



BEYOND NEGLECT

Event report



CWLC  **LBEC**

Child Welfare League of Canada
Ligue pour le bien-être de l'enfance du Canada

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FOREWARD BY ELDER ALBERT DUMONT

The words 'Beyond Neglect' sadly but accurately describe the failures in basic human rights for Indigenous youngsters within Canada's childcare system. The neglect still weighing us down today has its origins back to when people of European backgrounds and culture first put it in their minds that they (colonizers) knew what was best for the Indigenous children of this country. It will never be known how many Indigenous children have died from neglect while in 'care'. Only Creator has kept count of the numbers! The children who were emotionally impacted because of experiences in foster homes or group homes must be astronomical too, in its number.

To re-energize my commitment to the emotional wellness of young Indigenous people I often look back to 1993 when the story of Teddy Bellingham gave first breath to my life as a human rights activist. Teddy, a lad of Chippewa background was removed from his parents and community of Cape Croker (Chippewas of Nawash) by the Children's Aid Society (CAS) when he was 2 years old. At birth he was given the name Theodore Solomon. A family, the Bellinghams, who ran a sheep farm adopted Teddy. His family name of Solomon was removed from his identity and replaced with Bellingham.

Teddy suffered from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). He was kind, gentle and obedient. He was not however, capable of learning basic family-oriented chores and tasks, his FAS didn't allow him to do so. At 12 years of age, Teddy was returned to the CAS by his adopted parents who felt they were not equipped emotionally nor psychologically to care for Teddy in the way they hoped when they agreed to take him into their lives. At 16 years of age Teddy was 5'-3" tall and weighed 115 lbs. He was also burdened with the mind capacity in the range of a neuro-typical 10 to 12 year old child.

Teddy was living at a group home when he was lured into an apartment in Smith Falls, Ont. by eight white men who were partying inside. As soon as Teddy entered the apartment, he was set upon by the biggest and most powerful man in the room. Steve Allen was 6'-3" tall and weighed 220 lbs. Allen pumped iron to pass the time, he was a dangerous man. Teddy was beaten by Steve Allen for 5 hours until it was certain that he was dead. His body was buried in a shallow grave outside of town by his killers. There the body lay for over a year until Crime Stoppers were notified by persons unknown. The eight men who were in the apartment where Teddy died were rounded up.

At the trial no one from CAS came to the courtroom to observe the proceedings and learn how one of their wards had died. The Bellinghams neither, never showed their faces in the courtroom in support of Teddy's memory. They only came to give testimony telling why they made the decision to return Teddy to the CAS. Eye witnesses (four of the men in the apartment where the killing occurred testified for the Crown) gave testimony describing the brutality experienced by Teddy in the last 5 hours of his life. Somehow, a jury all of them white people, found Steve Allen guilty of only manslaughter.

Some might say that it is true Teddy's rights as a child and as a human being were neglected. In reality, what happened to Teddy Solomon went beyond neglect. He was never reported missing by the CAS. Teddy's killers spread the word that Teddy had decided on his own to "hitchhike from Smiths Falls to Alberta where he intended to start his life over." Nobody, including the crown attorney at the trial, questioned how a 16 year old boy with the mentality of a much younger child could formulate such a plan.

Teddy's killers came from 'decent' homes. Blue collar, hard working folks! The jury, I guess, couldn't bring themselves to convict Steve Allen of first degree murder (he was so charged) even though several witnesses testified that Mr. Allen told many people in the months before the killing that "I'm going to kill the Indian kid." Steve Allen came from a good home of law-abiding, taxpaying folks, just as the members of the jury saw themselves. Steve Allen's guilt or innocence was not decided by a jury of 'his' peers. It was decided by a jury who strongly identified with the killer's parents. I hope anyone reading this account will think about that for a while.

I believe that Teddy's life and death should become a case study to be examined at universities and other places of learning where the students are hoping to make a career for themselves in child advocacy. The story of Teddy Solomon is only one story of countless others. "Beyond Neglect?" What are we going to do about it?

INTRODUCTION

In April 2021, the Child Welfare League of Canada (CWLC), in partnership with the Children's Aid Foundation of Canada, led a series of cross-sectoral convenings with the goal of introducing a positive obligation for government and service providers to assist families who are experiencing difficulties in a context of poverty.

This three-day event convened people across sectors to gain a better understanding of how the child welfare system responds to the conditions that place families at an increased risk of child protection involvement due to assessments of 'neglect'. The goal of Beyond Neglect is to develop and champion evidence-based legislative frameworks that could help service providers and governments to better meet the needs of children, youth and their families. Six thoughtful, action-oriented discussions were informed by a respect for Indigenous sovereignty and a desire to advance equity, and by the knowledge and solutions offered by those who are most impacted by colonialism, anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism.

The event brought together a wide array of experts from various sectors: academia, government, community, the private sector, Elders, advocates, lawyers, as well as lived experience experts such as parents, youth and youth in/from care. This allowed for a holistic understanding of the complex emergencies and entrenched social problems that pose challenges and risks to the protection and well-being of children. Experts also made possible the profiling of existing initiatives, longstanding recommendations, and innovative thinking that seek to reduce the number of children coming into the care of mainstream agencies and increase the number of children connected to their families, communities and cultural heritage.

The year-long research and development of this project as well as the culminating three-day event was guided by a group of key advisors and Indigenous Knowledge Keepers. Traditional Algonquin Teacher Elder Albert Dumont offered opening and closing words throughout the webinar series, guiding the conversation by drawing on his wisdom and lived experience.

