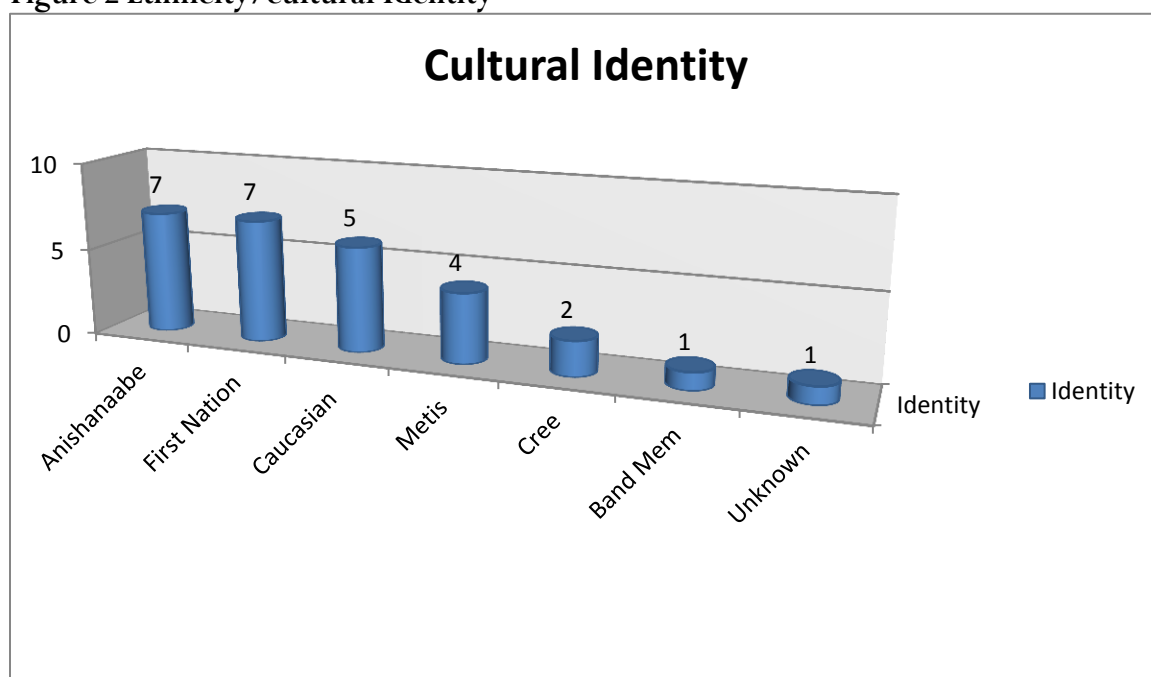
### **Who Are the Storytellers?**

The storytellers represented a diversity of experiences and backgrounds from working in mainstream child welfare agencies, Indigenous child and family services agencies, rural and/or urban settings, and child welfare authorities in addition to representing diverse cultural identities

and educational backgrounds. It was also important that I was alert to and respectful of diversity in terms of individual cultures, languages, spirituality, lived experiences and perspectives as I met with people.

Of the 27 storytellers who agreed to share their stories, there were 20 women and seven men who participated. Twenty-one individuals self-identified as Indigenous using identifiers such as Anishanaabe (n=7), Cree (n=2), Métis (n=4), First Nation (n=7), and band member (n=1). Six individuals stated they were non-Indigenous and identified as Caucasian (n=1), Canadian (n=2), Ukrainian (n=1), English/Scottish/German (n=1), and one person just stated she was not Indigenous but did not identify a different culture or ethnicity.

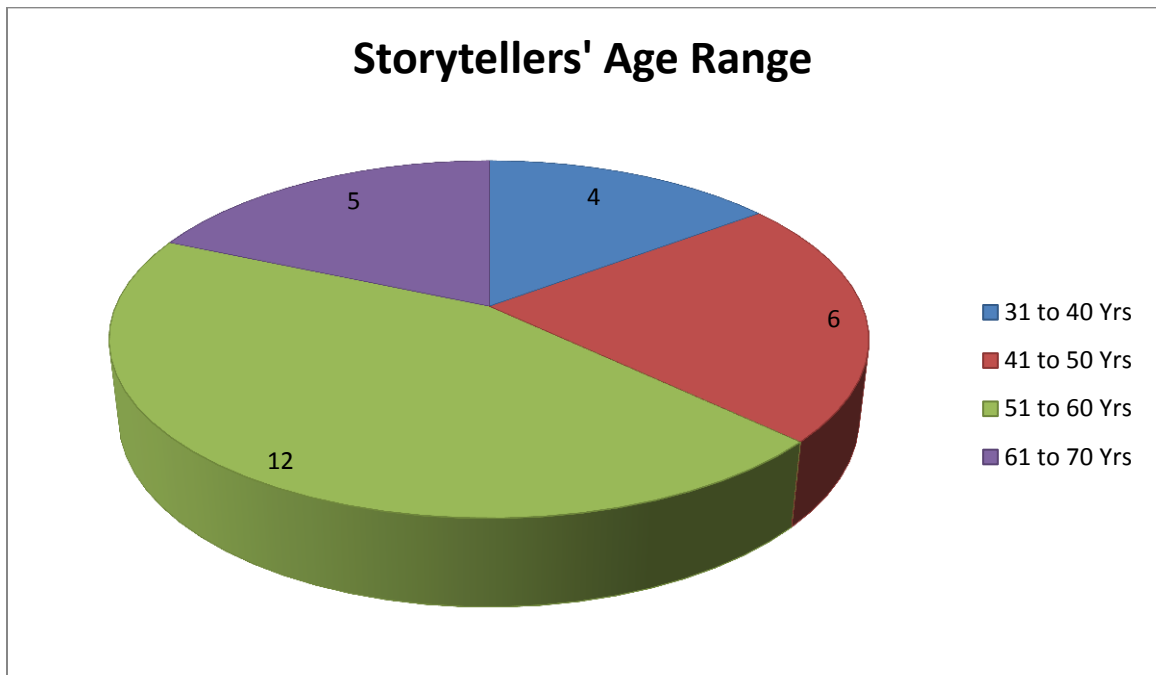
**Figure 2 Ethnicity/cultural Identity**



The data collection sheet also included a question regarding age range. I used 10 year age ranges as some people are sensitive about divulging their age and knowing the exact year of their birth was not pertinent to the study. The ranges began with 21 to 30 years and proceeded upward to 61 to 70 years. While none of the storytellers fell into the 21 to 30 year range, there were four

in the 31 to 40 year range, six in the 41 to 50 year range, twelve in the 51 to 60 year range and five in the 61 to 70 year range. The majority (n=17) of the sample fell into the 51 to 70 year range with 63% of the sample identifying as 51 years of age or more.

**Figure 3 Storytellers' Age Ranges**

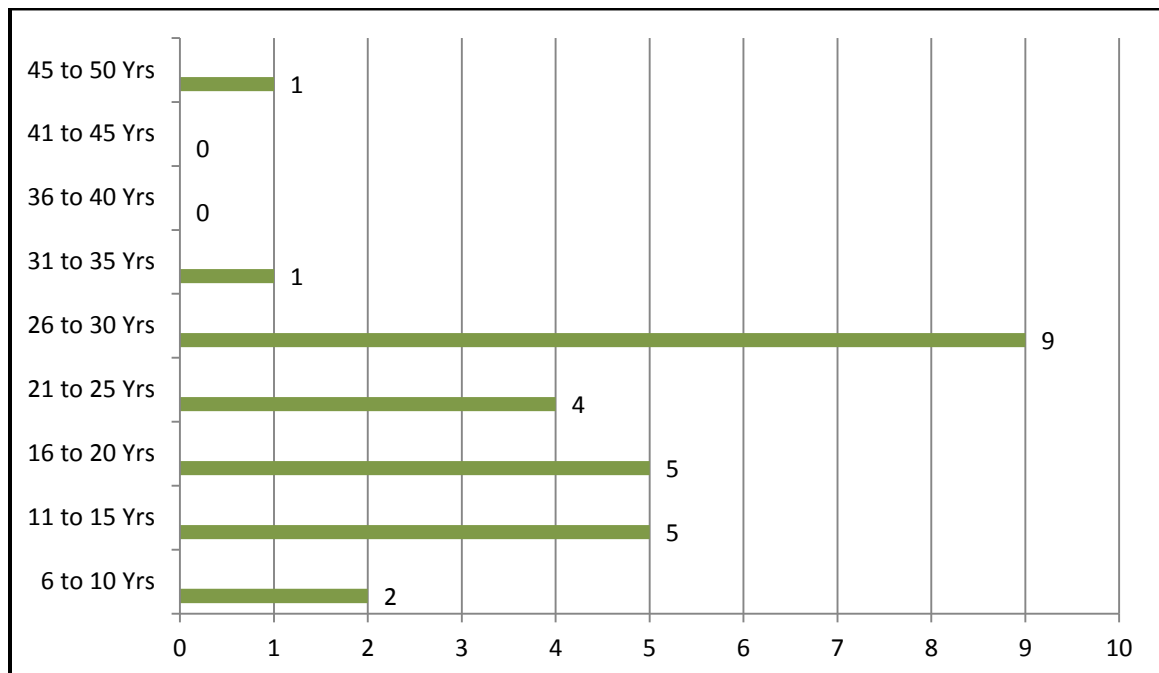


The larger number of individuals representing higher number of years in terms of age aligns with the total number of years this group has worked in the field of child welfare. The total number of years of child welfare related work experience for this group is 613 years. That number represents the equivalent of just over six centuries of child welfare experience for 27 individuals combined. As the following chart indicates the majority of storytellers (n=23) worked between eleven and 30 years in child welfare, while two individuals worked between 6 to 10 years, five individuals worked between 11 and 15 years, five individuals worked between 16 and 20 years, four individuals worked between 21 and 25 years, nine individuals worked between 26 and 30 years, one person has 35 years of child welfare experience and another person worked forty-seven years in the field. Of the 27 people interviewed one individual whose career had spanned 30 years

was in the process of retiring and two individuals had decided to make a career change and were in the process of leaving child welfare.

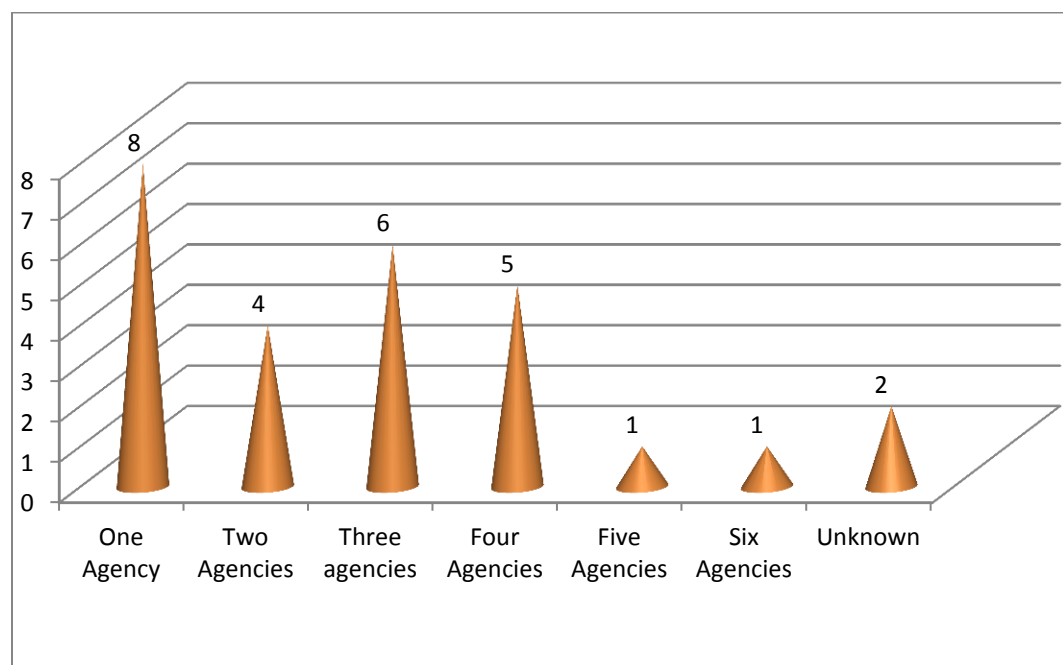
From an Indigenous perspective this group would be highly honored for their many years of experience and the wisdom they have gained through their lifetimes and the years of working in child welfare. From a research perspective the many years of individual and combined experience and knowledge resulted in an impressive historical recollection as well as a rich sharing of contemporary information regarding child welfare in Manitoba. There were times as I sat with people and listened to their stories I felt I was sitting with elders who were honoring me with the wisdom they gained from a lifetime of work with families and their children. Listening to them share their stories reminded me of the dedication and commitment to their values that carried them for so many years in a field of work that has turned many away as a result of the stress and trauma of working in a pressure filled environment.

**Figure 4 Total Number of Years Worked per Person**



Storytellers were asked to list the number of child welfare agencies they worked with over the course of their careers. In addition to their work with CFS agencies eight individuals also identified working with an authority or the Province of Manitoba. Since their work was child welfare related I have included these positions in the total number of agencies. Considering the length of time the majority of this group has spent in child welfare and the perception that child welfare workers change work places frequently, the overall number of agencies for which individuals were employed is surprisingly low. Of the 27 storytellers, eight individuals had worked in one agency, four people had worked in two agencies, six individuals worked with three agencies, five people worked with four different agencies, one person worked in five agencies, and one individual worked with six agencies. One person preferred not to state the number of agencies but rather indicated she had worked for Indigenous agencies in both northern and southern Manitoba. One other individual is unknown.

**Figure 5 Number of Agencies Worked in Per Individual**



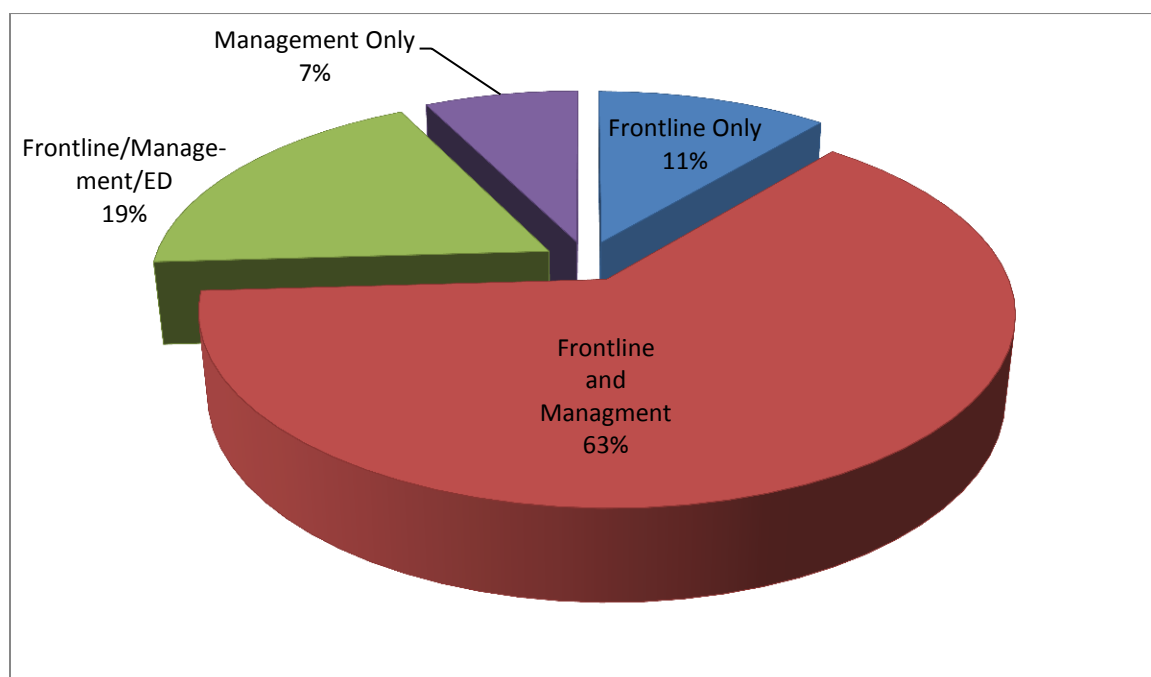
It was anticipated that given the timeline for the devolution process that many individuals would have moved on both in terms of seeking employment elsewhere or moving into management positions within child welfare. In order to capture some of the movement within child welfare I included a question in the information collection form that asked “What child welfare positions have you held?” The responses were very diverse in terms of job position descriptors. For example some used a general description such as frontline worker, while others were more specific in identifying their work titles such as abuse intake worker, resource worker, child protection worker, family service worker and so forth. Those in management positions also used both generic and specific job titles. For example they described their work in general terms such as middle or upper management or more specifically as intake supervisor or executive director. To simplify the process I broke them into the following four categories:

- Frontline work, which includes all direct service with families
- Frontline and management work, which includes having worked in frontline positions, supervisory positions as well as positions identified as management
- Frontline, management and executive director, which includes individuals who have worked in all areas identified
- Management only. This included individuals who identified their positions as resource managers

The majority of individuals (n=17) identified as having worked in both frontline and management positions. This number translates into 63% of the sample who fit this category. Five individuals identified their work as including frontline, management and executive director positions. Three individuals stated their work as frontline positions and two were in management only positions. Within the management category there were five executive directors, seven individuals who worked with the authorities, three of whom had held the position of CEO of an authority. Regardless of their positions, people considered themselves frontline workers because they had not only worked in frontline positions but in their management positions they were involved in the

day-to-day decision making and outcomes of child welfare work in agencies settings. The importance of listening to the voices at the frontline are emphasized by one of the managers in a child welfare agency, "...nobody is listening to front-line people. Nobody is listening to what's going on in agencies. This study is very valuable..." (Linda, participant).

**Figure 6 Job Classifications Representation**



The information collection sheet also requested education information and the responses varied in terms of the number of degrees and diplomas each individual listed. For example some people acknowledged both their BSW or BA degrees along with their MSW degrees while others only noted their MSW. Therefore I used the following categories: BA, BSW, MSW, CISW<sup>17</sup>, Metis CFCS<sup>18</sup> Diploma or none identified. There were 10 individuals who had their BSW, 11 people had a MSW, three people with a BA, one person with a CISW and one person had a Metis CFS

<sup>17</sup> CISW – Certificate in Indigenous Social Work

<sup>18</sup> CFCS – Metis Child, Family & Community Services Diploma

Diploma. One person did not list a degree or diploma. In the following table I have included all degrees and diplomas that were acknowledged individually.

**Table 1 Post-Secondary Education Levels**

<i>Degrees/Diplomas</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Other Degrees and Certificates Listed</i>
BA	3	No additional degree or diploma identified
BSW	10	1 - BA; 1- B Human Ecology; 1- Accounting Certificate
MSW	11	5 – BSW; 1- BA; 1- B Human Ecology
CISW	1	No additional degree or diploma identified
MCFCFS	1	No additional degree or diploma identified
None	1	No additional degree or diploma identified
Totals	27	14

### **Reviewing the Stories**

From a qualitative research approach, a code-recode strategy which is also referred to as code agreement, describes the researcher's coding of the stories on two separate occasions leaving a span of one or two weeks between codings to ensure a fresh outlook (Anney, 2014). The degree of agreement between the results of the two codings enhances the dependability of the study's findings.

For this particular study the stories were first reviewed when all the storytelling sessions were transcribed. This process began by reviewing each transcript while listening to the recording and making changes where it was apparent the transcription was not accurate. I then returned all completed transcripts to the storytellers and asked them to review them for accuracy and to delete or change any comments they did not want me to use in the final report. Nine individuals responded either with changes or to note their approval. I then reread each transcript and identified common story topics and began a list of related topics using a word or phrase that was commonly

used throughout the stories. As I continued to read I added new topics as they appeared and used key words from each storyteller's transcript and added them to the topic area in which they appeared to fit (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The addition of new topics required going back to the first transcripts to ensure the topic had not been overlooked previously. The storytellers were coded numerically for ease of recording. Five weeks later I reread the transcripts to ensure I did not miss information from the first coding and developed a more detailed table using the same concepts as in the first coding. This final step for this process involved moving some story details into different categories and collapsing some concepts with similar concepts. This process resulted in six main grouping of stories and within each main group were subgroups reflecting a different aspect of that particular story. Once categories were established, I cut and pasted all applicable quotes from the transcripts into the table which allowed me to review the story topics in even more detail.

As I began to work with the similar story lines, I realized that as with all good storytelling, there were several layers to the stories. On the first level storytellers were describing their individual experiences of the devolution of child welfare in Manitoba. Even though people experienced the devolution from different places and positions within child welfare, when all their stories came together there was one overall, consistent story or meta-narrative of the devolution process that included the beginning (pre-devolution), middle (devolution) and contemporary circumstances. Within that larger story were the individual stories of each storyteller reflecting their personal observations, many of whom had spent most of their adult lives working in child welfare. Their stories are accounts of commitment and dedication.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Research ethics is an integral part of the research process and this study was approved by the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board which follows an institutional protocol based on the Tri-Council Policy Statement on the Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.

The following discussion highlights the main areas outlined in the Storyteller's Consent Form as required by the research ethics.

### **Risks and Inconveniences**

The storytellers were social workers who work in a high stress environments and there was a possibility that they would feel emotionally and physically fatigued after they had discussed concerns related to the impacts in their work environments. As a researcher and social worker it was important to be supportive of the person's experience, to take breaks or stop the interview as needed, and to give them resources for ongoing support if indicated. This support was especially applicable when social workers were discussing the impact of losing children who were either in care or had recently left care and had been on their caseloads. (Appendix J).

### **Research Benefits**

It was observed that storytellers appeared to benefit from the discussion regarding the AJI-CWI process as it allowed for the opportunity to review and debrief about their experiences within their child welfare work experience and it gave them the opportunity to share their insights and ideas for potential change. Individuals often expressed that they believed the research study was important. It should also be noted that at the societal level, the care and safety of children is a state responsibility and it is anticipated that an exploration of the sweeping changes to the child welfare system in Manitoba will help to highlight the potential benefits and concerns from a frontline perspective.

It is also anticipated that the study will contribute to the academic body of knowledge as there has been negligible academic research regarding the devolution of child welfare in Manitoba in recent years. The study is also unique in that it addresses the question from the perspective of frontline child welfare workers. The relevance and timing of a research project on this topic is

germane as the devolution process is considered a unique progression on existing Indigenous child welfare models and is being observed by other jurisdictions as a possible model to emulate.

### **Storytellers' Right to Withdraw from Study**

In reviewing the informed consent with the storytellers the following steps were reviewed to assure them of their rights to withdraw from the project as follows.

- Storytellers were informed that they were under no obligation to participate in the research project and were free to withdraw at any time without prejudice.
- Storytellers were informed throughout the course of the research project that their participation was entirely voluntary and they were under no obligation to continue.
- Storytellers were informed of their right to request portions or all of the data they have provided could be withdrawn at any time.
- Storytellers were informed that the gift card would not be withheld should they decide to withdraw at any point during the storytelling process.

They were also be assured that if they do withdraw at any point in the research process the information they shared would not be used in the final paper and would be destroyed. The right to withdraw from the study was applied to one individual at their request.

### **Anonymity and Confidentiality**

As part of the informed consent process individuals were provided with the opportunity to decide if they want to remain anonymous or to be identified publically and this option was indicated in writing on the Storyteller's Consent Form. Individuals who requested not to be identified in the dissemination of the research results have been assigned pseudonyms chosen by the participating individual. The list of names and assigned pseudonyms were stored in a separate, password protected file that could only be accessed by the researcher. Transcripts and final drafts of the dissertation were sent to the storytellers to be reviewed to ensure any identifying information was changed to protect anonymity of those requesting it.

All individuals have been offered the opportunity to revise their transcripts and delete or alter identifying information such as community, agency or other affiliations' names or information. As noted in the consent form everyone was advised that there is a possibility that someone in one of the communities could recognize them through the stories they relate, but that care has been taken with final transcripts to delete or change identifying information which would jeopardize their standing in their communities or agencies.

### **Storage and Disposal of Data**

In order to maintain confidentiality, audio recordings and electronic copies of the transcripts were stored in separate password protected files on my personal computer which is not accessible to others. Key codes for storytellers' pseudonyms were stored in a separate password protected file on my personal computer and all backup copies of the above data stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office. At the end of the research and dissertation all relevant files will be deleted, audio recordings erased and paper documents shredded.

### **Feedback, Debriefing and Compensation**

Dissemination of findings include sharing a draft of the findings with those who shared their stories in order to encourage feedback on the findings before moving to a final report, which will also be reviewed by the contributors. All participating storytellers will be sent the final report.

At the end of the interview the storytellers were presented a gift card worth \$25.00 in keeping with the Indigenous tradition of gifting. Two individuals requested that I donate the \$25.00 to charity.

### **Dissemination**

It is important to be clear about how the stories will be applied and disseminated. It was explained to everyone who volunteered that the stories would be incorporated into a written dissertation report, in presentations in scholarly meetings and conferences, in academic papers and

books, as well as having it posted on the internet through the university library portal. At the completion of the dissertation I will also provide electronic links to the final product to everyone who participated and to interested social service agencies.

### **Researcher's Perceptions of the Recruitment Process**

I have always found that the most enjoyable part of a research project is getting out into the communities and interacting with people. I am always honoured when people choose to take time out of their busy schedules to share their insights and stories with me. In the past when I contacted people for interviews and set the meetings up, they always followed through and I was rewarded with their contributions. This research project was different in that the recruitment process was, at times, challenging. As initial responses started to come in through emails and phone contact, I was both excited and concerned that I could end up with more than the number of stories I hoped to do. Within the next few weeks, I began to notice a pattern in which people would contact me and agree to an interview and then call me back and tell me that they had to cancel the interview and would not be able to participate. Then on the same day as I completed my second interview the social worker, who worked with the General Authority, emailed me to say that her manager informed her that she had to withdraw her interview and stated that the interview should never have happened. I complied with her request and erased her recorded interview.

As I continued to recruit storytellers and engage in storytelling sessions, several people approached me for interviews saying they were in the process of changing agencies or careers but felt they could now share their experience since they would no longer be working with the same agency. They indicated they only felt free to speak once they had changed jobs. According to these individuals they had been told they could not do interviews related to child welfare. One person who had worked with the General Authority but had left to pursue another career choice explained when my research poster was circulated to staff through email "at the very bottom of it, it said, you

cannot do this on company time” (Marie A). Several individuals said they would not do interviews as they were afraid to lose their jobs and did not want to risk their pensions. Furthermore, there were 6 individuals who agreed to an interview but called to say they could no longer participate but did not cite a reason for cancelling the meeting. There were also two individuals who agreed to meet but did not show up for the meeting.

The reason for sharing this information is to provide background information on what appears to be a sense of reluctance to speak openly about the AJI-CWI experience and how it impacted the distribution of storytellers across the province in terms of responses from each of the four authorities. As noted previously, I sent out letters and posters to all child welfare offices in Manitoba and the vast majority of people who shared their stories were working for three of the four authorities and only one person who was currently working with a private agency within the General Authority followed through with a meeting.

My personal understanding of the lack of follow through for some individuals and reluctance of others to participate is based on a few factors. One reason is that child welfare workers are employed in a high risk, crisis oriented environment and cannot always find the time to complete tasks outside of their immediate caseloads so taking time out of their busy schedule is challenging. As the stories will show, many social workers continue to carry large caseloads and are overwhelmed with requirements of their work. Other factors are the politically charged atmosphere regarding child welfare in Manitoba resulting from relatively recent child death reviews and the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry along with negative media publicity.

I do not know if this outcome in terms of recruitment is commonly experienced as it is not a topic people write about and nobody has shared similar experiences with me personally. As an Indigenous woman and researcher I believe it is important to acknowledge the experience as it relates to our work, and impacts us on a personal level because as human beings we cannot separate

ourselves from the experience. I believe it is important to be able to share or express how our secular experiences affect our personal beings.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter set out to describe an Indigenous research methodology and qualitative research design including research questions, rationale for choice of topic, data collection method, data analysis, and ethical considerations. The data collection method is identified as storytelling as a way of honouring the traditional storytelling traditions of Indigenous communities, recognizing the relational aspects of communication, respecting the equality of research relationships, understanding the need to accommodate community needs, giving voice to people in the margins and regaining the collective stories.

The values and research principles are important in guiding the research process which begins with examining our motivations for engaging with the topic and community storytellers, through our respectful entry into the community, to how we hold the storytellers and their stories as sacred, and our goal of contributing to the well-being of everyone involved.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE STORIES OF PRE-DEVOLUTION

#### *Weaving the stories*

The desk is overwhelmed with paper  
 Bustling with voices, thoughts, hopes, and dreams  
 Powerful stories of healers and warriors  
 Stories waiting to be told  
 How do you weave the stories  
 Like a basket, fragile yet strong  
 The strength must come from many strands  
 That pull together to shape the basket  
 Each strand of every story carefully measured  
 Held together with integrity embracing truth  
 Truth that mirrors passion, strength and love  
 And, yes the fears for future generations  
 But is there a basket strong enough  
 A writer's fingers deft enough  
 To encapsulate so many years of struggle, disillusionment  
 Yet melded with steadfastness, determination and passion  
 Where do I start, how do I carry the truth of others  
 The many voices filled with puissant stories  
 Ground into paper so formally written  
 Omitting sounds of sighs, laughter, pauses  
 Eyes wet with tears, throats tightened with emotion  
 The intensity of words lessened, expressions muted  
 Hands stilled, the body silenced  
 The pleasing flow of distinctive accents Anglicized  
 Community voices muted  
 Dissolving as they disappear into the paper  
 Leaving only sterile words for unwary readers  
 Chistemaw goes first and leads the way  
 With thoughtful prayers and strong determination  
 The words will come, the stories told  
 The strands weaved, the basket complete  
 Relying on ancestral tools  
 Yet blending in our allies' ways  
 Placing trust in ancient ways of knowing  
 Using prayers and values to bring forth strength  
 Pulling and weaving the past, the present, and the future  
 Telling a story haunting, evocative yet strong

It must be told, and so it will  
If only to be heard by those who listen, truly listen  
Osowa Askiy Iskewew

### **Introduction: Connecting the Past, Present and Future**

The beginning of the storytelling sessions was spent getting to know each other or reconnecting if we had met previously<sup>19</sup>. The time varied with each storyteller that I met, as some individuals I had never met before and others I had engaged with as work colleagues and still others as former students who now work in child welfare. When it was time to start the storytelling session I would begin by explaining that the research approach was storytelling and they could begin wherever they felt comfortable and share their story of how they experienced the AJI-CWI devolution process. Since they had already been briefed about confidentiality and the research questions, people just began by sharing the memories most relevant to their experience. For some individuals the stories started with a description of their own childhoods, for others it started with their social work education, and for yet others, the focus was strictly on their work in child welfare as it related to the devolution. As the researcher, I listened and I absorbed as much as I could as I understood this was a learning journey.

When it was time to analyze the stories, it became clear that there was more than one level of story evolving. On one level I was hearing how social workers experienced the devolution process, how they felt going through it, how it impacted the work they do, and how it challenged them and continues to challenge them. While some people began by acknowledging traditional child care practices in their communities, the residential school experience and the sixties scoop and early child welfare legislation, others began with the AJI-CWI initiative and still others focused on the policy level of changes to child welfare in Manitoba. I was also hearing the very personal life

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<sup>19</sup> Several individuals gave permission to use their full name in the final report and others have had their names changed and given a pseudonym.

experiences of strongly committed individuals who talked about what drew them to the work, and what kept them there in spite of the disappointments, losses and sometimes overwhelming obstacles. In the end it became clear that a second level had emerged with the overall story of devolution evolving from the shared stories of 27 storytellers giving voice to the beginning, middle and contemporary issues of the AJI-CWI from their personal perspectives. This particular story does not have an ending as it is a dynamic story that will continue on and hopefully move in a direction that benefits everyone involved.

The overarching meta-story reflected by the storytellers begins by relating how people view the history of child welfare in Manitoba from an Indigenous perspective. The inclusion of these stories and perspectives from the past reflect the belief that the past influences the present and the future. From an Indigenous perspective the past, present and future are linked together as an organic whole and you cannot fully understand one part without the knowledge of the other parts. Sharing the storytellers' memories of pre-devolution history sets the stage for a more in-depth understanding of how Indigenous people anticipated and experienced the devolution process to date.

The story then moves to a description of the preparatory stages of devolution and how the storytellers experienced and processed those initial stages. The next part of the story of devolution describes how the AJI-CWI process was initiated and impacted people throughout child welfare. The story will then move to reviewing some of the principal concerns and successes expressed by the storytellers.

### **Taking Care of Our Own**

For some, the story goes back to the days before child welfare was an active force in their communities. Conrad Marsden begins by emphasizing the traditional view of children in Indigenous communities, "it's just one thing in our lives that's truly important and we've always recognized

that our children always come first. They're the most important and our most valuable asset" (Conrad). Marcel Valiquette questions how child welfare got involved in First Nations' communities, "where did that child welfare come from anyway, right? ...it's not ours. We had always had our own way of taking care of our own people, right. We never had a child welfare system come in and then tell us how to do things before".

In describing traditional child care roles, Rose Marie demonstrates the child care roles of extended family as she shares a story of a family member whose mother was unable to nurse her baby so another family member took on that responsibility. In Rose Marie's words caring for other family member's children was common practice:

*That's just the way things were done. And if somebody was not taking care of a kid, that kid would go to another family to be taken care of. There was no money involved in any of that. People were taking care of each other's children, informally without a legal paper. But today everything is so legal; we've been introduced to a world of capitalism, everything for money (Rose Marie).*

Debbie uses storytelling to describe the traditional role her grandparents took when she was growing up in a northern Manitoba community:

*We have a trap line that we still use up north and that's good enough for me. At that point, when I was in about grade 5, my grandmother told my mother, you can't let your kids not learn Cree or understand our way. So she said, you've got to send one or two of your oldest kids, which was me and my sister, we're the oldest – I'm the oldest – and she said, somebody's got to carry on this tradition of the language basically and the customs. But also... my grandmother understood a lot about plants and also my grandfather was a medicine person, you know. He was a midwife too. He would also deliver babies, I guess, back in the day. So my mother said, okay, okay. So I'm off. I'm sent off to live with my grandparents. My mother would speak to me in Cree but, you know, I could understand it. So I was sent to live with my grandparents for a year. That's how I learned how to speak Cree.*

*It's very different. I mean there was no money exchanged between my parents and grandparents. It was just done, that's the way it was always done, you know, it was historical. I mean the way I was taught to understand it is that every child has to go through this, especially the first born has to be brought up by the grandparent for a certain amount of it. My father went through it. My mother went through it. It's just so you just don't lose the oral history, the stories, you know, the language. That's why it was done. It wasn't done for, you know, CFS (Child and Family Services) reasons. I don't even know if CFS was around those days (Debbie).*

Debbie continues her story about living with her grandparents and within the story she demonstrates the wisdom and value of the grandparents' roles as she weaves in how she absorbed the traditional culture through hunting and trapping, and all the time learning her language, learning about plant life, recognizing the value of respect for all life, understanding the values of non-interference and independence, and developing relationships to the environment and animals.

*So I stayed with my grandparents and it was like living back like 100 years ago. I'm telling you. It was just, I got used to it. I got used to hunting, trapping by myself. And I ran across a lot of animals, like wolves. They didn't seem to bother me because I had this, I used to carry a little axe around, right. I was determined to, if they came after me, I was going to chuck them. I had no sense of fear. So that's all I ate was wild food. I ate everything. I ate a lot of things I never thought I would eat, you know, so I spent one year there just learning Cree and all these different plants and how they lived and how to appreciate life in general. My grandfather was big on that, how to respect life, really, and how to learn about it, how to keep it. It was a good thing. So I went home and then my mother didn't even recognize me. My hair was just bushy, you know. Because my mother would, every time she would clean us up, she would always put baby oil in our hair - so I don't know. Maybe to keep the mosquitoes away, I don't know, but she seemed to like the smell of baby oil in our hair. (Both laughing) But my hair was just like boing, boing, probably looked like a Neanderthal or something. She says to me, who are you? I said, "Debbie". "What?" Just shocked. I'm grown and got chunkier from eating all the wild food (Jean).*

In part, this story provides insight into how Indigenous family members cared for other family members, and how children became independent at an earlier age than other Canadian children. It also demonstrates how families survived off the land and how an Indigenous family's 'cupboard' looked very different from a mainstream cupboard because their source of food was different. The food came from hunting, trapping, fishing and gathering. Families had caches of dried and smoked meats and fish along with wild fruit and plants which had sustained them over thousands of years. With the arrival of the settlers, groceries from stores supplemented food from nature. When food was scarce, they shared among the families. Survival and living a good life have been practiced over many centuries and those values and practices have endured in many communities.

