



Briefing Paper: Strengthening families and communities from the ground up

Efforts to strengthen mainstream child protection systems frequently take a top-downⁱ approach of imposing formal (and at times non-voluntary) government-managed services on families experiencing difficulties. Such formal system-driven approaches often result in low service engagement by families in need, as they do not provide holistic supports and servicesⁱⁱ.

Community-based child and family services, for their part, offer largely voluntary, prevention focused resources, programs and services. They deliver accessible interventions by meeting families where they are at and providing targeted supports that respond to a family's specific needs and considers their full environment including income, housing, education, community connections, health, access to social services, etc. Tailoring and adapting programs and services through participation and inclusion of families enables responsive interventions and wraparoundⁱⁱⁱ protection for the child. Grassroots approaches feature community action, build on existing community strengths, and stimulate community-government collaboration. The role of community in child and family wellbeing is crucial, as children are frequently protected by informal relations such as extended families, communities, and leaders such as Elders, teachers, or religious leaders^{iv}.

The three organizations featured in this paper are also co-conveners for the webinar panel on this topic as part of the *Beyond Neglect* series. They are highly committed to a bottom-up approach that meets families where they are at and addresses all the social, environmental and systemic factors at play.

Families Canada

The experiences and issues that families face are as varied as the sizes and types of families that exist. These issues are dynamic and change with circumstances and time for each family. Building trusted individualized relationships at the grassroots with the significant adults in a child's life is key to understanding the unique challenges of each family as they evolve. Families Canada's members are hubs of community-based services and family support that place the child at the center, while providing programs, resources, and support to build the capacity of those around the child to ensure families grow strong and healthy.

The Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration

The MRCSSI's Culturally Integrative Family Safety Response model (CIFSR) enables mandated services such as Child Welfare agencies to proceed with their work while MRCSSI staff simultaneously support the family to address broader and more complex and underlying challenges. A strong working partnership has been established between the MRCSSI and the London and Middlesex Children's Aid Society (LMCAS). This model of collaboration between top-down and bottom-up services has been very successful and has led to positive outcomes that keep the child safe and at the center, without alienating the family and their community.

This Culturally Integrative Model works to address the unique role that migration, integration, culture and value/belief systems play in a child and family's experience. MRCSSI integrates best practices and embeds them within collectivist cultural norms. They develop evidence-based curriculum to meet the needs of families and individuals from collectivist cultures, those struggling with integration and those migrating from conflict zones. Services and responses are shaped through a family-focused, strengths-based and collective approach.

One Vision One Voice

African Canadians have reported that they experience disparities when involved with the child welfare system. They are criminalized, lack access to culturally appropriate services, and experience poorer outcomes than their white counterparts. At the micro level, anti-Black racism is embedded within society, operating within the policies and practices of child welfare agencies, between child welfare agencies, and within other systems such as education and police. At the micro level, anti-Black racism operates at the interpersonal level, through conscious and unconscious biases and microaggressions.

The One Vision One Voice Program encourages agencies to implement 11 Race Equity Practices that promote organizational change throughout child welfare agencies through a race equity lens. Race Equity Practice #5: *Engage African Canadian parents and communities* focuses on the importance of community engagement and building community capacity. Engaging parents and community members effectively in the child welfare system is both complex and vital to the outcomes for African Canadian children, youth, and families. Given this challenge and imperative, child welfare agencies must develop ways of engaging parents and community members not only in the short term, but also with the goal of developing and maintaining relationships over the long term.

Additional resources:

Caldwell, J., Delaye, A., and Esposito, T (2020) Studying the spaces around families: Critical considerations for neighbourhood research methods related to neglect-driven child protection involvement. McGill University, Center for Research on Children and Families.

Ashbourne, L & Baobaid, M. A (2020). Collectivist Perspective for Addressing Family Violence in Minority Newcomer Communities in North America: Culturally Integrative Family Safety Responses: *Journal of Family Theory & Review* (2019) 1
DOI:10.1111/jftr.12332

Baobaid, M., & Ashbourne, L. M. (2017). *Enhancing culturally integrative family safety response in Muslim communities*. New York, NY: Routledge. From:
<http://www.oacas.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/OVOV-One-pager.pdf>

One Vision One Voice resources: <http://www.oacas.org/what-we-do/onevisiononevoice/>

Information and Suggestions for a National/Regional First Nations Child Welfare Legislation: https://f54667c7-b33a-4709-8cba-66716a068b2d.usrfiles.com/ugd/f54667_7b7261788a914eb69334c90acf294d19.pdf

This Briefing Paper was written by the **Child Welfare League of Canada (CWLC)** in collaboration with **Zindu Salih**, Director of Operations at Families Canada; **Dr. Mohammed Baobaid**, founder and Executive Director of the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration in Canada (MRCSSI) and adjunct professor at the Western University; and **Keishia Facey**, Project Manager for the One Vision One Voice, OACAS.

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ⁱ Top-down decision-making identifies the desired outcome or results of a project before determining the process to achieve those results. This type of decision-making often accompanies a top-down management style where the heads of an organization make the decisions and pass them down to other members of the organization to implement. From: <https://smallbusiness.chron.com/decisionmaking-styles-organizations-24385.html>

ⁱⁱ Michael G. Wessells (2015) Bottom-up approaches to strengthening child protection systems: Placing children, families, and communities at the center. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Volume 43.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Wraparound** service delivery is a team-based, collaborative case management approach. Wraparound differs from many service delivery strategies, in that it provides a comprehensive, holistic, youth and family-driven way of responding to the needs of children and families. Wraparound services put the child or youth and family at the center, prioritizing the family's ideas and perspectives about what they need most. It is comprehensive in that a number of organizations work together to provide a holistic program of supports. From: <https://nwi.pdx.edu/wraparound-basics/>

^{iv} Dawes, A. and Donald, D., (2000). Improving children's chances. Addressing childhood adversity, David Philip, Cape Town, South Africa pp. 1-25