The series was divided into six themes identified by advisors as central to destabilizing and challenging the concept of 'neglect':

- 1) What is a healthy family? Guidance from youth and Elders;**
- 2) What is 'neglect'? Challenging and redefining discriminatory concepts;**
- 3) Using resources to effectively support child and family well-being;**
- 4) Rights, legislation and moving beyond forensic approaches to child and family well-being;**
- 5) Strengthening families and communities from the ground up;**
- 6) Learning from current federal, provincial and territorial research-informed initiatives.**

Each theme began with a webinar panel that was open to the public. Three 15-minute presentations were given by three to four panelists chosen for their expertise and their unique contribution to the conversation. A question-and-answer period with the audience concluded each webinar panel. Following each webinar, a small invite-only roundtable discussion was held for targeted experts in the field. Each roundtable discussion event convened between 20 to 25 experts, and small breakout groups ranging from three to six people were facilitated by CWLC team and student notetakers. The breakout groups exchanged for 40 minutes on the topic presented in the webinar, answering pre-assigned questions around what meaningful change could look like and identifying the barriers to accomplishing the desired systemic shift. The small groups then reported back to the larger group to help identify common ground for collaborative action. The roundtable discussions served as in-depth focus groups in order to collect thoughts and suggestions from key experts. The discussion outcomes have been collated in this report into a series of clear barriers and potential solutions that would have the greatest benefit to those who are experiencing the greatest harm from inadequate and discriminatory systems.

A series of briefing papers co-authored by CWLC and some of the webinar panelists were produced prior to the event, allowing the public to learn more about the topic and prepare for the discussion. All briefing papers can be found on the CWLC website, links are provided in each section below.

THEME OVERVIEW

What is a healthy family? Guidance from youth and Elders

In order to move beyond discriminatory and colonial concepts of 'neglect', we must first and foremost turn to voices often unheard and most affected by the mainstream child welfare system. In the introductory panel of the Beyond Neglect series, we heard the voices of young people and Elders, Indigenous and racialized youth and former youth in care, in an attempt to better understand their perception of what makes a healthy family. Knowing the true needs of children and families and having a shared vision of the goals to reach will help us act towards meaningful change.

The [briefing paper](#) on this topic was written by one of our expert panelists, Chevon Cadigan, a UNICEF Canada U-Ambassador and a Grade 10 student from Downeyville, Ontario. Chevon shares her reflections on what constitutes a healthy family, based on her own experiences and her involvement with UNICEF Canada.

Elder Albert Dumont and grand-daughter Kyrstin Dumont

Algonquin Elder Albert Dumont is an Indigenous rights activist and poet. He and his grand-daughter, 20-year-old Kyrstin Dumont, an Algonquin Anishinaabe activist and youth advocate, shared their thoughts and experiences about First Nations families. They discussed the importance of emotional support and mutual respect among family members. Kyrstin reflected on how children often lack self-esteem and self-love due to unhealthy family dynamics stemming from intergenerational trauma, and that love and compassion can go a long way. Albert stated that, "something no one will ever overdose on are the words 'I love you'". Parents and families have the responsibility to embed courage and strength, resilience and humility within their children. Families and communities have great responsibility towards their youth and must remind them of their own intrinsic power. In addition, conversations around spirituality are essential. Discussions around ancestors and nature help build a sense of identity within the family and a sense of place within the family's greater story. It is important to normalize and teach children about human rights activism and educate youth early on about the truths of life ahead.

To follow Albert's work, visit his [website](#). For more information on Kyrstin Dumont, follow her on social media.

UNICEF U-Reporters Poll

U-Report Canada is a polling platform which gathers the perspectives of youth aged 13-24 on issues they care about in order to influence positive change. It provides a real-time view of young people's opinions and perceptions on a wide range of topics in order to involve youth in decisions that closely affect them. U-report operates in 75 countries, with more than 800 U-Reporters in Canada, from every province and territory.

For the purpose of the Beyond Neglect series, a U-Report poll was distributed across the country through text messaging and social media in order to collect data on youth perspectives of what consists a healthy family. The diversity of the 156 respondents of the poll allows for a vast array of perceptions on the topic. All provinces and territories were represented with the exception of Newfoundland, the Northwest territories and Yukon. In addition, 47% of respondents identified as racialized; 35% identified as LGBTQ2S+; 17% as living with a disability; and 11% as Indigenous persons. The majority of respondents (68%) identified as female and almost half were between the ages of 17 and 19 years old. The remaining 50% of respondents were divided among 20-22 years old (21%), 13-16 years old (18%) and 23-25 years old (15%).

U-Reporter Ambassadors Chevon Cadigan and Olivia Lam presented the results of the poll during the webinar panel. Among the key takeaways, results point out that a large majority of U-Reporters (93%) say it is very important for families to provide young people with basic necessities such as housing and food. Comparatively, 80% say the same about mental/emotional support, 79% about protection from harm, and 33% about culture, religion, tradition, and values. Almost half of U-Reporters (49%) say it is hard or very hard for most parents/guardians in Canada to provide these things for their children. Only 5% say it is easy or very easy. Finally, according to young respondents, the main thing young people can do to build healthy relationships with their families is to communicate openly and honestly with them, even when it is difficult. They can also spend quality time with their families and try to better understand them.

U-Report Canada is led by UNICEF Canada, in partnership with BGC Canada, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, Kids Help Phone, Statistics Canada, The Students Commission of Canada, YMCA Canada, and the RBC Foundation. For more information about U-Report Canada, visit their [website](#).

Chanice McAnuff

Chanice is the Ontario Director of Youth in Care Canada and the founder of Project Outsiders, a youth-led social organization that aims to bridge the gap between youth in care and decision-makers. In her presentation, she addressed four factors of a healthy family for youth in care: commitment, awareness, leading and empowerment. The mainstream child welfare system views children and youth in care as being part of a temporary family. The shift in perception starts with the commitment of the foster parents when embarking on this journey. Foster parents must be committed to these young people, they must be aware of their capacity, their privilege and their responsibility towards these children. Foster parents of youth in care must lead by example and help empower children through constant support and validation. At the basis of healthy families for youth in care is the stability and accountability provided by the foster parent and their willingness to also be held accountable as guardians.

For more information on Chanice's work with Project Outsiders, visit their [website](#).