## Pre-devolution Relationships to Child Welfare

By the time child welfare made its official entry into Indigenous communities, Indigenous families had been ravaged by colonial policies and the effects of the residential schools. Child welfare workers who entered the communities with their own mainstream values and motivations did not improve circumstances for families and communities. The difference in worldviews and lifestyles between mainstream society and Indigenous people and how that translated into devastating child welfare policies and practices is reflected in Conrad Marsden's story about a family from his First Nation community during the sixties scoop.

*So I know there's families out there. They've counted like thousands and thousands of children that were lost to this child welfare system that was supposed to protect us. They took us away from our families and put us away somewhere else, and we don't know where they are. So I think that's one thing, and one of the biggest reasons why First Nations people requested or demanded jurisdictional rights was because we didn't want to lose our children. We wanted to have systems in place where we could deal and manage with our own family business, our family affairs and how we managed things. So we're talking Children's Aid Society. We're talking about a system that has been in place.*

*The story that I have is - a Children's Aid Society worker came into our reserve and they noticed that the mom and dad weren't there. The uncle was there. They had left to go grocery shopping. The social worker, along with the Indian agent, came in and noticed there was no food in the house. Well nobody explained to them that the parents were going to go grocery shopping. They were in fact going grocery shopping and you have to understand that there wasn't, everybody didn't have a vehicle and the mode of the infrastructure, the highways were made out of gravel. So I mean travelling in a '48 Ford that ran maybe 40 km top speed, you know, to go, what would take us normally 45 minutes, would take 3 hours to go grocery shopping. And you know, not all reserves had grocery stores so you had to travel quite long distances to go and get food. So the Indian agent went there and noticed that this family didn't have any food. There was no adult supervision so they apprehended all 10 children and these 10 children were lost. They came from my reserve and they were shipped across everywhere, all over the United States, Europe. One went to Switzerland. One went to Germany, and I don't know where the other ones went. I think a few of them went to the United States.*

*The mother and the dad came back, noticed, and the uncle that was there, they asked him what happened. He said, "I don't know. I went to the back to go check my traps and they were gone. Someone took them." So I mean there's a whole story in itself about this but at the end, you know, the mom died of heartache because she lost all her children, and the dad died after, a year later, because of, you know, losing his wife and all his children. So I mean, the anguish and the hurt and the pain and suffering that was imposed on us because of an outside system who didn't fully understand us or didn't want to understand us, or take the time, you know. They just outright and deliberately, without any kind of remorse, took these families away.*

The devastation to families and communities as result of past policies and practices cannot be relegated to historical fact or 'something to get over' rather they are living memories for many

surviving family members, including family members who went on to become child welfare workers. In sharing his family's story, Marcel Valiquette demonstrates the depth of the trauma and how the trauma lives on in families impacting successive generations.

*And talking about the Sixties Scoop, my aunt has lost 2 children, and I still talk to her now and then, and she still cries in the evenings sometimes, she says, because she wonders where those children are gone, right. You know, we tracked them down as far as BC, just recently again, and we lost them from there. I'm trying to still track them down after that, it's just, just trying to help her out, right, because she's still sad about that, yeah... But if you have someone looking over your shoulder, looking at you like that from mainstream, that's what it used to be, you know, and then you'd be declared an unfit parent and take your kids away and then lose them. That's what happened to my aunt when her two, her boy and her girl that she's lost now for 45 years, I guess, maybe longer. Yeah, she said "I was never an unfit parent. I didn't drink. I didn't do drugs". And people just called child welfare and they come and snapped those two children out of her care and declared her an unfit parent, but that's how they used to do it, that way, because they had all their adoption agencies all set up, you know, around and they needed to make a quota, I guess (Marcel).*

Bert Crocker, who started his child welfare career in the early seventies, provides an insightful historical overview of the circumstances and policies that came together and resulted in the sixties scoop. While the history of these policies does not account for the personal pain experienced by families impacted by the policies, it does underscore how policies, practices and the devaluing different worldviews have the effect of devastating communities. Bert explains that it began with the Canada Assistance Plan which came into effect in 1965 "guaranteeing that all Canadian citizens would have access to approximately equal services, both in terms of social services as well as in terms of medical care". This legislation meant an expansion of social services, particularly child welfare into First Nations communities. As Bert explains further:

*When that is combined with the fact that under US Child Welfare Legislation, it was almost impossible for agencies to get what we would call Permanent Orders of Guardianship on children because of the larger emphasis placed on parental rights. There were large numbers of adoption applicants from people wanting to adopt children and a large shortage of US born children who were legally free for adoption and the result was that throughout the US, there were many agencies that were looking for children who were legally free to be adopted who were not necessarily born in the US, and because of the unanticipated consequences of the Canada Assistance Plan, in Canada and in Manitoba particularly, we had large numbers of children that were legally free for adoption and the combined effect of those three pieces coming together generated what we now call the "sixties scoop" (Bert Crocker).*

For the most part, mainstream society either was not aware of the devastation caused by child welfare policies or chose to look the other way when it was reported publically.

Unfortunately this difference in worldviews or life perspective and its influence in child welfare decision-making continue today to the detriment of Indigenous families. Germaine points out that the difference in worldviews and life experience is often evident with young social workers who have no previous experience with poverty and diversity.

*...like you get kids come straight out of university from more affluent families, higher income families who have never seen an Indian [sic] in their life until they come to work, it's the first time they see Indian [sic] people. Like they read about them and stuff but they never really associate with them, and then they're working with us and they're making decisions based on our children. Cultures are very different (Germaine).*

Catherine's comment also points to the inability of social workers who have never experienced poverty to understand that children are happier being at home with few material belongings and where they are cared for than being placed in foster care where they have material goods.

*But lots of our people that work with children don't even have kids. They're like young people who are straight out of school, don't have children and have money, don't even know...some of the crazy stuff people used to say, like 'people don't have drawers or people don't have dressers'. Well fine and dandy that you can have them; people are poor! You know, as long as you've got a change of clothes sometimes kids are happy. They don't care, they're home (Catherine).*

Susan uses an example to describe her frustration in situations in which some social workers lack the understanding, knowledge and experience to understand the barriers people living with poverty face on a daily basis.

*I have nothing against someone having a good life. More power to you, right? But sometimes people that had a good life don't really know how it is for someone not to have food or, you know, to not live with two parents. They just don't have a clue. Because I remember that one worker, the one that had gone to private school, she had to cover for me one time because they have a buddy system there. She says to me the next day, 'Oh so and so wanted a food PO'...and I went, 'oh did you give it to her'? She goes, no. She made a comment something like 'well she's got 5 kids doesn't she get a big cheque'? And I was like, oh my god, did you really, did you really just say that? It was comments like that I just thought, why are these people doing social work? They don't work from their heart. They judge people (Susan).*

Susan goes on to provide her with an explanation of the benefits of supporting the mother and her family.

*So then I said to her, "well you know what, if you want to look at it that way", I said, "if we were to bring her children into care it would cost the government probably \$1000 a day." I said, "it was way cheaper to give her a food PO"; and I said, "you know what? It's the end of the month, and she is probably just running low until she gets her cheque". I told her, "she's a good mom, her kids are always at school, and she calls me when things come up." So it's kind of that (Susan).*

### **Pre-Devolution Relationships with Mainstream Child Welfare**

The precursor to child welfare involved the residential schools and Indian agents. As Dawn points out even before child welfare was involved in removing children from First Nations communities, Indian Affairs stepped in if there were reports of child abuse and they removed children without a mandate and without due process for families.

*...some of the research has also shown where there was like a death situation, kids were often taken out of the community by Indian Affairs who really didn't have a legal mandate and those kids often never came back to those communities and were raised somewhere without really any due process for the parents, no court hearing, you know, it was just, it happened informally. I'm not sure any other families would tolerate that, you know, so I think there were quite a number of kids that were raised outside of their communities, rather than any kind of support being put in the community (Dawn).*

Bruce Unfried, who started work in child welfare in Northern Manitoba in 1965, describes his early years in child welfare when child protection basically consisted of apprehensions in what was deemed life and death situations within Indigenous communities.

*So it was very, very confusing and there was never a clear mandate, like in the job I had, all of us did a lot of other work besides child welfare...So protection, child protection, was really apprehension because there was no clear guidelines as to what constitutes a child in need of protection. I mean there was an act but it was outdated. So very often the agency was involved in apprehension. So we had communities surrounding [Name of Northern city] and we would drive into [Names of three northern remote communities] [one of those communities] had no road other than in the winter time over the lake. So really the only services and the mandate at that time were life and death. So the only time you dealt with a case in a community outside of (Name of Northern city) was if there was a serious emergency. It was up to the individual worker to find that, if you can imagine, well what's serious and what isn't? (Bruce).*

The focus for child welfare at that time was not on reunification of families but rather the practice was apprehending children and going to court to secure a permanent order.

*And that's what we did in Winnipeg [CFS] years and years and years and years ago, not when I last worked there, but years ago. You got a child, you went to court, and you got a permanent order. That was it, you had one farewell visit and that was it. It was so sad (Catherine).*

Wade describes child welfare practice during pre-devolution in terms of “We were warehousing children. I've had kids who would go in foster homes and when they turned 18, all they had was a green garbage bag full of clothes and that were it” (Wade). Marcel concurs and describes the detrimental short term and longer term impact on families when the children are separated from families and culture.

*This was before the devolution. That practice of taking our kids into care and just maintaining them somewhere in a home. It, you know, they separated them from their culture, from their families, from the grandparents or uncles, all that. You know, they come from somewhere... when they graduated from that system, that whole system, they had nowhere to go, right. They're just empty people. Most normal people have family, right. They have a great big family. They have community. They have culture. They have religion. They have all that stuff that you take for granted. Our children didn't have that. We're still dealing with the effects of that system since the devolution (Marcel).*

Marcel Valiquette has been working with Indigenous child welfare agencies for more than 30 years and in the following quote he describes the extent of resources available to child welfare workers in First Nations communities three decades ago.

*I could go back to when I first started and I can tell you how it was when 30 years when I started... There was an agency already, Southeast Child & Family agency and they had little sub-offices in the community, just a one room office, right, and that's where we worked out of. And they had very basic training, you know like, what are some of the legal papers and stuff like that, and we didn't have any formal training... Things were different too back then on the reserve on how, you know, what was going on in our reservations. It was different, you know. You had your alcohol abuse and you had your drug abuse in the community. Back then it wasn't very noticeable, not like it is today, because the world has changed on our reservations; it's different (Marcel).*

One of the consistent concepts throughout the storytelling was the importance of keeping children connected to families and communities regardless of the time period. This goal was expressed in Faye's comment.

*But the Native agencies that I'm aware of, they've always looked for family. It's not like that's never happened. That's always been, protocol #1 is when you apprehend a child, you look for family. So if family, if healthy family members existed, you know, the children would be placed with them (Faye).*

Bert Crocker describes the efforts that Indigenous child welfare agencies made to overcome challenges in order to maintain placements in family and community homes in the early 1980s.

*I started working there in February of 1981... And I spent in total I guess about 14 years and 11 months at this agency. During that time the agency had a number of different challenges but throughout that time we were able to maintain approximately 80 to 85% of the kids that we had in care in culturally appropriate homes and many of them, most of them actually on-reserve, and although we found that it was a lot of work to locate and recruit and train and support and maintain those placements, I believe for the most part the outcomes were better than would have been the case if those children would have been removed from, not only their family, but their community (Bert).*

Bert continues his narrative explaining the next step in Manitoba child welfare resulted in the first tripartite agreement with the Federal and Provincial governments and First Nations in southern Manitoba. The agreement provided for federal funding and the application of provincial legislation for on-reserve child welfare services beginning with southern First Nations communities, and shortly after an agreement was reached with the northern Manitoba First Nations communities.

By the early 1980s many of the sixties scoop children had reached adulthood and were searching for their families and communities. Marie B describes the motivation and efforts of Indigenous agencies in their endeavors to reunify former sixties scoop children, an effort which had become a pressing concern in that period of time.

*When we came on board as First Nations people in 1982, because I think that's about the time when DOCFS started to work on their mandate, or were mandated. What was the objective and the intent at that time? Our leadership knew at that time that there was a lot of sixties scoop kids coming home, crying for help, from the States, from all over the world, that there was that injustice with them because of the CAS, Children's Agency, Children's Society, or whatever... as agencies, we brought back the sixties kids who were adults now, eh, and their stories... Like I worked with some of them and brought some of them back and also went and got some of their babies out in the States. So they, they had horrendous stories, you know (Marie B).*

Although First Nation communities were mandated<sup>iii</sup> to provide child welfare services to families residing on reserve beginning in the 1980s, children who were apprehended off reserve came under the jurisdiction of mainstream child and family services. While Section 42 of the Child

and Family Services Act provided for notification of apprehensions of First Nation children to their home community, notifications were not provided consistently for a variety of reasons and as a result relationships between agencies were often strained.

*Well pre-devolution, the Native agencies had no jurisdiction off-reserve, so there was a really helpless feeling to that. Now the legislation dictated that the general agencies had to notify the Native agencies. It's right in there in Section 42...so we would arrive at court, almost like the secondary players arriving to a game, you know, after the game had started 30 minutes, so we'd feel funny...not wanting to interrupt things, not overly welcomed by the general agency who had done all the work with the family up to that point - and the apprehension. The dirty apprehension, the work and we would come to throw our hat in the ring and say, you know, these are our kids and we would like a say, and especially if you're going for a Permanent Order of Guardianship, we would like that Permanent Order of Guardianship in our names, so it wasn't well received. It was a struggle. Every single case, it was a struggle... So there was no cooperation whatsoever from that general agency. Just a lot of resistance, a lot of just, the Native agencies just didn't feel important even though those were our kids, and we wanted a say and we wanted to be involved. It didn't seem to matter. Their case planning was going to be their case planning and if you disagreed with it, then too bad, there was nothing you could do about that (Faye).*

Conrad identifies the issue as an unequal relationship between mainstream and First Nations agencies to the extent Indigenous agencies were treated as though they were not capable of caring for their children.

*Despite, you know, them knowing, Winnipeg Child & Family, knowing that these were First Nations kids, they wouldn't call us. We would have to call them. We would have to go to their offices and we'd have to talk to the worker like we were a client. It wasn't that partnership or that understanding or that sense that, you know, we were at the same level, they didn't acknowledge that we were, that we were able and capable of managing, you know, and dealing with our own affairs (Conrad Marsden).*

This lack of cooperation in decision making has been described as going back to the stereotype that Indigenous families were not capable of caring for their children to the level of standards set by mainstream society.

*They perpetuated, Winnipeg [CFS], perpetuated that notion I think that they're [Indigenous children] better off in your home, you know, you can give them more, kind of any home but an Indian home idea, you know. I think Winnipeg [CFS] really perpetuated that. There were very few kids in First Nations or Indigenous homes when we transferred cases from Winnipeg [CFS], very few (Dawn).*

As Shelly explains she also observed that there were very few Indigenous foster homes. “And I know back in the day there were very, very few foster parents, very few Aboriginal foster parents” (Shelly).

Dawn describes the colonial relationship Indigenous families endured when they became involved with child and family services before the AJI-CWI was initiated.

*Whereas before with largely the non-Aboriginal sector providing those services, it was just to me, it was just a continuation of colonizing people. Like decisions were made elsewhere. You know, the powerful agency and a family trying to deal with that. You had families intimidated by court and so, yes, you would say, ‘well they had due process’, but they wouldn’t show up in court and then people would say, ‘well they don’t care about their kids’. Well you knew that wasn’t the case. They just felt defeated about the whole process. I think that has changed (Dawn).*

Other storytellers described how the Indigenous agencies reached out to support families by taking children who came into care off-reserve through the mainstream child welfare agency but who were from their communities. The Indigenous agency arranged to provide services for them, without additional funding to cover the costs involved.

*At that time they were taking, they would take permanent orders of kids that were, had come into care of Winnipeg CFS and they were going permanent, so [the agency] would take the kids that were affiliated with their community and take those orders in their name, but they never got any funding for that. They just would. So sometimes they case managed the case and other times they would just have it in their name but let Winnipeg [CFS] supervise it (Michelle).*

Even though prevention funding was minimal to non-existent, Indigenous agencies would also provide basic prevention services to support children to stay in their own homes.

*There was never, never any prevention dollars, very, very minimal prevention dollars given to the Native agencies prior to devolution, but that didn’t stop some of the Native agencies from doing prevention work, you know. They held those support groups for moms or dads. They did sewing circles for moms. They bought vans and they transported mom to the nearest town on child tax day to make sure that her money got spent on groceries for kids, you know, the kids that she had at home. The family services worker didn’t get reimbursed from the province for any of that, but they did it because they cared (Faye).*

### **Anticipating the Devolution from an Indigenous Community Perspective**

When plans for the AJI-CWI were announced, people in Manitoba responded in a number of ways, some were excited with the vision presented by officials, other were concerned about

availability of resources and still others objected to the idea of change and to handing over control to Indigenous people. As Michelle notes, Indigenous social workers were excited and hopeful that they could finally do serious prevention work on a broader scale. Unfortunately as she notes, child welfare workers do not get to work with people until there is an apprehension and children are already in care thereby obscuring the ability to do prevention work.

*So I was a front-line worker in that community in '99, and I think in my first year there, they had announced this whole thing, right, like the whole devolution and how that was going to happen. So we were very excited about it at the time... we were all very positive and looking forward to it, because we would be able to have relationships with people and do things a little bit differently and support them more, be more culturally appropriate. Like in my head, I had dreams of actually doing like prevention work with your clients or your band members, for your agency. That never happened like that, you know, you don't get cases until they're a case, right, so usually there's always been an apprehension or something, right? (Michelle).*

Louise saw the AJI-CWI as an opportunity for the communities to have a voice, to develop resources in the communities and to have prevention funding in place.

*When it first started, I think for me, I thought, you know, this is an opportunity for families and communities and for communities in particular to really have a say in how things can be done for their children and families, for resources to be developed in the communities. Like if children had to come into care we could have safe homes in the communities, that our CFS committees, which we had before, could run and work with the families and clients and with the agency to provide that information and that there would be more funding for preventative programs and that those agencies that were doing really well in those areas could be used as a model (Louise).*

Catherine's initial enthusiasm expressed hope for an increase in Indigenous social workers who could serve as role models and for more control in the placement of children and youth.

*I had such high hopes. I was thinking, wow, finally, we'll be able to do something better, you know. Our kids will have people that they could see that are more or less the same as us, you know, like they could see the sameness. Because when I grew up, never a catalogue, not a newspaper, not a doctor, not a lawyer, that you could ever look up to as a role model, right. So now I'm thinking, now they'll have more of that. We'll have that plus we'll be able to kind of have more control where our kids go – didn't happen, you know... But I had such hope and we are still struggling, I would have hoped that we would have been, I don't know, farther ahead or worked more collegially together (Catherine).*

Louise describes how the ideas that drove the AJI-CWI in the beginning were good, unfortunately the decision to maintain status quo funding for child welfare prevented agencies from moving to a prevention based child and family services.

*I think the thought behind, the idea behind it was good, you know, at the start, but I think the way it rolled out when they realized the amount of funding and things like that that it would take to do something, right; it just became too overwhelming. You had to do it within the current budgets and so then nothing, you know, nothing can really change. And I think that was a big thing, I remember very clearly being told there's going to be so much opportunity to do things differently with families and that has not panned out. In fact it just feels like we've become more, more policing... We became, you know, more investigative and punitive with families than we ever did before (Louise).*

Marie B adds to the discussion in her description of the initial enthusiasm which she contrasts with the current reality which has seen an increase in children being brought into care.

*Oh my goodness, we're going to take control of CFS and operate our own way of doing things and meeting our needs and having programs and having homes and not bringing too many kids into care, and having a creative way of doing, you know, bringing children home and all those kinds of things. Well that wasn't devolution. That's not how it is today. Today is like taking the kids. That's devolution, that's what devolution is, taking the kids, and you know, we understand that there is a protection that's needed for kids. That's totally clear ... Today it's still a myth. It's still mythical, you know, because there are so many challenges and so many things that we face in agencies that we never would have thought of back in the day (Marie B).*

Rose Marie reminds us that while the system is not working as it was envisioned, the dream and vision are still alive. "I think the dream and the vision still exist, but the system is not operating the way the vision and the dreams ought to be" (Rose Marie).

### **The Planning Stages of Devolution**

A number of the people who participated in the story telling sessions had been involved in the planning stages of the AJI-CWI which meant being at the planning tables throughout the process. Their insights tell a story of commitment and a willingness to work together to bring about the long awaited changes to child welfare in Manitoba. Dawn describes how the work began after the signing of Memorandum of Understanding and the protocol to guide the implementation process in 2000.

*One of the first things that we had to do was, well there were 3 tables. One was the Leadership Council, so that involved the leadership of the signatories... So all the work was brought up to that Leadership Council for sign off, but it wouldn't be brought up there until all the parties had agreed at the other tables, unless we were at an impasse. Then we would bring it there and say we can't get agreement. There were very, very few things that we had to take up like that. Like most of the time we had agreement... The Implementation Committee was responsible for developing the conceptual plan, developing all the work plans, the working groups, like there was a whole series of different working groups on Human Resources to case transfers... But a lot of work and a lot of*

*hours went into that two year process. Almost two years, because the Authorities Act was signed in '03, yeah. And then, so through that Implementation Committee and all that sign off went to Leadership Council, so we had all parties agreeing to how we were going to proceed (Dawn).*

Louise explains the benefits of one of the committees known as the Joint Intake Steering Committee which continues to meet to work out concerns that arise between or among agencies.

*And then, there was a lot of, I guess, confusion around like how things were to work between agencies, you know, particularly on and off reserve agencies, DIAs [Designated Intake Agencies], and that took a long time to iron out. One of the things that I think was good happened for our areas is what we called our Joint Intake Steering Committees, that was all the agencies who took over these cases met with the DIAs and those meetings continue today, although not as frequently and it was kind of an area where, or a meeting where you could go to discuss any issues or concerns and try to get those ironed out between the agencies, because a lot of times, for the First Nations agencies, there was common issues we were having with the DIAs (Louise).*

With the Indigenous agencies receiving a delegated mandate off reserve, the City of Winnipeg would now have 24 agencies<sup>20</sup> with 17 mandated by one of the four authorities in addition to the child welfare agencies in First Nations communities. In order to streamline the intake process the planning committee developed the All Nations Coordinated Response Network (ANCR).

*We also set up a centralized intake because there are 16 First Nations agencies and 1 Métis agency in the city. So we said, you can't have 17 agencies doing Intake. Like if the police need to know where to go, they need to have one point of contact, so that's how ANCR developed. We said okay, we're all parties and the ANCR Board reflects all the 4 Authorities. It's the CEOs of those Authorities so they can really direct how ANCR works on their behalf but it is a centralized agency and it is mandated through the Southern Authority. There was a lot of questions and hesitation about that when we started ANCR. It took us a long time to get agreement to a centralized piece, but I think people have accepted that and ANCR also does all the abuse investigations in the city. So agencies in the city don't have to do on-call and after hours which saves them resources. They don't have to do the abuse investigations (Dawn).*

Social workers also spoke about their participation and their observations of the AJI-CWI process and the outcomes of the devolution. As Louise notes, agencies encouraged their staff to become engaged with the planning process.

*And when we heard about devolution, or when we knew it was going to happen, our agency encouraged our staff to be involved in as many committees and sessions and opportunities where we could contribute to and provide our feedback, and we sat on lots of working groups and were a part of that process. And we were pretty excited*

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<sup>20</sup> Of the 24 CFS agencies in the City of Winnipeg, 17 agencies are mandated to provide child protection services (<http://www.phoenixsinclairinquiry.ca/exhibits/exhibit10.pdf>).

*about it because we thought there would be, you know, like lots of good change, and I don't feel that it turned out that way...in general it, I don't find that child welfare has changed for the better, from what I've seen. I know it certainly feels that way for our agency, and I guess just in general, as a whole, from what I see at a senior management level with other agencies and speaking with other staff, it's kind of the same feeling (Louise).*

Laury describes the hope and anticipation in the beginning of the planning process and describes the end as disappointing in terms of the outcomes.

*Like they did the planning, they put out the roll out plans. So I had the opportunity to sit there and just listen and learn and kind of like see where this was going, and when I sat at the tables, the way it sounded, it sounded good. But the way it turned out, to me it didn't turn out the way that we intended it to be. So...being at that table and listening and hearing, and then kind of being here now, it kinda didn't go the way of the vision (Laury).*

In her description of the process Karen talks about the initial excitement and then the concerns that were being raised about the fast pace and push to make it happen before another change in government occurred and the opportunity passed. The devolution of mandated services to Indigenous agencies was a complex process that left people concerned about the massive changes over a short period of time and the lack of resources to do it in a way that reflected peoples' visions.

*I was involved in lots of committees, lots of different groups, work groups at the time. There were focus groups being held at that time, so I sat in on those. It was a very exciting; it was seen as an exciting time, although scary, because I guess I have a feeling or a belief that Aboriginal agencies should be responsible for their families no matter where they live across Manitoba, on-reserve and off-reserve. So I was excited about the change, although very quickly we seen it was happening fast, and that was one of our concerns and we identified it right off the bat how quickly things were moving and many of us not feeling like we were ready to move, but there was such a big push to move the devolution along because of the current government and the flavour of the day and they were in support of it. And so, there were all kinds of promises. We were concerned about how was this going to fold out. How is this going to happen? Like, what resources were going to come to the agency to assist the agency in being able to deliver services to clients no matter where they lived across Manitoba? So many of us, I don't think, realized the significance of that massive move happening so quickly without the resources being put in place (Karen)*

Catherine explains that once the planning process was in place they felt the need to push through to completion as people were concerned that if the process stalled there was no guarantee that the devolution would happen.

*...you know, like the momentum was there and they had to get going, and if it stalled, then were they going to get it rebooted, right? Because really, I mean the Justice System was supposed to follow suit. They were supposed to all get transferred out too, like Probation ...but that stopped, did it not (Catherine)?*

One of the concerns Laury pointed out was how community leaders were welcomed at the beginning of the process but then there was a marked decline in their ability to participate as they were relegated to an arms-length relationship.

*But another thing too that I saw in the AJI when they were planning, at the start the leadership was very involved, very, very involved and then coming on the second, third year it was like they were being pushed aside, and that's how I saw it, they were being pushed. And then finally the last year, they said, okay, you'll be still involved but it'll be at arms-length. So they were put in this little circle and they said, okay that's where you're going to be and whenever we need you, we'll go to you at an arms-length, right. But to me they were totally, that was it because when XXX Authority came, then they were totally out of the picture (Laury).*

In order for the AJI-CWI devolution in child welfare to proceed successfully, it was important to choose committee members who supported the concept and were not there to stall or interrupt the planning process. Dawn explained this in view of the collapse of devolution planning within the justice system.

*...when they tried to do the AJI with Probation, the union, MGU, was quite upset at not being involved in any of the tables on the child welfare front. And I know we had to deal with a lot of negative stuff from them, and that was, they wanted to come to every table and the government probably would have let them, but the First Nations said no way, no way. When they did the Probation thing, the government didn't even bring it to the table. I guess they wanted to appease them so they let MGU come to those tables on the Probation side, and I think within 2 years that all collapsed because they just couldn't get anywhere with the union sitting there. No one was willing to look at alternative ways, and like to me, that was pretty telling (Dawn).*

As Bruce notes, people entered into the planning process with the best interests of the communities in mind and many of the outcomes related to numbers and complexity of children were unanticipated.

*And I believe, like when I think of the people that worked on the devolution process, from what I know of them personally, I think they had the best interests of their communities at heart. They thought they made the right decisions. Did anybody ever consider the number of children? No. Did anyone consider the complexity of cases? No, we had no way of knowing (Bruce).*

Overall, in considering the complexity of the devolution and the diversity of players involved, Michelle describes the devolution as an amazing feat.

*I think when the devolution happened, I don't know who was in leadership at that time...but to me, that's an amazing feat that they accomplished this, because to have everybody agreeing on things, I don't see that today. I don't see it at the agency level. I don't see it between all the Authorities (Michelle).*

### **Responding to the Change**

Although the planning for the devolution began shortly after the Memorandum of Understanding was signed in 2000 and the actual transfer of case files began in the rural areas in 2003, people still appeared to feel completely unprepared for the transition. As Karen notes, people were protesting that it was happening too quickly.

*Everybody in the system was saying, this is happening too fast. There's not enough training. We're not ready. We don't have the resources in place. But the wheels were in motion and there was no turning back, and so, we just kept going forward and since going forward, there have been change after change after change in the system and we have not been able to catch up to those changes and they just keep coming and coming (Karen).*

Now that Indigenous agencies had jurisdiction off reserve, there was a need to set up agencies in urban centers in order to provide services to families who chose to receive services from their agencies. This process proved to be challenging for some agencies. Catherine left the General Authority to work for an Indigenous agency which was just starting up and in her words, "When I got there, the infrastructure wasn't there so we actually didn't go live probably for about 6 months into it" (Catherine).

The agency Allison worked for had to develop a new unit to accommodate families living in Winnipeg. This included hiring new staff.

*...the agency that I worked for at the time had to build a whole new unit, like a whole new team in Winnipeg because the majority of the files were in Winnipeg, so they had to do a lot of hiring to put people in place, so it was really busy getting that going (Allison).*

She goes on to describe the events when files arrived before more staff was hired.

*...when the files started coming over, and of course we had the lists and the files, physical files, that came over and just organizing all of those and assigning them to people where there wasn't actually a staff but I would just go like Social Worker 1, Social Worker 2 and so forth. When they transferred over there was some kind of a mix-up and half, almost half of the files didn't come on the day, on the day they were supposed to (Allison)*

A lack of resources for families added to the difficulties for new agencies and for established agencies receiving an influx of new files.

*I didn't want to be a front-line worker because I was afraid that we didn't have resources for all of these cases that we were taking on. Like we had the bodies to be the worker, but nothing to support the family. We didn't have drivers or support workers or that kind of stuff, so I was concerned about that, so I left and did a foster care worker position (Michelle)*

Social workers in some agencies appeared to be caught off guard by the implementation plans that involved their agencies. This was especially disruptive for individuals working for Winnipeg CFS who were told they would be seconded to Indigenous agencies. As Faye explains other agencies, especially those who had been involved with the AJI-CWI planning process, were aware of the proposed changes and had prepared for it.

*And then I had friends, who I went through university with who were at some of the other agencies, and they were just like "wow, how did we not know?" And I said, "Oh you knew. Your senior management would have known." Our senior management knew that this was coming, but they were on the front-lines and they were completely overwhelmed with what this meant. And then the growth of those agencies had to happen overnight and so quickly. So the staff from the general agency was all of a sudden, like they were being seconded over to the Native agencies, and you can only imagine how that went over. Again, you know, just not understanding the difference, the different worldviews or anything. There's already resentment between the Native workers and the non-Native workers. It was, for some agencies, it was pretty tense. It was a pretty tense time. But for the agency that I was at, we didn't need secondments because we had been slowly, you know, preparing ourselves. So qualified Native workers had been hired in order to get ready for all those transfers that were coming over, so no secondments were needed (Faye).*

One of the concerns regarding the implementation of the AJI-CWI was the shortage of experienced Indigenous social workers and the need to second social workers, who had always worked with a mainstream agency, to Indigenous agencies.

*I know that there were lots of worries, I'll say, around agencies not having the capacity to have folks in place because workers had to be seconded to different agencies from the existing agency where the files were coming from (Allison).*

While the transition occurred as planned and the seconded social workers brought with them many years of social work experience, they also brought a mainstream approach to the Indigenous child welfare agencies.

...you know, devolution planning was happening, it, to me, was chaotic, yeah, chaos. People didn't know other than just, you know, sharing and teaching people under the different Authorities or agencies, how they knew how to do child welfare. So it was just transferring some tools and, you know, this is how we do it, this is how you'll do it (Shelly).

Marie A describes the extensive experience seconded social workers brought to Indigenous agencies along with their vision and knowledge of how to do child welfare from a mainstream worldview.

*I worked with a lot of secondees, you know. And yeah, they had a lot of experience, like 30 years, 20 years, you know, lots of experience, but it was all the same mandate. It was the non-Aboriginal visions ...it was still the same. It had not changed (Marie A).*

For some the experience brought out negative reactions from people who were unhappy with their lack of choice in being seconded and expressed this disappointment in a negative manner in the new setting.

*It's just like, we just move people around, and it's the same people who were so racist now, going to our Aboriginal agencies, being angry and upset, and disrespectful, you know, I mean and that was hard (Catherine).*

### **Reactions from Mainstream Child Welfare Workers**

Several individuals who had been working with Winnipeg CFS at the time of the transition indicate that they were not prepared for the AJI-CWI implementation and the changes it required.

*I think some people didn't think it was going to happen, because it was such a monumental change. I think some people just sat there and thought, okay, sure, but, you know, I'll believe it when I see it, that sort of thing, right (Craig).*

Joan's reaction was one of surprise as the three month timeline agencies were given to implement the changes appeared to take her and many of her colleagues off guard. She still questions whether people were in denial or if they had not been adequately updated as the planning progressed.

*No one really told us what was really going on and we didn't even really take it seriously because I think everyone was, I don't know if everyone was in denial or if everyone was just, because they had heard so much talk about it, so much talk but there was no explanation, no further explanation, or when it was going to happen or, you know, they never really let us in on what the timeline process was, so people were like,*

*'whatever, whatever, let's just do this thing'. It just seemed that no one was really paying close attention to it and then, all of a sudden, it's, oh my gosh, this is happening and this is happening like in 3 months and we're going to be told where we're going to be going and we're like ... so it was kind of like, what the hell is going on? You know, this is really is happening and it was just really chaotic (Joan).*

The devolution process left many social workers in Winnipeg CFS with questions regarding how the secondments were to happen, how it would impact their long term employment opportunities, as well as their benefits and pensions.

*...now we're starting to hear pieces, well if you were hired after a certain time, you're not guaranteed a position with the Province of Manitoba...I had passed that date, so I wasn't guaranteed employment with the province. ...So my co-workers, colleagues and I, like you had to choose. Okay, well you have 3 choices that you can make where you want to work. Well we didn't want to go anywhere. We didn't know anything about these other agencies and what they were like and never had any involvement with really, non-mandated agencies at the time and we had to check off where we wanted to go. We wanted to stay where we are...people are trying to be strategic and everything in how they're selecting and we really didn't know what we were selecting. We didn't know anything about the Northern agencies, the Southern agencies, like things like that. We just had no clue ... So it was just, we weren't happy about the process at all, at all. So but there was nothing we could do about it (Joan).*

Wade describes the process as climate of uncertainty that impacted people who were working with Winnipeg CFS and who experienced it at a very personal level.

*...there was pressure about people who basically said, 'you are going to go there. You're going to be seconded and that's what you're going to do'. So there was a real dissatisfaction within the front-line workers of lack of clarity and certainly; will I have a job tomorrow? And if I don't go, what are the repercussions about that...It was a climate of uncertainty. It really was. And when we started this process, the uncertainty got to the point where rumors started to occur, discontented really, and again I say this – I want to be sensitive when I say this – is that, you talk about us versus them, that reinforced the us versus them kind of mentality, you know...it was just a real hard climate to do work in child welfare in the province during that time. It was just, yeah, we had folks who were just wondering, what am I even doing this for? It really affected them emotionally and physically where they just said, I'm going to look for work elsewhere. Yeah, it was really a year, years of discontent, yeah. (Wade).*

### **From an Indigenous Perspective**

The devolution and the changes that came with it impacted everyone involved, including the Indigenous agencies and especially those agencies that had an influx of social workers from the mainstream agencies.

*Um, for non-Native front-line child welfare workers, it must have been shocking, especially if they were, if there was no longer a position for them at the general agencies and they had to move over to a Native agency, I mean*

*that must have been shocking. I mean those, you know, those were big, big changes, but we had big changes too on the front-lines during that time. We had, not at the agency that I was at, but other agencies had an influx of non-Native people all of a sudden at their workplace and then that tension ensued, so that was a lot (Faye).*

Karen speaks to some of the tensions that were brought about by the process and the need to move people into agencies and positions they may not have been prepared to move into.

*...the reality is those agencies, non-Aboriginal agencies, lost the bulk of their work and they were angry at our agencies, you know, and I guess there was a sense of blame. So right off the hop, the relationships were not good and ... And you had angry people, you know, over the secondments, because people's jobs were, you know, on the line, I guess when they worked for an agency that was losing all their clientele and so they were coming to us (Karen).*

As Faye notes, some Indigenous agencies were not prepared for the devolution and the transfer of case files but those agencies who were engaged with the planning process did prepare for the coming changes and as a result experienced the transition with less disruption.

