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Same Country; Same Lands; 78 Countries Away

An exploration of the nature and extent of collaboration between the Voluntary Sector and First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies in British Columbia

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Abstract

As the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2003) noted, Aboriginal children face more discrimination and increased risk factors than other Canadian children. Their lived experiences are shaped by the policies of assimilation and colonization that aimed to eliminate Aboriginal cultures through repression of fundamental freedoms, denial of ownership and the operation of residential schools (RCAP, 1996; Milloy, 1999). First Nations child and family service agencies have expressed concern about the lack of resources available to support families in redressing the significant impacts of colonization. The voluntary sector provides a myriad of important social supports to Canadians off reserve and this research project sought to determine how accessible voluntary sector resources were for First Nations children, youth and families resident on reserve in British Columbia. Results of a provincial survey of First Nations child and family service agencies and child, youth and family voluntary sector organizations indicate very limited access to voluntary sector services. Possible rationales for this social exclusion are examined and recommendations for improvement are discussed.

Introduction

In 1998 Canada was cited by the United Nations as the best country in the world to live based on the Human Development Index (HDI). At least this was the case for most Canadians but not for First Nations peoples as the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development found when it applied the HDI to registered (also known as status) Indian peoples living on reserve in Canada. Results indicate that the quality of life for status Indian people residing on reserve would be equivalent to the 0.739 HDI scores of Brazil and Peru, which are ranked 79th and 80th in the world respectively1. The findings of this report came two years after the completion of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) which documented Canada's history of colonial policies and practices toward Aboriginal peoples whilst tabling significant recommendations designed to ensure a respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal Canadians.

First Nations recognize that the impacts of colonization and assimilation in their communities are extremely troubling and they have been active in developing child and family service agencies (FNCFSA) throughout Canada in order to respond to community needs and restore community capacity to care for children within a cultural context. These agencies, funded by the federal government, receive their statutory authority from the provincial child welfare statutes unless a self-government agreement that includes authority for child welfare exists between the First Nation(s) and the Canadian government. FNCFSA face many challenges including high service demands, limited resources and the conundrum of bridging colonial individual rights based child welfare legislation with the communal rights based cultures of communities. The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children confirmed in its 1999 report that "Canadian jurisdictions are working toward the transfer of child welfare services to Aboriginal agencies. However, these agencies are struggling with overwhelming demand and a limited supply of culturally appropriate early intervention and treatment services[2]." This situation suggests that resources should be augmented through increases in government financial support and flexibility in funding regimes (Assembly of First Nations, 2000) coupled with increased support from the corporate and voluntary sectors.

Working with First Nations to respond to the needs of children, youth and families residing on-reserve fits the aspirations of Canada's voluntary sector which can be broadly described to "be a full partner with government in discussion and work undertaken to pursue a social development agenda.[3]" and to acknowledge the "vital role the voluntary sector plays in shaping and sustaining a high quality of life for Canadians and in turn increasing their engagement in community life[4]." The voluntary sector, through initiatives such as the Voluntary Sector Roundtable and Voluntary Sector Initiative, have sought to promote the coordination of efforts of the voluntary sector so as to direct, in a more focused, way Canadian public policy. The mobilization of voluntary sector resources in Canada is significant in its collective impact and influence on government as Delaney Turner notes "the economic impact of the sector [in Canada] is tremendous with 90 billion dollars in annual revenues, 109 billion dollars in assets and 22 million people making in-kind or financial donations to the sector.[5]"

Several child, youth and family serving voluntary organizations at the national, provincial/territorial and community levels have identified their desire to include First Nations in the dialogue shaping Canadian public policy and ensuring a high quality of life for First Nations peoples.

This project seeks to contribute to the collaborative dialogue by exploring the nature and extent of engagement between First Nations Child and Family Service agencies and child and family voluntary sector organizations operating in British Columbia in order to determine the degree to which First Nations children, youth and families on-reserve are currently receiving services provided by the voluntary

sector. First Nations child and family service agencies are the key child, youth and family service provider and service referral agent for on reserve families and thus provide an excellent conduit to gage voluntary sector engagement.