What is 'neglect'? Challenging and redefining discriminatory concepts

The responsibility for failing "to provide for or protect the child" is often attributed to the child's immediate caregivers, when in fact responsibility also lies in the failure of social service systems such as income support, housing, education, community, health and social services. This association between poverty and child protection placement is particularly powerful for Indigenous, Black and racialized families, who continue to be harmed by systemic racism and genocidal policies. The webinar panelists shared their expertise on this topic from a cultural, Indigenous and anti-poverty lens. For a more comprehensive look at this complex issue, see the [briefing paper](#) co-authored by CWLC in partnership with Dr. Gabrielle Lindstrom, Dr. Monica Ruiz-Casares and Leila Sarangi.

Dr. Gabrielle Lindstrom

Dr. Lindstrom (nee Weasel Head) is a member of the Kainaiwa Nation which is a part of the Blackfoot Confederacy and an educational development consultant for Indigenous ways of knowing. Some of her research interests include Indigenous homelessness, Indigenous lived experience of resilience, Indigenous community-based research, parenting assessment tools reform in child welfare, anti-colonial theory and anti-racist pedagogy. In her presentation, Dr. Lindstrom conceptualized the problem of child welfare as being rooted in the history of

colonial and Eurocentric worldviews. The experiences of Indigenous families are framed by these worldviews which leads to a “one-size-fits-all” model of care. The lack of understanding about the importance of culture and place is harmful to identities and to the role children play in ensuring Indigenous cultures endure.

To contact Dr. Lindstrom, see the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning [here](#).

Dr. Monica Ruiz-Casares

Dr. Ruiz-Casares is a Staff Investigator at the Sherpa University Institute in Montreal, where she evaluates health and social services for migrant and refugee families and other culturally diverse populations. She leads mixed-methods studies on child protection and well-being cross-culturally, mainly in contexts of parent-child separation, with migrants and refugees, and in low- and middle-income countries. Dr. Ruiz-Casares presented various causal models of neglect, including the parental deficit model which omits to take into account the social and political impacts on families; the environmental deficit model which focuses on material aspects such as poverty; and the more comprehensive ecological transactional model which considers child neglect to be the result of the breakdown of the family-community relationship and the social organization around families at all societal levels. She highlighted the importance of a locally and culturally grounded framework for child welfare systems, one which considers the perspectives of parents and children within their specific cultures and practices.

To contact Dr. Ruiz-Casares, see the McGill University [website](#).

Leila Sarangi

Leila is the National Coordinator of Campaign 2000, a pan-Canadian movement working to end child and family poverty. With over 20 years of front line, research and policy experience, Leila understands that the people experiencing systemic marginalization can be the furthest away from decision making. She is committed to connecting lived reality with public policy, advocating with and engaging people in a meaningful way to inform policy and legislative changes. She guided the webinar audience through the concepts of absolute and relative poverty and provided an overview of child and youth poverty across the country. Leila explained how child poverty is made invisible through differences in results between using basket market measures versus census low-income measures of poverty. More specifically, between 2015 and 2018, almost 580,000 children living in poverty were made invisible. In order to move beyond neglect, she recommends addressing income inequalities and adopting

stronger poverty reduction strategies. In addition, more accessible public services as well as a more culturally-sensitive approach to mainstream child welfare systems can help shift away from the current practices that favour a dominant Western understanding of neglect.

For more on Leila's work with Campaign 2000, visit the [website](#).

Using resources to effectively support child and family well-being

The social and financial costs of contact with the child protection system far outweigh the costs of early intervention. The ways in which funds are allocated and managed has a significant impact on outcomes for children and families. To ensure better child and family outcomes and shift the current protection-based approach to one that is focused on well-being, a fundamental change in program funding processes is needed. Such a change would enable communities and service providers to redirect funding to address the root causes of a child's contact with child protection services to the benefit of children and their families.

The [briefing paper](#) pulled from the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy's (IFSD) [report](#) on funding for well-being in First Nation child and family services. The panel for this webinar was composed of Helaina Gaspard, co-founder of the IFSD, as well as the executive directors of two high performing urban Indigenous Child and Family Services Agencies profiled in the IFSD report. The panelists on this topic shared their experience in managing their organizations' finances in ways that allow them the flexibility to provide more effective wrap-around services that meet the needs of children, youth and their families.

Helaina Gaspard, Ph.D.

Dr. Gaspard is a researcher, advisor, teacher and convener. A co-founder of the IFSD, Helaina works at the intersection of politics and public money, in research and strategic engagements to deliver evidence and public policy outcomes. Her presentation provided an overview of funding structures that can modify outcomes for children and families and focus on well-being. To do so, program funding processes must undergo core changes, moving away from the mainstream child protection approaches and adopting prevention/early intervention models. In fact, direct and indirect costs can be mitigated with prevention/early intervention approaches to child and family services. Not only do effective funding models and front-end investments help to improve child and family outcomes in the long-term, but ROIs are shown to be high for prevention focused services such as parent education and family support

programs. Dr. Gaspard expanded on performance-based budgeting which allows for an optimal utilization of resources toward the desired goals, ensuring a better alignment between the allocation of funds and the overall vision of the agency.

Visit the IFDS [website](#) for further information and for all materials associated to Dr. Gaspard's work.

Dr. Jeffrey Schiffer

Dr. Schiffer has Métis and German ancestry, and was born and raised in unceded Coast Salish territory –in what is today Vancouver, British Columbia. Dr. Schiffer is the executive director of Native Child and Family Services (NCFS) of Toronto. He is a member of the Board of Directors of CWLC, the Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario, the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council, and he co-chairs the City of Toronto's Aboriginal Affairs Committee. Dr. Schiffer presented an overview of NCFS's service model focused on the well-being of Indigenous children and families. NCFS is the largest multi-service urban Indigenous agency with a child welfare mandate in Canada. The service model approach takes root in an understanding of Canada's history of colonization and genocidal practices. The model has a holistic understanding of the multiple factors underlying the challenges faced by Indigenous children and families (poverty, housing, employment, healthcare, justice, etc). With these cross-sectoral challenges in mind, the agency's funding structure is highly diversified. They provide holistic and integrated wrap-around services through funding from multiple sectors, including municipal, provincial, and federal sources. This enables the agency to adopt a prevention/early intervention approach and focus on the best interest of the child and the family.