*I started my career in 2001 and they were already started talking about it but it just seemed like light years away, and so that's why that particular Native agency that I worked for, you know, we did stay on top of those transfers because we knew eventually that those kids are coming over to us. They were going to be coming over to us and we'd better be ready. And some of the other Native agencies, they weren't staying on top of those transfers and so they got the shock of their lives when they had like 500 kids transferred over to them in November of 2003 and they weren't prepared at all... so they had to do hiring really quickly, whereas the agency that I was at, we were slowly preparing for that mass transfer that was going to happen, so when it happened, it happened actually without a bump in the road at the agency that I was at, so I was very fortunate (Faye).*

Marie A describes the work environment in a non-Indigenous agency that was preparing to increase Indigenous social workers to 53% of their staff after the start-up of the AJI-CWI. At that point in time Indigenous social workers were a minority within the agency.

*And when I started, there were only 3 Aboriginal people, and when we used to walk into the lunchroom, people would just go quiet. And there was more non-Aboriginal than there was Aboriginal and they didn't like us. They were so fearful of that 53% representation of Aboriginal/Métis that they thought they were going to lose their jobs and it made it very difficult for those that were there. A lot of Aboriginal people worked one, two years and they were gone because of the politics within the agency (Marie A).*

## Set Up to Fail?

One of the commonly aired misconceptions was “that mainstream society or mainstream child welfare didn’t believe that Aboriginal people were ready to manage their affairs” (Conrad Marsden). Susan remembers similar negative attitudes.

*...and I think in the devolution the spotlight was on the Aboriginal agencies, and I think people were waiting for us to fail, because they were probably thinking, ‘oh are these Natives going to be able to do this?’ (Susan).*

Wade describes how some mainstream social workers discussed Indigenous people’s inability to take on the responsibility of child welfare, “The Aboriginal people, what they’re doing here, they don’t know what they’re doing’; like it appeared that they were being set up for failure, and that just reinforced any type of stereotypes that occurred and that was unfortunate.” Wade relates some of the feedback he received from colleagues after they had been seconded to Indigenous agencies; some of those individuals expressed negative criticism.

*...based on the feedback I got from them, is that they couldn’t wait to get out of there [Indigenous agencies] because there, again there was no infrastructure; that the folks who were in supervisory positions had no knowledge and basically put in position where they were, where they lacked the skills of the supervisor, you know, lacked clinical supervision (Wade)*

Marie B believes these doubts have not disappeared and she questions whether the lack of resources and inability to develop preventative services are just unintended consequences of the devolution or are intended to act as barriers to success.

*...it is discouraging like today because we run into a lot of problems that were not thought through, or were they thought through to make us who we are and where we are today?...Were we just set up to fail or to try and fail? Because that’s been the underlying thought from other agencies (Marie B).*

Other storytellers acknowledge the negative attitude that promotes the idea that Indigenous agencies will fail but strongly refute the possibility. For example, Laury confirms that child welfare has its daily challenges but social workers have the determination to make it work.

*But, you know what I really believe, I believe that no matter what they put on us, we’ll do it because we’re survivors right. And I always feel that this stuff that they’re making us do, they want us to fail. That’s what I always feel and so, you know, when I think of our workers and what they’re having to do, it’s crazy. Like a lot*

*of times it's just like you're in craziness. Every day is like a crazy day here... so they put these things on what the workers have to do, and it's like you don't have a choice (Laury)*

Marcel remembers the negative comments when the devolution was in the planning stages and shares his strong resolve that Indigenous people will succeed.

*I remember in the devolution process and the proclamations, everybody was saying when it was happening on how 'it'll fail', you know. Within 2 years or whatever, the government will be taking all the agencies over again. "Yeah, right", we said. "We're not going anywhere, you know, we're here to stay" (Marcel).*

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter set the background for the implementation of the AJI-CWI process by starting where a number of storytellers began, namely in their communities remembering how families and communities cared for the children. These memories are critical as they ground us in the strengths, knowledge and values passed on from ancestors and act as a reminder of the direction Indigenous people are determined to go in caring for families. The story then moves into the first contacts with child welfare and the sixties scoop and shares storytellers' stories to demonstrate the devastation to Indigenous families living in their home territories in Manitoba.

The storytellers, some of whom were working in the field of child welfare from the mid-1960s and 1970s, describe the evolution of child welfare as it pertains to Indigenous communities and the subsequent struggles of Indigenous communities to track the children who were apprehended and often lost to their families and communities.

The story continues with the response to the AJI-CWI vision as it is shared with child welfare. Storytellers begin by describing their reactions and their expectations for the positive changes the devolution was intended to generate. As the reality of the work and changes required in implementing the process began to set in, people shared stories of feeling overwhelmed and apprehensive and spoke about the struggles presented by negative reactions to the changes in child welfare which had to be overcome in order to move on.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE TRANSITION BEGINS: TRANSFERRING FILES

One of the major tasks of the AJI-CWI devolution was the actual transfer of case files from the mainstream child welfare agencies to Indigenous agencies. For the majority of storytellers this was a significant point in the devolution process and is often remembered as a chaotic time. For some of the agency people the rush to transfer a high number of case files associated with complex child welfare situations over a short period of time signaled the beginning stressful changes. It was not just a simple matter of transferring the children and youth associated with the case files but it also meant that Indigenous agencies inherited the foster families who were caring for the children. This in effect meant working with a large number of non-Indigenous foster families who were apprehensive of the changes and distrustful of the process.

As Dawn explains the transfer of files began with agencies in southern rural Manitoba.

*I think for the Southern agencies there were, and again I have all those numbers but it was close to 1,000 cases that had to get transferred from Winnipeg CFS, never mind all the regions. When we did the transfers of cases, we went region by region in the province and we started with the smallest region which was the Interlake, for the purpose of hopefully we could work out glitches and see how it worked. . . . we did Winnipeg last because that was where the bulk of it was. But that transfer not only involved cases but it was a huge HR component with the union involved because Winnipeg was all unionized, so we had to work with them and they were dragging their heels initially. There was quite a resistance from Winnipeg [CFS]. Winnipeg [CFS] took an attitude that this is never going to happen, like that was, even though they saw region by region that we were actually transferring cases, and so they got caught short and then they blamed the process (Dawn).*

A number of social workers spoke about the rush to transfer files, the lack of information in the transferred files and the inability to meet to discuss the children and the families whose files were being transferred.

*. . . we talked about how the best way to do case transfers would be, you know, meeting with the families and meeting with the workers and, at the start it was like this is all going to happen, and by the time it actually went through, none of that was happening and cases were just being transferred at light speed and when we were bringing attention to it, they were saying, 'it's got to happen, so just do it and be done with it' . . . that was kind of a bad feeling for us. . . I mean all the cases had to transfer and they did, and everything that was said at the beginning was going to happen, really didn't pan out. It might have at the start, but by the end, like meetings weren't even happening. Just cases came, paperwork, and sometimes, you know, the paperwork would be thin or there'd be lots and you just dealt, you had to work with what you got (Louise).*

One of the factors that complicated the transfer process stems from the fact that the file transfers were no longer interagency transfers but rather they were now agency to agency transfers.

Richard De La Ronde explains how this added to the confusion.

*But this was something different, this was transferring legal responsibility and it was something that was new for them. And although it was ironed out, like they [planning committee] put it on paper what it should look like, it was something new and not everybody was following it the way it should have been... People had never done file transfers between agencies, because it was all government agencies, right, and there was never this transfer of legal guardianship between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal agencies. This was new, and to do something new that quickly at that volume, like the volume of files that they transferred and then the speed that they did it with... (Richard).*

Germaine describes the file contents of the transferred files her agency received as containing meager information and lacked vital information such as assessments.

*I think it was, 2005, when we got all the transfers, and it was just, it was such a mess in how the cases were transferred from Winnipeg Child and Family to the communities, to the agencies, because all they sent was an Intake sheet, like the first front page of demographics of who this child is and a green sheet. They never sent assessments, nothing. They said no, you go get your own assessment done. They never shared information and that's where, for me, that's where the big gap in the service [occurred] (Germaine).*

Many of the file contents were not original documents. As Marcel notes the file contents received at the agency in which he worked were not originals, "so many files would come over at one time, right, and they were all photocopied". Another major concern expressed was the number of files being transferred at one time. Richard De La Ronde describes his reaction when the transfer process began.

*Like just all of a sudden, you know, Sandy Bay, brand new mandate, and all of sudden, here's 400 files. Holy shit! And we started going through files and there were files that we would look through and kids hadn't been seen for 2 years. I wouldn't accept that file and people would think, oh you know, he's a troublemaker. You know, he's saying, slow down the transfer and now we're trying to give him files and he's not accepting them. Like I had a stack of about 100 files. I'm like, there's nothing that tells me where, I don't even know where this kid is. There's nothing in this file and you're trying to transfer it to me. The last file recording was 2 years ago... Just don't give us a bunch of files or families are going to get missed. People are going to fall through the cracks. Like it was rushed, it was a rushed transfer. They said, no it's got to be done by this date. This is our work plan and, you know, and that was 2005; and how many child deaths did we have in Manitoba in 2005? There were 3 or 4 children. Phoenix [Sinclair] is a perfect example (Richard De La Ronde).*

Marcel expressed his disbelief at the high number of children in care that were being transferred back to the community where he had been working.

*...they said, oh we have 275 kids coming to you. 275, where did they all come from? That was more kids in care than we had in our existing agency on our reservation. More than double than what we had, and that's where the government had all our kids in care over time and didn't bother telling anybody where they were (Marcel).*

Susan spoke about her experience reviewing transferred files after she changed positions from working at Winnipeg CFS and started working for an Indigenous agency. At one point she recognized a name on one of the transferred files as a family she had worked with at the mainstream agency.

*You know what, when I was at Winnipeg CFS, they had social work students that were coming in on Saturdays and doing those transfer summaries...and we got the transfer summaries. They were like 4 pages, because there was such a crunch, they had this deadline that they had to meet. Because I remember some of the names, and I was like, "Oh my gosh, this person had a file like that" (Indicates about one foot high). And then people were like, "Really? How do you know?" I'm like, "Because I worked at Winnipeg [CFS] and I remember this family" (Susan).*

Susan also goes on to explain that after the devolution accessing family histories involved a time consuming process as all the original files were stored at a central office and could only be reviewed if an appointment was made in advance.

*...I remember after the devolution, I remember having to look up a file that was previously involved with Winnipeg CFS, and they had to go and get the file from [A main office]. I set a date at the Winnipeg office at XXX, got to just review it (Susan).*

The agencies that were expected to transfer all the required cases to Indigenous agencies by the set deadline were under a great deal of pressure as frontline social workers were expected to carry their regular caseloads in addition to preparing the file transfers. Wade spoke about the pressure this created for frontline social workers.

*...priority one was to get these cases moved off, and of course, in child welfare, and I think anyone who worked in the child welfare field knows there's the expectation to get these summaries done, to get all this work done, this paperwork done, and still manage your caseload. So, you know, there was no opportunity to give you the time to do that in a way that made sense to the frontline workers. So they were pressured to get this moved off and pressure still to maintain, you know, still do protection work. So I think, you know, things got missed.*

*And you know, my opinion was that things got missed so much that we, I think, workers, or agencies, may have put other kids at risk with respect to focusing clearly, and focusing on the transfer and not do the due diligence of best practice on existing cases (Wade).*

Karen confirms that social workers were concerned that children and youth would be getting lost in the transfer of files, “I know why Phoenix happened, you know, that situation happened. We all talked about something terrible is going to happen” (Karen).

One of the concerns that first became evident to Indigenous social workers during the file transfer is that mainstream agencies transferred only the files of children and youth in care as they did not maintain family files. As Laury explains, the practice of their own agency included keeping family files even when children became permanent wards.

*I know because when we got a lot of the files, Children’s Aid never worked with the families, like the parents. They would make the children permanent wards right away and there was never a case plan for the parents, never. When we were working, that was always our vision that the parents would have input into their case plan, right. So when we got a lot of the cases transferred, it was just children’s files. We didn’t get one parent file because they didn’t have parent files. We always said we’d always have [a family file], if we worked with a child and they became permanent wards; we would always have a family file, always. So we always had all those family files. So when AJI came about and Southern Authority came about, then the agencies were told, close all your family files. This office did, but the CBTs [community based teams] didn’t, and now, like 4, 5, 6 years later, 7 years later, they’re saying, you need to open all your family files. They should never have been closed, so now we have to go back and open all these files. It has to do with funding they said (Laury).*

Shelly expressed her disagreement with the practice of not maintaining family files when you have a child in care, “I guess one of the other deficits is that, you know, once a child becomes a permanent ward, you don’t have anything to do with that woman but yet you have her child” (Shelly).

Social workers who had been employed with the mainstream child welfare agencies during the transfer of files presented a different perspective on how the transfers took place. Catherine describes meeting with social workers from Indigenous agencies to discuss the cases that were being transferred.

*...we would go and meet with whoever came from those agencies and we would do a little presentation on our kids, especially if we had little sib groups, we'd talk about each one and talk about what they liked or didn't like, or about their placements...* (Catherine)

Wade remembers the process of preparing the files for transfer which he said was completed "in a timely fashion" and after receiving approval from supervisors arranged to meet with Indigenous agency social workers.

*I was a front-line worker at that time, you know. It [case transfers] was reviewed by the supervisor, signed off by the supervisor. We then had an opportunity to meet with the case worker of the Aboriginal agency and his or her supervisor, to come to the table and actually have some sort of a verbal discussion regarding the case transfer. For the most part, I would say about, and again I'm going by memory, 30% of the cases were transferred from our agency... For the most part, the Aboriginal, our Aboriginal partners came and were willing to have that discussion, but some didn't show up. We just ended up giving the files to them and I personally, and again my supervisor supported this, and that was the best practice approach was that we would like to actually meet the worker, meet the supervisor and then actually take the worker, once that worker was identified with the Aboriginal agency, to the home, introduce the child to the new worker (Wade).*

Wade went on to describe the apprehension children and foster parents experienced as a result of the lack of preparation to the transfer.

*I think that is probably the worst part of the process I experienced because, we were giving the families, we were letting the families know that, you know, there's going to be a change in worker and we already had a long term relationship with some of these children, with some of these families, as well as the foster homes. Because when the kids now are transferred over to an Aboriginal agency, the foster parents are a little bit reluctant to work with a different agency when they've already cultivated a long term relationship with the worker, as did the kids in the family. So when, there really was no opportunity to do a slow, methodical transfer of knowledge, skills, and get everybody comfortable with respect to this new transition, this new way of doing business. So there were some frightened children. There were some frightened parents, and certainly some frightened foster parents because they didn't know - who am I going to work with now (Wade)?*

Wade continues with his story in which he presents how he experienced the transfer of children from his caseload in Winnipeg CFS to Indigenous agencies. He reports feeling a sense of reverse discrimination during meetings when the files were transferred to Indigenous agencies.

*...we transferred files over to our Aboriginal partners, there was, and I experienced this, it was almost reverse discrimination where, you know, where they felt colonized, initially when the files were transferred over that when I tried to give them information and say, 'you know, I think this is the way you want to do it because this is what we've been doing with this family'. It was like, 'how dare you tell me? I'm now the worker'; and this one Aboriginal worker was very clear, 'I've been under your thumb all these years, I'm running, I'm steering the ship now', and basically said like, 'it's our time to shine'. So, you know, whatever feelings they had with respect to their own relationship with non-Aboriginal people, it was almost an opportunity to poke the non-*

*Aboriginal people in the eye and say, this is our case. I'm going to do what I think is in the best interest whether you like it or not, right. Which was sad, you know, it's unfortunate because the only person that lost was the families and the children (Wade).*

In the following discussion Wade describes his concerns for the children who had been transferred from his caseload to Indigenous agencies who are described as lacking the necessary skills to provide child welfare services.

*...there was always a danger, ah what happens if they mess up, you know? And, because people were just, particularly when you had a long-term relationship with these children, a long-term relationship with the family, and then when we transferred over to an Aboriginal agency, you're thinking, oh my God, please nothing happens, right? You're always you're lying awake at night saying, you know, I did so well. I did, you know, some really meaningful work with this family. I'm now giving the child and the family over to someone who probably doesn't have the skill set. So please don't let anything ... you almost, because you built relationships, as I said earlier, and they're like yours, right, they're your family, and no one can ever do the best work that you could do, and I think for the most part, some social workers feel that way, but when you transfer them over to someone who doesn't have the skill set, you're always fearful that something will happen right - letting go of your baby (Wade).*

Karen describes the transfer of files to Indigenous agencies as an overwhelming process which caused agencies to struggle with the massive changes. She also questions if the system had just slowed down at that point if some of the problems could have been avoided.

*Cases came without case transfer meetings like they were supposed to. They just, it became very, very overwhelming for a lot of us in the system at that time and we still are struggling. We're still struggling with that massive change, it happened so quickly, and maybe we could have, maybe we could do better if we had stopped at that change and tried to get our footing and tried to get all our ducks lined up to be able to meet the needs of clients across Manitoba. But what was happening was those transfers came so fast, there was just no time, like we just got them and we had to figure out what we were going to do with them. And for an agency, that caused all kinds of impact across the board in terms of when we inherited cases, we inherited the [foster] homes, and many of those homes were not culturally appropriate. There were a number of cases where there was misinformation being presented to other agencies about our kids that they have in their care (Karen).*

### **The Transfer of Foster Children and Foster Families**

The transfer of files meant the transfer of children, youth and foster homes over a relatively short period of time. It was, of course, one of most important pieces of the devolution and understandably there were many questions and concerns. As a result storytellers engaged with the topic providing insightful deliberations. The concerns ranged from the shortage of Indigenous foster

homes at the point of devolution, the lack of information foster parents had about the devolution process, the obstacles in recruiting Indigenous foster homes, the expectations and demands for high rates for many of the children in care, cultural training and expectations for foster parents and the rights of foster parents versus birth parents.

Faye begins by describing the initial reactions she observed in her work at an Indigenous agency when they began to transfer foster children and the foster parents.

*Devolution occurs, and we have, when we're talking about the transfer of, you know, thousands of Native foster kids, we're also talking about the transfer of foster parents that are caring for those foster kids. And some of those foster parents were extremely apprehensive about all of a sudden having to work with a Native agency, and all of a sudden having to work with a Native social worker and what does this mean; so that was exhausting too.*

Susan provides some insight into the reasons for the foster parents' concerns when the transfers occurred. Some of their fears were driven by a lack of knowledge regarding the actual transfer process and were caught up in the stereotypes and misinformation regarding the care children would receive through the Indigenous agencies.

*...it's almost like they forgot about foster parents in this whole transition, right...I think for foster parents, they really didn't know what was happening. And I think a lot of people were scared, because I remember talking to foster parents when I was working at Winnipeg [CFS], and they were like, oh I'm scared that this child's going to be sent back to their reserve and they're going to be forgotten and, you know, they're going to have like a bad life.*

Louise explains that foster parents were under the impression that not only would they have their foster care rates cut back but the children would be taken out of their homes. It appears the birth families that had made the choice to go to an Indigenous agency were not apprehensive as they appeared to have a better understanding of the process.

*I know foster parents had a terrible understanding because we had foster parents tell us, and we know people were told, 'oh when your case gets transferred to Native agencies, you're not going to get proper funding and they're going to come here and take all these kids out of your home' ... So that was kind of, like that was bizarre. That was probably, to be quite honest with you, my recollection is that was almost a bigger issue than clients having concerns about their cases, because clients had the understanding that they'd be getting good services, and you know, they were going to come to an agency at least that knows them. And whereas foster parents were kind of told in general...and they were scared or afraid or whatever, and then we'd explain to*

*them and then they'd see, okay these kids aren't going to be moving. These workers are not scary...and they're trained and they know what they're doing. (Louise).*

One of the adjustments that had to be addressed in the transfer was the change in available funding for foster care in Indigenous agencies as opposed to Winnipeg CFS. As Faye explains the foster programs were much smaller in scale in First Nations communities and they had established good working relationships with their foster families prior to the devolution.

*We were small-scale. We were the small fish in the pond prior to devolution. We had foster parents. We had great foster parents who, you know, liked working with Native kids and liked working with Native social workers, and had no problem with that.*

As Faye goes on to explain, when the AJI-CWI transfer of foster care homes from Winnipeg CFS occurred, foster care rates became an issue for foster families who had become accustomed to higher rates than the Indigenous agencies could accommodate in their budgets.

*...and they had also been working with the general agency [Winnipeg CFS] who received, you know, plenty of money, had their budget reconciled every single year with respect to the kids in their care, and all of a sudden they're at a Native agency where money is tight and they weren't used to that. And so they're dealing with these strangers that they never wanted to deal with in the first place, and then these strangers are telling them no, because there's no money or your rates can't stay at what it was...So lots of placement breakdown, lots of, 'well you're going to pay me this rate or you're going to come get this kid'; you know, lots of those stories happened. But we just couldn't keep up, and there was no way the Native agencies could have paid those rates that those foster parents had in place prior to coming over. So we had to quickly, you know, get to the provincial table and say, you know, this is what they want or they're going to give up these kids and we don't want that. We're going to try and prevent placement breakdowns. So at the end of the day, several of them still got those outrageous rates, even though ethically the Native agencies had never seen rates like that in our lives, but those people were just so use to it from working with the general agency [Winnipeg CFS]. So we just felt - it was again a helpless feeling (Faye).*

Catherine supports the concerns that there has been disparity in foster care rates between the General Authority and other Authorities that creates problems in foster care.

*There's also a huge disparity about, and our agency still talks about that, what Winnipeg CFS pays for their foster parents and when the child gets transferred to one of our agencies, the rate is seen as excessively high, because our agencies would never have been able to pay the rate that they were getting (Catherine).*

Some of the storytellers expressed a concern that some foster parents are fostering for the wrong reasons. Joan suggests the need to overhaul the foster care system with centralized training to meet the needs of the children in their care and their families:

*...many foster parents are in it for the wrong reasons, you know. They're in it for money. They're not doing it to provide a stable and loving and nurturing home and still keep them connected to their culture... and that needs a whole overhaul too, the foster parent, like the foster caring network (Joan).*

Faye expressed a similar concern indicating that “There was a feeling that fostering children and fostering Native children had become a business at some point. People were able to pay their mortgages based on the kids in care because the rates were that high”. She goes on to explain that some of those rates still exist and “We need placements and if paying those ridiculous rates is what gets us, what gets a kid a safe roof over their head, then that’s what we have to do”.

On the other hand, Karen described some of the struggles she has encountered to increase per diems for foster homes in First Nations’ communities where specialized training is not available but as she acknowledges, some of the caregivers bring a wealth of traditional knowledge and understanding that benefits the children and youth in their care. As she explains, there were children in care with high needs including “schizophrenia, autism, all kinds of mental health issues, high, high needs, it’s harder to place these kids unless you’re paying \$150.00 a day” and although she understands the need for additional support, she finds accessing the additional funds is a struggle that she is willing to make.

*I’m okay with that. Well in order for me to do that, I have to say to the foster parent, okay I’m going to do an IRAP, which is, you have to do a letter, you have to do a social history, you have to do all kinds of paperwork with special rates.*

The IRAP application goes to the authority for approval and is often sent on to the provincial government for final approval which is both time consuming and frustrating “now I’m spending my whole day trying to get...a foster parent skills attribute assessment” which is basically proof of certified education and training and because the training is not available in First Nation

communities, the application is turned down (Karen). Karen goes on to describe one example in which she was refused a higher per diem for a high needs child living in an Indigenous community, connected to family, community, culture and language.

*So when I do IRAPs, I write, this is a First Nations family living in a First Nation community providing care for a First Nations child, being able to expose this child to their family, their culture, their, you know, their whole world, their community. The foster parent will do all kinds of things to ensure that this child knows who they are and their identity is not all screwed up and messed up and they're not going to be questioning, you know, where did I come from... This lady that's fostering has fostered for 30 years. She came from her own family fostering. She grew up with foster children in her home. She's First Nations, lives in the community, speaks the language. She's never missed a Parent/Teacher day, a powwow, a cultural thing. The child's family can come into the home and visit. She takes the child – to me that is a wonderful foster parent. She gives all the love to these kids that they'll ever need, and I couldn't get her \$50.00 a day service fee. But we'll give it to somebody in Winnipeg... (Karen).*

Susan makes the point that children with special needs often end up in foster care because their families do not have the resources to look after them but once they are apprehended the funding is available to foster parents which brings her to question why families cannot receive the support so the children can stay in their home rather than going into foster care.

*And you know sometimes too, there's some children that have high needs so they'll go in a foster home, right, and then we'll pay foster parents these high rates to take care of these children. I always say, couldn't we somehow pay our own people, our own families to take care of their own children? But there's this rule, that we can't pay kinship. You can give them something, but you can't give them the high rates, which doesn't make sense. If we're already going to pay so much for this child in a foster home and if we can place them with family, how come we still can't give those rates? So there are some things that don't make sense, right? But people always say, well families shouldn't be paid to take care of their children (Susan).*

Michelle has made the observation that even 'regular' foster parents in Manitoba do not get enough training to support them in caring for children with high needs.

*...it's not like just because those kids are going to their family that they're not going to have any needs, right? Their needs are often complex, right, mental health, you know, pre-natal exposure to substances, and attachment disorders... And even our foster parents nowadays, again, you know, the regular foster parents don't get enough training for that and support. The province doesn't even fund for foster care workers... These kids have like really high needs. There's so many high needs kids in Manitoba and we do not have resources for them. Nothing that is meeting their needs; it's very difficult (Michelle).*

## The Need for Indigenous Foster Homes

The lack of available Indigenous foster homes was an ongoing concern before the devolution and for many agencies it is still an ongoing struggle. Some agencies appear to be more successful in recruiting Indigenous foster homes depending on the available resources and the agency's focus. As Bruce Unfried notes, there are still a number of children in non-Indigenous foster homes including children who have high medical needs. There are also agencies that have increased the number of Indigenous foster homes and yet others who have reduced the number of children in care.

*And the other issue that comes up is there still are a number of children, a number of Indigenous children in non-Aboriginal homes. And so, these are children who have been in homes for a number of years because of medical reasons, and there's going to have to be some planning done as to how to resolve that because it's still an issue. The lack of housing, the stringent licensing regulations for alternate care facilities and the insufficient medical support services in northern First Nations communities have set up real barriers for special needs children to return to their home communities. Most agencies have experienced an increase in caseloads. Most have expressed an increase in Winnipeg requests for services, and some agencies like XXX have had a decrease in the number of children in care (Bruce).*

Marie A maintains that the majority of foster homes at the General Authority are non-Indigenous, "Most of the [General Authority] homes, and this just breaks my heart, most of the foster homes are non-Aboriginal" (Marie A).

Dawn describes concerns about the need to increase the number of Indigenous foster homes and draws attention to the lack of resources, housing issues and the need to support family healing.

*I think there's still more children in non-Aboriginal placements than anybody would like to see and agencies are trying to tackle the problem of lack of resources, and often you're moving kids out of the community because you just have no place in the community to put them, and it's often a housing issue. It's sometimes within the family. There isn't enough resources to really try and get those families out of their dysfunction, because money to actually work with families is pretty scarce. Lots of money there when you take kids away for the placement piece of it. So there's still some real challenges for agencies that way and there's a lot of political pressure on them to place kids in Indigenous homes, and as there should be (Dawn).*

First Nations agencies also struggle with finding foster homes in their communities and this is further complicated as agencies that had specialized homes in First Nations communities lost the specialized homes due to a change in funding. The end result is the placement of children in non-Indigenous homes in urban and rural areas rather than in home communities.

*When devolution came, I really thought that we would have more resources like that in our communities, but what happened was the majority of the kids that are in care are not living at home, in their communities, anymore. They're in the rural areas<sup>21</sup> around Winnipeg. Rural areas in Winnipeg and there are some in the city, whereas back in the day, we didn't want to place kids in the city. We didn't want to place kids outside of Winnipeg areas. We wanted to keep them closer to home, that was our mission back in the day (Marie B).*

Germaine indicates that Indigenous children are in Indigenous placements as long as they stay in the First Nations communities but once they are in urban centers they are often placed in rural farming communities.

*They're all Aboriginal homes in the communities, but here in the City of Winnipeg and surrounding areas, we get a lot of kids shipped out to farm communities, because when I go to St. Malo, Steinbach, there's lots of Aboriginal kids there and they're there because they're in foster care (Germaine).*

Unfortunately, First Nations' communities cannot accommodate all children who come into care. As Joan notes finding placements for children in their communities is often difficult due to a lack of resources and especially the lack of specialized resources.

*We do have a lot of kids that have to come to the city because there aren't any placements out there and they don't have any specialized resources out there, really any resources at all anyways, right, so they just send them over this way to Winnipeg, which isn't always a good thing. But they do maintain some stable foster homes out there (Joan).*

Another concern that was identified during the transfer of children was the separation of sibling groups into separate foster homes. As Allison notes, in those cases social workers from Indigenous agencies would wait until one of the foster families decided not to offer foster care and then they would try to place the siblings together.

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<sup>21</sup> Areas outside of Winnipeg in the southern part of the province are often referred to as the bible belt of Manitoba.

*...what we found is that siblings weren't placed together [transferred cases]. That wasn't a priority. It didn't seem to be the priority, so they were like sort of scattered all over the place. There wasn't, I don't recall, there wasn't very many, if any at all, that were even placed with family and not close to the community ...so if a home decided that they weren't going to provide foster care, what we would do is when those situations or opportunities came about is that we would try to place the siblings together, and if that wasn't a possibility, then again looking for family and looking for folks that were willing to foster from the community of origin (Allison).*

Catherine shares a story about a family of seven siblings who had been separated and her efforts at keeping the family together through family visits.

*...one time I had a family that had, I think they had 7 children and they were placed all over the darn place, two in the city, two in Interlake area, two in Stonewall, and then one was, I don't even remember where the other one was. But you know, I tried to make Christmas visits. I tried to do sib visits, you know, because these kids need somebody after because behaviors become difficult as kids move up in age as we all know and then foster parents just, you know - our kids are disposable. So at least if they have family relationships, I always used to think. So I used to be quite bossy with foster parents and tell them, you know, we're having family visits and I said, and I want you guys to bring something to that, or get those kids to help you make cookies or brownies, or I don't care, rice, whatever, to bring, because kids feel good when they've brought something and they all ate together (Catherine).*

Unfortunately, as Faye notes, efforts to keep siblings together through placements or family visits has not been occurring automatically even after the devolution.

*There's siblings that haven't been brought for visits with each other, even though they've been permanent wards for years and years, and so it'll be brought to our attention and we'll ask the agency what's going on there. And they'll just say, oh well, you know, no one's ever done that, you know. No one's thought to have those siblings brought together. And so, you know, in terms of identity, what are you doing? You already took them from their families. The least you could do is work hard so they know their siblings. You couldn't place them together for whatever reason, so make sure that those visits happen, even three or four times a year, you know. It will be special for them. They'll remember it. And then they'll know each other as they grow up and they'll find each other. They'll be there for each other when they're adults (Faye).*

### **Barriers for Developing Indigenous Foster Care Resources**

Storytellers spoke about the difficulties in developing foster care resources in their communities because the poverty and poor housing conditions do not meet the requirements of the foster care regulations. Another barrier is the historical relationship Indigenous people have with child welfare. As Faye explains, Indigenous people who are willing to foster are often impoverished

and living in crowded homes in their First Nations communities that are not up to code and therefore do not meet the foster care regulations.

*What we see on reserve is that the housing, I mean foster care regulations are really strict in terms of a foster child needs their own bedroom. There needs to be a window. The window needs to be this size. There needs to be a fire escape route, you know, all this kind of stuff. You can't place children in basements. You know, what if they die in a fire? You know, all these very restrictive procedures and policies are in place. If you want to become a foster parent, even a general foster parent, you know, it's very restrictive. You have to have a certain kind of home. You have to have a working vehicle. You have to have skills and experience in caring for kids. You have to prove that to the agency, right? We don't want to be just licensing anybody. So that's very restrictive to people on reserve who do have a kind heart and say, you know what, I do want to foster. Then the foster care worker goes out to their home and says, you don't have anywhere for the kid to sleep (Faye).*

Rose Marie describes some of the living conditions for people living in rural and remote First Nations communities that prevent families from taking in foster children.

*And homes, 2 bedroom homes where you have 20 people, people are sleeping in shifts. How do you do child protection? It's unrealistic standards that we're starting to impose. That was concerning. How do you relax, how would you relax standards like that? How do you write something like that? But that's what people know. Not everybody is a perpetrator. Some of those families are pretty good with how they could care for their kids. Sleeping in shifts is pretty creative to me. People walking all night and then sleep during the day. It happens (Rose Marie).*

Richard De La Ronde agrees that homes are not built to the same code as required in mainstream communities and that is a major impediment to fostering. He adds other requirements such as the need to obtain four unrelated references or taking your pet to a veterinarian when there are none in the area are additional examples of barriers for potential foster parents in First Nations communities.

*When you look at the licensing requirements for a foster home, you know, homes aren't built like that on reserve, they're not. Windows are not a certain size. Rooms are not a certain size. You know, those standards clearly were written by a non-Aboriginal person in Winnipeg ... Like what we were struggling with, you know, you had to have four unrelated references as part of your foster home application, you know. That's almost impossible to do on reserve. So we were asking for it to be two. The tough ones like if you had a pet, you had to have a thing from the vet. Like people don't take their dogs to the vet on reserve... we had a lot of expired Places of Safety, because with the standards that we had, we couldn't complete the licensing process for those kinds of things (Richard).*

As Bruce Unfried explains some of the current standards do not fit in an Indigenous context and act as deterrents rather than helpful guidelines.

*And then, the other one is like four letters of reference. Well we found out that most Indigenous people don't write letters about their neighbours. They are not in the habit of talking about so and so, so do you really need it? Well the Province says yes, because that's what we do in River Heights and West Kildonan, so we should do it in Garden Hill First Nation. So I'm just using a couple of examples where regrettably the standards never changed and so a lot of the First Nations agencies are bound by outdated standards (Bruce).*

Another barrier that often comes up when Indigenous families agree to foster is the information required by background checks.

*The sad reality is our people, if you factor in the residential schools and just the number of Aboriginal families involved in child welfare, we can't get enough of our own people to foster...we'll bring children into care, right, and maybe aunty, uncle, cousin or whatever, they want to be kinship [care]. They want to take care of the children. We're still required by provincial standards. You have to do criminal background checks. So let's say one of them had a prior, which means they were involved with CFS three years ago, we have to look at that and determine, okay, was this a low, medium or high risk. So if they're deemed medium risk, we can't use them...So as much as we want to place children with family, sometimes we just can't. And then, like I said too, sometimes families just don't want to be involved with CFS. They don't want to come and foster and, for their own issues (Susan).*

The situation is similar in terms of the criminal record checks for individuals who have charges from earlier stages in life.

*Or even people who've had, you know, petty theft charges or silly kinds of offence charges from their early 20's and now they're in their 40's and so all those charges come up when you do a background check, because you have to do a background check on potential foster parents, so then even that can be restrictive, right? (Faye).*

As Laury indicates potentially there may be suitable foster parents available but until the process is changed to accommodate the changes people have made in their lives, the barriers will remain.

*...you can have a really good Aboriginal family, but then they don't meet certain criteria so then they're not considered, right. Yet you know maybe this family has not drunk for 10 years, but then they have something on their record that says no, can't use them. So it just ...the process, of the way things are done and if we had a process that we could put into place... we'd have tons of foster parents that would be Aboriginal (Laury).*

As Allison explains although some families are willing to provide short term care they are often reluctant to provide kinship care for a longer term. In her words:

*...some of them don't continue to foster their kin if their kin stay in care longer because of some of the interference from the birth parents. ...not all families, not all grandmas and grandpas or aunties and uncles want to provide foster care. I think for some of them there's some challenges around kinship care because then there's interference from the parent around those kinds of situations. So families tell us, you know, once my granddaughter or once my grandchild or once my niece or nephew go home, I won't be providing foster care*

*services. I'm only doing it for the short period because they identify that, and while ideally you want to place children within their family, but there's challenges on that side too because of the interference they receive. So it is a challenge (Allison).*

As Bruce Unfried notes, some family members prefer not to foster but are willing to provide care for family members in the traditional sense meaning that they will care for their relative's children whenever the parents are not available rather than go through a legal process that involves child welfare.