For me, as an Aboriginal person who works in the voluntary sector, this paper is also a search for answers- to understand why the lines demarcating the reserves seem to create a humanitarian boundary over which the rest of Canada has not overcome and beyond which First Nations are not recognized and legitimized as valued and distinct citizens of this country. For years I worked as a social work(er) within the provincial government and I witnessed the significant benefits brought to children and youth by the voluntary sector and then when I traveled about 8 blocks away to work on reserve, the voluntary sector was not only absent, it often appeared to find reasons for not crossing the reserve boundary at all. As one who believes that our freedoms and humanities are intertwined, I could not understand why the reserve lines held the power to separate peoples from one another, to separate Canadian values from Canadian actions and to separate all of us from our historical and contemporary truth.

The paper begins with an overview of the First Nations experience of colonization and assimilation within Canada specifically focusing on how these processes continue to shape the lived experiences of First Nations children, youth and families in British Columbia. The First Nations context is then contrasted with the role, objectives and missions of the voluntary sector in Canada, and in British Columbia more specifically. Collectively these historical contexts frame the findings of a research survey designed to measure the explicit nature of engagement between voluntary sector child and family serving organizations in British Columbia and the First Nations child and family service agencies. The paper ends by analyzing the survey findings within the historical context and providing recommendations for promoting future collaboration.

First Nations Context

> Long before the first European settlers crossed the Atlantic, the original citizens of Canada had a rich and vibrant culture, a profound spirituality and deeply held social values based on respect for the earth and all forms of life. The political structures that existed in the indigenous nations were so highly developed that the Iroquois Confederacy served as the model for the first concepts of federalism, on both of which our own system today is based…. We had and continue to have, much to learn from the first nations people. Their full participation in our national culture, can be mutually enriching and beneficial"[6]

History is not just a collection of interesting anecdotes of our past; it is an integral link in the process of knowledge itself. It frames our understanding of who we were, who we are and who we can become as a human society (Llosa, 1998). It informs our understanding of our role in the interdependent web of life, and frames our understanding of the importance and value of relationships within it - including our relationships with peoples of other cultures and nation states. Its value is so fundamental that freedom of expression is often constitutionally protected by democratic nations in order to avoid the manipulation of history to support agendas that are not in the public interest. So if a true and authentic history is not one engineered and unified story – it is an inclusive record of diverse knowledge and experiences then what does the voluntary sector (VS) know about the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and how has this shaped their relationships with them? As this historical summary will demonstrate there are significant reasons to question the degree to which the voluntary sector acts as a protective factor in cases of pervasive structural discrimination and rights violations. In a country endowed with a well developed voluntary sector, academic community and structured legal system it is difficult, but critical, to understand why

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what is about to be described happened at all. Critical because the only way to stop it from happening again is to learn why it happened in the first place.

Anthropological evidence confirms that indigenous peoples have lived on these lands for thousands of years as sustainable, diverse, communities. Radiocarbon dated evidence at Charlie Lake Cave in BC proves that indigenous peoples lived on the lands now known as British Columbia for over 10,500 years (Muckle, 1998).

They had complex societal systems and knowledge that cut across all major schools of contemporary study – engineering, architecture, pharmacology, ecology, physics, astronomy, arts, education and social work. This complex knowledge collectively reflected as culture varied from community to community but was tied together by a holistic worldview that valued interdependence and communal rights. The keepers of this knowledge were the Elders; it was their role to transfer this important knowledge, known as oral history, from one generation to the next ensuring it's survival in perpetuity. As Elders were the most knowledgeable of all community members they were given primary responsibility for guiding the care of children. No society was ever without its challenges and First Nations communities had highly developed systems to support children and families in need through systems such as custom adoption whereby community members would care for a child indefinitely if he/she could no longer be cared for by his/her family.

The Beothuck peoples met explorer John Cabot, amongst the first colonial visitors, on the shores of what is now known as Newfoundland in 1497. Early contact between First Nations and the colonists can be generally described as mutually beneficial as it was based on a trading relationship. However this soon changed as colonial interests shifted from trade to settlement and resource expropriation. As the immigrants migrated west, they encountered other First Nations peoples and began to construct settlements. The two primary colonial powers, the British and French struggled for control over the new world. This struggle culminated in England defeating France in the Seven Years War resulting in British control over much of what is now known as North America. The British victory was due, in part, to the substantial aid provided by the Iroquois Confederacy and thus it was in the interests of Britain to develop territorial settlement plans that would ensure that they remained on good terms with the Indians (Titley, 1986; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). The British set out the terms of territorial settlement in the Royal Proclamation of 1763. This proclamation is a significant legal basis for what was termed Aboriginal Rights and Title in the Constitution of Canada (1982). The Proclamation contains the following significant passage:

> And whereas it is just and reasonable, and essential to our Interest, and the Security of our Colonies, that the several Nations or Tribes of Indians with whom We are connected, and who live under our Protection, should not be molested or disturbed in the Possession of such Parts of Our Dominions and Territories as, not having been ceded to or purchased by Us, are reserved to them, or any of them, as their Hunting Grounds[7].