For further information, visit Native Child Family Services of Toronto [here](#).

Doreen Moellenbeck

Doreen is the executive director at Dakota Ojibway Child and Family Services (DOCFS), Manitoba. She is a member of Shoal Lake #40 and has approximately 14 years of experience in the field of Child and Family Services. DOCFS's mission is to protect children as well as strengthen families and communities' capacity to care for their own children. The agency's strength lies in coordinated prevention between a broader Tribal Council of which it is an integral part, and other organizations (e.g. health, education) and community-based offices. It leverages resources beyond its organization to respond quickly and decisively to the needs of the eight First Nations communities it serves. To better respond to the needs of children and

families, the agency works alongside the Local Child and Family Services Committees, who represent the community, share knowledge, and provide resources. DOCFS continually secures access to financial resources allowing for rapid action and response in cases of emergencies.

For further information, visit Dakota Ojibway Child and Family Services [here](#).

Rights, legislation and moving beyond forensic approaches to child and family well-being

The child welfare system is often thought of as the set of laws, policies, actions, and programs aimed at protecting children from harm and enforcing the rights of children to be protected from abuse, neglect and harm. An overly narrow and Eurocentric view of harm and an overreliance on a forensic model of child welfare fails to consider the full 'ecology' that contributes to the safety and well-being of children, families and communities. Moving beyond a forensic approach to child and family well-being means shifting the mainstream child welfare system's focus from apprehension to prevention by supporting families to stay together and thrive with the help of community-based services, supports, and resources. The panelists presented ways legislation can be used to create conditions under which children, youth and their families can thrive.

The [briefing paper](#) was co-authored by CWLC in partnership with panelists Raji Mangat, Irwin Elman as well as Raymond Shingoose who offered guiding principles for a First Nations legislation.

Raji Mangat

Raji Mangat is the Executive Director of West Coast LEAF, a non-profit organization that uses legal strategies to address gender-based discrimination and inequities for all women, trans people of other genders, Two Spirit people, people with non-binary gender identities, intersex people, and gender non-conforming people. Since 2018, West Coast LEAF has undertaken work in collaboration with Indigenous communities that is aimed at shifting the child welfare system in British Columbia from one of apprehension to one focused on support and prevention. Raji's presentation focused on shortcomings in the BC legislative framework, which fails to meet Canada's obligations to all children, particularly Indigenous children. Raji identified the prioritization of short-term safety over other rights, as defined through a Eurocentric lens in understanding children's best interests; limitations in the list of factors that are considered in assessing best interests; and a lack of accountability for system-actors when

it comes to realizing the obligation to use measures less disruptive than apprehension as particular areas of attention for law reform efforts.

For further information, visit West Coast Leaf [here](#).

Raymond Shingoose & Vice Chief Dave Pratt

Raymond Shingoose is Anishinabek from the Cote First Nation. He experienced traditional adoption, the 60's Scoop and Residential School; the life lessons of each of these experiences contributing to his vision for child welfare. Raymond has broken down many barriers and has established innovative approaches to governance, administration and program services in the child and family services sector, and his efforts have set a strong precedent for many other First Nations developments. He has successfully established the Yellow Thunderbird Lodge as a leading example of a First Nation Treaty Based governance structure.

Vice-Chief Dave Pratt is an executive member of the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations. As a member of Muscowpetung Saulteaux First Nation located in the unceded, traditional and ancestral lands in Treaty 4 territory, Vice-Chief David Pratt knows and understands the importance of maintaining close ties to family, community, culture, and connections to the land. As a Treaty and Inherent Rights champion, he continues to work tirelessly relying on traditional laws, values, and the advice and support of Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers (TTK) and Indigenous Knowledge Keepers (ITK). He continues to inform and bring awareness to a variety of issues that affect First Nation people, bridging gaps in areas of human rights, duty to consult, fighting systemic racism, and discrimination.

For further information on Vice Chief Pratt, see the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations [here](#). For more information on Raymond's work, visit the Yellow Thunderbird Lodge [website](#).

Irwin Elman

Irwin Elman served as Ontario's Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth from 2008-2019. Today he is a Fellow with the Laidlaw Foundation of Ontario and the Global Strategic Advisor to Until the Last Child. Drawing from his extensive experience in the field, Irwin's presentation provided a reflection on the impossibility of having the mainstream child protection system be reformed by the people who created it, arguing that it serves to protect its own interests rather than meet the needs of children, youth and their families. He suggests that the current system be abolished and rebuilt by those with lived experience and by marginalized communities. It is crucial for government to listen to the expertise and voices of youth in and from care, as they

are the experts. Irwin explained that while we cannot legislate love for youth in care, we can legislate the conditions under which love can exist and thrive.

For further information on Irwin's work, visit his [website](#).

Strengthening families and communities from the ground up

Child protection systems frequently take a top-down approach, imposing formal, government-managed services on families in need, while leaving the underlying factors that are making families vulnerable unaddressed. Community-based child and family services, for their part, offer largely voluntary, prevention-focused resources, programs and services in accessible settings. The three organizations featured in this section 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. They have co-authored the [briefing paper](#) alongside CWLC, allowing for a more comprehensive look at innovative grassroots practices aimed at fostering healthy families.