*Well many of the Indigenous folks say, well I don't want to be a foster parent. I want to look after my nephew. Mom's in the hospital for 3 months. I don't want to be, I have no interest in being a foster parent. You have to be one, so away we go. So in my view, I guess there's a real lack of understanding of kind of the community context for how children are placed in homes. Forgive my repetition as I feel passionate about this issue. The problem could be easily fixed if only there was the political will to enable the Indigenous agencies the flexibility to develop their own standards which reflect the realities of their communities (Bruce Unfried).*

As Marcel explains, some people do not want to be a part of child welfare because of the negative historical relationship, yet other individuals who have had a positive experience in child welfare return as caregivers.

*...it's very hard for us to recruit even family members, you know, they don't want to be involved because it's child welfare. Child welfare's got such a negative view out there... It's not all negative too, because when I work with people when some of them come back as foster parents. They were in care at one time. There's a few in there in between when I'm talking to them and they had good experiences, right. There's some lucky ones that had good experiences and they want to come back and then they want to be able to, because they went through that, they feel they want to give back to some kid and try to help them and so on, so. We are hoping with the new type of work that we're doing that it's going to be a heck of a lot better, you know (Marcel).*

### **Foster Care and Culture**

Integral to the concept that drove the AJI-CWI devolution was the intent to ensure families in Manitoba had access to culturally relevant child welfare services regardless of where they resided in the province. Craig spoke about this issue in relation to the efforts he and his colleagues incorporate in the recruitment of foster parents. One of the concerns he raised is finding a balance between ensuring cultural connectivity and providing a stable placement in situations where the foster parents do not acknowledge the child's cultural needs.

*You don't know until a child is placed in a home really how this individual is going to conduct themselves in terms of working in a multicultural milieu, if you will. And you do your best, most people do, but you find some people who, indirectly, just dig in their heels and they don't want to work with culture. And so then it becomes a problem because we want to minimize placements for kids. The last thing you want to do is put a child into a home whereby a month or two or three or six months later, that placement breaks down so it immediately becomes a challenge because we don't want a placement to break down but we do want the child to be able to feel comfortable and safe, knowing who they are in terms of their culture (Craig).*

In Dawn's experience, once the foster parents built some trust with the Indigenous agencies they willingly participated in the cultural training and events.

*...although a lot of the tension with non-Aboriginal homes did diminish considerably when they saw we weren't just going to come with a bus and pick up all these kids. And many agencies have developed some really good approaches. They have like community feasts where the foster parents bring the kids. They have ceremonies where the foster parents bring the kids, and the foster parents stay and are involved. They come to cultural awareness training, and many foster parents are, once the agency reaches out, they're very happy to do that, so it isn't dumping on them when they have an opportunity. I don't think they ever had the opportunity with Winnipeg Child & Family because it wasn't an important thing to that agency to make sure that the people who were caring for our kids were really having these kids best interests at heart, you know (Dawn).*

Some storytellers explained that the cultural training for foster parents includes teaching foster parents about the historical background "I do presentations in front of foster parents and I do a history of the child welfare and what happened back then and all the changes, you know, leading up to where we are now, before the devolution happened" (Marcel).

For the agency Shelly works with, the three to four day foster care training is focused on culture with the expectation that foster parents participate regularly in cultural events.

*...providing orientation to foster families to attend three, four day workshops geared towards culture, Aboriginal culture, and participating in things like sweats, and understanding what that means. Also, sharing circles, you know, what does that mean? It isn't just going to a powwow and there you've fulfilled your cultural component in your family. So it's a bit more of connecting to provide those young ones the teachings (Shelly).*

For some storytellers the training is an important piece but they question whether the foster parents follow through on a regular basis as they are not mandated to incorporate the culture.

*They train them. They have to have all this training, and they do good training, I will admit, and it all depends which agency they're involved in, right? And they do train them in some Aboriginal culture stuff. But they don't mandate them to make them take the kids. Like they don't say, well you know, every month you*

*should be taking them to a ceremony, or every month you should allow them to go to, you know, to Ojibway language class, or you know, some way to connect them to their culture, you know (Marie A).*

According to Joan, foster parents in her agency are not mandated to attend cultural events and some foster parents resist any contact with the children's birth families.

*...some agencies, I don't know if they mandate their foster parents to, okay you have to attend this cultural activity or this. I don't know, I don't know if they do or not. We don't, we encourage definitely, yeah. I think as a foster parent you should do that. You want to keep their culture, you know, keep them in line with their culture and their family, right. Like a lot of them [foster parents] say, 'I don't want to do family visits' and...no, like they don't have any visits. They try to come up with excuses...no, we don't keep them connected to their families (Joan).*

Marcel takes a direct approach with the foster care training in telling foster parents that the children are with them temporarily and in most cases will be returning to their families. In Marcel's words, "You're there to provide a service to the children until they need to go to their own family. Don't expect children to stay with you for life like it used to be, so that's not going to happen". He also addresses the issue of raising foster children in religions not compatible with the birth family's beliefs.

*I tell them blatantly that there's going to be no conversion of our people anymore in our child welfare agency. If they are of a different faith, that's fine, you can practice your own faith, but we will have no conversion of our children, plain and simple (Marcel).*

The agency Marcel works with has also uses the training sessions to address the abuse of children while in care. Indications are that it has been very successful.

*...we've enacted and enforced a no hitting policy at all on our children... And they sign a declaration that they understand this. Three years ago we had about, oh every month, any given month, we had an abuse investigation going on in our foster homes, but it wasn't until we started doing this and we started making it mandatory, every foster parent has to come in, both if they're a couple, they have to come in for an orientation, and that [no hitting policy] is repeated to them over and over... in the last year, we may have had only one, maybe two, but I can only think of one home where we had to remove children because of allegations of abuse (Marcel).*

As Faye concedes, reports of child abuse in foster care indicate a serious issue.

*So those investigators would, you know, they'd have to be strong, strong people, emotionally strong people. And I would say two out of every ten child abuse referrals that came in was abuse taking place in a foster home. So we're not just talking abuse taking place in biological families and before the apprehension occurred, we're talking about abuse in foster homes. So even then, you know, myself and other senior managers are looking at*

*each other, going, you know, what are we doing? We apprehended from an abusive family to put them with abusive families? What is this supposed to be about? It just seems so backwards. Yeah, like a hot bowl of soup being poured over a child's head by a foster parent, you know, those types of particularly horrifying incidents (Faye).*

### **The Use of Non-Indigenous Foster Homes**

More than a third of the storytellers spoke about their concerns not just about Indigenous children placed in non-Indigenous homes but the placement of children in foster homes in which children are being raised in distinctively different cultural environments and learning different languages. The concern is not that the children are learning about different cultures and languages, rather the concerns are that the children are not learning their families' languages and cultures. Often the babies apprehended at birth or as toddlers and placed in these homes are unable to speak English or their parents' languages and as a result cannot communicate during visits.

*...some of these are wonderful homes and they're wonderful people and love these kids, but these little kids are speaking, is it Mandarin? I don't know what kind of language but it isn't Ojibway or Saulteaux or Cree. They're speaking other languages and their whole worldview is very different. Then, when they're 18 and they have to come home at 15, because a lot of those placements break down when they're adolescents, and the kids don't have a clue who they are anymore (Karen).*

While the struggle to recruit sufficient numbers of Indigenous foster parents has been an uphill battle on a number of fronts, the issue is not new to child welfare as the Indigenous authorities inherited a system that did not value culturally matched foster homes. For child welfare workers who recognize the cultural genocide of the sixties scoop and residential schools, the loss of culture for the children in care is a serious consideration.

*And then when we're at training, they talk about how the Filipino community is changing the foster care system because the majority of our kids in care are placed within Filipino families. They're so culturally different. ... A lot of our kids are starting to speak the Filipino languages and their culture. So as they get older, like when they're placed as babies and they get a little bit older, they identify with Filipinos because they're brown, they're brown like us and some of them do look like Filipino children, so they acculturate or assimilate to their culture and that's really sad to see (Germaine).*

Michelle highlights the concern that some Indigenous children in care are not learning English which prevents them from communicating with their birth parents. In her words, "...it's a

problem, especially when kids don't even learn English, right? They learn some other language from some other country and then at a visit, they can't even speak to their parents because they don't know English" (Michelle).

Susan shares an experience of a child in care who cannot communicate with her parents.

*...when I was at [An Indigenous agency], the little girl, she was speaking Filipino. That was her first language, and then the parents are like, why is my child speaking Filipino? She should be speaking Ojibway. Like what do you say? So there were a lot of cases like that where we didn't have enough Aboriginal homes, so you just have to place wherever, right (Susan)?*

Social workers expressed their concern for the ongoing assimilation of children into cultures that are not necessarily the mainstream culture but foster homes who do not connect the children to birth families or communities. The concern is based in the complete disconnection from families and cultures and the long term outcomes associated with past practices in child welfare.

*...they're being put in homes that they should not be. They're learning a new language. They're completely disconnected from not only their agency, their family, their community, their world. We're going to have a whole generation of children, like I am going to, I'm scared of what we're going to see in 20 years from now, because what we're doing today, we're going to feel the impact because when people say to us, child welfare is no more than a legal way, it's a sanctioned way to destroy a whole nation and that is what we do. When you take little kids from their mom and their dad and their community and their family, and you give them to another family that doesn't even know how to speak English, and like, and those little kids are now going to the Philippines for a holiday rather than the powwow on the reserve, we're going to feel an impact in the generations to come, worse I think than even residential schools, because this system is not set up to be supportive of families (Karen).*

Many Indigenous social workers who are already overwhelmed with high workloads appreciate the care many of their children and youth are receiving in the non-Indigenous foster homes but at the same time placing children in non-Indigenous homes represent difficult decisions with potentially devastating outcomes reminiscent of the sixties scoop.

*And it's just, it's heartbreaking and we look at each other some days and go, what did we do? How did we let this happen? Yet we had no choice. We had to, they need a home, and it's not that these people don't care about them, you know, I have visited during my days on the front-line, I visited Filipino foster homes. They were caring people, and you know, I don't want to make any racist remarks against them, but they just weren't*

*the culture that those kids needed, like inherently needed, you know, to grow up to know their own identity, and so it can be demoralizing some days to a) think about people getting rich off of foster kids, and b) to think that their culture is being completely overlooked. And when they turn 18 and turn back and look at their child welfare agency and say, what did you do for me, you know, how are we supposed to answer those difficult questions? Are we supposed to tell them, 'well we did the best we could'? You know, we did the best the system would let us do. They're not going to understand that. They're not going to get that. They're just going to feel that they should have been treated better and they weren't, so (Faye).*

In one particular case, a social worker spoke about the outcome of a situation where the non-Indigenous foster family wanted to ensure the child stayed with them and applied for guardianship of the child with the longer term goal of adoption. The storyteller described the agency reaction in terms of grieving for the loss of this child from their community.

*...the foster parents are applying for guardianship, the back door to adoption. We had one where we lost a child and you felt that loss because we're going through the grieving stages right now. We're in denial and bargaining and anger all at the same time, and that little, that little child was removed from her connection to her siblings. That doesn't feel good. She was denied a family of where her blood connection is. She'll never experience her heritage because that family never allowed it before, and those kids question why they can't see their little sister anymore. The mom and the dad were opposed to it but they don't have a voice. Like the judge thinks that this is the best interest for that kid, but he's the one that severed those ties that do bind, cause he guaranteed by the time she's a teenager, and we all know this, she'll come back and she'll ask where [her family is], or she'll end up on the streets because she won't be able to deal with it, you know, because she remembers. She'll remember where are these sisters of mine? My brothers, where are they? She will and you know, the decision of the judge, very, very wrong in our eyes, in my opinion, you know. He thinks that he did justice to her but didn't, and the other thing is that, just deprived her of a connection. It didn't matter what we said or did (Marie B).*

Marie A summarizes many of the concerns expressed by others as she describes her experience working in a mainstream agency.

*It's taking away our heritage. It's taking away our children's culture. It's taking away their families, their parents. It's taking away their extended families. They're placed with people they don't even know. They're learning their culture. They're learning their language. They're being taught to hate their parents. They're taught that their parents were bad. That's what I'm hearing from families now (Marie A).*

### **Foster Care versus Parental Rights**

One of the inequalities in the current system is the lack of parental rights as compared to the rights of foster parents. As Marcel notes, foster parents have the right to appeal most decisions whereas the courts are the only recourse for birth parents.

*If you ask me in the existing child welfare the way it is now, foster parents have more rights than parents, you know. They can appeal this and they can appeal that, and they can appeal this and they can appeal that, within the existing legislation right now. The way the legislation is for parents, they can't appeal a thing. They could through a court and that's it. You see the discrepancy there, you know, I mean there's nothing for parents for their own protection, for their own rights, for their own children, you know. It's so lopsided. The whole child welfare system is built up just to keep the big monster going, but foster parents have so many rights (Marcel).*

Dawn reasoned that part of the explanation for Indigenous parents' reticence to advocate for their rights would be that parents who have had their children removed and who have been repressed historically would be less empowered than the more vocal foster parents.

*...there's a selection that's done for foster parents, so arguably they are more vocal and more, for the most part, probably able to take their case forward than a family that just had their kids removed and already feel like they have no say, and especially when you take our First Nations families who, you know, are often discriminated against and come from that. Like now, it's difficult for them to get up and fight, you know. So foster parents push their side over, forward and through and have the vocal abilities, I guess, to do that, and our families don't. So yeah, they end up with more rights in that way (Dawn).*

One of the developments that resulted from the devolution was the growth of a foster family lobby group who were concerned that their foster children would be removed and placed in Indigenous homes.

*Like we had another strong lobby group with foster parents because they were determined that when, and they were all the non-Aboriginal foster parents, right, especially in Winnipeg, and they had a strong lobby group that met with the Minister and they wanted all kinds of restrictions because they were so concerned that, you know, the First Nations agencies were just going to rip these kids out of their homes and return them back to the reserves (Dawn).*

As Dawn explains the government agreed to keep in place an independent appeal process for the foster parents in the event that a child was removed. Until the devolution occurred the Support Branch made the decisions and technically that responsibility should have transferred to the authorities.

*Well the foster parents wouldn't do it. You know what they said? "Well, they're First Nations [authorities] and they'll side with the First Nations." I said, "Excuse me, but the government's been non-Aboriginal and no one's ever accused [them of not being impartial]"...So government said to us, "Okay how about if for the first three years, we set up an Independent Appeal Panel so it can, the Authority makes a decision and then if they're not happy, it can go up there". And we were saying "That's pretty racist. All these years, you could make the decision and now because we're doing it and you have non-Aboriginal foster parents who don't like that idea,*

*and because all of a sudden they think they're not going to get a fair hearing." That was not their concern before, you know. But we compromised and we said, "Alright, for three years." Well it's now been like 13 years, and we still have that Independent Appeal Panel. And we've gone back to government and said, 'you said 3 years. Take it out of legislation' - still not done. Very few cases go there (Dawn).*

### **Positive Foster Care**

Although storytellers expressed numerous concerns regarding foster care services in Manitoba, they also recognized that there are caring foster parents who are doing their part in providing positive foster homes for children.

*And there's, you know, there's some foster parents that we have that are not Aboriginal but they will do anything to give that kid what it needs. I just wish that everyone could be like that, and they, like they know at some point these kids may go back to their families. Then we have, on the other side, foster parents who, you know, they don't want, like as soon as the worker comes in, they want to know what are you here for, you know. It's just like they don't want anyone to see what goes on in their family and then that's where you get to kind of red flag where you're going to have problems with this foster parent at some point in time, because you can see it (Laury).*

Catherine supports the foster parents who show love and comfort to the children in their care regardless of ethnic culture.

*You know, you see people who are non-Native working all day and all night and see them hugging our kids when our kids are crying, who cares, right? But people, 'oh they're not Aboriginal or they're not in an Aboriginal home'. But they love our kids. (Catherine).*

There can be little doubt that people from non-Indigenous cultures are fully capable of showing love and caring for Indigenous foster children. The question is whether this is enough to compensate for the loss of cultural and family connectivity. The concern regarding the high number of non-Indigenous foster homes is directly related to the outcomes for Indigenous foster children being raised by non-Indigenous foster parents and who are being isolated from their families, communities, language and cultural knowledge. It is this concern that fuels the argument that the child welfare system is reproducing similar if not worse disruptions and trauma for Indigenous families and communities than the residential school system. With whole communities still reeling from the negative impacts of the residential schools and sixties scoop, the practice of maintaining non-Indigenous foster homes is under scrutiny by many Indigenous agencies.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter is the story of transition from the pre-devolution planning phase to the actual devolution which began with the transfer of child welfare files. The chapter begins with describing how social workers experienced the transfer from both an Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspective; the shortage of Indigenous foster homes at the time of devolution; the lack of information foster parents had about the devolution process; the obstacles in recruiting Indigenous foster homes; the expectations and demands for high rates for many of the children in care; cultural training and expectations for foster parents; concerns about loss of cultural identity for children in care, and the rights of foster parents versus birth parents.

## CHAPTER 9

### WORKING AT THE FRONTLINES

#### *Working with the data*

That's what they call it  
 Working with the data  
 But it's so much more than data  
 It's tears and raw emotion  
 It's anger and frustration  
 Its stories shared, memories re-lived  
 Families torn asunder  
 Children's cries, screaming for mommy, daddy  
 Memories burned into your soul  
 Home, familiar sights, sounds, smells dissipating  
 Leaving only fading memories  
 Entwined in a never ending ache to 'go home'  
 To play our games, eat mom's food  
 To hug and snuggle in familiar arms  
 I'll be good, I promise  
 Please, please just take me home, please...  
 It's tough to stand by watching  
 Children hurt by a system  
 A government system who takes on their care  
 Youth dying left with no hope  
 Parents running from their pain  
 Lost in a world of addictions  
 Fighting, fighting to escape a world of darkness  
 What are we doing  
 When will we turn this system on its head  
 Are we the ones who are doing this  
 They promised change  
 Our children were to go home  
 We were the spark to keep our culture alive  
 To keep the culture strong  
 Creator, please,  
 Please make our fires strong,  
 Please bring our children home  
 Osowa Askiv Iskwew

## **Introduction: Challenges in the Field**

Throughout the storytelling process it was evident that the social workers involved in the study were deeply committed to the children and families and to the work they do in child welfare. The length of time spent in the field by the vast majority of individuals who shared their stories is one of the strongest indications of that commitment. The people I spoke with were realistic and forthright about the challenges they face on a day-to-day basis and many shared their concerns. Some of the issues they spoke to were related to high caseloads, racism in the workplace and the trauma they experienced when children were hurt or died while in care.

### **High Caseloads**

While representatives from two agencies indicate that their caseloads are reasonably low, others described the caseloads as high and in some situations difficult to manage. As an example of reasonable caseloads Joan indicates that, “we have a very manageable workload here, like 20 to 25 cases, but sometimes, it ebbs and flows, right” (Joan). Still others reported higher caseloads, “I’d say the average caseload is 35 to 45” (Nadine).

Marie A revisits the original vision which included lower caseloads and more direct work with families.

*...they had all these beautiful visions and programs and they were going to give them all this funding, and exactly, just think about how long ago that was? They wanted to lower the caseloads so that social workers can really work and support families (Marie A).*

Allison describes current work conditions as very different than the original vision of devolution and goes on to explain how the high caseloads impact negatively on the work with families. Maintaining high caseloads means more paperwork which combined with the time required to input information into CFIS<sup>22</sup> means more time at the desk rather than with families.

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<sup>22</sup> CFIS refers to information management system used by child welfare agencies in Manitoba.

*I think that overall because of the higher numbers in care, in terms of the funding pieces, that hasn't changed. Staff still have high caseloads, and they're not able to meet all their demands. Lots of paperwork, it's really heavy on paperwork, and when you're in the office doing paperwork, how much quality time are you spending in the field building those relationships with families (Allison).*

Laury provides detail on the role CFIS plays in the day-to-day work of child welfare workers.

*From the minute they get into the office, they're on their computers. They have to open up CFIS and everything, even if a phone call comes in, they have to put it on CFIS right away, and if they put it in their little books, at some point they have to put it on, everything has to go on CFIS. If there's an abuse referral, if there's a new intake that comes in, like it's all got to go on CFIS right away. Some workers are really good at it. Some struggle, they really struggle (Laury).*

As Maria notes there have been efforts made to reduce the number of cases per social worker but for the most part that is not the daily reality as cases are usually redistributed to colleagues when social workers go on leave, holidays or when there is a gap in hiring after someone leaves the agency.

*There have been inquiries and recommendations about caseload ratios; however it is difficult to meet those ideal ratios. They're always higher. For example, in the situation where, even if the person carries what looks like a reasonable caseload, although it's not what the recommendation is, you often have someone going on leave, so then people are picking up other people's caseloads, which don't get recognized in a funding formula. So I do see a lot more pressure put on people (Maria).*

In Louise's experience child welfare has moved to a more compliance driven system with the increase of requirements and resulting demands in recording and reporting which in turn impacts direct work with families.

*...it's really a compliance driven system now I guess as opposed to anything else... there are so many things that workers are required to do. You don't even have time to do what you're meant to do, which I think is to go out and work with families and try to keep children in their homes, and try to, you know, develop the programming that you need to keep them there (Louise).*

The high caseloads in combination with increased documentation required for the changes that have been implemented since devolution such as the SDMs, a new risk assessments tool, the requirement to record all calls and conversations regarding all child welfare related interactions on CFIS, and the lengthy IRAP applications for increasing foster care levels on behalf of foster parents,

all add to workloads. Another requirement that came out of the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry is the need to meet face-to-face with every child on every social worker's caseload every thirty days to ensure their safety which involves travel for the foster children living in rural areas. Other regular responsibilities such as preparing for and attending court, responding to foster and birth parents concerns, crisis that come up in child welfare settings and extensive documentation can become overwhelming in the face of high caseloads experienced in many agencies.

*...we have to see all our CICs [children in care]. You have to see them once a month. I've got 30 plus. There are only 20 working days, so as much as the Aboriginal agencies, they are good, but in some ways, there is a lot of expectation because these are our children. They're from our communities. We need to go out and see them. We need you guys to do this. Sometimes, you feel as a social worker, like you're burning out because the agency does have these expectations and then on a personal level you also want to give, give, give (Susan).*

Another concern that was raised that is related to caseload stressors is the time required to find resources for the families and children on their caseloads.

*...so we're often digging for our own support workers. We're digging for our own respite providers or we're digging around for our own drivers, you know, because we can't do it all. Like front-line social workers can't do it all. They have to be able to rely on a team of people around that kid, and if you don't have that, if you have to be everything, it's even more time consuming. If you have to drive a kid to a doctor's appointment, that's, you know, the majority of your afternoon on one kid. That's tough. But, you know, if you don't have that pool of people or those resources, then you're stuck. So that needs to be looked at too, is just they're expected to do it... To be everything, and that's impossible. So of course, you know, kids are falling through the cracks and of course, you know, culture is being overlooked, and of course, not for any miss-intent, bad intentions, but just being overwhelmed with the caseload itself, because it should never have been that high in the first place. How we make that okay, I don't know (Faye).*

### **Racism in Child Welfare – Pre-Devolution**

*The devolution in my opinion*

Culture, the social worker said, culture is great.  
 Everyone needs culture  
 I took courses you know  
 Good thing I did  
 Because now I can work with all kinds, she said  
 People don't need someone from their own culture  
 Look at the rest of us  
 We don't get a choice, she said  
 And we have culture too.

Problems? No problems she said  
 We just have too many forms, she said  
 Can barely squeeze in our visits  
 And *they* don't even fill out their forms  
 No, they don't fill out forms, she said.  
 Sharing information?  
 I can't protect confidentiality  
 When they all have the same last name, she said  
 They all have the same last name  
 We do all their work for them  
 Cover their crisis, cover their...  
 Culture is great, she said  
 I was trained to work with all sorts  
 And they can't pull the residential card on me  
 No, they can't pull that card on me  
 I've been there, she said  
 My folks were poor and alcoholics, and  
 Look at me now, she said, *look at me.*

Osowa Askiy Iskwew

A number of people shared their experiences with racism in child welfare and described how difficult it made their work because most of the stories were based on racism perpetuated by the people they worked with and who were providing child welfare services to a population of primarily Indigenous people. The first of these stories are from a period in time when Indigenous social workers were a minority of workers in mainstream child welfare agencies. Catherine describes the reaction in the agency where she worked when the AJI-CWI was announced.

*And then, when the AJI-CWI was announced, oh my God, it was like throwing gasoline on a smoldering hatred and anger about Aboriginal people. Like they always said, they're all on welfare, like those are the steady comments all the time, and now what? And everybody was worried about their own jobs and management is telling people there'll be jobs for everybody. Don't worry about it. And some people, 'oh I look pretty good in braids'. Like piss off. Like, you know, and it was just stupid comments like that constantly... a lot of them were like middle and upper class people, right, and racist. I tell you there's not a day that went by when I didn't hear derogatory stuff about our people every day, and sometimes I would address it, and sometimes I would just go - what the hell? Why? Because then I get up in a tizzy and then I'm all po'd at people and I need to focus my energy on my clients and try to be respectful to everybody; but it's a different life (sighing) (Catherine).*

Susan shared a story about her reaction to racist remarks denigrating an Indigenous family involved with the child welfare agency where she worked.

*I remember the social worker had gone on a home visit and she had come back. I was sitting in my cubicle and then there were a few workers there and she was talking and she was saying how she was going to have to go home and shower. And I guess someone said, 'Oh like why'? She goes, "Oh that home I went to", she goes, "It smelled so poor". And I could feel like my heart beating and I was like, 'oh my god', right? I'm like, I cannot believe that this is coming out of her mouth. So anyway I poked my head out and I said, "Out of curiosity", I'm like, "What does poor smell like"? And then her face went red and she's just, she shut up. I don't think she thought I was there...what is filing a grievance going to do? I still have to work with that lady and then there was still others, you know, I would probably have been like targeted (Susan).*

Faye shared an experience when she and other Indigenous students were subjected to racist remarks in a classroom setting at a time the discussions regarding the AJI-CWI devolution were just beginning.

*Even in class, I remember being in class in the late 90's, when they were talking, they were just talking about it [devolution], and ...non-Native students making very racist statements about, you know, 'why would this have to happen and why would they, when they can't take care of their kids now', you know, that kind of stuff was being said. One guy stood up and said, said to the professor, you know, "Is there any way this nightmare is going to go away or is this really what we're going to have to live with it"? You know, and me and the other one or two Native students just sat there and had to listen to this. Yeah, so that was, that was ...in a big class, not a small class, it was a big social policy class, and the professor didn't do much to knock it down or make it stop. He just let the discussion happen...he's [the student] still in the field. He's still in child welfare. He's at the general agency (Faye).*

In the same time period, child welfare in Manitoba made it compulsory for child welfare staff members to learn about Indigenous culture and spirituality by having them attend a teaching lodge. As Catherine notes, not everyone embraced it as an opportunity to go out into the community to learn something valuable about the people with whom they were working. As she explains, "No way". It was like in one of our team meetings, people were complaining about it, and one guy said, "Well what are we going to learn? He says, they're teaching us what? The little brown bottle?" (Catherine).

As efforts in the early days of implementation were in place to increase the number of Indigenous child welfare workers in mainstream agencies, the racist remarks continued. Marie A

describes the atmosphere and racism in the agency where she was employed after the devolution was in place.

*...we had the Aboriginal unit and then we had the Métis unit and then the General unit. That's how they segregated us. And it wasn't uncommon to hear front-line non-Aboriginal workers walk out back. They would have to walk behind, like past our unit to get to go out back to have their smokes, right. They would walk out and one of the things that I've heard many of them say, "Oh those fucking bitches, you know, that Aboriginal bitch, she thought she would tell me what to do. I fucking told her, you're Native trash. We're gonna take your kids, we're gonna take your kids and that's all there is to it". And they're laughing and they're joking among themselves, and they know very well that this is the Aboriginal part and they're laughing and they're joking... When we used to go into the building, like I said, my friend, she'd walk in and we'd walk in the morning and there'd be like all these non-Aboriginal workers there, and she'd go, "Good morning!" And not a word, not a word (Marie A).*

Debbie makes the point that some people continue to speak in racist terms regarding Indigenous clients.

*There's a lot of workers, supervisors, that have said to me things like, oh they're just drunks. They don't deserve nothing. You know, stuff like that. I mean it just doesn't make any sense to me, and that's, I mean, 20 years ago I heard that. I've heard it at the latest, a month and a half ago. So I'm, 'where does that thinking come from'? ...And they're so blunt about it, you know, like you're gonna agree with them? Like I'm gonna agree with you? Like really, what the hell? What's the matter with you? So, I've advocated for families and gotten into trouble over it because it's the right thing to do and they don't want, the supervisors and upper managers don't want to hear it. They're not interested (Debbie).*

Marcel describes his early experiences with blatant racism which was supported in policies such as segregation and makes the point that today Indigenous people continue to fight racist policies which may be less transparent but still impact critical decisions related to the control of child welfare and funding.

*...there was, and there still is, very, especially the provincial government has such a problem with racism in their organizations, and we always had to fight against that, you know. Well, I've been fighting against that all my life. Today it's not as blatant as it was. It used to be segregation... Yeah, segregation. You'd go to a movie, you'd have to sit on this side, you know. That part's for the Aboriginal people. This part was for the white people. Even in the schools when I was going to school in my first time, I didn't even know what the heck racism was. I'd never experienced it before, you know. Nobody ever called me a dirty Indian until I was off of the community. I looked around, 'I'm clean, I'm not dirty'. But still today, it's still prevalent in the provincial systems, you know. I'm sure in time that's going to change. It's not as blatant as it used to be. It's more subtle and it's hidden. And a lot of times it's hidden in what they do to the child welfare system, to the Aboriginal agencies, to the funding and that, and who controls all of that, right? You know, just to try and keep us down, you know, and that's not right. We're supposed to be living in a good and just society. For some, I guess (Marcel).*

Nadine demonstrates the complexity of racism as she describes how racism can be expressed in unexpected ways and from different groups of individuals. She describes some of her experience with racism as a front line social worker.

*But I did have a handful of people that were Caucasian and they would pick the Métis [agency] because they had Aboriginal children and then they would treat me with racism, and they would ask me things like...who's the fucking Indian telling us how to raise our kids, and what not. So I experienced some of that. I also experienced racism from the other end where I had an Aboriginal woman and she didn't want to deal with me because I'm Aboriginal. And that perception was, she was used to having all different types of racists sitting in front of her dictating, or whatever the situation was, but she wasn't used to having an Aboriginal woman in front of her and what was explained to me was that, she felt even more less than because I was a successful Aboriginal woman rather than a Caucasian or Asian or whatever have you there (Nadine).*

For the most part racism is more subtle in today's society but as Michelle notes "racism is alive and well". She cites the example of a room full of senior management who recently took a workshop to inform them of issues such as residential schools and historical trauma. Michelle questions how people who have been educated and work with mainly Indigenous people would not have been exposed to the information that was "Social Work 101 kind of stuff...a lot of time was spent on it, and I thought that's kind of sad that everybody in this room doesn't always understand, or doesn't already understand and appreciate, you know, what had come from that" (Michelle).

Bert Crocker responds to the question of racism from his position as an ally who has spent more than 40 years working with Indigenous people in child welfare.

*I mean there was a lot of racism and I mean some of it was within the agency, no question. Some of it was in other places, you know, I came across it years ago in school settings. I came across it when I had dealings with police services. Has it gone away? I don't know. Has it gone underground? You bet, you know. People who are racist are, for the most, better at hiding it and probably more selective with respect to where and under what circumstances they let it show a little bit, or quite a bit, or whatever.*

*It's almost impossible to be working in child welfare currently and to be openly racist in terms of how you provide your services...the Authorities can take some credit for that, but so can society generally, so can the Truth and Reconciliation process, so can the efforts that many schools have taken to provide, at least a little bit, in their curriculum about, you know, cross-cultural and you know, the importance of appreciating the contributions of all different groups and races and cultures. So yeah, you know, devolution has helped, but is devolution the only explanation for that change? No way. (Bert).*

## Trauma and Compassion Fatigue in Child Welfare

There are numerous contributors to compassion fatigue which is commonly referred to as burn-out in the social services. A number of social workers spoke about the trauma in child welfare in different contexts such as overwhelming workloads related to high caseload numbers, lack of sufficient supervision in the face of difficult situations, historical trauma and the loss of children in their care.

Marie A shared her story shortly after she had left her child welfare position to pursue a different career. With new files being opened on a daily basis the numbers were exceptionally high in the agency where she worked, and eventually the crisis oriented work led to a decision for her to leave child welfare.

*There's so many of them being burned out, they give up. That's why I left. I couldn't do it anymore. I had 70 to 100 cases and you get to the point where you're not working effectively with these people. You're not helping these people... You know what you're doing? You're doing crisis intervention. That's all you're doing. You know, you come in you check your phone, there's so much - families are in crisis. Those are the ones you check for immediately, those are the ones, you have to prioritize them, right. So it went from something that had a great vision to something that's just the same (Marie A).*

Faye's acknowledges the emotional toll that the work takes and notes that many social workers stay an average of two to three years.

*The turnover is so high, you know, the social workers will stay for maybe 2 or 3 years and then they're gone, because they've gathered that experience and they're gone to something else, or they're burnt out, which happens pretty quick. Some people don't realize the emotional toll that this job takes on you (Faye).*

Louise works in an agency that has a high staff retention rate and yet describes the yoyo effect of difficult days when the exhaustion and discouragement set in and she questions her role and yet how that turns around when she recognizes the real reasons she is in child welfare and she is ready to return to her work.

*...and that's why, you know, that's why we stay here, because I mean some days, it's just, it's like you go and it's like, I just can't take it anymore. Like I don't even want to be in the system anymore. I can't see another story. I can't read another article, you know, I can't do it. And then you go home, and then on Monday morning you get up and you think, well I don't do this job for the media, and I don't do this job for the*

*province or whoever. I do it because like I care about those families. Like I see these families; I see those families in the grocery store. I see them every day. Like, you know, they're in the community, and even more so, for those staff who live right there in the community, and you know, you care for those people and you want your community to succeed and you want those kids home and that's why you do it, and that's why people stay, because there's always hope, right. There's always hope in the future that things will get better, and it hasn't all been terrible (Louise).*

The high turnover in child welfare presents additional stressors for agencies as they are continually rehiring and training, making it difficult to develop a stable and experienced workforce.

As Catherine notes, "In the last 6 years, I don't think there's, like in this department, there's not been, like it's all new. Even in the last year, my whole department's new" (Catherine).

Maria has observed that she has noted an increase in stress related leaves which she contributes, in part, to an increased demand in work related stressors.

*To me there's also been an increase in compassion fatigue in terms of what people are experiencing; I'm going to use the old term, burnout. To me there's been an increase in posttraumatic stress disorder related claims as well. And I would venture to say it's got a lot to do with the increased demand on workers to produce paperwork and still meet the requirements to have the face-to-face and personal contact. (Maria)*

As Wade explains, even for those who have immersed themselves in their careers in child welfare when they do leave it becomes a topic that they prefer to avoid.

*I'm 30 years in with the province where I started; you've seen it all, right, and I don't know, at some point in time, because it's such a stressful job and you see such horrors that, you know...I've had colleagues who just, once they get out of child welfare, they don't want to talk about it. They don't want to read about it. They don't want to even consider anything about child welfare because it's something you dedicated or committed your life to, and they've had enough. They really have (Wade).*

Faye talks about the need to teach people who enter the field of child welfare that they should anticipate that the work will often take them out of their personal comfort zone and being empathetic to the families' experience will help keep them centered.

*Because this job, a lot of it is being out of your comfort level. No one likes to get into a confrontation and when the clients are upset with you, it's not easy. When the clients are swearing at you, it's not easy. But remaining professional and remaining objective and thinking, and being empathetic to the fact that this is a very stressful time in their lives; you've just taken their children. How do you expect them to be towards you? Any other reaction would actually be abnormal (Faye).*

Trauma is also experienced when people feel caught in positions that conflict with their personal teachings and values. Laury explains the conflict she feels in her work as the apprehension of Indigenous children continues at an alarming rate and how the sense of helplessness sets in when you are required to follow established protocols and standards that result in more apprehensions.

*But it's just like, it's just like I feel like what Children's Aid did to our families back then; I feel now as an Aboriginal person, that's what we're doing. It's just the people have changed and where I'm Aboriginal but I'm doing the same thing. Sometimes I think, 'oh my god, what am I doing to this family'? Because this is not what I would normally do, right, but because we have to follow all these things that they're making us use. Then I'm thinking, 'what am I doing'? Like even when I go to court, I think, what, you know, 'what are we doing to these kids', you know. And AJI, the purpose was, again, the initial vision was to prevent kids from coming into care, working more with families. That never happened. We're bringing kids in faster; like today a baby is born and that baby is coming into care. Like it's just, I bet you in a week, we're apprehending 5 babies a week. It's not good (Laury).*

Faye explains that in spite of the public's perspective of child welfare workers the removal of children is traumatic for everyone involved, including the social workers.