The Royal Proclamation informed the development of the ***Indian Act*** in 1867 which set out that Canada, not the provinces/territories, was responsible for Indians and Lands reserved for Indians and thus had a primary role in treaty making (Mercredi and Turpell, 1993). Treaties were negotiated in other parts of Canada although Canada's role in the negotiation process and the implementation of the treaties themselves has been broadly criticized (Berger, 1977; Mercredi and Turpell, 1993). In British Columbia, treaties were not signed, except for the Douglas treaties and Treaty 8, due to two key factors: 1) the province of British Columbia, upon entering into confederation in 1871 steadfastly frustrated any attempts to resolve the lands question and 2) Joseph Trutch, Canada's representative on the treaty issue, unilaterally decreased the amount of lands allotted per person in other treaties

making any agreement entirely unsustainable and thus disagreeable to First Nations (Di Gangi and Jones, 1998; Titley, 1986).

Under the assimilation regime, the federal government policy shifted from exercising its trust responsibilities in ensuring resolution of treaties and fair treatment of Indians, to a policy of assimilation in hopes of eradicating Indian peoples and by extension Indian land ownership as described in 1920 by Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs:

> Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian department."[8]

Scott, along with being the most influential Canadian public servant on Indian issues for the first three decades of the 1900's was also an essayist and poet (RCAP, 1996, Titley, 1986). The coordination between his own personal racist views and Canada's policy or assimilation is expressed in many of his works. The following stanzas of the poem *Onondaga Madonna* are one example:

> *She stands full-throated*
> *and with careless pose*
> *This woman of a weird and waning race*
> *The tragic savage lurking in her face*
> *Where all her pagan passion*
> *burns and glows*
>
> *Her blood is mingled with her ancient foes*
> *And thrills with war and wildness in her veins*
> *Her rebel lips are dabbled with the stains*
> *Of feuds and forays and her father's woes*
> *And closer in the shawl about her breast*
> *The latest promise of her nations doom…*[9]

Whilst implementing the assimilation policy, the Canadian government actively impeded progress on the Treaty making front by amending the *Indian Act* to make it illegal for First Nations to hire legal counsel for the purpose of treaty making or to gather in groups to plan or protest. In addition, socio-political ceremonies such as the Potlatch and Sundance ceremonies were outlawed and the Canadian government legally compelled First Nations to assume a band council system displacing traditional forms of governance.

There were other abuses as well. Until 1960, the *Indian Act*, defined a person as "an individual other than an Indian"[10] effectively denying Indians the rights and benefits of Canadian citizenship such as secondary education, veterans benefits and the right to vote.

All of this occurred against the catastrophic backdrop of loss of Indian lives from small pox, tuberculosis, starvation and murder associated with colonization. Some First Nations communities in Canada, such as the Beothuk of Newfoundland, were entirely eradicated (Howley, 2000) and others, such as the Haida Nation, lost 93% of its population over a sixty-five year period between 1850 and 1915 (Globe and Mail, 2000). The impact on a community of losing 93% of your citizens is horrendous- the grief of loss of life, relationship, knowledge and skills continues for generations. The tragedy is that at least in the case of the Haida the loss of life was preventable as explorers intentionally off loaded an infected sailor onto the shores proximal to a Haida village as described by a Chief of the Haida Nation ""They almost wiped us out with smallpox," Guujaaw said. "It went down to 500 people. We had driven off the miners and every attempt to colonize our land. We whooped them every time. It was pretty clear from our point of view that the smallpox was deliberate. We have documented evidence someone dropped off one man on our island with smallpox and our people attempted to care for him.[11]"

The colonial powers often rationalized the annihilation of Indian peoples as being necessary to free up land for European settlement and to ensure their safety. The Bismark Star published this editorial following the massacre of Indian peoples at Wounded Knee in 1890:

> The pioneer has before declared that our only safety depends on the total extermination of the Indians. Having wronged them for centuries we had better, in order to protect our civilization, follow it up by one

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> more wrong and wipe out these untamed and untamable creatures from the face of the earth[12].