Zindu Salih

Zindu Salih is the directors of operations for Families Canada. She has over 15 years of experience in international development and project management. She worked with the United Nations in the Maldives, Sri Lanka, India and East Timor. Families Canada is a national association of Family Support Centres. Their member agencies and frontline family service workers act as hubs of community-based services providing family support programs that place the child at the centre, while building the capacity of those around the child to ensure families grow strong and healthy. The most effective preventions and interventions meet these families where they are and provide targeted interventions that respond to their specific needs. Tailoring and adapting programs through participation and inclusion of members of the most affected and vulnerable families enables responsive interventions and provides wraparound protection for the child.

For further information, visit the Families Canada [website](#).

Dr. Mohammed Baobaid

Dr. Baobaid is the founder and executive director of the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration (MRCSSI) in Ontario. He has conducted research on families, children and youth at risk of violence for over 30 years, with a focus on developing culturally appropriate responses. Based on the outcome of his research, a culturally integrative model of family violence responses has been developed and implemented at MRCSSI. In his webinar presentation, he highlighted the importance of understanding the broader context around immigrant and refugee families and communities in order to better respond to their needs through an ecological, collectivist framework. Current mainstream top-down child welfare often results in the escalation of conflict, the adoption of intrusive intervention methods and child removal. The MRCSSI's culturally integrative family safety response model takes a strength-based approach and adapts individualistic-based practices to the context of collectivistic culture. It is shown to decrease the period of involvement in the justice system as well as in the child protection system, increase engagement with the community of origin, and reduce escalation of conflicts and violence. Key takeaways of this model included long-term prevention and early intervention efforts, relationship building with diverse cultural communities and the distribution of power among a diverse array of communities and authorities to better impact children's safety and well-being.

For further information on Dr. Baobaid's work at the MRCSSI, visit their [website](#).

Keishia Facey

Keishia is the Project Manager for One Vision One Voice at the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS). She has worked to address the disparities and disproportionalities that exist for Black children, youth, and families in both the service delivery and policy levels across many sectors, including education, mental health, and child welfare. Her range of experience has contributed to the strategic direction, thought leadership, and advocacy to bring awareness to anti-Black racism in her community and across the province. The African Canadian service delivery model proposed by One Vision One Voice is rooted in strength-based, family-centered practices. Keishia presented an overview of systemic macro and micro-level racism embedded within mainstream child welfare, education systems, health care, judicial systems, governments, etc. Policy level supports must be implemented in order for child welfare agencies to ensure families and communities play an integral part in the processes and solutions that are developed. Community recommendations include specialized services and supports to Black families to reduce protection risk and strengthen families; ongoing supervision with workers to address bias and disproportionality; Anti-Black racism

training, including whiteness and implicit bias; Stronger emphasis on kinship care and on anti-oppressive and anti-racism approaches to care.

For further information on Keishia's work, visit the One Vision One Voice [website](#).

Learning from current federal, provincial and territorial research-informed initiatives

Provinces and territories have attempted to reform child welfare systems to be more prevention oriented. The three initiatives featured in this webinar panel are highly committed to an evidence-based and trauma-informed approach: that is, ensuring child welfare supports and services are provided in the most effective and holistic way. Panelists presented innovative research-informed initiatives that are currently being implemented in New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia.

For more information on this topic, see the [briefing paper](#) co-authored by CWLC in partnership with panelists Dr. Denise Michelle Brend, Irwin Elman and Faith Goodman.

Dr. Denise Michelle Brend

Dr. Brend is an assistant professor at Concordia University and co-researcher at the Canadian Consortium on Child and Youth Trauma. She discussed the implementation of sustainable trauma-informed care in services for children and youth in Québec, building on the Attachment, Regulation, Competency (ARC) model. This program teaches front line workers to use a strengths-based approach in their interventions with young people placed in child protection and recognizes trauma as often being the root cause of behavioural and emotional issues of youth in care. An ARC-informed program is currently being delivered and evaluated in 16 Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux (CISSS) and Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux (CIUSSS) in Quebec and, in collaboration with the founders of the approach, in New Brunswick health and social services. Key takeaways on making sustainable change include creating safe environments (secure, predictable, coherent), making data driven decisions (implementation, intervention & problem resolution), training everyone as much as possible as well as developing on-site expertise and co-developing structured interventions and multi-site coordination.

To contact Dr. Brend, visit the Laval University [website](#).

Dr. Bill Morrison

Dr. Morrison is a professor of Educational Psychology at the University of New Brunswick and co-executive director of the Health and Education Research Group. He has 25 years of clinical practice and extensive experience in the development and implementation of health and education services for children and adults in several Canadian provinces. He was instrumental in the design and implementation of New Brunswick's Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) framework, and has worked on senior policy initiatives related to integrated mental health services in the Northwest Territories and British Columbia.

Dr. Morrison presented an overview of the challenges faced by children, youth and families with complex needs in the mainstream child welfare system where services lack coordination and governments and other service providers work in silos without a systemic collaborative approach. The Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) framework seeks to strengthen positive mental health practices and provide responsive, integrative assessment and intervention services for children and youth. It is committed to the engagement and empowerment of children, youth and their families and delivers appropriate service intensity in alignment with the level of child and family needs. The ISD framework is an evidence-based approach that is currently implemented province-wide in New Brunswick and is in planning stages in British Columbia.

To contact Dr. Morrison, visit the New Brunswick University [website](#).

Faith Goodman & Kenn Richard

Faith is the founder of Until the Last Child (UTLC), working alongside Child Welfare Agencies to encourage and support innovation towards long term stable outcomes for children in care. UTLC believes in shifting our way of understanding toward “belonging” rather than child removal. Belonging is the precursor to well-being and takes root in the knowledge of one's culture, being surrounded by a safe, loving, caring and permanent ‘family’. UTLC promotes the achievement of this fundamental change through an interdisciplinary approach. This approach includes of course the rich knowledge of the current child welfare system but also employs the knowledge and skills of other unexpected allies in this work – such as the business and technology sectors, and those carrying the wisdom of lived experience.