*And then we wonder why the public sees us, or views us, as baby-snatchers and you know, all those kinds of nasty things, because the system forces us to do that, and if only the public knew what we know, that we wish we could help the family. We didn't want to do that apprehension. I've done two, I did two apprehensions in my career on the front-lines, the 7 years that I, and it's just something that you'll never forget, you know, taking children away from their families. It's traumatic for everyone involved. Nobody likes to do it. It's not something that people like to do. So even those labels that exist out there that we enjoy taking children, that's not true at all. Not to any. But no one, unless they've worked this job, would know that, you know, how awful it is to have to take a child away from their family, and have them screaming in the back of your car as you're driving away from that house (Faye).*

The relationship with certain media outlets often adds to the day-to-day stress and the fact that there are no responses made to refute the stories due to confidentiality concerns makes it even more difficult.

*...the image that the public sees of child welfare is just what they get in the media and that's so inaccurate. You know, certainly there's tragic stories where things have happened and that information is not necessarily inaccurate, but there's never anything good about child welfare and because of the confidentiality pieces... So it's like, like nobody responds to negative stories. I find that different because I don't know but good or bad, when there's bad stories about the police in the media, then right away you have the police at least responding or trying to, and giving a story, whereas our Authorities, our agencies, like nobody responds. It just, the story's out there and it just sits. I don't blame the public for having a bad image of CFS, you know, because that's all they know, like they're not in the system... (Louise).*

Brenda agrees that the relationship with the media needs to change and she believes the authorities should have a role in making changes.

*I think what needs to change, child welfare is viewed very negatively in this province and part of the issue is, there's all kinds of stuff being said. Nobody responds, you know. We were talking about this yesterday. The media can say whatever they want about child welfare and they say terrible things about child welfare. Not one Authority steps up for us. We can't step up and defend child welfare, you know, and talk about how things are and the realities we face. I think that our Authorities need to step up to the plate (Brenda)*

Rose Marie reminds us that Indigenous people, including child welfare workers, continue to be impacted on a daily basis by the deeply rooted historic trauma regardless of a person's role in the community. It is through healing and working through personal trauma that in turn provides individuals with the knowledge to teach others about how to work with the deeply rooted pain. Personal healing needs to occur before social workers can effectively work with others who are experiencing trauma.

*But you know what, the historic trauma we deal with of our people that is something so significant that our child welfare agencies are not dealing with. I mean we're in an environment now of Truth and Reconciliation but people continue to say "give it up..." It's not going to be old news. It was a time that really created a lot of harm, so much damage to our people and you see, that's what we're working with every day, that transmission. You know, we can create all the fancy models and everything else that everybody thinks and believes, they just don't understand the relationships that are so deep rooted, that go further than any legislative requirement or act. You know, there's just so much that we bring as Anishinaabe people and people working in the system to teach them (Rose Marie).*

It is apparent that individual social workers assess the work related stressors in their environment and respond in the way that best fits them and their circumstances. After working 22 years in child welfare Germaine decided to move on to different work. As she explains, "I'm leaving on good terms in the sense that I've always been brought up not to hate people and not to hate process and just to move on. If things can't change in the system, then it's time to jump off of it" (Germaine).

Faye emphasizes the importance of team building and helping each other through the difficult times. In her opinion you need a strong team and supportive supervisor to get through the days when you want to quit.

*So it doesn't matter what unit or what kind of specialized program you're in, foster care, you know, frontline statutory services, abuse investigator, you learn as a front-line worker to rely on your team. You have to have those relationships with your team. Your team becomes your family, you know, because we spend more time at work than we do with our actual families, so those people become your family, and when you have a particularly traumatizing incident, you'd better have a team that you can debrief with, and you'd better have a strong supervisor who's going to hold your head up and say, are you coming to work tomorrow? Are you coming back? Are you going to be able to continue doing this type of work? And you're only going to be able to get through stuff like that with support. So, but on a general basis, at our agencies, I see that dynamic. I see people supporting each other through this awful, awful job, and they do come back the next day. They do come back to work, so there's still some very refreshing aspects to the job, and that type of connection that you have with your co-workers is a major one. They really do become like your family. You form life-long friendships when you're working in child welfare because you have each other's back (Faye).*

### **Surviving the Trauma of Child Deaths**

Several people spoke about trauma in relation to the passing of children and youth in care for whom they felt a deep sense of responsibility. In describing her work situation when children died in care, it is evident during that period of time Susan was responsible for a very high number of cases, did not feel she had a supportive environment and had experienced historic trauma, all of which contributed to and complicated her personal trauma.

*I really needed the break, because when I was with Winnipeg CFS, like your caseloads were really high...I think I was sitting at almost 60, ...So yeah, definitely I needed a change because just before the devolution, I had two children die on my caseload and it's hard...And I think when I was at Winnipeg CFS, there really wasn't a lot of support in terms of being able to talk to people, because in my unit, I was the only Aboriginal person, so I sort of felt, if I'm going to talk to someone, they're not going to really understand where I'm coming from, and for me too, I always have my heart on my arm because I was a permanent ward too...So it was hard. And when I was at Winnipeg CFS, one of the children that died. He was actually murdered and it was just one of those situations, wrong place, wrong time, and I think after that I was just kind of done. Like it just hurt so much because this boy was from [a northern community]. He'd come to Winnipeg and it's almost like he just had, I guess, had a hard time adjusting to Winnipeg and just got into the wrong crowd of kids and everything. So yeah, the devolution, yeah, was an opportunity for change, so I went to [an Indigenous agency] and there it was really, really good. Got to charge my battery (Susan).*

Nadine's story took place after the devolution and represents a time when her agency which had started from the ground up was still struggling with management issues. She describes it as a time that her case load was spiraling upward and "supervision wasn't happening".

*Then I got depressed and I got sick, and then kids are dying on my caseload, and, well two kids died [suicide] on my caseload... The second time I was a basket case...and I have to say, that experience was the worst in my life because I was just thrown into the fire when it came to dealing with the family, and even the second one, I felt like I was thrown into the fire in dealing with that family. And I was devastated, like can't even, oh my gosh, and then after that, I still tried to stick around. I tried, like I'm strong, I can do this. I can do this and I couldn't. I fell apart and I had to resign because I wasn't eligible for disability, like I wasn't eligible for benefits. We weren't covered under stress from work, so I got denied. I lost my home, my car. I had two little kids with me, so now I'm couch surfing, staying on my addicted relatives couches. It was horrible. I had no money, no income ... So I lost them both within a two week period and it was horrible. (Nadine).*

As Nadine explains, she knows that she does good social work but was overwhelmed and did not get the support when she really needed it. Although Nadine went back to work in her agency in a different position where she feels she still makes a difference and feels good about her work, she nonetheless feels the impact from those traumatic times.

*I was good at what I did. It was the lack of support that got me where I was. So that was devastating to me because I just put 10 years into this agency and I'm committed, and I feel like nobody else noticed. And I have this reputation now and I don't like that. I don't like that shadow following me around like, like I'm not good at what I do or that I can't do protection, which I can, I know I can (Nadine).*

Faye describes when she experienced two child deaths with her team and her need to move to a different agency shortly after the loss.

*I experienced two child deaths in my time as a senior manager and it was just as difficult because I felt responsible for that unit and those kids died. They weren't in care though. They had left care but they were still, they had just left care. So that just about did me in. I can tell you that that was a major factor into why I left, why I left that agency, because I loved that job and I liked that agency, but that just about did me in. So it was time to re-evaluate (Faye).*

As Faye goes on to explain social workers do not just walk away and forget the trauma of child deaths, but rather many feel the need to leave the agency or leave child welfare completely.

*...some of those awful stories never reach the media, but as child welfare workers, we know them. We live with them every single day. And the careers, you think back on your careers and you can remember the awful ones and where you were and what happened, especially for those unfortunate workers who had to experience a child death on their caseload and that is particularly rough on a frontline worker. Those are often the ones that'll*

*have to go on leave or they'll just quit, and say, I can't work in this field anymore. It's just too much... (Faye).*

### **The Role of a Crisis Team**

One Indigenous agency had the foresight to train a crisis team who was responsible for responding to crisis in their rural communities, providing support to sister agencies and responding to government requests for assistance. The crisis team was unique as their community based experience provided insight into the relationship of trauma among community members and how to support everyone involved including the community social workers. Louise speaks to the importance of the crisis team and the loss of its funding.

*We had our own treatment team, providing counseling, service support, and that's been our biggest loss which we had to do because of the funding piece, when our agency funding changed under this whole process, because ... when there was a crisis in the community, oftentimes you have staff who are involved in that crisis because they're related to people in the community and they're from there, so they're involved in that crisis situation directly and they need supports to be brought in because they can't be the support people at the time. And the whole program, we had to cut that... We've had situations where there's been major crises and like we have nobody to send. We used to be able to, like say for example, if there was another agency had a crisis because we had that team, we could still keep our core members but send a few to try to help out sister agencies. The province asked us for help different times, you know, in situations like that, and we were able to do those kinds of things. Now we can't, like we can't (Louise).*

### **Chapter Summary**

The underlying topic for this chapter is the trauma experienced by frontlines child welfare workers. The field of child welfare can be extremely challenging at the best of times. When monumental organizational change is added to the everyday stressors of maintaining a busy workload and dealing with families in crisis, the tipping point can emerge surprisingly quickly. People spoke about high caseloads and stressful workloads required by an evolving system that was not only working through the devolution process but also responding to child death reviews and subsequent recommendations. They also shared stories of racism and resistance to implementing a different approach to doing child welfare. Another story emerged regarding trauma social workers endure when they find their values clashing with the work they are required to perform in the name

of legislation and policies. Three people shared their stories of loss and trauma when young people they had worked with died. The stories point out the urgent need for agency and collegial support and funding resources in order to maintain a healthy environment that encourages healing and support.

## CHAPTER 10

### METIS CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

#### Introduction: Pre-Devolution

The establishment of a Métis authority and the Métis child welfare agencies were an integral part of the AJI-CWI process. The fact that it was the first such agency in Manitoba made its journey unique in terms of the challenges and successes it experienced. While many aspects of that journey were similar to the other three authorities because they share the same legislation, standards and timelines, their experience was driven by determination to establish a new agency that reflected the Métis communities' vision to provide for their families with an approach that fit their unique cultural needs. The story reflected in this chapter of Métis child and family services is the composite story of those individuals who shared their stories and insights. A number of social workers who shared their stories were either currently employed with Metis Child, Family and Community Services (Metis CFCS) and Michif Child and Family Services or had worked with the agencies and/or authority at different points in its relatively brief history.

Before the AJI-CWI the Métis were restricted to providing non-mandated services through the Manitoba Metis Federation. As Linda explains, although they had the right to be notified when a Métis family became involved with child welfare, notifications were not provided consistently.

*...prior to devolution, in a sense, I was working for the Manitoba Metis Federation and I worked in a department there called Metis Family Support, and what we did was we tried to support families but we had no mandate whatsoever in terms of child welfare, right, so we were advocates. We would help support families involved with child welfare, so while the agencies out there knew about us and they could refer their families to us, it didn't necessarily always happen that way, right. And at that time too, we were supposed to be notified when our children came into care just like a Band would have to be, right, so they did do that but it was few and far between, you know. There were some good agencies and some not, or just individual workers (Linda).*

The Metis Family Support program continued to reach to out to as many families as possible, knowing that Métis children were not being matched with Métis foster homes or provided with culturally appropriate services while in care with mainstream CFS.

*...kids were put into care in homes that were not necessarily culturally appropriate. There was no cultural training like to even try to supplement the care that was being provided to them in absence of a culturally appropriate home. There was none of that. So I think that for us it was, at the very beginning, like it was always the fight for taking care of our own children, our own families, our own communities and so the hope was that, you know, someday we would have responsibility and authority to do that for ourselves (Linda).*

When the Authorities Act was eventually passed in the Manitoba Legislature, it was a day of celebration. “I remember being in the Leg that day when it was proclaimed, I think it was in November – and everybody, like once it was all done, everyone just started cheering and screaming” (Linda). In her description of the Métis vision, Linda indicates “we saw this vision, this new system where we, you know, could work with our families and our kids and we’d have resources to do things differently. We could be innovative... So I don’t think that that necessarily happened, but I think that was our dream (Linda).

Establishing the first Métis child welfare agency meant starting with the very basics from finding building space, to hiring staff and developing the legal paper work and policies necessary to operating a child welfare agency.

*...we didn’t have anything, right? We didn’t have any buildings, anything, so we were given funding to establish that, and a few staff, right, to develop your policies and then we had to have by-laws and operating policies, you know, that kind of stuff, so that happened. We were given a few secondments from the Province to help assist us, like as staff. They wouldn’t give us money to hire our staff. Like we had to take existing staff from the system, so that was another huge thing (Linda).*

Linda discussed the need for seconding staff and described the process from the perspective of the starting up a new agency whose administration were trying to be strategic about who would be chosen to work in their agency.

*...but how all the staff were going to be divvied up, and it was almost like the draft, like a hockey draft when it actually went down and who got who. Like it was literally, we had lists of people we really wanted to get. Like it was like that, it was like the hockey draft and that’s how it all went down for all the Authorities, how staff was split in different [authorities] (Linda).*

The board of directors consisted of community members who were also engaged in a learning curve.

*...you go and you just do the best you can, right? It's all new...we'd have Board meetings that we'd attend, talk to our Board about it... We were reporting to them rather than them directing us, for the most part, I'd say...our Board was made up of lay people, right, community members so they were, you know, paraprofessionals..., grannies ...but I mean they didn't understand the system, per se, right. So at the working group level at that time, they couldn't really direct us (Linda).*

Nadine describes her first weeks on the job ...so I began working with Métis CFS, and our agency was just beginning from the ground up. The first month I was sanding walls and doing the drywall and what not. So we were really starting from the beginning (Nadine). In this case, files were transferred before the agency was fully prepared.

*...when the devolution occurred and we started getting cases, and then they were coming in like so fast and we didn't have, like paper, we didn't have computers. We didn't have pens. We didn't have nothing yet. I was like running, we shared an office with Winnipeg Child & Family, and I'd go and borrow, I'd borrow their phone because mine just shut down. It was just horrific, but we just kept plugging through. We didn't have family support workers, foster care workers, nothing. We had to do all of it, and which was fine, but it was tough (Nadine).*

Linda describes the next step in establishing the agency which involved the time period when the files were transferred to the agency. She remembers it as a chaotic time simply because it was a new agency and had received approximately 500 new files along with child welfare workers and foster homes from Winnipeg CFS.

*...when it went live in 2003, the day that cases transferred, like we had staff for a period of time up to that point, but they weren't there for very long before they started transferring cases and we tried to do it so cases came with workers too...There was a lot of turmoil at that time. Like it was crazy, but imagine a system where all of a sudden everybody's getting a new worker and kids, you know, all of a sudden there was an agency. It was chaos. It was, and anybody who says it wasn't, is not being truthful. But that's basically how it unfolded for us. And then, yeah, we had some real growing pains, I'll tell you that, so, yeah. But we were a brand new agency. We'd never ever done that before, right. We had seasoned workers, you know, but not all of them (Linda).*

Nadine remembers the early years as being overwhelming in terms of high caseloads while at the same time trying to establish cultural programming and experiencing the expansion of the actual agency infrastructure.

*It was really tough and as time went on, every worker's files and caseloads were growing. Like there were a few of us at that agency that had 80 plus cases on our caseloads. I'm not even kidding, and it was horrible. So we got somebody to come in, contract work, and help us close some of those cases, but still it was constant putting*

*fires out. And so we're trying to like keep our heads above water and trying to develop this agency, and come up with some programs, and sharing circles and culture room, everything else was just growing and we're getting more buildings and more units, and the kids now, there would be permanent care kids that are so angry and so lost in the system ... I'm hoping that now we're at a point where things actually get a little better (Nadine).*

Another initiative that was unique to the Métis agency involved preparing workers beforehand through an education program based in the Red River College. Nadine was a member of the cohort who completed the program. In her words:

*Being in the diploma program was really difficult. It was a pilot project through the MMF, Red River [College] and the University of Victoria, and it was a child youth care and social work combined, and so we went through 3 years and then, like 2 years full time in class and we had 18 months of internship and then another year of mentorship, and then they finally recognized us after we went before a government panel and what not. So they didn't redo the pilot project because of the amount of hoops that we needed to jump through to be recognized. And even then, I still felt pigeon-holed, because I felt like there was, because it was a diploma and as time went on and I was getting more and more experienced, and so then I was too experienced for like a community position, and then there were so many BSW workers out there to compete against (Nadine).*

### **Métis Service Provision**

The Métis agencies are mandated to provide services to Métis and Inuit families and also provide services to non-Indigenous families who choose their agencies. While the number of Inuit families they provided services to is relatively small, it is a relationship that is based in respect for their culture and as a result of this commitment they have developed a unique working relationship with child and family services in Nunavut.

*And I guess the other thing that's different in terms of devolution as well, is because we're mandated to provide services for Inuit children and families, and when families are coming to Winnipeg from Nunavut, we do have a working relationship with them and if, for some reason, if they need to be involved with child welfare, we connect with Nunavut and get direction from them in terms of what would they like us to do. How can we work with you? What do we need to be doing over here? ... So we, you know, take direction from them as opposed to us, even though this is our jurisdiction, but just to honour their practice. And the wording is different. Like their wording is a little bit different, so when they say a certain term, I have to go and look at their legislation, although it means the same thing, but just the wording is a little bit different (Allison).*

The Métis agencies have a strong focus on keeping children in relatives' homes and connected to the Métis community. One of the ways this is done is through a concerted effort to find family members to care for foster children.

*We try as much as possible to place children with their families, with kin, whether its grandmas and grandpas or aunts and uncles or cousins, and we do searches. We have a staff member that takes a file and searches the family to see if there's any options there if we're not able to find family right away...so we do as much as we can to find extended family for them (Allison).*

As Nadine notes, this has been a successful endeavor as more than half their foster placements are relatives who become designated as Places of Safety. As she explains, "I am happy about the amount of Places of Safety we have over foster homes. Over 50% of our homes are Places of Safety or child specific license, rather than general foster care and specialized foster care (Nadine).

Another approach they use to ensure cultural continuity is through their adoption program in which they ensure matching Métis children with Métis families. While this approach is not always supported by outside agencies, the Métis agencies take a firm position.

*We also have an adoption program where...we match our kids with Métis families as well and when we go check the registry, when we put our information to the Adoption Registry, we ask for them to not only match our kids based on the child's needs but also with a Métis family. And we've had some challenges with that because the staff felt that there was an element of as though we were being discriminatory against families that are not Métis. And we said that, well this is what we practice and if we're going to have an adoption planned for Métis kids, we want them to be with a Métis family and to, because they belong to the Métis community and we don't want them to lose that connection. So I know that there was resistance from other agencies about that, but we just kept pushing and say no, don't send us families that are not Métis (Allison).*

The importance of keeping children connected to family and community is also emphasized through the use of openness agreements that allow for continued contact between the adopted children and their birth parents.

*Also with our adoption plans, all adoption plans have to have an openness agreement where the children have some connection, contact with their birth parent, providing that the birth parent wants contact...but overall most of the families that we have openness agreements with are honoring that (Allison).*

The success of their approach is tempered by the sheer number of children coming into care in the province and the associated difficulties involved in finding culturally matched homes for all Métis foster children. The next best solution, as Craig points out, is to find homes that are willing to expose the children to their culture while in their care.

*Children keep coming into care, and at a pretty alarming rate in this province. So we don't have the luxury of matching every Métis child off with a Métis caregiver. I wish we did, but we don't. Only a portion of our caregivers are Métis, so we have to place Métis children in non-Métis homes, Caucasian homes. So then the challenge there is, is with the Caucasian caregiver to come on board to allow this child to be exposed to their culture while they're in their care, and that can be a challenge in some homes, other homes it just works beautifully... (Craig).*

## **Challenges**

While the Métis Authority shared many similar challenges as the other Indigenous authorities during the devolution process, as the stories indicate, the efforts of Métis people in Manitoba to establish child welfare agencies that would reflect their history and culture were also unique in a number of different ways. One of the ongoing challenges is related to the fact that there are only two agencies, the Metis Child, Family and Community Services and the Michif Child and Family Services who are responsible to care for Métis families across Manitoba.

*But we have teams that work, so they just travel, like they travel around, so yeah. So our agency [Metis CFCS] just does Interlake and Southeast Manitoba, and the Michif does Brandon and the rest of the north... So that was another thing, we have such huge geographic areas to cover but we were never given the funding for that, right (Linda).*

One of the frustrations regarding the Métis' unique cultural history and place in Manitoba is related to the lack of understanding by other social workers in the child welfare system to recognize and identify who is Métis and who is not. As Allison explains the confusion regarding the identity of First Nations, Métis and Inuit is glaringly evident in the transfer of cases from mainstream agencies.

*...there's an Authority Determination Protocol<sup>23</sup> [ADPs] it's called, and that's how families pick a service provider and in general, people [social workers] who are not Aboriginal, they don't seem to understand the three different populations around, like Métis, Inuit and First Nations, because when they fill it out, they'll say Aboriginal and they'll call them, like 'they're Aboriginal' and they'll say something kind of wonky about them. So I get, when we read the ADPs there's a general sense that people still don't understand what that means - like the 3 different Aboriginal groups. And then when we get transfers, because we get cases that are coming*

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<sup>23</sup> The Authority Determination Protocol was introduced with the planning and implementation of the AJI-CWI to assist in the distribution of families with children in care among the four new authorities designated in law through the Child and Family Services Authorities Act. A FAQs page has been posted online and can be viewed at <http://www.aji-cwi.mb.ca/pdfs/adp-faqs.pdf>

*from the non-Aboriginal agency, you may have for example, the mom, let's say one parent is Caucasian and then the other parent is First Nations, and then they'll say the kids are Métis or they're half or three-quarter Métis, we think, well where do you guys get this information from (Allison)?*

The lack of knowledge regarding appropriate terminology and the understanding of the historical impact of the sixties scoop complicates working relationships and understanding among social workers who should be working to achieve positive outcomes for families.

*...you know, that word 'mixed blood' and sometimes there's not even an Aboriginal person in the family but they'll say they're Métis... And I also think just in general too, there's not a lot of people or, in the system, especially the new, like newer and younger workers not making those connections like to the sixties scoop and all the Aboriginal people that were adopted, and that's one of the reasons why our adoption program is so different, because we don't want to repeat that (Allison).*

### **The Strength of Métis Culture in Child Welfare**

People spoke about the importance of sharing the Métis culture with staff, foster parents and families alike.

*We do provide sweats, we have sharing circles, like I said. We have cultural camps where our staff dresses up like 1800s Métis people and we do cultural things like trapping and snaring and fishing and things like that. So we do that during the summer and the winter, so that's exciting (Nadine).*

Craig describes some of the cultural pieces that they share during their foster parent training.

*...we do lots of cultural work. We have a cultural staff. We have teams of youth workers that focus on culture. Like I say, I partner with a historian and a craft person who describes themselves as more of a crafty person, they do our foster parent cultural training. It's just a fun day. Yeah, it's one day, and half the day is a history lesson in the Métis nation, and the other half is, let's talk about some local Métis people that you might know of. Let's talk about how to weave a sash. Let's talk about playing the spoons. Let's talk about, and they have a Métis trivia game, that sort of stuff, and people just buy into it and it's just great. It's just really, really good. I'm very, very proud of the stuff we do on that front in our agency (Craig).*

The Métis culture is also shared with families using a variety of methods from educational kits to making drums. The reason for offering cultural activities is to support families to connect with their cultural roots and develop cultural identity and pride in their ancestral connections.

*In terms of the Métis culture, our agency is always promoting that with families who want to learn about the history of Métis people. We have a cultural kit that was developed by the Louis Riel Institute. We also give many kits to our permanent wards that are Métis. It will have like maybe the sash in there, or it'll have a book*

*about a Métis story and just information about Métis people. We have staff that facilitates crafts where they'll make like Métis specific items such as beading. Those are some of the things that they do but they also incorporate some First Nations items, like maybe dream catchers or they'll make drums, those kinds of things. So it's not only Métis but it's also about supporting what families want to learn or what they want to do (Allison).*

In Linda's perspective the Métis agencies success is measured through the response from people in the community.

*I mean I heard, like having gone to these like regional meetings I've heard families are happy, right. They've said, oh you know, we're so happy to have people from our own communities who understand our issues and understand the scenarios that we live in and understand where we're coming from and what we want for our families, for our kids, to be able to do this work. I mean, like they are. We hear this over and over and over again. Probably not so much at the agency level, you know, because just like again because of the nature of the work, right, but at MMF, and like at that level, I think they hear it a lot (Linda).*

Another measure of success is the children in care who are graduating from high school and going on to college and university. As Allison reports, "...we have students, we have kids that are, young people, that are at university; or Red River [College], and there's more students that are graduating high school" (Allison)

Nadine sums up her connection and support of the Métis culture in sustaining the children in care.

*When I get into a room full of Métis pride, I'm just like, my heart's just bursting. I grew up with a lot of racism. I grew up in Transcona so I feel like if any little bit of pride we could put in the children or the parents, then we should do it (Nadine).*

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter captures a portion of the story of the Manitoba Métis people's passage through the first years of the AJI-CWI devolution process. The historical and contemporary contributions of the Métis peoples in the province of Manitoba have never received the full recognition they deserve so it is not surprising that until the AJI-CWI became a reality, they had no official voice in child welfare. Their journey is unique in that it meant starting their child welfare authority and first agency, the Metis Child, Family and Community agency from the ground up. The only solid

components they had to begin building their organization were their vision to provide their people with culturally relevant child welfare support and the determination to make it happen.

The Métis storytellers, who worked at various points in the establishment of the authority and agencies, spoke about the early struggles to prepare for the actual start-up date when case files, child welfare workers, and foster families would begin arriving. The stories relate the tremendous amount of work and commitment it took to get through those early years. The determination to make a difference in the lives of the people they work with can still be heard in their telling of the story as they continue to forge ahead with their vision to provide Métis children with Métis foster homes, Métis adoptive families and Métis culture.

## CHAPTER 11

### POST DEVOLUTION CRITIQUE

#### Introduction: Assessing the Changes

Change, especially large scale organizational change is often met with a certain amount of apprehension, resistance and lack of trust. The AJI-CWI represented monumental change with movement of established staff, infusion of new staff, new infrastructure, newly formed authorities and changing rules and the transfer of workers, children in care, foster families and knowledge to newly established agencies. This chapter reviews the reaction to the devolution, which started in rural areas and small urban areas in 2003 and continued in Winnipeg and Thompson in 2005. The concerns and issues discussed in storytellers' stories covered a range of topics from concerns about how the devolution has impacted social worker and client relationships, and questions regarding aspects of the authorities' roles, the Child and Family Services Act, standards and training, and funding.

The vast majority of storytellers expressed concerns about the outcomes of the devolution. For example, Marie B considers the changes in the context of increasing number of children in care and likens the changes to the former Children's Aid Society.

*Honestly, it hasn't made a difference. Like that's the honest answer. Across the board, if you're looking at kids, you know, where the number has gone up, that hasn't improved their lives; no, that child welfare system for them has not improved because you're looking at a legacy of kids that have grown up in care, and who are the ones doing it? It's us, eh, and it hasn't improved for them because if you have 11,000 kids in care...then you have got to look within to see, because that's what I've done, I've looked within to see why are we at this state, you know?...like there's been a creation of a new form of Children's Aid. That's what it is. I mean that's a rough way of saying it, but that's what it is, because it hasn't created hope. It hasn't strengthened families the way it's supposed to. It hasn't kept kids at home. Very important. It hasn't kept kids at home...* (Marie B).

In Marcel's opinion, the devolution did not actually occur because the Child and Family Services Act did not change and Indigenous people are still not in charge of Indigenous child welfare.

*There was no devolution. All it did was changed was who did their work, right. But child welfare didn't change. The Act didn't change. Child welfare didn't change. The Authority didn't really change, maybe has some Aboriginal people working in there, but the focus, you know, you did child welfare from the mainstream perspective - didn't change. It's still the same. The promises of the devolution was all hogwash, you know. I mean they're supposed to, they said, oh yeah, we'll give back child welfare to Aboriginal people. That did not happen. But nothing, it can't happen because there's no [Indigenous] child welfare component to the Child Welfare Act, except where you have to legally notify a band now if a child comes into care, and that's it (Marcel).*

Richard De La Ronde makes the point that agencies are managed like mainstream agencies because that is how they are trained to deliver services: “Even within agencies, you have First Nations agencies, but they're run like government agencies, you know, they have people that are trained in a certain way...” (Richard). Nadine concurs with the idea that her agency mirrors mainstream governance.

*Well, I feel that my agency is very much like Winnipeg Child & Family, the structure of it. However we do have sharing circles. We do have, we have a lot of culture but I just feel the structure is very mirrored to Winnipeg Child & Family Services (Nadine).*

People used different descriptors to define the outcomes of devolution using terms describing it variously as “a myth” (Marie B); that “it's broken” (Craig); “We have the illusion of having control” (Conrad); “it's still provincially controlled” (Michelle); and “there's “a disconnect between child welfare and the other organizations around sharing information because everybody's always mindful of confidentially” (Allison).

Faye describes the dilemma of working in child welfare as being “stuck within a system that is not designed to help families, it's designed to apprehend kids, and that makes it really, really tough (Faye). Laury uses the train as a metaphor to describe how she feels about the devolution.

*I find now it's like we're on this train, it's like we're on this train. The best way I can describe it is we're on a train now and we can't get off. And it's just going, going, going and we can't get off. That's how I feel now (Laury).*

## The Child and Family Services Act

It was determined early on in the AJI-CWI process that the Child and Family Services Act and the Adoption Act would remain in place but the mandate would be devolved to First Nations and Métis peoples across the province. Judging from many of the comments expressing the need to change the act, the significance of that earlier decision appears to have been overshadowed by the initial excitement and planning for the structural changes that were to occur throughout the province.

Several people expressed disillusionment regarding the inability of the current Child and Family Services Act to meet Indigenous peoples' needs. Marcel acknowledges the only change to the act was the addition of the Authorities Act and he points to the need for changes to the legislation.

*It's unfortunate though the Act, the Child Welfare Act, never really changed during the devolution process, that didn't change at all. They just modified it just to create the authorities, that's all they did... There has to be changes to the system, to the legislation. It has to be more flexible to our needs, you know, it's a piece of paper and it could be changed, you know (Marcel).*

In Marie B's view the use of the Child and Family Services Act was meant as a temporary solution until Indigenous people developed their own act.

*So then the only recourse was to borrow that legislation from the province and they were given, you know, the mandate to run their own agency with the intention that as a people, we would have, the leaders would have arms-length into it for the time being, and then we would make up our own Act. Just like the way we're going to make up our own Indian Act. So we borrowed the Child Welfare Act (Marie B).*

Conrad emphasizes that not only have Indigenous people always cared for their families but First Nation communities in Manitoba have been practicing mandated child welfare since the late 1980s, "We had all our policies, and we had our codes and standards in place. We wanted you to give us that [the authority to develop a child welfare act] back then". In speaking to the AJI-CWI outcomes, Conrad makes it clear that not having legislative rights did not meet the communities' expectations and needs.

*But we already knew that we wanted more than just jurisdictional rights. We wanted our codes of standards. We wanted our own legislation at that time... They just wanted to get it out of the way and get it done and do it in a way that kind of gave what Aboriginal people needed, which was jurisdictional rights and case management... I mean clearly the province wasn't ready and the feds weren't ready to give jurisdictional rights completely and solely to Aboriginal people. I mean can you imagine what that would mean? I mean it would be more than just, you know, task managing cases and running agencies by themselves, it would be more on a governance level (Conrad).*

Germaine supports the point that Indigenous people still do not have legal authority or leverage to advocate for children in a way that meets their cultural needs. She also draws attention to the ongoing destruction to Indigenous family units under ill-advised legislation.

*It's like we don't have any legal authority per se as Anishanaabe people or as communities, First Nations communities, to really say, no we want our children. This is the way we want it to be implemented. There isn't that, so we don't have that leverage, that legal leverage, if you will, around having our children. Like to really fight and speak for our children and advocate for them to be in our homes, to be with First Nations people; and at the same time, there's so many issues that come with that, like around the sixties scoop, the Child Welfare Act, or the general welfare act itself had some serious implications to the destruction of families. That's what I've seen (Germaine).*

Conrad advocates unequivocally for self-governance that gives Indigenous people full control over child welfare.

*I have to stress the importance around in order to govern and have jurisdictional rights, we need full, full and complete control over that, so that means governments needing to negotiate and start forging governments that are First Nations, First Nations governance or government, so it would have to be like a 3-tier, federal government, provincial government and Aboriginal government (Conrad).*

In Marcel's estimation a new act would build on the protection of children and ensure the act focuses on the well-being of Indigenous people, "Start over. Keep the child protection part and make sure that the children are safe and use that, right, and build from there, build up to where we can do some good with our people" (Marcel).

### **Standards and Indigenous Child Welfare**

Child welfare standards are a critical component of day-to-day practice with families. In Germaine's words, "The standards are the bible, that's what they say. That's the bible. Anything you want to know about child welfare practices. But we don't follow that all the time. It's not

relevant to how our families live...” As Bruce explains, the Authorities Act has a provision in which individual authorities can develop culturally appropriate standards but they must comply with the provincial standards.

*But what the Authorities Act says is that an authority can develop, can work towards culturally appropriate standards. But then the next section says the standards must comply with the provincial standards. Not going to work (Bruce Unfried).*

Bruce goes on to explain that provincial standards were developed with and for the mainstream child welfare system and the assumption that one set of standards fits all has not changed from the provincial perspective over time.

*But the real stickler for me ... was the standards never changed. It was provincial standards that no longer fit the First Nations communities and that was a contentious issue but it never got resolved. The folks who were at the bargaining table when they passed the Authorities Act really didn't want to deal with that... So the standards piece was an impediment, still is an impediment, and so it's created this, a real conflict between agencies and the Province (Bruce).*

Richard De La Ronde questions whether the province has any intention to change the current child welfare act. He also points out that post devolution efforts at changing standards and regulations have been at best, insincere.

*Will they ever change the Act more? I'm not sure they would do that, personally. Will they change the standards and the regulations? They've reviewed them. Like in my time here in my agency, we've been called to meetings to go through standards and regulations. Well what I found in that process is they said "well we're consulting with First Nations in terms of standards and regulations". What some of my colleagues didn't realize is that what we were going through; we were asked to give our opinion on lighter regulations and standards, like the easy ones, not the ones that we were having problems with. Someone else at the Branch did those ones on their own... (Richard).*

While the child welfare act and standards were not written with the intention to support a culturally relevant approach to working in child welfare, agencies have been applying their values, knowledge and creativity to change how their agency works with Indigenous families. Marcel explains one approach the agency uses to increase family foster placements.

*I had conversations like this with a lot of different people; what can we do differently but still in the confines of the legislation, the standards? We do our policies and stuff like that, so it's different. Compared to pre-devolution, you know the devolution of child welfare, there's been a lot of changes... we're doing like new, new*

*things in the agency... They hired a lady to do nothing but genograms and history and looking at all the family connectedness, right, because it's so important that we believe that families should be together... in the last year we went from like 99 family placements to about 145... in not even a year (Marcel).*

Richard discusses how he works to put the best interests of the child foremost even if it means working around the standards when they are not in the best interests of the child and as a result finds the number of children in the care of his agency has been significantly reduced.

*I'm about compliance but I'm also about, I bend a lot of rules and if you look at my numbers of children in care in the last 5 years, they've come down 2% every year. I have 100 kids less in care than I did last year, just in one year... don't let standards and regulations dictate your practice. I say they're there to guide you but they're not there to tell you how to do your job (Richard De La Ronde).*

### **Authorities' Roles**

When the Authorities Act was passed, each authority, the First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority (Northern Authority), the Southern First Nations Network of Care Authority (Southern Authority), the Metis Child and Family Services Authority (Metis Authority) and the General Child and Family Services Authority (General Authority) were organized to administer and provide the delivery of child and family services to their designated groups<sup>24</sup>. In the planning stages the establishment of the four authorities was viewed as an important strategy in the devolution of child welfare to Indigenous people.

