



2017 National Year of Dialogue for Reconciliation and Renewed Relationships

IPAC MANITOBA EVENT DEBRIEF

Reconciliation and Child Welfare IPAC – Manitoba February 2, 2017

Highlights

- Communities should have greater control over how things are designed and delivered (they have ideas on solutions; government needs to allow those solutions);
- Flexibility is needed to respond to different community realities;
- Current government institutional and program barriers are preventing communities from achieving success; and
- Need to shift resources away from funding reactionary measures to focus on prevention.

Speakers

- Florence Paynter, Elder
- Cora Morgan, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Children's Advocate
- Bert Crocker, Southern First Nations Network of Care
- Diane Kelly, ADM, Child and Family Services, Province of Manitoba
- Tara Petti, Southern First Nations Network of Care
- Billie Schibler, Metis Child and Family Services Authority
- Brian Hart, First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority
- Patricia Cox, General Child and Family Services Authority
- Sandra (Sandie) Stoker, All Nations Coordinated Network of Care
- Morgan and Krystyne, former children in care
- Diane Redsky, Executive Director, Ma Mawi Chi Itata Centre

Context

Manitoba is unique in Canada for having specific First Nations (southern and northern), Metis, and general child authorities

Devolution done in response to the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry

Manitoba has approximately 11,000 children in care; the most per capita in Canada

About 90% of these children are Indigenous

Manitoba has the highest child and infant apprehension rates in the western world

Manitoba has the lowest threshold to intervene in North America, which sets families up to fail

Manitoba Government recently passed a new law: The Path to Reconciliation Act – first of its kind in Canada – to guide its reconciliation efforts under the principles of respect, understanding, engagement, and action

Manitoba is currently drafting legislation on customary care – using the community's customs to provide care; (i.e., very general, flexible definition that basically says it's up to the community to define)

Gaps and Opportunities in the Current CFS Model

- Province still has lots of control; creates duplication of oversight; probably have too much resources on the admin side
- Built up, inter-generational, deep-rooted trauma makes it difficult to address some of the root causes and get into prevention; need to address this as a society
- Authorities are often left holding the bag on mental health issues, but aren't adequately resourced for this
- Having to deal with sexually exploited and suicidal children is resource intensive
- Too few foster families in Manitoba
- Province of Manitoba has acknowledged that there has to be increased incentives to focus on prevention
 - Current model is when number of children in care goes down, funding for authorities goes down, creating a perverse incentive for authorities to keep number of children in care high
 - Currently don't get money for prevention



Diane Redsky, Executive Director Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, explains their experience with family group conferencing as approach to keeping families together.

- It's been 12 years since devolution and the number of children in care has doubled; the optics of devolution suggested that power of decision making was given to First Nations and Metis people; however, this is far from the truth because everything has been siloed and defined for the authorities by government
 - Customary care / family group conferencing – current buzz words that reflect the traditional ways of doing things; government still makes you fit into boxes and programs; government not truly embracing how these should be done
 - Don't want to see more funding to foster families; should be more money to keep families together; when you take kids away, should be apologizing to that family
 - If agencies fail to act, then they are criticized; forces agencies to act when they shouldn't; definition of abuse is from 1978
- Recognize that it isn't just a child welfare issue, it's a justice issue, it's an education issue, it's a leadership issue
- Really need to adopt a global and flexible funding model
- Need to flip the model

Insights from Ma Mawi's Experience with Family Group Conferencing

- Concept from New Zealand
- New Zealand requires family group conferencing prior to seizing children
- Family group conferencing shifts decision-making regarding care and protections of children to the entire family and community
- Belief is that with the right supports families can be kept together; sometimes it's not an easy solution
- Families know the history and story of what's going on the best
- Ma Mawi has been successfully using this model for a number of years and has saved the CFS system millions of dollars by taking children out of protective care

Insights from Former Kids in Care

- Lied to when they were taken away (going for ice cream; going to camp) and not told where they were going
- No support for parents; mental health checkup would have likely kept family together
- No one ever asks the child what they want
- If we can afford to pay a foster family, why can't we pay to try keep the family together
- Need to have workers with life experiences so they can connect and understand children (how does a middle class worker understand a kid having to eat raw pasta with cold sauce for dinner); need to be genuine and honest

- *Results*
- As a result of IPAC bringing the authorities and agency together:
- The northern and southern First Nations authorities agreed to collaborate and provide training for their front-line workers.
- The authorities and agencies learned that they are facing many of the same issues. They've committed to future collaboration across their organizations, a dialogue that never existed before.

Additional resources

Two presentations from the day are posted at <http://www.ipac.ca/Manitoba/PastEvents>



This IPAC-Manitoba sponsored event resulted in new collaboration and commitment to further dialogue between the various child authority agencies. From l-r: Brian Hart, First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Service Authority, Billie Schibler, Métis Child and Family Services Authority, Patricia Cox, General Child and Family Services Authority, Sandra (Sandie) Stoker, All Nations Coordinated Network of Care, Tara Petti, Southern First Nation Network of Care, Cora Morgan, First Nations Child Advocate