Kenn Richard is the founder of Native Child and Family Services of Toronto. Both sides of Kenn's family come from the original Métis and Francophone settlements along the Red and the Assiniboine River in Manitoba. He has been practicing social work, principally within Aboriginal child welfare, since the mid-seventies. Kenn is a strong children's advocate at both

the national and the local level and is often called to lend advice to government in the field of Native Child Welfare. Kenn explained that the “specialised” child welfare system is not served well by its existing culture of exclusion. Best practice and academic underpinnings reinforce exclusivity, and this is problematic in many ways. Canadians need a generalized and inclusive system to look out for the welfare of children. As his mother would say, “It’s everybody’s job to look after the kids”.

For further information, visit the UTLC [website](#).

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION OVERALL OUTCOMES

A total of 145 experts participated in the roundtable discussions, including Social Work student note takers and CWLC hosts of the event. Represented sectors included government-level decision-makers in child welfare, child and family agencies and associations of community services, various youth in care networks, academics, advocates, Indigenous Elders and Indigenous youth. CWLC wishes to thank all those who participated and contributed their expertise to the event. For additional information on participants, view the full list of acknowledgements at the end of the report.

Each roundtable discussion was guided by two questions. The first question invited participants to share existing barriers to taking action on the discussion theme, for instance, examples of barriers to moving beyond discriminatory definitions of neglect, to implementing changes in organizations, or to developing grassroots initiatives that support families where they are at. The second question led participants to reflect on solutions to these barriers, whether it be finding ways to moving beyond a forensic approach in child welfare towards a rights-based approach, to embedding a positive obligation in legislation to support families, or how organizations can manage finances in ways that allow them the flexibility to provide more effective wrap-around services that meet the needs of families. Participants were also invited to identify promising approaches and initiatives being implemented and their impact on children and families.

Themes emerging across all six roundtable discussions have been collated into major recurring findings. This section provides a summary of barriers and potential solutions that would have the greatest benefit to those who are experiencing the greatest harm from inadequate and discriminatory social service systems. Main themes emerging from the discussions include: addressing the underlying factors of 'neglect' such as systemic racism and poverty; increasing collaboration between child welfare and community organizations through integrative approaches; and prioritizing lived experience and ensuring the involvement of families and communities as equal stakeholders in decision-making processes and policy changes.

Recommendations from existing reports are included in the following section, reiterating suggestions made during the roundtable discussions. These quotes illustrate the recurring nature of the proposed solutions and the longstanding consensus built around the necessary shift in child welfare.

Addressing the underlying factors of ‘neglect’

As illustrated in the “What is ‘Neglect’? Challenging and redefining discriminatory concepts” webinar panel presentations and the accompanying briefing note, it is essential to acknowledge the failure of social service systems when it comes to assessing and responding to child and family needs. This is especially important for Indigenous, Black and racialized families, who continue to be harmed by systemic racism and genocidal policies. Addressing the systemic causes of ‘neglect’ by providing more adequate support to families can, in many cases, better respond to the needs of children, youth and their families than an approach focused on family separation. Ensuring community support is available and accessible to families is also an important part of addressing these issues early on. Widening the intervention focus to include the community and society as a whole, through a strength-based approach, can promote holistic family well-being while addressing the root causes of family difficulties.

Recommendation #1: The [government] should develop a provincial strategy to identify and address how families’ social and economic conditions are linked to racial disparities and disproportionality in the child welfare system. This strategy should contain measurable commitments to address these inequalities, including increasing the availability of funding, housing, services and supports to help families meet their needs and safely keep their children. The government should report on these commitments on an annual basis.¹

As highlighted in the “What is a Healthy Family?” webinar presentations, today’s child welfare definition of ‘family’ remains rooted in outdated and Eurocentric worldviews, which are embedded in colonialism, systemic racism, ageism and which perpetuate a disconnect between marginalized children and youth and their communities. The label of ‘neglect’ within child welfare assessment practices is too often applied to systemically marginalized children, youth and their families who are experiencing poverty, housing and food insecurity, trauma, and a lack of access to proper social supports and services. The concept of ‘neglect’ as it is used in the mainstream child welfare system today fails to account for the responsibility of social systems in perpetuating the marginalization of families in difficulty. As a result, punitive interventions such as child removals and family separation are too often being put forward as the only possible solution. Parents are often blamed and labelled as inadequate caregivers for

¹ Interrupted childhoods: Over-representation of Indigenous and Black children in Ontario child welfare. Ontario Human Rights Commission. Canada, 2018.

their children, rather than being provided with understanding, support and services to encourage family preservation and wellbeing. Longstanding systemic racism and colonial mainstream child welfare approaches result in a lack of cultural awareness and safety in the supports and services provided to marginalized children, youth and their families. It is clear that the “one-size-fits-all” approach of the mainstream child welfare system fails to account for the diversity of family needs. A more flexible and holistic approach is needed – one that accepts families for their challenges and seeks to support them in the best way possible, without discrimination or judgement.

Recommendation #4: Government departments providing services to First Nations children and families to undergo a thorough and independent 360° evaluation to identify any ongoing discriminatory ideologies, policies or practices and address them. These evaluations must be publicly available.²

In addition, the loss of a sense of community due to these outdated colonial worldviews has impacted the ability for families and communities to be interconnected. Social media contribute to the isolation of youth, who prefer virtual communication, and to the exclusion of Elders who experience a gap between their lived experience, their history, and the realities of youth today. Connecting communities can help youth gain more knowledge about their history and provide greater perspective to the trauma they have experienced themselves.

Increasing collaboration between child welfare and community organizations

Child welfare must be grassroots led in direct collaboration with agencies, working together rather than as separate entities. Innovative solutions lie in community-based, grassroots initiatives that ensure better representation and a greater understanding of diversity and entrenched social injustices. It is possible to shift from an over reliance on the mainstream child welfare system to more creative collaboration with communities. Systemic responses are needed to integrate services, address discrimination in funding and prioritize financial support for grassroot initiatives that have an early intervention and prevention approach. Measures can also encourage smaller organizations to develop partnerships with larger resourceful agencies and collaborate to better support families.