The role of the authorities was a topic that came up frequently in social workers' stories. A number of people questioned the power relationship between the province (frequently referred to as the Branch) and the authorities. As Marie states, she believed the devolution meant the authorities would have more control. "Well I thought at that time that it was going to be broken off

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<sup>24</sup> The Northern Authority provides services to First Nations people and people who identify as northern First Nations and others above the 53<sup>rd</sup> parallel; the Southern Authority provides services to members of First Nations and those who identify with the southern First Nations and others who live below the 53<sup>rd</sup> parallel; The Métis provide services to the Métis and Inuit and others who live within Manitoba, and the General Authority provides services to all other persons in Manitoba not receiving services from the other authorities.

into those four Authorities and the Authority would have more control. The Authority doesn't have more control. The Authority never had control" (Marie B).

One of the most frequently mentioned methods of control by provincial powers was through the funding arrangements which includes the billings for children in care as referenced in Faye's discussion.

*Despite the formation of the four Authorities, the provincial Child Protection Branch is still very much at the table when it comes to billings and, you know, how much we pay foster parents and how much do we not, and what can be paid for foster kids and what can't be, you know, that power still doesn't lie with the Authorities. The Branch decides all that, and sometimes if the answer's no, then the Authority has to pass that message on to the agency and the agency's case plan is blown up. The child is disappointed or the child loses a placement, or, you know, so there's still a lot of power that's not within the reach of the four Authorities even though I thought that was supposed to be the intention, once the four Authorities were formed, that there would no longer be a need for the Child Protection Branch because everything the Child Protection Branch does or did would have been delegated to the Authority level, but 13 years later, that still hasn't happened either (Faye).*

The frustration at the agency level is evident in Richard De La Ronde's comments regarding requests to the authority that are delayed because authorities send agency requests to the province for approval.

*...everything that we send to them, they always say, 'well you know, it's got to go to the province, it's got to go to the province'. And so, I just said, 'what do we need you for? Like you're just another level of bureaucracy that I have to go through. Why can't I just have a funding agreement with the province to my agency? Why do I need my money to flow through you? Every time I ask you for something, you've got to go up there anyway and ask'. To me that's not devolution. That's, they set up another bureaucracy to handle First Nations agencies in a government way and for us to still implement government standards and policies and regulations. So to me, we didn't evolve the system. It evolved slightly; then it stopped (Richard).*

Laury's description of the province's role moves beyond the financial aspect to incorporate everything, including the forms in use in their agency. The province's insistence on retaining these roles was not part of the original vision that drove the AJI-CWI planning.

*Like everything we're doing now today, even if we call Southern Authority, if we send them paperwork and stuff, the normal response is, 'we'll get back to you. We have to check with the province'. So it's like now we have Southern Authority but they can't make decisions. They always have to run it by the province. So that's how I feel like we stepped back. That was not the vision that we had when we were doing AJI... Yeah, and even like every form we're using now is from the province. All the paperwork that's been developed is from the province, and then Southern Authority just tells us, this is what you have to use. But it's still not ours; it's still not ours (Laury).*

Bruce predicts that once agencies have boards in place and funding flows direct to agencies, the authority's roles will become redundant.

*...all the provincial money flows through the Authority and they disperse it, other than the child maintenance. People submit their child maintenance costs and it gets paid, etc. I would expect that probably once agencies get the Boards in place, once they get the agencies to manage finances, then the authorities will really become redundant in my view. You know, I think it will be funding that flows directly as anecdotal evidence seems to confirm the fact that many staff and management view the Authorities as another level of unnecessary bureaucracy (Bruce).*

Louise expressed her disappointment in the authorities' lack of advocacy for agencies and views their roles as enforcing status quo policies in addition to implementing numerous new policies developed in response to recent child death reviews.

*Our authorities really can't function as, what we seen them to be, like advocates for communities and agencies and with the province, and instead like they're just the province and they're the same thing, and they have to enforce the same things that was already in place before, plus a whole bunch of other additions because of, you know, recent child deaths. Like they're nothing, nothing at all how we thought it might be and how they initially said it would be (Louise).*

Richard De La Ronde also references the impact of the child death reviews and describes the province's rationale for not allowing the authorities' legislated responsibility to develop their own standards and regulations.

*...it's one of the powers the Southern Authority was given under the Authorities Act, so that they could write their own standards and their own regulations. That's never happened, never, it's never, ever happened. So what happened instead, because of the child deaths, the province sort of took a firm grasp on standards because they felt they were liable. It was their standards and regulations that were not being met, were not being followed. People were not using CFIS, people were not seeing children every 30 days face to face, so they, instead of letting go of the standards, they honestly enforced stricter ones. And that's continued right till now, from 2007 till now (Richard).*

As Bruce Unfried explains, the province never gave up its jurisdictional control to the authorities but if that were to occur the outcome would result in local political control, self-determination and ultimately to culturally appropriate services.

*And the Authorities were supposed to take over the powers of the Province — didn't quite turn out that way, because the Province reflects the following components...provincial standards and local control. Local control*

*implies the presence of a board. The issue of jurisdiction was never resolved. Jurisdictional control is linked to political control and ultimately to self-determination. A resolution to this issue would lead to the development of culturally appropriate services (Bruce).*

For some storytellers, the authority they were familiar with was more supportive in the first years of the devolution process than it is at the present time.

*If you were to ask me about 6, 7 years ago where I thought our Authority is in terms of how they interact with us, and I would have said they're below us, sort of supporting us. They provide us with support, a foundation. But if you were to ask me now, I don't see it that way. I see it as it's reversed, that the Authority is over us and now sort of being the authoritarian and it causes some problems (Craig).*

Karen concurs with the impression that the authority has changed its approach to agencies and sees the agencies pushing back in challenging decisions made on their behalf.

*Our Authority has really changed. It's, at one time, I used to feel like they were supportive and I used to feel like they were there for us as our Authority should be. That's not the case anymore. It's a very different relationship. I think the Authority is still trying to hang on to trying to maintain relationships with us and with agencies, but I'm seeing a flavour of the day where, like we're challenging the Authority now a lot of times (Karen).*

Faye describes the authorities' roles as negotiating concerns regarding child welfare issues at the agency level and being responsible for a number of approval processes. She also considers the question of whether or not the authorities make a difference for families.

*So we definitely have some authority at that level, at the Authority level. There's different, you know, approvals that need to be signed off on, foster home variances, you know, foster parent appeals, extensions of care and maintenance, you know, those all come to the Authorities. So there's still quite a bit of decisions that are made at the Authority level, but enough to actually make a difference? Probably not, no. To make a difference, we would have to be in charge of the funding...until the funding is looked at, and who's in charge of the funding is looked at, we're just going to continue on in this sandstorm that we're in, unfortunately...the families ultimately are the ones that suffer because there's no money for them, because we try really hard in some of the cases to make the argument, foster families and biological families, and if it's not approved at the provincial level, or at the Child Protection Branch, it doesn't occur (Faye).*

Michelle makes the case that the Indigenous authorities play an important role because they come from a similar background as the agency staff and as a result they have an understanding of the history and contemporary issues which in turn support them in developing meaningful programs.

*It's a good opportunity to have this [authority] to be able to work with people of similar experience and have empathy and understanding and to be able to have the opportunity to create programs that will meet their needs*

*based on their history and especially since there's such overrepresentation within the system. Yes, this should be acknowledged, you know (Michelle).*

Some storytellers spoke about the distrust of government motives. Dawn describes efforts she observed in the government when they employed a divide and conquer approach with the different authorities.

*And then how much government tries to divide and conquer, which we've seen them do. They would approach one and not the others or take some action with one and not the others. I think the government had a hard time sharing power, big time (Dawn).*

Rose Marie looked back on her time as a CEO of an authority and her work with government officials.

*I was able to look at all of these things from a whole different perspective, and in hindsight you can see how governments do work and operate. They stay 10 steps ahead as far as I'm concerned because they don't sleep, you know (Rose Marie).*

Dawn observed that in recent years the government has pulled back some of the responsibility they had devolved to the authorities at the beginning of the devolution. She makes the point that the child welfare system's performance was less than satisfactory before the AJI-CWI indicating that a return to those methods of running the system would not work.

*They've taken back some of the stuff that they had devolved and were letting Authorities make decisions about. I don't know what they're, I'm guessing they're using the rationale the Authorities can't do it, blah, blah. I mean the Branch can't do it, you know, they've demonstrated that over the years. It's not like we took over a system that was functioning well, you know. And people forget that when they say the First Nations agencies this and that, like they forget that the system was pretty messy and chaotic when we took it over. So it's not like it was running well and then we threw a big cog in the machine, you know, that's not what it was. And I think government should be doing more to work really closely with the Authorities and support them and be collaborative rather than jumping on them right away, you know, if they don't like what they're doing. The government needs to realize they've handed this over, you know. So, and I think that's hard for governments to do, especially when Ministers come under fire the first thing is to put their foot down (Dawn).*

### **Funding Concerns**

The topic of funding or the lack of sufficient funding was addressed by numerous social workers. Since a number of people had worked with the mainstream agency before the AJI-CWI

process, they were familiar with a system that had more resources. In their estimation the Indigenous agencies became the have-nots.

*...it was very difficult when we became, when we totally separated from Winnipeg CFS, no infrastructure, no money. You had to account for every darn cent that you had. At the Aboriginal agencies, like the funding, the funding formula, I don't know what the heck it really is. I mean it's like I came from a very privileged child welfare life and I come to this, where we don't have resources. We don't have, like in Winnipeg [CFS], if I needed a homemaker or a respite provider, I'd write a memo and I'd say I want this for this many hours a week for my family, and then we'd sign a family service contract. I got it. At our agency, the new agency, and even now, in this current place we are at, there's very few skilled homemakers, support workers. There's not enough drivers. There's not enough resources... Winnipeg [CFS], like we all knew we were millions over budget at the end of the year and that debt would get wiped out. Our agencies, our Authorities, have a budget and we have to live within it. There's no ifs, ands, or buts (Catherine).*

Faye makes the point that in spite of the devolution, the funding models have not changed and money does not flow to the agencies unless children are apprehended. This means that the emphasis remains on apprehensions versus prevention services.

*...so despite all this change, you know, the funding models never changed. The funding formulas never changed. Native kids on-reserve don't get as much funding as a non-Native child who's apprehended here in the city, so that structural racism still exists... So what happens is we have to go in and we have to apprehend kids in order for the agency to be able to start billing the Province for that child's care... this hasn't changed in 40 years. We still have to apprehend kids in order to get money for them, in order to help them. But how do you help a child without helping the family? Where did that go? I thought the whole purpose of moving from the Children's Aid model to the Child & Family Services model, and when did that happen? The early 80's, mid 80's? We were going to take that focus off just the child and put that focus on to the family. I thought that's what the government promised, but then the money never came. The money never flowed in order to do that. So any child welfare worker, Native or non-Native, is stuck in this system that is backwards. If we had more prevention dollars, you would see the numbers of children in care come down (Faye).*

Rose Marie suggests an alternate solution would involve channeling the funding directly to First Nations' communities to provide much needed resources.

*So, you know, go based on the numbers and the more kids in care you have, the more funding your agency gets, right. We're a big commodity. We're a big commodity, and if you gave all of that millions to the First Nations community to survive...our children would have such a better chance because when we look at them, we need them. It breaks your heart, you know (Rose Marie).*

Bruce Unfried supports the assertion that First Nations child welfare agencies are dramatically underfunded making it difficult to develop resources.

*I think agencies do a reasonably good job, but they're handcuffed by standards. They're handcuffed, well the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal said that for the last number of decades, First Nations agencies were dramatically underfunded, and so they were working with half the money that everybody else was getting, and then were criticized for not developing enough resources. This funding issue has not fully been resolved to this day (Bruce).*

### **Services not Funded or Insufficiently Funded**

Indigenous child welfare agencies have always recognized the importance of cultural services in their work with families. Unfortunately funding for cultural services or positions for cultural providers are non-existent. Michelle makes the point that “some agencies have hired, at different points in time, they had cultural workers, but that’s not a funded position either, right, so they’re still taking money from some other service” (Michelle).

Travel is another area that is woefully underfunded for those agencies that have children placed outside of their communities, making required travel an additional cost not covered in budgets. Marie B explains how travel expenses were not factored into budgets with the new requirements that flowed from the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry.

*...from the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry and the face-to-face, the photo, the visits, well it wasn't factored in about the travel component of each worker to go and do all of those site visits, face-to-face visits. We don't get any money for travel, travel expenses, and we live in rural Manitoba, right, so, and our geographic area is broad, so you know, if a person is travelling from Pine Creek to Winnipeg, that's a 5 hour drive. We don't get money to cover those expenses for the workers and the majority of our kids are off reserve, and the funding formula is based on workers, social workers that live in the city and don't have to go far (Marie B).*

Another example relates to travel for court which can require flying out of remote communities, winter travel conditions, or in other cases regular monthly travel over long distances by vehicle to meet court related duties.

*One of our communities has to travel 2 hours to go to court. Well that's 3 days a month, or more, if you have that pre-court meeting that is an actual court date, if there's a pre-trial date. So when you have staff just to go to court and it takes all day because of geographical reality, I guess, the whole thing is boiling down to there isn't enough funding and there isn't enough resources (Karen).*

Karen explains travel time and expenses using a different scenario that involves all day travel to meet with foster parents and the children in care.

*So we have workers who are travelling non-stop to try to [meet with foster families], like the other day, a worker came to Brandon, had two home visits...they got there and both foster parents weren't home with the kids...and those were booked appointments. So that worker has now travelled 4 hours here and travelled 4 hours home, for nothing. We didn't meet the standard...We transfer cases wherever we can within our organization to try to be, I guess, cost-effective as much as possible, but I mean there's a cost for families and kids when you do that (Karen).*

Maria points out the irony of being underfunded for travel when one of the AJI-CWI goals was to keep families connected to their communities. In the meantime, children are regularly placed in homes outside of their communities due to a shortage of foster homes in their home community or when they need to access specialized resources found only in urban settings.

*...we're not being funded sufficiently for travel, in some cases, and when you look at the rural area, if devolution was supposed to recognize kids being affiliated with their communities, why isn't there sufficient travel funding provided to keep them connected to community and community workers (Maria)?*

Carolyn explains how the provincial budgets do not take into account that the lack of resources in the community requires more travel which in effect contributes to a deficit.

*On the provincial side, the funding formula does not provide for travel for workers. Supposedly they say it's included in your 15% operating costs. Well your operating cost doesn't cover that, you know. So that's a huge deficit, in my opinion, because especially agencies in the rural area, your cost of travel is huge. You've got the lack of resources on-reserve, so you've got to take the kids or clients off reserve so you're travelling all the time, you know. Family visits, you're travelling all the time (Carolyn).*

Maria B notes that alternate care positions are not covered by the provincial budget which is problematic for those agencies that are located off reserve.

*...the province needs to fund alternate care positions. They don't fund alternate care positions, or foster home positions. They don't fund those, so. The federal does, like we have positions for that [on reserve], but you know, there's off reserve work too, but they don't fund those (Marie B).*

Another critical area the provincial budget does not support is foster care workers.

*...the Province won't pay for the foster care workers. So how do you license homes if you've got no money and really, in my view, it's a provincial responsibility because it's in Winnipeg and they're looking after provincial kids, but the Province won't fund them, so they've had to find money from other sources to hire foster home workers. This movement of funds from various other program accounts often puts the agencies in a deficit position (Bruce).*

Other positions most organizations take for granted are the reception and janitorial supports. According to Karen, these positions are not in the budget and she uses a recent example to describe the frustration of being understaffed.

*We don't have funding for positions like receptionists, janitors. . . I was at [rural agency] this week on Monday and the worker was out on an Intake call, a child abuse call. One worker was sick. The supervisor was in another community and we couldn't find a casual receptionist, so I'm trying to, not only do my work - I had a meeting there that day - trying to answer the phones, trying to man the office. I'm in a meeting; we're trying to talk to a family. People are walking through the front door. Like I don't understand how the Province and the Feds think we're supposed to run an organization without adequate funding (Karen).*

### **Family Reunification and Lack of Funding**

Child welfare funding does not take into consideration the depth of poverty experienced by many families and the lack of social support agencies in most First Nations communities. In the first quote Karen draws attention to the need for temporary funding to support families to keep the children at home. She then shares the stories of two single moms and their struggle to maintain their children at home to illustrate the point.

*I'm hearing in Manitoba right now, we should never apprehend children because there's no food in the fridge. You're right, we should not. Families live in poverty. But then the province and the feds should give us money to be able to [help], we don't have a food bank in [name of First Nation community] (Karen).*

*There's nothing there. There isn't one line on the budget for Family Reunification yet you expect to hand back 5 kids to somebody and she can't feed them. She can't put clothes [on them]. . . We cannot return children to their parents without adequate financial support. I got a call just before I came here today. We returned 4 children where we were going for a permanent order; we worked long and hard with this mom. We returned these 4 children just 3 months ago. She was hoping she would get her Child Tax on the 20<sup>th</sup>, whenever they got it. Well she's got four kids and she didn't get it. She was going to get it now May 20<sup>th</sup>. So she phoned today crying and said like, I can't even afford to send them to school on Monday because they have no lunch. I don't have any money to feed these little kids. (Sighs) She's used up whatever she can at the food bank. . . She said, like I just need a little bit of help to get me to Welfare, and then I might have to come back next month to get me [through] to Child Tax so my kids don't miss school and they can go to school every day with lunch. So we make a decision. There's 4 kids that need to be fed from now until the first, May 1<sup>st</sup>, so we write a \$200 purchase order and go buy bread, milk, eggs, butter, whatever, lunch meat, fruit, to try to get her through. Well that \$200 comes out of our Family Support [budget] and we are in major deficit of Family Support because we don't get that kind of funding. We don't get enough funding to support families and our agency is in a terrible boat right now. . . we have always needed to provide for families when we return kids.*

In the second example, Karen describes the situation in which a family home burned down.

*We have a lady, her house burned down and her kids ended up in care, 5 kids there. Well we're returning them at the end of this month. There are no Family Reunification dollars. There is not one line in the funding formula or in maintenance guidelines to return those kids and make sure they have groceries, beds. Their house burnt down. They have nothing. So we have spent the last month trying to, we paid a damage deposit of \$700, \$750, so her and her children can have a home. We had to buy; they have no beds, so we had to buy air mattresses for all of the kids. We had to buy a blanket and a pillow for all of the kids, and a sheet. We had to buy like groceries for them. That whole pot was almost \$2000 that we had buy for groceries, household items, like start-up costs to be able to return these 5 kids...it'll probably cost us \$2000 a month per child to keep them in foster care, when all I need is just \$2000 to help this mom. We make a decision to help her. We take the \$2000 out of our Family Support dollars that we don't get for family reunification (Karen).*

As Marie B concedes, agencies often make the choice to help families and go into their deficit to assist families or the children and their families will fall through the cracks.

*But sometimes you have to make the decision as to whether or not you're going to have kids fall through the cracks, or if you're going to really be rigid and say, you know, we're going to stick to the budget. But you can't do that because little lives are at stake, so, you know, you dig into your deficit, I guess, and try and not let that happen, you know (Marie B).*

People often assume deficits are the result of careless budgeting or the inability to budget appropriately but as Karen points out agencies are required to develop annual Strategic Business Plans for federal and provincial funders.

*This is so exhausting. What is exhausting for me is, in this past year, our agency has had to do so much fighting for funding, and you know, we have a business plan. We call it a Strategic Service Plan. It's a business plan for the province and the feds. When they implemented that 5 years ago, that was horrendous, like. Our business plan was 200 pages... it's a very paternalistic document from the government on what they want from us. And we spent tons and tons and tons of time, resources, money, to do that year after year (Karen).*

Faye believes that if agencies were provided with more prevention funding, the number of children in care would decrease.

*If the prevention dollars went up, the number of kids in care would just naturally come down. It would be inevitable because we wouldn't have to bring them into care if we could help the families with money, if we had that pot of money to help them. Even just simple things, we're not talking complicated things, we're talking groceries until next Friday, you know, those are the kinds of things that families get stressed over, you know, diapers, milk, formula, all that kind of stuff that is crazy expensive these days. If CFS agencies had a pot of money to say, you know what, here's \$100. Here's a purchase order for Walmart. Here's \$100. Go get what you need until next Friday. But no, we wait until a family actually goes into crisis because they have nothing and they have nowhere to go, and then we swoop in and take those kids, because those children are being neglected (Faye).*

## Funding for Social Work Positions

Another area where some agencies fall short in their budgets is payroll because the governments' are funding at mid-range level pay scales when some agencies have social workers and staff who have been in their employ for most of their careers. As a result of paying a higher number of long term employees at a higher pay range, agency budgets fall short.

*They're there because it's like a calling and so they've committed all those years to it. So having said that, what happens is, to my understanding of funding for a position, the government funds a position in a mid-range on the provincial pay scale, both federal and provincial. One [government scale] is maybe one level higher than the other, but they're funding mid-way on that scale. When you have that number of long-term employees working for you, even if their position is designated in the funding formula, the Agency is still not getting the payment needed (Maria).*

As Bert Crocker demonstrates, funding formulas do not always fit with agencies needs and realities. So for example, if a funding formula uses a ratio of one social work position to 25 protection files but does not fund other necessary positions this translates into the agencies struggling with decisions to maintain recommended ratios or find funds from other parts of the budget or increase recommended ratios to cover unpaid positions.

*In the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry, the provincial government's funding formula says that for protection families, the ratio will be 1 to 25, and with the move to Family Enhancement (FE), for FE files, the ratio would be 1 to 20. And if you do the math right, I guess, the numbers can be made to reflect that. Unfortunately, the provincial funding formula does not fund at all, for example, foster family workers whose job it is to recruit, to support, to license, to train foster families. There's nothing in the provincial funding formula for abuse workers, and so all of those extra necessary things that have to be done, you have to take the staff out of that 1 to 25 or out of the 1 to 20 in order to make ends meet and provide those other services. Though in reality, it's more like 1 to 30 or 1 to 37, and the province has never seen fit to fund those other positions that, either from a legal perspective or from a service, you know, no matter which perspective you look at it from, you need those other services too and they aren't funded (Bert).*

Small agencies are required to work with smaller budgets and as a result start out disadvantaged. It impacts hiring decisions, foster recruitment decisions, and ability to access outside resources.

*When you're a small agency, you can't offer big salaries. You can't offer the big benefits, so you find, you've got to find ways to attract good employees and good foster parents. So that was never talked about how some*

*agencies would be at a disadvantage once devolution was complete, that we're all looking for the same things. We're all trying to refer our families to the same places (Richard De La Ronde).*

One other area that social workers talked about was the changes they have observed in the type and severity of issues they are dealing with on a daily basis with families which also increase the need for more resources. For example along with a serious increase in drug use, there appears to be an “increase in mental health cases, and basically that requires more work, right. So there's no adjustment to the funding based on that, or no adjustment to the caseload ratio based on that” (Carolyn).

### **Group 2 Resources**

Another concern raised was the barriers for Indigenous agencies to establish residential facilities in their First Nation communities, which they believe would benefit the young people in their communities.

*And when communities tried to build a home for, like an emergency home or a place of safety home, they're challenged by what needs to be done for it to be approved, to have the rates approved, to have the start-up costs, those kinds of things. And then when we hear about homes that are being approved at \$400 to \$900 per diem per day, and the kids in those homes still run, well there's something wrong with that picture, whereas, you know, with our homes back in the day [pre-devolution] were \$170, \$180 per diem and we were successful I can say in the placements because the kids stayed. Then there's something wrong with that picture altogether (Marie B).*

Before the AJI-CWI and the changes that accompanied it were initiated one agency found the residential homes in the communities had the advantage of ensuring the safety of the residents.

*So at the time, the agency then decided to look at having their own agency homes which were more appropriate for our group of kids, and they didn't go AWOL, and if they did go AWOL, well there would be the staff that would go and, not hunt them down, but they would go and look for them, like literally look for them, physically and get in their vehicles and go and look for them. Yeah. So we don't have no specialized homes, no specialized agency owned and operated homes (Marie B).*

As Dawn explains the Group 2 Resources have been in place since before the devolution and while they were to be reviewed in relation to the devolution, that review was never done so they remain in place and have become the only option available for Indigenous agencies.

*The provincial government, and that's certainly been true with, unfortunately, with an NDP government, is they're still very reluctant to pass on sort of the placement sector. One of the big things, chapters of work, if you will, under AJI was what we call, group 2 resources, and that's your whole residential care system, where lots of First Nations kids are there, lots of money gets spent for your Knowles, Marymount, those groups. From the start there was, as soon as that came out in the conceptual plan, those groups were lobbying government. To this day, that piece of work has not transferred or moved over at all. Agencies also have a much more difficult time getting the provincial government to license and support the group home development on reserve or the emergency home development, or even if its off-reserve, if it's a First Nations agency doing it, they have way more obstacles (Dawn).*

Carolyn believes establishing homes in the communities would have a number of benefits both in cost saving and in providing economic development as well as being able to provide services in line with their community traditions.

*I believe there can be some savings in the system and, you know, we do have high cost group homes and if you were to establish homes on-reserve, it can be at a lower cost and basically it's more culturally appropriate. It's within the community and it provides economic development for the community, and there has to be some type of process to allow for that development to occur and for funds for that to occur too (Carolyn).*

### **Chapter Summary**

The announcement for the planning and implementation of the AJI-CWI was originally greeted with enthusiasm and renewed hope for a system that was anticipated to address many outstanding child welfare concerns in the Indigenous communities. For many it was an opportunity to establish self-determination in child welfare and begin to address serious issues such as rising numbers of Indigenous children in care, lack of culturally relevant services and a strong prevention focus with sufficient resources to make it happen. Unfortunately many of the outcomes did not match the early expectations of the storytellers.

Some of the concerns that flowed from the critiques included the need to develop a child and family services act and standards for and by Indigenous people; questions also arose regarding the role of the authorities and; concerns were expressed regarding sufficient funding to meet the needs of impoverished communities, provide preventative services and critical child welfare positions and cultural supports.

## CHAPTER 12

### CHANGES AND BENEFITS FOR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

#### Introduction: Assessing the Benefits

It was important for people to take the time to express what they believed was positive about their work in child welfare and to point to some of the important changes as a result of the AJI-CWI. Some of the positive changes they identified are related to parental choice of authority, improved cultural training and services, knowing where all Indigenous children are placed while in care, better relationships with families, and graduating youth in care. Conrad sets the stage for discussing the success of Indigenous child welfare by saying:

*We've been ready and prepared. We've been practicing child welfare and, you know, managing ourselves. We're still here. We're still saying that we need, you know, systems that are going to embrace our culture, our way of life. They're [cultures] going to help us move forward in a way that's representative of who we are (Conrad).*

One of the most significant changes brought about by the devolution is that Indigenous communities now know where their children are when they go into care. For those communities who have lost children through the sixties scoop and the more recent child welfare practice of withholding notification of apprehension to communities, social workers like Marcel Valiquette have a response.

*I can say to them, you know what? I know where every child of ours are, where that child is right now, you know. I can say that, with the exception of one or two who may be running or have gone AWOL, right. But 15 years ago, we couldn't say that. We didn't know where our children were. The devolution brought our children back (Marcel).*

Another important change for all Indigenous people in Manitoba is that they now have the option of receiving services from Indigenous agencies regardless of where they live in Manitoba.

*I think with the First Nations agencies, you know, we now, in Manitoba anyway, every single First Nation is covered by a First Nations agency. So you have a lot more presence in the community...I would say overall it's been that our First Nations families and our kids are getting better service. I think the other really important thing is through this process and taking on the off-reserve, we know where our kids are. Like even if Winnipeg is providing service, they have an obligation to notify the Authority so we know where the kids in care are, and*

*we can say to a community, you know, from your community there's 30 kids in care. 10 of them are from Winnipeg, 8 of them are placed in non-Aboriginal homes but we know where these homes are (Dawn).*

Several people commented on the positive changes brought about by the Authority Determination Process (ADP) which provides families with the opportunity to choose their authority.

*Well, now we have something called the Authority Determination Process, commonly known as ADP, where the families get somewhat of a choice as to which Authority they want to work with. So I mean that's more than they ever had before. It gives them a bit of a feeling of, you know, that they have a say, because it [apprehensions] is such a helpless situation, but the ADP has to be signed by the family, and has to be explained to the family by a social worker. So I think that most people see that as a benefit to Indigenous families where they don't, if they don't want to work with a general agency, they don't have to, they can choose a Native agency to work with, so that's been a good thing (Faye).*

Allison expands on the benefits to families in the event they choose to change service providers.

*So that's one of the major changes that occurred with devolution is that they're able to choose a service provider and if for some reason things are not going well, then they can also transfer to another agency that they choose, providing that they meet the criteria... I think that's a really good thing so that children and youth are getting more opportunities to be supported and guided, and if they want to participate in cultural activities or cultural learning, whereas before, it wasn't like that (Allison).*

### **Keeping Children at Home**

The devolution has also opened up opportunities to change the way child welfare keeps children safe in certain circumstances. For example, as Richard De La Ronde explains, it is easier on the children to remove the parents from the home if they are using alcohol or drugs and to allow parents back home when they are not using.

*...so what I see different is traditional social work is when a family, for example, has a party on the weekend and social workers come in and they take the kids. Mom and Dad have to do a, b, c, d to get their kids back and the kids remain in care, and how it's changed for me, from what I've seen is the way we, at least for us, the way we do social work here or we try to do our social work this way - if there's a party, kids come into care; kids go home on Sunday. Friday night party, whatever, Saturday night party, kids go home on Monday. Mom and Dad still have to do a, b, c, d but they do it as a unit. They do it together and they deal with their parents' issues collectively as a family rather than kids over here. It's traumatic for the kids. To me that's punishing. So what our agency is closely looking at is Section 20 of the Act where by law I can take care and control of the home. You kick out the parents and leave the kids where they are because there's nothing wrong with the kids. In most instances, it's the parents. So we've done that 5 times, it's something new we're trying and we're*

*finding that parents are more cooperative when they're the ones that are getting kicked out, not the kids. But there's no mechanisms for how we pay for the supports, you know, we've got to put supports in the home, extended family. There's no mechanisms for us to pay people right now to do that, so I'm hoping that's something they'll look at of us being able to enforce Section 20 (Richard De La Ronde).*

Craig notes benefits of the devolution can be observed from the community efforts in which “Aboriginal leadership are playing a role in developing permanency planning for Aboriginal kids. That’s just great and that’s how it needs to be” (Craig).

### **Commitment to Families**

Storytellers spoke to the commitment demonstrated by Indigenous social workers whose work focuses on change for the families and communities.

*...people don't go into child welfare or CFS, people don't work at CFS for the money, and I believe that's true, like when I look at our staff and the people who worked here and the people who have since gone, and so many have, like they really want to see a change in child welfare and they want to see kids at home, and they want to see families healthy, and functioning communities (Louise).*

After the devolution Susan left Winnipeg CFS and went to work with Indigenous agencies that she describes as dedicated to families and who are not referenced by case numbers.

*Like I have non-Aboriginal friends, and they say Susan, what's the difference, right? ...and I'll tell them that the Aboriginal agencies, like CFS agencies, they are very dedicated to the families. It's just not a case number, and actually if you go to (name of Indigenous CFS agency) and the agency I work for now, there's no file number, there's no client number, and when I worked at Winnipeg CFS, the families had client numbers. There was a file number... [At the Indigenous agencies] we were always reminded, like the children in care, those are our children in care. Being respectful, doing everything that we can to help children in care, work with their parents, work with the families, you know, try to get the children home, so it was really good, really good (Susan).*

Dawn describes the approach by Indigenous social workers with families as committed and having a heart for the children.

*I think people are, while it's hard work, you see a real commitment to the families and the kids from those agencies and people; yeah you always have workers who don't pull their work, but for the most part, people are willing to go the extra mile, ... Like people really have a heart for these kids and want to do good by them and their families (Dawn).*

Rose Marie describes how her commitment and understanding of children and their families stems from her own experience in residential school and child welfare.

*All I knew when I was in residential school and the child welfare system, fear, that's all I knew. I was scared, yeah, of everything, you know. But as I grew intellectually - I was not going to be afraid. Nobody was going to put me in that place anymore, and that's the challenges I took in the systems that I had to do in my role and in my responsibilities as a front-line worker right up to CEO. I didn't take that honour lightly to work with our families and our children. I took it to the limit in terms of whatever the outcome was (Rose Marie).*

### **Connecting Families**

One of the changes after devolution was the focus on resuming family visits for children who were permanent wards and were not getting family visits previously. Some families had their permanent orders successfully rescinded.

*... a lot of times, those cases that came to us as permanent wards, we've been able to resume family visits with their families because they weren't having visits prior to, or very few visits. We've done that... there are cases where we've been able to reunite families and rescind the permanent orders and those parents are looking after those children again and stable and managing, and have managed for a number of years already because it's been a while since that's occurred... it doesn't matter how dysfunctional their family was and they haven't seen them for 10 years because they're permanent wards or whatever, they're going back... so it's better for them to know, to be a part of that family all along, so they're knowledgeable of what they may be going back to... Their foster parents were scared to start the family contact again because there was nothing prior to, and they're scared but then they say okay, like you know, the kids go home. They see, okay, I now have family. I love my family. I realize they're not able to care for me right now, but at least I have that connection to them and I'm going to be staying at that foster home and I'm staying in school (Louise).*

Agencies also recognize that many children who are removed from their families and communities lose all connections if family and community visits are not maintained.

*They have no connections to anybody. So that's one of the things as an agency we try and do is to maintain that connection, you know, even though they're permanent wards, the parents still get their visits. You know, they still get to go to their communities... when the community has like their community powwows, we encourage the foster parents to take the kids there, just so they can see, like see, you know, where this kid comes from, what family this kid belongs to because all the families go to the powwows. So that's good to see. And there's, you know, there's some foster parents that we have that are not Aboriginal but they will do anything to give that kid what it needs (Laury).*

Overall, Marie A believes the introduction of the four authorities brought about a general awareness regarding the power and control previously invested in one agency and the need for culturally relevant services to Indigenous people across Manitoba.

*It [devolution] actually brought awareness to what was really going on within that system. There was actually a need for the different agencies to be brought into the place, like you know, the Métis, the General. I think*

*that was good because it just made them aware that, you know, one agency had way too much power and when they broke it up, I thought that was the best thing in the world (Marie A).*

### **Professional Development**

Another area of improvement in the system people recognized has been the increase in educated Indigenous social workers who have a different connection to the people and communities they work in.

*...the Human Resources, the number of Aboriginal and First Nation, Indigenous staff has really increased over the years, which for the most part is a positive thing. It doesn't mean that those workers are necessarily always more sensitive, but they're certainly more open and they have much more grounding in the culture and an openness to try and implement or find ways to integrate it into their practice. Whereas before like with largely the non-Aboriginal sector providing those services, it was just, to me, it was just a continuation of colonizing people (Dawn).*

Maria describes the increase in First Nations social workers in the agency where she has worked for 29 years “We’ve been able to have our workforce go from approximately 2/3 of First Nations descent to now 87% of First Peoples descent” (Maria).

Wade acknowledges the benefits for Indigenous children to have educated Indigenous social workers who can keep children connected to their communities and roots.

*...the Aboriginal agencies are certainly hiring and certainly getting educated individuals and have knowledge about child welfare. So I think as we move further along this continuum, it'll become even better for our children. I do believe that the benefits, it was a rocky road, but there certainly is a lot of benefits where kids need to be associated with their Aboriginal roots and to be serviced by an Aboriginal agency, so yeah, that's probably one of the benefits is that they're connected to their community, connected to people who understand them, right (Wade).*

Marcel Valiquette has also seen an increase in educated and trained social workers who he maintains also have a good standing in the community where they work.

*...another good thing is the educational requirements, right, for workers. You know, they have to have a certain level of training or education or a BSW, you know, to practice, and they must be in good standing, you know, in the community and all that that comes with it, right. Those are really good standards to have, you know. That's a positive thing (Marcel).*

Dawn describes the confidence that Indigenous social workers bring to the field, “First Nations professionals, are equally comfortable and strong and lobbying their own leadership as they

are lobbying the provincial and federal governments. I think we've become pretty good at that"

(Dawn).

### **Improved Relationships with Families and Communities**

Some social workers reports that families are building trust in the agencies' efforts to support them and do not view their roles as strictly apprehending children.

*I feel like that people are turning to us, not us but I mean, the child welfare system as a whole, as a support rather than 'they're just coming to take our kids', like they used to before the devolution. Because that's what it was, that's how it felt before the devolution (Nadine).*

Joan finds that even families who have had their files closed stay in contact and want to maintain a relationship.