² Spirit Bear Plan. First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada. Canada, 2017.

Practice # 10: Establish collaborations and partnerships. Ensure ongoing engagement of African Canadian parents and the local African Canadian community to support the work of the child welfare agency and the success of African Canadian children, youth and families. 10.4: Work with African Canadian community organizations and service providers to develop and provide culturally appropriate prevention services that strengthen families and ensures the safety and well-being of children and youth, such as family counselling, and counselling and supports for children and youth who come out as LGBTQ, and their parents.³

As highlighted in the “Using resources to effectively support child and family well-being” webinar presentations, funding directly impacts agency outcomes for children and families. Having better collaboration between funders and agencies can allow the latter to be more creative and more flexible in how they allocate resources, which in turn can deeply impact the efficiency of service providers and better serve the community. Collaborative service delivery models allow local community agencies to use their funding in ways that respond specifically to their own community's needs, while working in very close collaboration with governing partners. Collaborative approaches lead to better relationship building between funders and service providers. Rather than service providers accepting terms without negotiation, a better relationship and understanding of the work done at the agency can be helpful to implement more flexibility in fund management. The creative leeway this funding provides allows for the inclusion of family's voices and the possibility to respond quickly in emergency situations. Constant communication between various field experts can enable quick responses in crisis situations and fast mobilization of funds.

Obstacles to connecting existing community-based initiatives to policy and governments include challenges in funding due, among other things, to systemic barriers, resource scarcity, competition between organisations and silos between systems. The lack of stability and reliability from government funding due to constantly changing legislations and shifting political parties prevents organizations from planning ahead and directly affects outcomes for families. Organisations would benefit from funding in consistent time frames regardless of political shifts; this would allow for more foresight and planning. Program funding also limits the organization’s capacities and does not provide resources to administration, back-office operations, planning, and management. Mission-based funding can serve as a solution to such issues.

³ Turner, T. (2016). One Vision One Voice: Changing the Ontario Child Welfare System to Better Serve African Canadians. Practice Framework Part 2: Race Equity Practices. Toronto, ON: Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies.

Recommendation #66: We call upon the federal government to establish multi-year funding for community-based youth organizations to deliver programs on reconciliation and establish a national network to share information and best practices.⁴

As illustrated in the “Rights, legislation and moving beyond forensic approaches to child and family well-being” webinar panel presentations and the accompanying briefing note, legislative frameworks fail to meet Canada’s obligations to all children, particularly Indigenous children. The mainstream Eurocentric lens through which a child’s interests are understood leads to the prioritization of short-term safety over other rights. A focus on short-term safety is not in line with a rights-based approach, which would consider all of children’s rights together and consider the best interest of the child more broadly. Whereas the current, forensic approach focuses on investigating, reports and crisis management, a rights-based approach would support family and community on an ongoing basis, providing care to families in a more holistic, comprehensive, and culturally sensitive way. In order to embed a rights-based framework into the mainstream system we must consider the context and community to which the child belongs. The stories of children, families and communities are an integral part of the solution. Service providers can set families up for success by providing parents with the right tools that meet their specific situation and needs.

Recommendation #1.2: We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to commit to reducing the number of Aboriginal children in care by providing adequate resources to enable Aboriginal communities and child-welfare organizations to keep Aboriginal families together where it is safe to do so, and to keep children in culturally appropriate environments, regardless of where they reside.⁵

A lack of accountability when it comes to utilizing measures less disruptive than child removal, and a risk-averse mentality when such measures must be implemented are other examples of systemic barriers that are entrenched in all sectors of the mainstream child welfare system.

Recommendation #5: All public servants including those at a senior level, to receive mandatory training to identify and address government ideology, policies and practices that fetter the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action.⁶

⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action. Canada, 2012.

⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action. Canada, 2012.

⁶ Spirit Bear Plan (2017) First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada.

Prioritizing lived experience

Participants voiced a strong desire to see families and young people with lived experience included at decision making tables and involved in policy making and program development. The voices of children, youth, families, Elders and communities must be included when implementing policy change. Engaging those most effected by the child welfare system can allow for more effective services to better understand and respond to their needs. Solutions must be embedded in community knowledge and an understanding of the multiple worldviews of the families involved. By focusing on lived experience and by giving families the power to be part of the conversation, we can ensure that they receive the supports they need and avoid contact with child protection systems as much as possible. The webinar panel presentations on “Strengthening families and communities from the ground up” as well as the accompanying briefing note provide important examples of this.

Recommendation #2: Listen to children and youth. It is time for a pan-Canadian dialogue on the well-being of children. Beyond adult worries about children’s health risks and educational achievement, let’s ask young people what would lift up their sense of well-being. Children perceive well-being differently than adults – the importance of good quality relationships, social inclusion, environmental protection and the other things that matter to them but are difficult to measure, including their autonomy and freedom. The voices of those furthest from opportunity must be included - children are not a homogenous group. Children and youth have shown over recent months that they intend to be included in discussions that will shape their futures. For adults and policy-makers, it is time to listen, learn and act. A National Commissioner for Children and Youth and a lower voting age will help us do that.⁷

Inter-sectoral tables and multi-disciplinary dialogues that include the voices of people with lived experience can help address larger systemic issues such as the overrepresentation of First Nations, Métis and Inuit children, and Black and racialized children in child welfare due to colonialism and systemic racism. In addition, experts from racialized communities can provide more diverse perspectives that can inform the implementation of policies. Building capacity within communities and giving them the tools to resolve issues themselves can help limit external interference from the child welfare system. As illustrated in the “Learning from current federal, provincial and territorial research-informed initiatives” webinar panelists, community voices should drive research and provide the narrative for professionals to work

⁷ UNICEF Canada. 2020. Worlds Apart: Canadian Companion to UNICEF Report Card 16: UNICEF Canada, Toronto.

with. Programs must be sustainable and the voices of those impacted must state the successes. Researchers should disseminate their findings in a way that can convince governments of the necessity to address these issues and implement the solutions.

The main barrier to engaging those most impacted is the mainstream deficit-based approach to families and young people involved with child welfare. This view results in a child welfare system that is punitive and stigmatizing in its approach and in a society that blames parents for the impacts of systemic discrimination. Mainstream child welfare must adopt strength-based practices, shifting from a deficit approach which emphasizes problems and pathology, to a positive partnership with the family. This includes empowering families to be independent, respecting the self-governance of Indigenous peoples, and investing more research into the community knowledge of marginalized families and their needs.

Recommendation #1.2.5: We call upon all governments, with the full participation of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQA people, to immediately implement and fully comply with all relevant rights instruments, including but not limited to: UNDRIP, including recognition, protection, and support of Indigenous self-governance and self-determination, as defined by UNDRIP and by Indigenous Peoples, including that these rights are guaranteed equally to women and men, as rights protected under section 35 of the Constitution. This requires respecting and making space for Indigenous self-determination and self-governance, and the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples to all decision-making processes that affect them, eliminating gender discrimination in the Indian Act, and amending the Constitution to bring it into conformity with UNDRIP.⁸

Training social workers for cultural competence

Event participants made many calls for additional education among social workers. Indeed, the lack of cultural competence among child protection workers is a significant barrier to better responding to neglect. Educating social workers and decision makers about the impact and enduring effects of colonialism on their work could help reduce hasty interventions. Teaching from an Indigenous, trauma-informed, and equity-based lens may help professionals change their ideologies and their responses to neglect.

⁸ Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Canada, 2019.

Recommendation #57: We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.⁹

However, it is unclear whether training can be the solution to transforming a system steeped in colonialism, white supremacy and eurocentrism. Many factors are involved in reproducing racist practices. The lack of diversity in agency teams reinforces this cultural gap. Hiring additional minority groups among social workers can increase cultural knowledge and cultural sensitivity to the practice. In addition, assessment tools, resources and services must be culturally informed and streamlined between various actors involved.

Context specific vs collectively adopted practices and policies

An interesting tension surfaced during the discussion events between community-based services that respond to specific child and family needs and unified definitions and models that are accepted and adopted throughout all child welfare systems. On one hand, there was a strong desire among expert participants to create a system that responds to child and family needs in ways that are context specific, responsive to particular needs, and that are community-led. In this sense, policy changes must be made to allow workers more flexibility and responsiveness according to specific needs of children and families. On the other hand, participants called for collectively agreed upon definitions, and the adoption and implementation of similar expectations and outcomes throughout all systems. In this sense, community organizations and child welfare agencies should endorse the same ideologies around child and family well-being, adopt the same language and have the same objectives in order to better meet the needs of families. This tension calls for a greater understanding of the ways in which community-based initiatives and larger child welfare organizations can work together and support each other with the best interest of families in mind.

⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action. Canada, 2012.

NEXT STEPS

As highlighted by the existing recommendations cited in this report, most solutions brought forth by the expert roundtables have been suggested in the past. Many recommendations are long-standing. For instance, calls for addressing the systemic causes of ‘neglect’ and the responsibility of social systems in perpetuating the marginalization of families in difficulty, implementing preventative measures rather than reactive ones, irradicating longstanding racism and colonialism, implementing promising practices such as collaborative approaches, rights-based and child-centered methods, or involving children and families in policy change, have been championed by many, for decades. Existing reports detailing recommendations relevant to moving ‘beyond neglect’ include the Calls to Action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the Calls for Justice by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, the Spirit Bear Plan by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, Jordan’s Principle, the One Vision One Voice Race Equity Practices, and many others.

Findings from CWLC’s cross-sectoral convenings have reiterated the consensus around longstanding barriers preventing change in child welfare. We know what obstacles are holding us back and solutions have been proposed. Why are we not acting upon this knowledge and implement meaningful change? The social complexities around children and families, the slow pace of change in large institutions and the lack of political will make actionable solutions difficult to identify. It is not surprising that concrete solutions were harder to gather during online roundtable discussions.

In light of these findings, CWLC will undertake work to review decades of recommendations and highlighting key recurring ideas and changes that would help us move “beyond neglect”. Among the vast number of relevant solutions put forward by advocates, lived experts, and sometimes even governments themselves, we will call attention to the few most common and promising changes that have yet to be implemented. By producing a roadmap for meaningful change and grounding the conversation in what experts agree must change, we will be better able to provide guidance on what to do next toward creating a positive obligation for governments and service providers to support children and families who are struggling with difficulties that put their wellbeing and safety at risk.

Concrete changes to the child welfare system are lacking and the long road to implementing these solutions in policy is sinuous and unclear. Incremental change can build toward important systemic change, and we will seek to provide actionable steps for all parties involved to create small and sustainable changes. The pandemic has brought a unique window of opportunity to do things differently and has brought to light many gaps and inadequacies in our systems. We can no longer look away.

POEM BY KYRSTIN DUMONT

215

Kamloops British Columbia

When you opened in 1890 you had one job...

When you closed in 1977 you had a million undocumented secrets

The year is now 2021,

Your swept under the rug secrets are dug up in an unmarked grave with 215 of our strongest and most loved community members.

These community members are kids as young as three years old.

Why do we have to mourn our lost treasures while Canadians say things like...

“ how many deaths were caused by viruses or sicknesses”

“ why did they do this to these kids ?”

“ they just wanted to give them an education”

“ but how many deaths were caused by the school themselves ?”

“ you wouldn't have evolved without us”

I shout again,

215 sons and daughters

215 brothers and sisters

215 Indigenous CHILDREN

All of whom were murdered and undocumented for the simplest reason...

Being an Indigenous child.

I ask you this,

Put yourself in every single Indigenous persons shoes –

Why are our kids any different than YOUR kids?...

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