*...a lot of them find us to be supportive to them. So, and a lot of them are calling, a lot of them who have files that are closed to us, are calling back old workers, you know, letting them know things that are going on (Joan).*

Nadine looks back on the devolution process and acknowledges that while the first years were challenging, she believes in the end it has benefitted families.

*...that's what I feel about that, the first ten years, too many growing pains there. But I mean, it had to happen, right, it had to happen. I'm glad that we were all there to, at least some of them, that we've made an impact, yeah. I feel like I have made a big impact on a lot of lives, a lot of young women and children mostly, I have. I know I have in spite of all the (sighing) swimming and dodging and what not through the first 10 years (Nadine)*

Dawn makes the point that some changes take time and when a person looks back, they can see the progress that has occurred since the devolution was first set in motion.

*You feel like you're spinning your wheels. You go to meetings and 10 years later, the agenda is still all the same but when you look back incrementally at the changes, I think there's been a lot. You see more and more kids in care graduating high school, which is, you know, the future, the hope for the future - education (Dawn).*

A number of storytellers also talked about success in terms of the young people who have been graduating high school and going on to college or university.

*But today, you know, 10 years later, we worked with a lot of those children that we inherited and we spent a lot of time working with them very carefully and we have children graduating from high school. We never had that before... They're graduating and we have kids also going to university, right. And we have programs where we*

*focus more on setting them up for training, if they choose not to go that way beyond 18 and keep them in care, this is what you've got to do (Marcel).*

Louise talks about annual graduation celebrations for youth who are successfully completing high school and she acknowledges “our sister agencies that they’re... having grads increase” (Louise). One agency report that their agency graduates have been steadily increasing “when you look at throughout 2006 to today, we’ve had more than 100 graduates from Grade 12 and some of those have come back because they, they’ve graduated from college” (Marie B).

Faye speaks to the commitment and support social workers provide to each other based on their ethics of caring.

*If you see another agency, if you see your sister agency struggling, you know, you help out, yeah, so that's been great. So that is just a part of devolution, you know, for the most part... So that's one thing that I do love about, on a general basis, child welfare workers, they're very ethical people. They've taken it among themselves, you know, to care for kids, to protect kids, and to me, that's a special kind of person. Not everyone can do that (Faye).*

Conrad speaks about his pride in the work that is being done for the children.

*I think there's been a lot of positives, yeah, and you look at a lot of the agencies and you'd be really impressed. I mean there's some really smart Aboriginal people out there, but I mean it just makes me proud, you know that despite all the atrocities and all the hardships we've faced, we still endure. We do it because of our children. We do it because of who we are, our spirit. We do it out of respect of our elders, our grandparents, our grandmothers, and we're proud. We're a very proud people and we have a lot to be proud of (Conrad).*

Marie B explains that Indigenous people incorporate their values and traditions into the work they do. The values that guide their personal lives are the same as the ones that guide their work in the community.

*No doubt, there are good works that we do with kids and families and communities, and there are ways that we do incorporate our values and our traditions and our way of life to the work that we do, because we're it. We're Anishinaabe to begin with, so we do have that. I'm a mother, grandmother, sister, and you know, that can't be taken from us. I have a tepee at home. I keep the home fires burning, you know, I know that (Marie B).*

### **Finding Success in the Devolution**

Faye acknowledges that while the changes to the child welfare system do not support prevention efforts, the devolution was long overdue.

*For the most part, the Native social workers are happy with it because it's something, in our minds, that should have happened a long time ago, you know, decades ago, and why it took the residential school era and the sixties scoop, and why it took this long, you know, we'll never know because we should have been in charge of it decades ago. We should have been in charge of our own child welfare services decades ago for the benefit of our kids and our families...But at the end of the day, we did it because it's what was best and it's still what's best. Whatever failings we had, we had because the system is set up poorly, not necessarily because workers aren't competent or good workers, you know. Does that play a factor sometimes? Absolutely. But the system is poor. There's no money for prevention. There's a lot of work you can do with a family before they go into crisis where you have to actually apprehend children (Faye).*

Marcel clearly prefers the changes to the child welfare system compared to the way it was before the AJI-CWI.

*If you ever asked me, would I ever go back to the old way, I'd say, 'you'd be out of your mind. No way'. There's so much that's changed and so much different in terms of how we do things, you know, how we do things, we never had that opportunity before to really do things differently, to think about things differently, and how we interpret things compared to the old mainstream way, right. It's so, there was no cultural component to that old way. Now it's different because you could read the same legislation and stuff like that and interpret it differently and switch that into policies and standards, standards and policies for your own way of doing things (Marcel).*

Linda summarizes the changes and acknowledges the final outcomes as unique in that it was completed consensually.

*Nobody else has done this, really. I think we're the only ones. I think we've been, in that way, I think we've been quite successful in some ways, not so much in others, but I think we have been successful in being able to do things done based on consensus, which I think is really hard, but for the most part it is done that way (Linda).*

### **Storytellers' Recommendations**

Storytellers recognized while there were improvements to the child welfare system with the AJI-CWI, there were still many concerns related to the high number of children in care. Faye's comment echoes the concern of other social workers who believe the system needs to focus funding on prevention rather than waiting until the situation requires the removal of children from their families.

*I mean real change comes when the governments start looking at how kids are funded. Real change occurs, will occur when the governments realize that prevention dollars will take us farther than apprehending kids; but it's not a new concept. I think they've been, I think that discussion's been going on for 30 years and it's just falling on deaf ears, unfortunately (Faye).*

Dawn supports a system of preventative funding and points out that policies and legislation are focused on a punitive approach to child welfare which follows from the attitude that parents are at fault when children are apprehended.

*You know, it's a huge challenge for agencies and First Nations resources, and to me that's where it gets back to, can we not find some money to support families in the first place, then we wouldn't be scrambling for resources, and then can we not find some money to address some of those barriers that keep us from putting kids with their family or in their own community. You know, child welfare always has been, and I think it's changing a bit with the First Nations, but policy and legislative wise; it's still a punitive system. It's still, smarten up or I'll take your kids and if you're not parenting, it's somehow your fault and Heaven forbid I should give you money to look after your own kids. Like that's an attitude that's out there. And I think that's why it's so hard to get money to put services into families when their kids are still at home (Dawn).*

Dawn continues her discussion by noting that funding to support children cannot be accessed until they are in care and at that point the money is accessible to foster parents to provide all kinds of support.

*Family Support services are all capped dollars, never enough money, but Child Maintenance is an open pot. I mean that's telling. As soon as I put a kid in care with some other family, I can access all kinds of money. I can give that foster home homemakers. I can give them daycare. I can get them a new vehicle because they now have these kids and they need a new vehicle and I can pay their mileage to go to doctor's appointments, but I can't give any of that to mom if she's got the kids, you know, and that's like crazy making sometimes. If you could just do half of that for the moms or the parents, you wouldn't need to have resources (Dawn).*

Rose Marie advocates for a child welfare system that is entrenched in Indigenous law and in which Indigenous people are full partners on every level.

*It [AJI-CWI] needs to give us full practice. It needs to give it its rightful place in law, right. Whether its Anishinaabe law, however you want to entrench that, it has to be ours to make, you know. The non-Aboriginal systems have developed and made many mistakes on the backs of our kids, and now we have the time to make some of those things right; we should be able to do that. Give us the time to do that. It's still in its infancy stage; it's only been 12 years, right. There's still a long way to go, but we need people in those systems that can actually think and can actually have the empathy to be able to recognize how our communities exist, you know, and all of those things that continue to make them exist the way they are. They'll never benefit as long as the way the systems are set, as long as we're not partners in anything, as long as we're not partners in economy of any kind. We'll always be totally dependent. We'll always be colonized. We're not even in a period of decolonization yet, we're still colonized. But I still believe that we have a system that can work (Rose Marie).*

Conrad describes a system that gives Indigenous people sovereign rights which ensure decision making rights. He also recognizes the need to plan for the mechanisms to support sovereignty as colonization has blocked economic opportunities for centuries.

*We've been wanting more than just jurisdictional right; we wanted something that would basically give us sovereign right, decision-making, authority over what we do as First Nations people. We don't need an outsider coming in and telling us how to arrange our furniture in our home. We know how to do that ourselves. But I mean you have to look at, you know, the mechanisms that we require to move forward in that way...everything revolves around money and there's a currency value to everything. So if we're expected to do that, then we need to be able to have those mechanisms in place which essentially run on money. .. that's where the partnership comes in; we need a way of sustaining our revenue and be able to have those services and supports in a way that we feel are best for us...if they only had the vision and the trust in us to, you know, take what we felt was important (Conrad).*

Bruce Unfried suggests the next steps for Indigenous child welfare is to further decentralize with their own community boards of directors.

*I think what agencies are working towards is, you know, agencies to have, to further decentralize and communities to have their own child welfare, their own child welfare agencies with Boards. I don't know any other way to do it. I think the timing is of the essence...so I would guess that maybe in the next five years, that agencies will slowly decentralize and agencies, communities would have their own agency with a Board. To me, that is having control over the agency at the community level. The next step would be to provide the financial supports to communities to develop their own placement resources in the community. Funding is still going to come from the Province and the Feds. so I would guess that maybe in the next five years, that larger agencies that currently provide services to four or five communities will continue to decentralize and communities will have their own agency with a community Board (Bruce).*

The other important aspect to determine successful and less than successful practices is having the ability to track changes in terms of outcomes for children and families.

*I think we need to do more to track outcomes and stuff but you really want to see that this is going to make a difference for the kids. Because to me, if the outcomes for the kids are the same, then what's the point, you know? Like if the kids are still ending up in jail or on the street, suiciding, even though they've been under First Nations care, like if we can't do better by them, then I think we failed them, you know...And anecdotally, I think we can all point to kids where we can say, look, like this kid's doing so well, you know, but it would really be good to have someone do some concentrated research on those kinds of outcomes, like you know, from when the kid started, what's the picture look like now (Dawn)?*

Marie B's concerns regarding the high number of Indigenous children being brought into care and being placed in non-Indigenous foster homes and group settings echo many of her colleagues concerns.

*...but to be accused of bringing lots of kids into care, then you can't really deny that because the stats are there. But, why? Why are there lots of kids in care and why are we placing them in non-First Nations homes? The same questions can be asked, why aren't Indian foster parents or Indigenous foster parents coming forward? You know, the other extreme, and then what can we do? What can we do to facilitate those changes then? ... You have to do that placement protocol that's been in place from day one. You have to follow that, because you know, the shortcut is sometimes non-Aboriginal homes because they're easier to find, but it's more work to go look for a First Nations home, eh? But they are out there. So that's the thing that we have to work on. Yeah. (Marie B).*

Other storytellers spoke about the need for healing for families and for more hands on support. In Shelly's words, "we need to stop looking at our kids as dollar bills and look at the family and say this family needs to heal. Let's put the money in the family instead of separating them" (Shelly). In Marcel opinion, child welfare needs a different approach to caring for families.

*Step in as you need to, put in supports, be there for as long as you need, keep the family together if it's possible. It's not always possible, right, but I think these knee-jerk reactions right away, as long as there's a problem in the home, you go in there and apprehend right away. All you're doing is causing harm, you know, for the whole family. It could be done different, you know. I think that's our future is to make things different and though it's totally different from mainstream child welfare (Marcel).*

Other child welfare workers suggested more supports. Joan stresses the need to have in-home mentors "that could teach them, get in the home and teach them and motivate them". She also suggests that "there should be like a centralized foster care network..." where they are all "educated the same way". Michelle sees the need for trained support workers to work with families in a variety of roles, "...they need to develop a training program for support workers and those people that are going to be working with the families, whether that be preventing kids from coming into care, or helping facilitate reunification...and to pay them appropriately" (Michelle).

Dawn recognizes the difficulty of keeping children at home or with relatives if there are addictions with no focus on healing. In terms of healing families she questions "where's the

addictions treatment... where are those family healing programs”? As she advocates for an emphasis on healing programs she is effectively pointing out what should be obvious:

*...it's equally important to try and keep those kids from coming into care in the first place and putting dollars into community resources and family support and figuring out how to give a family a new house... When parents aren't drinking, they're really good parents, very strong attachments to their kids. When they're drinking, it's not safe, you know. So what can we do about that? Or if mom goes on a binge, why can't we put someone in that home, you know, until mom comes back (Dawn).*

### **Chapter Summary**

The final message shared by the storytellers is about the positive changes and benefits that occurred as a result of the AJI-CWI. Clearly the devolution did not meet all the expectations but it did meet some important goals which people were happy to report on. Overall individuals spoke about enhanced services to families through choice of authorities; opportunities at the agency level to provide innovative services focused on keeping families together; amplified reunification efforts; increased number of Indigenous professionals; more cultural programming; positive community relationships, success stories of youth graduations; and most importantly, knowledge of where all the children in care are placed.

Finally, this chapter discusses recommendations by the storytellers which follow from the critiques regarding self-determination in child welfare, funding models, the need for emphasis on prevention, decentralizing to the local level, and tracking outcomes for children in care.

## CHAPTER 13

### OVERVIEW OF STUDY, RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

The story of the AJI-CWI began with recounting the storytellers' recollections of how children were cared for in traditional ways, and with extended family playing a major role in the support and care of children in their communities. These stories about extended family members playing these important roles tell us that long before the arrival of settlers, Indigenous communities had natural support networks in place (Anderson, 2000; Hare & Davidson, 2016; di Tomasso & de Finney, 2015). The fact that there were natural support networks built into communities informs us that Indigenous people were prepared for events brought about as a result of human experiences and through natural tragedies. The telling and re-telling of these stories is critical in keeping cultures alive and it is a reminder that re-storying is an act of resistance that refutes those forces in society that would have us believe Indigenous people are not capable of caring for their families. It is also a reminder that Indigenous cultures were shaped and adapted over many centuries of self-sufficiency and *minopimatisiwin* and Indigenous people have not forgotten (Cornassel, Chaw-winiis & T'lakwadzi, 2009; Manitowabi & Shawande, 2012).

As time progressed and colonialism impacted communities to a greater degree, many families were torn apart by residential schools, the decisions of Indian agents to remove children and eventually the sixties scoop and millennium scoop. As storytellers shared their memories of how families in their communities lost their children, it was clear that they were not just relating history but they were talking about the pain people from their communities still carry - they were relating living memories of their own and of their relatives who still grieve for the children they lost through colonial forces. While these stories are stories of personal pain and loss, they are important stories that need to be told and kept alive for future generations to continue to learn from. It represents the continuation of Indigenous peoples' stories of colonization, survival,

resilience and resistance (Manley-Casimir, 2012; Lavallee & Poole, 2010). The lasting impact of these living memories cannot be understated in relation to understanding the communities' push for self-determination in child welfare and for the excitement generated by the proposal to devolve the child welfare system in Manitoba to Indigenous people.

As the devolution moved from the planning stages to the actual transfer of hundreds of case files of children in care and the foster families who were attached to the children, social workers in the receiving agencies described the process as rushed and overwhelming. While some agencies were prepared for the transfer, other agencies were still in the process of hiring and negotiating the secondment of staff from Winnipeg CFS. The rush to complete the transfer over a short period of time along with all the changes necessary to accommodate the transfer created serious concern for the safety of children and at the same time created stressful work environments. Some of the concerns expressed represented different perspectives, with some individuals describing the anxiety they experienced regarding enforced secondments with what they believed to be potential loss of jobs, and for many the loss of benefits and pensions. For Indigenous people, concerns were expressed regarding secondments transfer of mainstream perspectives and methods of doing child welfare.

The vision for the AJI-CWI was based in a large part on the belief that child welfare services should be community based and reflect and incorporate the cultures of the relevant communities whether they are First Nations, Métis or the general population (Tilbury & Thoburn, 2009). As the foster children and their respective foster parents were transferred over to their respective authorities it became clear that it would take time, determination, and innovation to meet that vision. One of the concerns social workers related was that the vast majority of foster homes were non-Indigenous at the point of devolution. While that situation appears to have improved according to 2011 statistics that reflect 49% of Indigenous foster children aged 14 years

and under, who reside in Manitoba, now live in homes with at least one Indigenous foster parent. This means there remains a great deal of work to be done (Turner, 2016).

One of the most strongly protested concerns expressed by social workers is related to both the difficulty in recruiting Indigenous foster families and the use of cross-cultural foster homes (Brown, George, Sintzel & St, Arnault, 2009). While people acknowledged the ability of different cultures to care for children, they were extremely concerned that high numbers of recently immigrated families, who justifiably maintain their own strong cultural ties, are involved in fostering a large number of Indigenous children. This concern was strongly voiced on behalf of children who are apprehended at birth and very young children who are now learning new languages and cultural traditions while losing opportunities to learn their own Indigenous language, culture, family and community relationships. While there is a diversity of cultures represented by foster families, the Filipino community was referenced in this context on numerous occasions from social workers from different agencies as they indicated the Filipino community represents a high proportion of foster parents who were transferred as a result of the devolution and who express a strong interest in fostering. Many immigrant family members struggle to find employment when their credentials are not recognized in Canada and fostering becomes a source of income. As social workers noted, Filipinos have much in common with Indigenous cultures and appearance in terms of familiar brown skin and strong orientation to extended family and community, as well as values of cooperation and sharing.

The dilemma for these social workers is that they recognize the importance of culturally matched foster homes in developing a strong self-identity and having this knowledge leaves them feeling complicit in the loss of culture and ties to the children's families and communities (Ivanova & Brown, 2011). Bellefeuille & Ricks (2003) compare the institutionalization of children, which subjected children to "disconnection, powerlessness, and degradation" to the

...disconnection of being placed in a non-Aboriginal foster home or the sense of powerlessness that emerges as decisions are made by judges and social workers who work from a Eurocentric world view, and last but not least the degradation of having one's culture devalued by not sharing in the language and traditions. (p. 28)

While it is generally believed that the very young are resilient and less impacted by child welfare workers' and judges' decisions, one has to question why several years down the road when these children reach adolescence and begin their search for self-identity and belonging it often ends with tragic results (Carrière & Richardson, 2009; Lavallee & Poole, 2010). The loss of Indigenous children through government sanctioned institutions and policies has a long painful history which continues to be experienced as ongoing loss and grieving for the communities involved.

The lack of culturally matched foster homes was described by Indigenous social workers as a form of assimilation and in many cases more damaging than the residential schools and sixties scoop as many pre-school age children are unable to converse with their parents in English, let alone speak their own Indigenous language (Richardson & Nelson, 2007). Research supports positive outcomes in the case of culturally matched foster children and foster families (Carriere-Laboucane, 1997; Wright, Hiebert-Murphy, Mirwaldt & Muswaggon, 2006) The issue of cross-cultural foster care and the outcomes for Indigenous children and their families demands further discussion and research efforts (Brown, George, St. Arnault & Sintzel, 2011; Brown, Mehta, Skrodzki, Gerritts & Ivanova, 2013).

Related issues discussed include the lack of enforceable policy requiring reluctant non-Indigenous foster parents to engage the foster children with their birth families and in community based cultural events (Brown, et al, 2009; Carrière & Richardson, 2009; Sinclair, 2016). An additional concern is the justice system's support of applications for guardianship to non-Indigenous foster parents which storytellers describe as a back door to adoption. Some agencies have been

creative in finding ways to increase the number of Indigenous foster families such as ‘finding’ or taking funds from other positions to hire a foster worker position to research family genealogies for possible placements. This in turn creates budget issues and an increase in workload for other frontline workers.

Storytellers identified barriers to developing more Indigenous foster homes as a result of insufficient housing due to poverty experienced in Indigenous communities, homes not built to the same codes as urban housing, foster care regulations that do not fit Indigenous cultural norms and the historical trauma impacting many individuals (Brown, Gerritts, Ivanova, Mehta & Skrodzki, 2012; Brown, Ivanova, Mehta, Skrodzki, & Gerritts, 2013). These are not new issues and for the most part these barriers are in place due to outdated policies which do not fit with the realities of Indigenous peoples’ lives. The solutions need to reside with the communities impacted as they have first-hand knowledge of the issues, the communities’ needs, resources and most importantly, the solutions.

Other concerns the storytellers spoke to were related to a lack of funded positions such as foster care positions, support staff, including drivers, and in-home supports. There is ongoing concern for high needs children and youth who continue to be forced to leave their families and communities because of insufficient resources in First Nations communities (MacDonald, 2012). The questions posed by participants include, Why does the funding only flow when children are removed and placed in foster homes? Why is there no support for the families to care for their own children in their homes and communities?

Also of concern is the lack of adequate funding that either keeps children in care or places them at risk of apprehension simply because the depth of poverty experienced by many Indigenous families does not allow them to provide the basic necessities (Blackstock, 2007; Blackstock & Trocmé, 2005; Strega, Fleet, Brown, Dominelli, Callahan & Walmsley, 2008). Social workers

expressed concern for families who struggle to properly feed and clothe their children due to inadequate funding to the agency for reunification efforts and for emergency funds for those times when families run out of food and other basic necessities. Social workers continuously fight to support families in rural and remote communities which lack basic necessities such as sufficient, affordable and nutritious food, clean water and basic support services such as food banks and medical support services that are accessible in urban centers (Blackstock & Trocmé, 2005; Wright, Hiebert-Murphy & Gosek, 2005). Storytellers also expressed concern about the lack of or insufficient funding for critical support positions and services and staff positions, travel costs in rural communities, needed to keep children in their homes and to provide culturally relevant services.

### **The Story of Métis CFS**

The story of Métis child and family services is in many ways representative of the overall story of devolution as the Métis Authority followed the same AJI-CWI vision, mission statement, strategic design principles and timelines. What was unique to their experience was the determination they demonstrated in going from never having had their own child welfare services in Manitoba to developing an authority and two CFS agencies. While the growing pains were challenging at times, their process reflected the strength and spirit of the Métis people's historical and contemporary fight to retain their culture. As Cathy Richardson explains, "Métis tactical resistance shows itself in the various ways in which Métis people have worked to preserve their dignity and culture during times of oppression and racism" (2015, p. 149). The Métis story spoke of the need to start from the ground up developing their own authority and the first Métis child welfare agency which was responsible for all Métis, Inuit and members of the general population who identify them as their choice of service provision in the province (Carrière, 2017).

Their preparations to take on the child welfare mandate included a Métis child welfare worker training program, development of bylaws and policies, finding office space, and hiring staff. Their story is one of unique challenges and success stories as they established culturally relevant child welfare for the Métis people in Manitoba. Among the challenges they faced was the restricted funding as they took on the responsibility to develop services under the constraint that reforms to the child welfare system were to be cost neutral; their source of funding is provincially based; and they struggled to hire Métis staff which meant seconding social workers who were trained in mainstream methods of child welfare. Their approach and strengths in doing child welfare is reflected in their strong family orientation and creative programming which has continued to grow over the years to include a strong emphasis on a kinship care model of foster care, an adoption program that safeguards their emphasis on culturally matched adoptions, the use of openness agreements with adoptive families and birth families, cultural planning and training efforts to ensure children, youth and families have cultural knowledge and connections, and working with the Post Adoption Registry to help connect families (Metis Child, Family and Community Support, 2015-2016).

### **Trauma, Racism, Child Deaths and Inquiries**

Trauma while working at the frontlines was reflected in the stories of social workers who have experienced stressors such as racism in the work place, high caseloads, compassion fatigue and the trauma of child deaths in child welfare (Cameron, 2012) . Indigenous people have been subjected to racism from the beginning of contact with Europeans but the knowledge that it is not a new phenomenon does not make it less isolating or easier to tolerate. After more than two hundred years of experiencing official racist policies which saw Indigenous people dispossessed of their lands, forced onto reserves, their children stolen through the residential schools and child welfare systems resulting in a legacy of impoverished conditions, it is not surprising when racism

raises its ugly head in the very institutions that are charged with ensuring the best interests of our children (Anand, 1998; Harding, 2009; MacDonald & Levasseur, 2014; Palmer & Cooke, 1996; Sinclair, 2016). For the most part discussions of racism in the context of child welfare focus on the experiences of children in care and couched in terms such as racial disproportionality, referral bias or institutional discrimination (Cross, 2008; Harris & Hackett, 2008; Tilbury & Thoburn, 2009).

The stories of racism shared through this study were, for the most part, about racism directed at Indigenous families by non-Indigenous child welfare workers. Whether the racist comments were heard in the workplace or education setting or in recent days or years ago, they were etched into the memories of the storytellers and recalled with a sense of indignation and revulsion. The willingness of the social workers to share their experiences of blatant racism opens up the discussion to another level that illustrates racism's detrimental impact on families involved in child welfare and the harm it creates for the individuals who are exposed to the insults. The topic of racism in Manitoba and elsewhere has been brought to society's consciousness through government inquiries and reports, changes to legislation, high profile court cases of murdered Indigenous individuals, and media coverage, which has for the most part forced much of the overt racist discussion underground (Anand, 1998; Harding, 2009; Lett, 2013; AJIC, 1999; Razack, 2000). The role racism plays in regards to the well-being of Indigenous people in child welfare at both the personal and institutional levels must be prioritized for more in-depth discussion and research targeting resolutions in order for individuals and our society as a whole to take responsibility for the damage it creates. It also requires governments to take strong public positions on the issue.

As social workers shared their stories of the loss of life for children they had worked with, it was clear that their worst fears had been realized. The loss of a child is the worst possible outcome under any circumstance. For child welfare workers and their supervisors, who are charged with the responsibility of the children in their care, experiencing the death of a child, regardless of

the circumstances surrounding the loss, is a devastating event (Dill, 2007; Regehr, Chau, Leslie, & Howe, 2002). In addition to their personal grieving, social workers and their agency are responsible for attending to the grieving parents and foster family, the follow up investigations and inevitable media attention (Douglas, 2013b; Gustavsson & MacEachron, 2004; Thomlison & Bloom, 2012). For Indigenous social workers who are often members of the communities involved in the loss and work from the values of sharing and support for extended families and communities, the loss of these children is something that cannot be distanced. Social workers described common responses to child deaths as changing jobs within the agency to positions with less direct contact to families in the field, pursuing different positions in a different child welfare agency or leaving the field of child welfare indefinitely.

While there is literature available on the topic of child welfare workers and their experience with child deaths and the risks they face in terms of burnout, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma, it is silent on how these devastating events are experienced by Indigenous child welfare workers, supervisors and their agencies (Dill, 2007; Douglas, 2013a; Douglas, 2013b; Horwitz, 2006; Gustavsson, & MacEachron, 2002; Gustavsson, & MacEachron, 2004; MaFadden, Campbell & Taylor, 2015). This topic is a critical area to consider in view of the traumatic history of Indigenous people including the caregivers who may be vulnerable to vicarious trauma (Gosek & Bennett, 2011).

For those social workers who experienced the compressed time and workload pressures of the devolution, their worst fears that children would get 'lost' in the system, fall through the cracks or die as a result of the massive changes that were brought about during the transition, were never far from the surface. As it was, those years were marked by the loss of children's lives and the resulting investigations, charges against parents and the largest inquiry into a child death known to Manitoba. While the relationship between the devolution process and child deaths has not been

explored in detail, it remains an unanswered question for some. The academic literature notes that in addition to the loss of life due to medical conditions and suicide, the actual number of child fatalities across Canada classified as homicides has remained at 86 deaths per year over the past 30 years (Trocmé & Chamberlain, 2003). According to statistics from the United States, it is estimated that between 30% and 50% of children who die as a result of a maltreatment fatality have had contact with child welfare services in their lifetime (Douglas 2013 a; Douglas, 2013 b). This means the potential that a child welfare worker will experience a child death at some point their career is fairly high.

The death of Phoenix Sinclair on June 11, 2005 and the subsequent inquiry which began in March, 2011 and concluded in January 2014 with a final report which set out 62 recommendations has had a far reaching impact on everyone involved and beyond. The impact experienced by the social workers I spoke to was evident as 16 individuals of the 27 who shared their insights, wove the circumstances of Phoenix Sinclair into their stories. This was not unexpected as one study on the impact of child death inquiries on child welfare workers reported that “the death of a child is the most critical event encountered by child welfare workers, ranking above being physically assaulted and threatened” (Regehr et al, 2002, p. 891). Regehr et al (2002) further details the impact of child death inquiries and public response on the child welfare workers and the agency. The child welfare workers experience the trauma and grieving of a child they have worked with and then are re-exposed to the trauma stimuli leading up to and during the inquiry. The inquiry becomes all-consuming as the child welfare workers involved review and question every aspect of the process in preparation for the inquiry. In the meantime they both anticipate and experience criticism of their personal and professional integrity and live with the fear of threats of violence. Additionally, they experience a sense of isolation as people who they anticipated supporting them move to the sidelines to observe rather than support (Regehr, 2002). Not surprisingly, the media has not been

seen as helpful in the manner in which some reporters present the role of child welfare workers to the public (Cooper, 2005; Douglas, 2009).

While the stress that comes with working in child welfare was acknowledged, it is apparent that it is a topic that remains in the background with little formal support at the organizational level. The support program that had been in place by one creative agency to support crisis situations in their communities and sister agencies was dismantled due to lack of funds. The devolution of child welfare in Manitoba added a whole new level of stress to working in child welfare as the magnitude of the change required for the devolution and for the ongoing responses to child death reviews was overwhelming and unsettling for many child welfare workers.

### **The Child Welfare Act, Standards and Indigenous Self-Determination**

It was clear from many of the comments shared by the storytellers that there was a strong sense of disillusionment regarding the structural outcomes of the AJI-CWI. One of the strongest critiques was related to the Child and Family Services Act and Adoptions Act, which had only been changed to include the new Authorities Act. Otherwise the legislation for child welfare in Manitoba was not altered to reflect Indigenous worldviews and culture. Others spoke to the role of the authorities and their apparent lack of decision making power and the lack of adequate funding to bring about the necessary changes required by their impoverished communities. One of the major disappointments expressed by storytellers was that the decision making power and funding are still allocated by the provincial government and not from the authorities.

The early vision of the devolution of child welfare was heralded as the force to change the face of child welfare in Manitoba. It was proposed as a joint initiative among the Province of Manitoba, the Metis Federation, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak who were the political entities representing their respective communities. They spoke of Indigenous people as having “unique authority, rights and responsibilities to honour and care for

their children” and as having distinct rights and authority “to control and deliver their own child and family services” (AJI-CWI website, 2000). It was an exciting vision for Indigenous people who had fought for many decades to finally have control over the destiny of their families. It did not take long before it became obvious that the proposed plan was seriously flawed as two foundational pieces that would have improved chances for success were taken out of the equation. These two critical components included the principles stating that the reforms were to be cost neutral, secondly, the new services would be offered under the existing Child and Family Services Act (1985) and Adoption Act (1997). In spite of these serious setbacks, Indigenous people continued to move ahead believing that change needed to happen. So enticed by the promise that they would finally have a say in the decisions regarding their children both on and off reserve and Métis people would receive a mandate province wide for the first time in the history of child welfare in Manitoba, they pushed ahead in good faith.

The observations expressing disillusionment by social workers in the system are not surprising in view of the history of colonial relationships and differing worldviews. The terminology used for describing the process included “collaboration and cooperation” among the four parties, raising expectations that all four signatories were collaborating as equals, working on a nation to nation level. In order for that to occur, there would need to be an honest dialogue with Indigenous parties stating their needs and what they bring to the table and vice versa. This process did not happen because the provincial government laid the ground rules and at that point it would have been clear that they were not negotiating as equals. This was not collaboration among equals but a continuation of a top down relationship. In the same way the federal government handed over the administration, but not control, of reserves to chief and council without providing adequate budgets, infrastructure, or equipment to ensure the wellbeing and safety of the communities, the Manitoba government handed over the responsibility of administering child welfare. For example,

child welfare workers noted the Act and provincial standards were not changed to reflect Indigenous worldviews and while they can write their own agency standards, they must be in line with provincial standards, meaning they must meet the approval of the Province. As the planning process started out, it was Indigenous participants' understanding that the four authorities would take on the responsibilities the Province had controlled before the devolution. That did not materialize. Instead it was observed that the Province gradually pulled back its decision making power, leaving the authorities to administer the funding and policies handed down to them.

Canadian governments are accustomed to operating from a hierarchical superior-subordinate relationship in which the ministers are "individually and collectively responsible to the legislature for the decisions and actions of the department under their control" (MacDonald & Levasseur, 2014, p. 99). This creates reluctance to hand over responsibility and control to other entities. While Canadian governments are becoming more adept at using the language of self-determination, autonomy, and collaboration, it is still to their benefit to hand over day-to-day responsibility but not the political and monetary powers and to put in place buffers such as the four authorities so the blame is deflected from government sources. The 'Problem' is then seen from the public's perspective, as deriving from 'those' Indigenous people who still don't know what they are doing. For example when funding issues are raised, it is typically presented as due to agencies lack of knowledge of financial accountability. Once again Indigenous people are left to 'fix' what colonial forces have abandoned as *their* issues. In the end the new 'collaborative' arrangements have not provided Indigenous communities with the resources to address very real issues of poverty and racism which drive much of child welfare related issues.

The funding issues are complex with federal and provincial funding at different levels, with some services funded by one and but not by the other level of government resulting with the overall result being less funding for First Nations children. As MacDonald (2009) notes,

“Mainstream child welfare is notoriously underfunded and understaffed, and these old difficulties will be transported to the new system along with the existing funds (p. 184). In addition to these concerns the system will need to account for the increasing number of children being taken into care, the complexity of the social issues and health concerns, and rising costs in caring for children (Rubin, Alessandrini, Feudtner, Mandell, Localio, & Hadley, 2004).

Government ‘infuses’ new funding into the system with one hand and claws back funding with the other hand. For example in 2006 the provincial government responded to the external reviews into the child and family services system by announcing the Changes for Children initiative which would provide a series of initiatives, including additional funding in the amount of \$42 million dollars over three years to improve the child welfare system in Manitoba. The Province also committed an additional \$6.1 million to bolster the foster care system (Champagne et al, 2007). Four years later, in July, 2010, the federal government provided \$177 million in new funding to Manitoba’s Aboriginal child and family services agencies to enhance prevention focused services for on-reserve agencies (Barker, 2010). Annable (2017) of CBC News reports that children’s special allowance that is to be “applied exclusively toward the care, maintenance, education, training or advancement of the child in respect of whom it is paid” and which is reported to be “over \$30 million every year” has been “taken from the agencies for the past decade and given to the provincial to be put in general revenue”.

Storytellers spoke about the government decision making as divide and conquer approach used with different authorities. One person who has insight from working at all levels of child welfare described the government decision makers as never sleeping, meaning that policy and their long term outcomes are thought out in advance.

The other concerns addressed by the storytellers were related to the funding model which continues to be based on bringing children into care rather than providing similar resources for

families as a way to keep them in their homes. The funds only start to flow once the children are apprehended and families are torn apart. The underfunding of First Nations agencies makes no sense as the depth of poverty and its associated difficulties cannot be separated out from the issues in child welfare.

In spite of the disappointments, storytellers spoke about the benefits families and communities have experienced as a result of the devolution. The greatest benefit coming out of the devolution is knowing where all the children are now placed. Other benefits include: the choice families now have in deciding which authority from which they will receive services; the opportunity for more creative ways of reconnecting and keeping families together which in turn results in better relationships within the community and with child welfare workers; it also offers more opportunities for children and families to connect with their cultures; and has resulted in an increase in professionally trained Indigenous child welfare workers. Overall the storytellers recognize the need for pressing ahead with changes to the child welfare system and they also recognize that the AJI-CWI represented a change that was long overdue and that the changes have been both instructive and empowering, giving them new insights into ways they can support their communities. Storytellers made recommendations for changes that targeted the need for increased funding for support services which focus on healing for family members, changing the funding model to a prevention model in order to keep children in their homes, tracking outcomes for children and youth, and most importantly, developing a child and family act that is entrenched in Indigenous values and principles, gives Indigenous people sovereign rights and devolves child welfare to the communities.

### **Recommendations**

In this section I will provide recommendations based on the information drawn from the study outcomes.

During the early planning phase of the AJI-CWI, the decision was made to proceed with the devolution while retaining the same Child and Family Services Act and Adoption Act and to devolve services to the four authorities while maintaining the existing funding. Unfortunately the current Child and Family Services Act and Standards do not support culturally relevant child and family services. The first recommendation calls for full recognition of Indigenous people's sovereign right to develop their own child and family act and standards that reflect their cultural values, and the reality of their communities.

A second recommendation is to further devolve child welfare to First Nations' communities thereby giving them the rights, responsibility, and funding to regain the care and support of their community members.

The third recommendation calls for sufficient funding and resources to keep children and youth in their family homes where personal safety is not a factor. This would require a change in focus from accessing funding based on number of children in care to a preventative model wherein the focus is on prevention and healing. While the transition to a preventative model would require a bridging period and increased cost, the long term benefits to families and communities would be significant. Moving to this model of child welfare would reflect Canada's commitment to reconciliation on national and international stages.

A fourth but related recommendation calls for the need to provide birth families, with high needs children and youth who suffer with mental health and medical issues, with sufficient training, respite and in-home supports to maintain them within the family circle where that is indicated.

A fifth recommendation is to support agencies' efforts to provide culturally matched foster homes for children in care. At the current time there are no funded positions for foster care which means those agencies who do hire people to recruit and work with foster parents must take the funding from other parts of the budget which results in a deficit and/or increased workloads for

case workers. Ensuring adequate funding and resources for foster positions, which are essential in order to support initiatives to search for relative or community placements along with other necessary foster care related supports, sends a message that family and community are a priority.

The sixth recommendation calls for education and training of all child welfare workers and management personnel to include a strong focus on the history of Indigenous people including but not limited to, Indigenous traditional cultural methods of community and family care and support, the role of ceremonies and rites of passage, the ability to recognize and respect the differences in worldviews, the impacts of residential schools, sixties scoop and the current conditions impacting Indigenous families.

The seventh recommendation is to provide regular and consistent ongoing training for child welfare workers and management to ensure everyone working in the field has the information in the preceding recommendation regarding cultural training, in addition to the training and standards currently in place.

The eighth recommendation recognizes the need for ongoing research efforts related to Indigenous child welfare in partnership with agencies at the university level. Research is also recommended in the child welfare system through tracking, collecting and analyzing outcomes for children and families involved in child welfare on a provincial level using the information management system.

Finally, the ninth recommendation is to ensure that cultural training for foster families, where no culturally based homes are available, is mandatory and ongoing and that it be mandatory for foster parents to be accountable for immersing foster children in their culture and languages and maintaining contact with family members and their communities on a regular basis.

## Study Limitations

Overall this study's topic and the application of Indigenous methodology are unique in the available literature on child welfare in Canada. As a qualitative exploratory study the intent was not to search out specific answers to certain questions on a large scale but rather the intent was to capture in-depth stories related to how a sample of frontline social workers experienced their work in child welfare before, during and in the contemporary circumstances related to the AJI-CWI process in Manitoba. The choice of topic, the 27 storytellers who represented a range of cultures and social work positions, and the storytelling method certainly revealed the complexities and produced in-depth stories related to the AJI-CWI process and outcomes.

One of the study limitations was the sample size involving 27 storytellers who would not claim to represent all child welfare workers' opinions regarding the AJI-CWI in Manitoba or child welfare in other jurisdictions. As noted above the study intent was to capture an in-depth snapshot of the AJI-CWI experience in Manitoba over a 17 to 20 year period of child welfare history and therefore many of the outcomes are restricted in terms of applicability to other child welfare jurisdictions.

A second limitation is related to the study's ability to represent all four child welfare authorities equally. Recruitment involved sending out letters of introduction and requests for participation to all CEOs of the authorities and Executive Directors of child welfare agencies. Additionally, cover letters explaining the research project and posters were sent to all child welfare agencies as listed on the Government of Manitoba website. While the majority of respondents had worked in one of the original Winnipeg CFS agencies before the devolution, I only had the opportunity to interview two people who were currently working in an agency under the General Authority. One of the two individuals was required by the manager of the agency to withdraw the interview. I also interviewed one individual who had recently left the General Authority to pursue a

different career. The other authority that is not as strongly represented is the Northern Authority. Travel cost was one of the barriers to interviewing people in northern and remote communities. Also several individuals from the Northern authority who had agreed to interview cancelled due to serious illness and busy schedules, thereby reducing the number of individuals available to interview.

The ability to replicate this study narrows as time passes as many child welfare workers who worked in child welfare before the AJI-CWI have reached retirement age or have moved on to other careers, thus reducing the number of people who were involved in pre-devolution and who are currently active in the field. This leaves increasingly fewer individuals who could speak to the historical aspects.

### **Insights into My Research Journey**

The wise ones often share the teaching that we are all on a journey and we all have work to do and in doing so we will extend our learning. This research study has been a learning journey as it was meant to be and in this piece I will share some of what I observed and incorporated into my learning.

As I began this 'project' I questioned my role in taking on the topic of child welfare as I had never worked as a frontline child welfare worker and did not feel I had expertise about child welfare beyond my own experience as a former child in the system and working with families involved in the child welfare system. As I spent time with the storytellers, I realized I had often heard or experienced some of what they expressed as a community member and through my time working in the Indigenous community, as a social work teacher, and through family and friends who work in the system. For example, I eagerly followed the discussions that resulted in the signing of the memorandums of understandings; I heard students and others question the 'readiness' of Indigenous people to look after their own families; later on I began to hear stories of

disillusionment from social workers who had invested so much time and effort in the planning and implementation process; I heard and experienced the grieving of the child deaths, especially Phoenix Sinclair whose loss touched so many people in Manitoba and across the country; and finally I heard a determination to keep fighting for changes that will benefit the children and families.

### **Acknowledging the Spiritual**

One of the teachings I follow is the admonition to ‘trust the process’ which in this instance meant I was engaged intellectually, emotionally, spiritually and physically in the process of this study. For example, determining my methodological approach was not only an intellectual process but it was also a process of going inward and acknowledging the personal investment. It involved offering tobacco and talking to my ancestors whenever I questioned the process or got stuck along the way. Plus, researching, processing and writing take a certain amount of physical, emotional and spiritual stamina.

Acknowledging the spiritual also involves acknowledging and honoring the spirit of all creation. For this study it meant approaching people with respect and integrity. In practical terms it meant understanding that some people were too busy or had other obstacles and were not available to share their story. It also meant understanding that people have different experiences and opinions on the study’s topic that need to be respected, and it meant respecting the limits on sharing information.

### **Storytelling as Research**

Trusting the process also meant following through with the storytelling process in a respectful manner, understanding that each person would share their ‘truth’ and bring the story of the AJI-CWI process alive. The storytelling sessions were the most powerful part of the research as the storytellers shared experiences and intellectual insights, with many also sharing compelling and meaningful personal stories that illustrated the depth of their child welfare experience and

commitment. It was evident from the stories shared with me that the individuals who responded to the call for storytellers were motivated by their personal and professional investment in improving the child welfare system for children and families. The storytelling also benefitted the storytellers as they were given an opportunity to express their political perspective on a topic meaningful to them and it gave them an opportunity to debrief about their experiences. Their individual stories benefitted me, as researcher, as the stories were told from individual perspectives which in the end, told the larger story of how frontline workers observed and experienced the devolution of child welfare in Manitoba.

### **Relational Connections**

The process was relational both in terms of time spent interacting with the storytellers and, as I was informed, the recruitment poster was posted in lunchrooms and public spaces in offices and sent out by email to child welfare workers, which prompted people to engage in discussions about the study and the devolution. It is through the storytelling and the office discussions that people made relational connections to each other and to their commitment to the children and families. On a personal level, meeting and hearing peoples' stories connected me to new acquaintances and reconnected me to established relationships. The telling of their stories also connected me to the people, communities, and topics they shared in their stories.

### **Respect for Language**

Respect for languages can be interpreted on more than one level. For example, although some people I engaged with spoke English as a second language, they all choose to speak in English which means I did not use an interpreter. Therefore the respect for language included taking care with the words shared with me and making every effort to ensure I did not misinterpret the original meaning or take the words out of context. One of the ways to ensure the use of quotes was

accurate was to share the transcription and the final draft of the stories with the storytellers for feedback.

### **Research is Political**

This study has always been personal and it has been political simply because it is a meaningful topic and it has had political implications for resistance throughout, from the early proposal stage to the storytelling, analyzing and writing. As I write this I realize in the end, two main questions remain, 1) did the AJI-CWI meet the strategic goals it set out by the AJIC<sup>iv</sup>, and the strategic design principles set out by the AJI-CWI<sup>v</sup> and 2) did it meet the needs of Indigenous families and communities involved in child welfare in Manitoba? While the exploratory nature of this study and the small sample size does not allow for a conclusive assessment of these questions, I will briefly review the main points. From a positive perspective, mandated child welfare services for Indigenous people have been expanded throughout Manitoba through the establishment of the four authorities, and the Métis have jurisdiction of child welfare services through the establishment of the Métis authority. This is a monumental change in that not only have culturally relevant services been developed and made available to all Indigenous families in Manitoba but Indigenous people can now say they know where all their children, who are involved in the child welfare system, are for the first time in many decades. This is a success that can be celebrated and for those who were involved in bringing about these positive changes, there is no going back to the time when they had no authority or means of tracking their children and lost children to the system. Other changes include a system wide information system, a central intake system, and the right for families to choose the authority from which they will receive services.

There is also an obvious recognition that systemic issues such as poverty, a severe shortage of adequate housing, a lack of employment opportunities, inadequate resources to support healing from addictions and trauma, systemic racism, and the imposition of mainstream values and

standards and funding inequalities in areas such as foster care and support services for Indigenous communities which all contribute to the high number of Indigenous children in care. Yet, the concern and outrage expressed by child welfare workers and the public at the steady increase of Indigenous children in care appears to go unheard by the people in power.

It is important to note that in the intervening years since the implementation of the AJI-CWI, there has been a steady increase in the number of Indigenous foster families and a substantial increase in educated and trained Indigenous social workers. What has not changed is the recognition and support from government that Indigenous communities are fully capable of taking full responsibility for caring for their families and communities. Child welfare services for Indigenous people are hampered by a child welfare act and set of standards designed by mainstream government officials and by funding that continues to be based on the number of children brought into care, thereby perpetuating a system designed to tear families apart.

Given the long history of colonizing policies and practices, the number of children in care will not be reduced until families are provided with support and accessible resources to begin their healing. Governments must step up to the plate and invest in reducing poverty and providing services the rest of Canadians take for granted such as decent housing, clean water and accessible nutrition. Governments must recognize Indigenous communities' ability to care for their own people, and given the political autonomy and resources, they ARE capable of reversing the current trends in child welfare that provide for children outside of their family homes rather than using creative alternatives to keeping families together and in their communities whenever that is plausible.

Cultural genocide has been an oft repeated refrain throughout child welfare discussions since Judge Kimelman publically acknowledged what Indigenous people had been saying for years. The ability to raise their own children in their own communities by relatives who could share the

languages, teachings, ceremonies that connect them to their territories and communities has been a driving force to keep Indigenous children in their homes and communities. Storytellers talked about the importance of teaching foster families about Indigenous cultures and expressed concern that it is not a requirement for foster parents to ensure Indigenous children are connected to families and their culture, which includes language. The negative long term effects of not connecting children to families and culture was expressed throughout the stories. They also spoke with pride in the many ways culture was expressed in their work with families and in the increase of Indigenous child welfare workers who embrace their culture.

### **Experiencing the Process**

There is no doubt in my mind that my life experience that includes being an Indigenous child in care at the beginning of the sixties scoop, a mother of seven and life partner, a lifelong student, a social worker and social work teacher influenced the choice of topic, research methodology and written report. I don't apologize for that as we are the accumulation of our experiences, gifts, choices and values. In many respects the life experience provided in-depth insights.

One of the biggest battles in writing this dissertation was with the inner struggle I have lived with all my life – living and walking in two worlds. The dissertation brought out both worlds in different ways. The one most relevant to this piece of the writing is the struggle to write and speak in a Euro-Canadian academic form while part of me was busy analyzing and feeling the stories from a very personal perspective. As I wrote I recognized the influence of different universities and the professors who taught me that the use of first person in my assignments was not academic writing and at the same time I considered the influence of the university I am currently working with to complete a PhD that encourages the use of self in academic work. Putting into practice the understanding that knowledge does not flow strictly from my head, but rather that real knowledge

comes from connecting with our inner being was an interesting journey that I believe my ancestors would appreciate. I think the readers will see both sides of me in the written work although for the most part I automatically fell into an academic writing mode. The need to look inward was reflected in the poems I stopped to write along the way whenever the going got tough. I am eternally grateful for the support I received that enabled me to stay in touch with my inner self through poetry writing.

The study of child welfare in Manitoba was not a 'soft' topic to take on. On a personal level, it meant looking inward and backward to my own childhood, my time in care, and my relationship to my mother's pain as a residential school survivor and life survivor. As the work progressed through the historical discussion, the focus turned to all the lost children and families who were torn apart for all the wrong reasons. As I got into the interviews there was no denying the pain and the strength of people who work in child welfare and have lived with the trauma of loss and stress involved in their work. Finally, when I began the data analysis I was confronted with the political implications of recording ideas drawn from a diversity of experiences and ideologies. My goal was clear in that I believe it is important to present all perspectives as honestly and impartially as possible. While I was aware of the political climate around the topic of child welfare when I chose to do research on the devolution in Manitoba, since I had watched it unfold from the periphery, I wasn't quite prepared for the level of passion and sense of urgency expressed by the people who lived it from the frontlines.

The most rewarding piece of this process has been the storytelling sessions and time I got to spend with social workers in Manitoba. I always walked away from our meetings filled with gratitude for all the busy, busy social workers who took the time to share their stories and their passion for the families. I listened to your stories and I tried to listen with respect and with an inquiring mind in order to capture as much information and depth of meaning as possible. When I

played back the recordings I could hear your voices, your accents, your passion, your laughter and tears. That was truly a gift because it was as if I was back sitting in the room with you and this time I could allow myself to feel the depth of what you were sharing with me. The only drawback is that I couldn't use your stories in full detail due to space restrictions. This means there are still powerful stories to be shared. All my relations.

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## Appendix A

Form Letter to Chief Executive Officers of Child Welfare Authorities

Dear:

Re: Child Welfare Research Project

I am currently a PhD student at the University of Victoria and a resident of Manitoba with an interest in child welfare I have chosen to do my dissertation research on the topic of the devolution of child welfare in Manitoba. I am writing to share my current plans for my research and to invite your feedback.

The research topic is *The devolution of child welfare services in Manitoba: An inquiry into the outcomes from a front line experience* and the purpose of this research project is to develop an understanding of how frontline child welfare workers perceive the impact of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry-Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI) devolution process in Manitoba, including what they perceive as the benefits, the deficits, what they perceive as areas for improvement and how they perceive the role of Indigenous culture in child welfare.

The research questions include:

How do front line child welfare social workers perceive the impact of the devolution of child welfare services, commonly referred to as the AJI-CWI Initiative, in Manitoba?

Sub questions include:

- e. What do front line social workers perceive as the benefits of the devolution process to Indigenous families in Manitoba?
- f. What do front line social workers perceive as the deficits of the devolution process to Indigenous families in Manitoba?
- g. What changes do front line social workers perceive the child welfare system in Manitoba could implement in order to benefit Indigenous families in Manitoba?
- h. How do frontline social workers perceive the role of Indigenous culture in child welfare?

The criteria for participation include:

- Individuals need to have worked in child welfare in Manitoba before, during and after the devolution of child welfare which began in November, 2003, and
- Individuals should not currently be a student in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba.

Research of this type is important because the child welfare devolution process in Manitoba has been a major undertaking which impacts thousands of Indigenous families and individuals who are working in the child welfare system. While there have been numerous government sponsored

reviews of the devolution process there has been negligible academic research regarding the actual outcomes in recent years. The study is also unique in that it will address the question from the perspective of Indigenous frontline child welfare workers. The relevance and timing of a research project on this topic is important as the devolution process is considered a unique progression on existing Indigenous child welfare models and is being observed by other jurisdictions as a possible model to emulate.

The current plan is to interview thirty social workers who have frontline experience using a storytelling approach to understanding their experience and insights. Participation in this research will be completely voluntary. If a participant decides not to participate, they may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If they do withdraw from the study their data will not be used in the data analysis and it will be destroyed.

All participants will be given the opportunity to decide if they wish to remain anonymous or have their names published. Individuals who have requested NOT to be identified in the dissemination of the research results will be assigned pseudonyms and a list of names and assigned pseudonyms will be stored in a separate, password protected file that only the researcher has access to. Transcripts will be reviewed with the participant to ensure identifying information is changed to protect anonymity.

The research plan will not proceed until it has received approval from the Human Ethics Research Board at the University of Victoria.

In the meantime if I am available to meet with you and your colleagues to discuss suggestions and feedback regarding this research project. I can be contacted at...

Respectfully,

Gwen Gosek, MSW, PhD Candidate

## Appendix B

Form Letter to Executive Directors of Child Welfare

Dear:

Re: Child Welfare Research Project

I am currently a PhD student at the University of Victoria and as a resident of Manitoba with an interest in child welfare I have chosen to do my dissertation research on the topic of the devolution of child welfare in Manitoba. I am writing to share my current plans for my research and to invite your feedback.

The research topic is *The devolution of child welfare services in Manitoba: An inquiry into the outcomes from a front line experience* and the purpose of this research project is to develop an understanding of how frontline child welfare workers perceive the impact of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry-Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI) devolution process in Manitoba, including what they perceive as the benefits, the deficits, what they perceive as areas for improvement and how they perceive the role of culture in child welfare.

The research questions include:

How do front line child welfare social workers perceive the impact of the devolution of child welfare services, commonly referred to as the AJI-CWI Initiative, in Manitoba?

Sub questions include:

- i. What do front line social workers perceive as the benefits of the devolution process to Indigenous families in Manitoba?
- j. What do front line social workers perceive as the deficits of the devolution process to Indigenous families in Manitoba?
- k. What changes do front line social workers perceive the child welfare system in Manitoba could implement in order to benefit Indigenous families in Manitoba?
- l. How do frontline social workers perceive the role of Indigenous culture in child welfare?

The criteria for participation include:

- Participants need to have worked in child welfare in Manitoba before, during and after the devolution of child welfare which began in November, 2003, and
- Participants should not currently be a student in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba.

Research of this type is important because the child welfare devolution process in Manitoba has been a major undertaking which impacts thousands of Indigenous families and individuals who are working in the child welfare system. While there have been numerous government sponsored reviews of the devolution process there has been negligible academic research regarding the actual outcomes in recent years. The study is also unique in that it will address the question from the perspective of Indigenous frontline child welfare workers. The relevance and timing of a research project on this topic is important as the devolution process is considered a unique progression on existing Indigenous child welfare models and is being observed by other jurisdictions as a possible model to emulate.

The current plan is to interview thirty social workers who have frontline experience using a storytelling approach to understanding their experience and insights. Participation in this research will be completely voluntary. If a participant decides not to participate, they may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If they do withdraw from the study their data will not be used in the data analysis and it will be destroyed.

All participants will be given the opportunity to decide if they wish to remain anonymous or have their names published. Individuals who have requested NOT to be identified in the dissemination of the research results will be assigned pseudonyms and a list of names and assigned pseudonyms will be stored in a separate, password protected file that only the researcher has access to. Transcripts will be reviewed with the participant to ensure identifying information is changed to protect anonymity.

The research plan will not proceed until it has received approval from the Human Ethics Research Board at the University of Victoria.

In the meantime if I am available to meet with you and your colleagues to discuss suggestions and feedback regarding this research project. I can be contacted at ...

Respectfully,

Gwen Gosek, MSW, PhD Candidate

## Appendix C

Poster Distribution Letter

Dear Executive Director:

RE: Poster distribution

I am a doctoral student conducting a PhD research study called *The devolution of child welfare services in Manitoba: An inquiry into the outcomes from a front line experience*. I plan to interview 30 social workers from across Manitoba who have had frontline experience working with Indigenous families both before the devolution process, during the transition and after its completion and if they are currently not a student in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba.

Participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If someone does decide to participate, they may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. The interview process will be completely confidential, and individuals have the choice to determine if they wish to remain anonymous or to be identified in the final report.

I would greatly appreciate your support in sharing my recruitment poster with your contacts through email and by placing a copy of the poster on your bulletin board. When the research is completed I would be pleased to forward you an electronic copy of the final report.

This research has been approved by Human Ethics Research Board at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)). If there are any questions or concerns you can contact the researcher, Gwen Gosek at ...or you can contact my supervisor, Dr. Leslie Brown at...

Thank you in advance for your support.

Respectfully,

Gwen Gosek, MSW Ph.D. Candidate

## Appendix D

### Recruitment Poster

If you are a social worker who was working before, during and after the devolution of child welfare in Manitoba and are not currently a social work student, I would be interested in hearing about your experience.

I believe your experience and insight would be a valuable contribution to the current knowledge base regarding the AJI-CWI initiative and outcomes of the devolution process.

I am currently an Indigenous PhD student with the University of Victoria and a Manitoba resident with an interest in child welfare and in particular, the relationship between social workers and Indigenous families as a result of the devolution process.

I will be using a storytelling approach to gain an understanding of frontline child welfare workers' experiences and would meet with you for 1 to 2 hours per meeting at a place and time convenient to you.

A small honorarium will be provided in the form of a gift card to you to show my appreciation.

All participants will be given the opportunity to decide if they wish to remain anonymous or have their names published. Confidentiality and your desire to remain anonymous will be respected throughout the process.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used in the data analysis and it will be destroyed.

If you are interested in participating please contact me at ...

This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).

## Appendix E

### Email Script for Participant Information

Date

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research project, *The devolution of child welfare services in Manitoba: An inquiry into the outcomes from a front line experience*. As indicated our telephone conversation I am including a copy of the research purpose, the research questions, participant eligibility criteria and a brief data collection form that we will review together at our first meeting. Also please find attached a copy of the Ethics Consent Form which we will review at our first meeting.

If you should have further questions or concerns before we meet please feel free to contact me at this email address or by phone...

### Research Purpose

The purpose of this research project is to develop an understanding of how Indigenous frontline child welfare workers perceive the impact of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry-Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI) devolution in Manitoba, including what they perceive as the benefits, the deficits, what they perceive as areas for improvement and how they perceive the role of Indigenous culture in child welfare.

### Research Questions

How do front line child welfare social workers perceive the impact of the devolution of child welfare services, commonly referred to as the AJI-CWI Initiative, in Manitoba?

Sub questions include:

- m. What do front line social workers perceive as the benefits of the devolution process to Indigenous families in Manitoba?
- n. What do front line social workers perceive as the deficits of the devolution process to Indigenous families in Manitoba?
- o. What changes do front line social workers perceive the child welfare system in Manitoba could implement in order to benefit Indigenous families in Manitoba?
- p. How do frontline social workers perceive the role of Indigenous culture in child welfare?

### Participant Eligibility Criteria

- Participants need to have worked in child welfare in Manitoba before, during and after the devolution of child welfare which began in November, 2003.
- Participants should not currently be a student in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba.

Data Collection Form – see attached

Ethics Consent Form – see attached

## Appendix F

### Phone Script in Response to Potential Participants

Researcher: Hello (name), my name is Gwen Gosek and I am calling in response to your inquiry about participating in the research project regarding the devolution of child welfare services in Manitoba. Wait for response

Let's begin by going over the criteria for participation and if the criteria are a match, I will then give you a brief overview of the project and set up a meeting time.

The criteria involves having worked in child welfare in Manitoba before, during and after the devolution of child welfare which began in November, 2003, and currently not a student in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba.

Does this describe your experience? Assuming the response is yes.

As the poster describes the purpose of this research project is to develop an understanding of how frontline child welfare workers perceive the impact of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry-Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI) devolution in Manitoba, including what they perceive as the benefits, the deficits, what they perceive as areas for improvement and how they perceive the role of Indigenous culture in child welfare.

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include meeting with me in a place and at a time convenient for you. The meeting can take place at my private office or a place that you designate. I will forward copies of the consent form and research questions to you by email before our meeting.

At the initial meeting we will discuss my commitment as a researcher to protect your rights and confidentiality as required by the Human Ethics Research Board at the University of Victoria. Once the consent form is signed we will begin the interview, which will incorporate a story telling approach, in which you are encouraged to talk about your child welfare experience working with Indigenous families both before the devolution process and after its completion. My role in this process is to listen and support your process.

Opportunities will be provided to take breaks and to end the interview when you determine you need to break. It is anticipated that the initial meeting will take 1.5 hours. If further meetings are required to complete the story telling, a mutually available time and place will be arranged.

Do you have any questions at this time? Respond to questions as needed.

Would you like to set a meeting time and place now?

**Appendix G**

## Data Collection Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name or Self-identified Pseudonym : \_\_\_\_\_

1. Male: \_\_\_\_\_ Female: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Age Range:

21 - 30 \_\_\_\_\_

31 - 40 \_\_\_\_\_

41 - 50 \_\_\_\_\_

51 - 60 \_\_\_\_\_

61 - 70 \_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you identify as Indigenous: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

4. How do describe your affiliation ie. First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Cree, Anishanaabe or other \_\_\_\_\_

5. How would identify your education?

Secondary: \_\_\_\_\_

Undergraduate: \_\_\_\_\_

Degree sought or attained? \_\_\_\_\_

Graduate: \_\_\_\_\_

Degree sought or attained? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix H

### Participant Consent Form



**University  
of Victoria**

*Participant Consent Form*

### **The devolution of child welfare services in Manitoba: An inquiry into the outcomes from a front line experience**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *The devolution of child welfare services in Manitoba: An inquiry into the outcomes from a front line experience* that is being conducted by Gwendolyn M Gosek who is a graduate student in the School of Social Work at the University of Victoria. You may contact her if you have further questions by email at ...

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a PhD degree in Philosophy. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Leslie Brown. You may contact my supervisor by email at ...

#### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this research project is to develop an understanding of how Indigenous frontline child welfare workers perceive the impact of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry-Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI) devolution in Manitoba, including what they perceive as the benefits, the deficits and what they perceive as areas for improvement.

#### Research Questions:

How do front line child welfare social workers perceive the impact of the devolution of child welfare services, commonly referred to as the AJI-CWI Initiative, in Manitoba?

#### Sub questions include:

- q. What do front line social workers perceive as the benefits of the devolution process to Indigenous families in Manitoba?
- r. What do front line social workers perceive as the deficits of the devolution process to Indigenous families in Manitoba?
- s. What changes do front line social workers perceive the child welfare system in Manitoba could implement in order to benefit Indigenous families in Manitoba?
- t. How do frontline social workers perceive the role of Indigenous culture in child welfare?

#### **Importance of this Research**

Research of this type is important because the child welfare devolution process in Manitoba has been a major undertaking which impacts thousands of Indigenous families and individuals who are working in the child

welfare system. While there have been numerous government sponsored reviews of the devolution process there has been negligible academic research regarding the actual outcomes in recent years. The study is also unique in that it will address the question from the perspective of frontline child welfare workers. The relevance and timing of a research project on this topic is important as the devolution process is considered a unique progression on existing Indigenous child welfare models and is being observed by other jurisdictions as a possible model to emulate.

It is anticipated that the information gained through this research project will help inform child welfare policy and practice and contribute to the academic knowledge base.

### **Participants Selection**

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are one of potentially 30 participants who have identified as a child welfare worker who has had frontline experience working with Indigenous families both before the devolution process and after its completion and you have confirmed that you are currently not a student in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba.

### **What is involved**

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include meeting with me in a place and at a time convenient for you. The meeting can take place at my private office or a place that you designate. I will forward copies of the consent form and research questions to you by email before our meeting. At the initial meeting we will discuss my commitment as a researcher to protect your rights and confidentiality as stated in this document and that you have consented to. The interview will not proceed until the consent form is signed. The interview will incorporate a story telling approach in which you are encouraged to talk about your child welfare experience working with Indigenous families both before the devolution process and after its completion. My role in this process is to listen and support your process.

Opportunities will be provided to take breaks and to end the interview when you determine you need to break. It is anticipated that the initial meeting will take 1.5 hours. If further meetings are required to complete the story telling, a mutually available time and place will be arranged.

With your permission I will audio tape the meeting and take notes. At the completion of the meeting the audio tapes will be transcribed and a copy will be sent to you in order to revise and delete as you see fit. We will then meet to review the transcripts and develop a condensed 'story' that will be used as research data. As in the story telling tradition, the information you share belongs to the storyteller and I will only use and publish those portions that you agree to make public.

### **Inconvenience**

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time commitment to share your story and to finalize the research story. In order to alleviate the time pressures I will arrange to meet with you in a place and time convenient for you.

### **Risks**

There are some potential risks to you by participating in this research and they include feelings of sadness or stress as a result of discussing work related concerns. To prevent or to deal with these potential risks I will

provide support through debriefing, take appropriate breaks, ensure individuals have opportunities for self-care and offer outside counseling supports.

An additional potential risk involves conducting research in a relatively small population which may pose a risk of you being recognized in the published findings even though you may choose to be anonymous and this may reflect on you in your community or in work place relationships. In order to minimize risks you will have the opportunity to review your transcripts and either change identifying statements or delete statements that you believe would identify you in your work place or community. You will also have the choice to be anonymous at any point you identify during the research process even though you may have originally requested to have your name used in the final document.

### **Benefits**

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include the opportunity to discuss your experience which allows for the opportunity to debrief about your experiences within your child welfare work practice and to provide you with the opportunity to share your insights and ideas for potential change.

The care and safety of children is a state responsibility and it is anticipated that an exploration of the sweeping changes to the child welfare system in Manitoba will help to highlight the potential benefits and concerns from a frontline perspective.

It is anticipated that the study will contribute to the academic body of knowledge as there has been negligible academic research regarding the devolution of child welfare in Manitoba in recent years. The study is also unique in that it will address the question from the perspective of frontline child welfare workers. The relevance and timing of a research project on this topic is germane as the devolution process is considered a unique progression on existing Indigenous child welfare models and is being observed by other jurisdictions as a possible model to emulate.

### **Compensation**

**As a way to compensate you for any inconvenience related to your participation, you will be given a \$25.00 gift card which will not be withdrawn should you decide not to continue your participation. If you consent to participate in this study, this form of compensation to you must not be coercive. It is unethical to provide undue compensation or inducements to research participants. In other words, if you would not participate if the compensation was not offered, then you should decline.**

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used in the data analysis and it will be destroyed.

### **On-going Consent**

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will ensure

- You are informed throughout the course of the research project that your participation is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to continue participating if you so decide to withdraw.

- You will be assured of your right to request portions or all of the data you have provided be withdrawn at any time.

### **Anonymity**

All participants will be given the opportunity to decide if they wish to remain anonymous or have their names published.

Individuals who have requested NOT to be identified in the dissemination of the research results will be assigned pseudonyms of their choice and the list of names and assigned pseudonyms will be stored in a separate, password protected file that only the researcher has access to. Transcripts will be reviewed with the participant to ensure identifying information is changed to protect anonymity.

All participants will have the opportunity to revise their transcripts and delete or alter identifying information such as community, agency or other affiliations' names or information. While there is a possibility of someone in one of the communities recognizing you through the stories you relate, care will be taken with final transcripts to delete or change identifying information which would jeopardize your standing in the communities or agencies.

### **Confidentiality**

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by the following process:

- Audio recordings and electronic copies of the transcripts will be stored in separate password protected files on my personal computer.
- Key codes for participants' pseudonyms will be stored in a separate password protected file on my personal computer.
- All backup copies of the above data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office.

### **Dissemination of Results**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared in the following ways:

- A link to the final dissertation report will be sent out to all child welfare agencies and interested parties
- A link to the final dissertation report will be sent to participants
- Dissertation/Class presentations
- Presentations at scholarly meetings
- Published article, chapter or book
- The dissertation report will be published on the Internet through the University of Victoria

### **Disposal of Data**

All data will be destroyed at the end of the research and dissertation process. All relevant files will be deleted, audio recordings will be erased and paper documents will be shredded.

### **Contacts**

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include:

**RESEARCHER:** Gwendolyn Gosek by email:

**SUPERVISOR:** Dr. Leslie Brown by email:

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

<i>Name of Participant Please Print</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
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WAIVING CONFIDENTIALITY *PLEASE SELECT STATEMENT only if you consent to having your name published in the final results:*

I consent to be identified by name / credited in the results of the study: \_\_\_\_\_ (Participant to provide initials)

I consent to have my responses attributed to me by name in the results: \_\_\_\_\_ (Participant to provide initials)

*A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.*

## Appendix I

### Approval Form for Finalized Transcript of Participant's Story

The purpose of this form is to confirm your agreement to use the attached transcript as the final transcript for publication purposes. It also indicates my commitment to destroy all previous copies of the data and only reference this copy of the transcript in any future published works.

If you agree to the above statements please sign below.

Please print name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix J

### Counseling Resources for Research Participants

If you experience emotional distress as a result of talking about your experiences for this research project please feel free to contact the researcher, Gwen Gosek at . . . , or a counseling service listed below or a different one of your choosing.

Youville Centre	204-233-0262 or 204-255-4840
Klinic	204-784-4059 or 204-784-4067
The Family Centre	204-947-8592

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Genesis 1:28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

<sup>ii</sup> For example after speaking about Indigenous spirituality in class I have had the experience of receiving an anonymous email which was followed up by an anonymous phone message warning me not to bring religion into the classroom. This occurred after a discussion of the medicine wheel in which I was explaining the balance of the four aspects involving the emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual. My response to the demand not to talk about traditional spirituality was to bring in elders and spend more time on talking about the role of spirituality in relation to Indigenous worldviews because it is my understanding that in traditional times everything began with ceremony from the beginning of life right through to passing on to the spirit world. Most students are eager to learn about the cultural teachings and traditional ways, others are afraid to go outside of their religion, and yet others profess to be atheists. As a teacher my role is not to convince students that one belief is superior to the other but rather it is my role to help students understand Indigenous culture so they will be knowledgeable and respectful in their social work roles with Indigenous people.

<sup>iii</sup> After the Child and Family Services Authorities Act was proclaimed in 2003, changes included:

Delegation of Powers: Creation of Aboriginal (and general) Authorities governed by boards of directors appointed by their respective political bodies. The Authorities have taken on, for the most-part, the powers formerly vested in the Director of Child Welfare. This devolution of powers to the Authorities and granting of appointment rights to the political bodies is a significant devolution of power to Aboriginal people and their political structures. Although the exclusive power of the Authorities is considerable, accountability still remains with the Crown through the Minister. Authorities may create a mandated child and family service agency or take it over if they believe it is necessary to do so. They are the funders of the agencies and may direct them to take action if they see fit (Aboriginal Justice Inquiry Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI, p. 4).

<sup>iv</sup> The Recommendations of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry in the area of Child Welfare were:

1. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal child and family service agencies be provided with sufficient resources to enable them to provide the communities they serve with the full range of direct service and preventive programs mandated by the Child and Family Services Act.
2. The federal and provincial governments provide resources to Aboriginal child and family service agencies for the purpose of developing policies, standards, protocols and procedures in various areas, but particularly for the purpose of developing computer systems that will permit them to communicate quickly and effectively with other agencies, to track cases and to share information.
3. Principle 11 of the Child and Family Services Act be amended to read: "Aboriginal people are entitled to the provision of child and family services in a manner which respects their unique status, and their cultural and linguistic heritage.
4. The Province of Manitoba in conjunction with the Manitoba Metis Federation develop a mandated Métis child and family service agency with jurisdiction over Métis and non-status children throughout Manitoba.
5. The jurisdiction of the reserve-based Indian child and family service agencies be extended to include off-reserve band members.

- 
6. Indian agencies be provided with sufficient resources to ensure that this expanded mandate be effectively carried out.
  7. A mandated Aboriginal child and family service agency be established in the city of Winnipeg.

(Retrieved from <http://www.ajic.mb.ca/reports/firstquarter.html#SCHEDULE 3>)

**v Strategic Design Principles set out by AJI-CWI**

1. There will be a common process to develop the implementation plan to restructure the system;
2. The distinct rights and authorities of First Nations and Metis peoples and the general population will be province-wide;
3. Each CFS Authority requires a skilled and appropriate workforce; and each has the right to define 'skilled', 'appropriate' and the criteria through which the workforce is hired;\*
4. Services, administrative and financial resources in the child and family service system will be distributed in a way that achieves equitable funding and parity of service throughout the province;
5. There shall be a method for determining which Authority or agency can provide the most culturally appropriate services for a child and/or a family;
6. Intake services will be coordinated; there will be timely first response; and the intake system will ensure that no child is at risk because of gaps between the mandates or operations of agencies;
7. Each Authority will provide the full range of services and functions as outlined in The Child and Family Services Act and The Adoption Act;
8. Child and family services records and processes need to be computerized; and there will be common registries for the whole system;
9. The system of services delivered by mandated child and family services agencies shall protect and honour children by building and empowering community, family and personal capacity through the delivery of holistic, restorative, integrated, preventive, supportive and protective services.

\*The province will work cooperatively with the Authorities to develop a competent workforce and maintains the capacity to ensure standards in this regard.

(Retrieved from <http://www.aji-cwi.mb.ca/eng/strategicdesignprinciples.html>)