This theme of the settlers being at risk from the Indians was reflected in many cowboy and Indian westerns of the 1960's and 1970's. It fed a persistent and false stereotype that Aboriginal people are a risk to the rest of Canadian society. This is simply not supported by the historical or contemporary evidence – if anything it is the reverse that is true society has posed risks to Aboriginal peoples.

Another critical factor contributing to the massive loss of life was starvation. As settlers moved into First Nations territories they often recklessly expropriated resources, including the wildlife upon which First Nations depended. The Plains Indians relied on buffalo for food, shelter and clothing. It is estimated that in 1800 there were over four million buffalo on the North American plains, after 95 years of sport and professional hunting by settlers there were only 1,000 left resulting in starvation and significant disruptions in traditional ways of life for First Nations (Hirschfelder, 2000).

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples estimates the average loss of life amongst First Nations in Canada due to disease, starvation and murder to be at 80% of the population (RCAP, 1996). According to oral history and anthropological evidence there had never been such a catastrophic loss of life as there was during these years. To put this loss of life in a global historical context it is estimated that 20% of the population of Great Britain lost their lives during the Plague and two of three Jewish persons were tragically lost in the Holocaust (US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2002) – there are few historical incidents that match the degree of depopulation suffered by First Nations in Canada.

The devastation from depopulation was made even more difficult for the surviving Haida peoples as along with being subject to a plethora of colonial policies, anthropologists harvested the memorial poles for museums that they had erected in memory and respect to those who had died. This practice of removing memorials and even more disturbing, the unearthing of First Nations burials sites, was not a unique practice. As Douglas Leechman, archaeologist for the National Museum of Canada, describes the scene on one of his own bone collecting expeditions in 1944, "On my arrival at the island, I found one picnic party already established and three other groups arrived during the two or three hours that I spent there.... In conversation with these people I learned that digging for Indian bones was a recognized form of amusement for all bathing and picnicking parties who visited the island [Aylmer Island.]"[13] The whimsical view of the value of First Nations burial sites is contrary to mainstream values sanctifying the deceased. The hypocrisy in values and actions of non Aboriginal Canadians is symbolic of the systemic dehumanization of First Nations peoples that accompanied colonial and assimilation doctrines. This dehumanization supported mainstream Canada in rationalizing the serious disconnect between the values it espoused and its antithetical actions towards First Nations.

But this was not the extent of the hardship endured by First Nations, the residential school policy initiated in the 1870's was particularly offensive in that it aimed to assimilate and eliminate Indian peoples and used their children as a means of accomplishing this. The government of Canada, via the *Indian Act*, forced Indian parents to send their children to these schools, engaging police to enforce the law where necessary and employing the churches to run the schools thus supporting the proliferation of the Christian agenda. Marlyn Bennett, a First Nations researcher, describes the child's experience of residential school as follows:

> *"the RCMP also assisted by arriving in force. They encircled reserves to stop runaways then moved from door to door taking school age children over the protests of parents and children themselves. Children were locked up in nearby police stations or cattle pens until the round up was complete, then*

taken to school by train. In these schools, children were often segregated by gender, received inadequate education, forced to work, and suffered beatings for speaking their Native language, humiliated and ridiculed and sexually abused. Children were taught to hate their Native Culture and as a result became "cultural refugees" (Boyko, 1995:187). Residential schools are an example of the most unmitigated form of cultural racism carried out by the government and missionaries in their attempts to "civilize" Aboriginal peoples.[14]"

The conditions at the schools were deplorable. The federal government, in an effort to reduce costs required that the schools be built with the cheapest materials and workmanship and this was reflected in the consistent problems with heating, ventilation and the prevalence of safety issues resulting from poor construction (Milloy, 1999). These issues, along with the federal government policy encouraging the churches to maximize enrolment in the schools created conditions for the ravage spread of small pox and tuberculosis. There are those who argue that the deaths from disease were accidental, simply a causality of peoples from differing cultures coming together. But if that were true the Government of Canada Department of Indian Affairs would have responded to the reports issued by their Chief Medical Officer, PH Bryce in 1907 who concluded, "even war seldom shows a large a percentage of fatalities as does the education system we have imposed on our Indian wards.[15]" Bryce had surveyed the health of some 1537 children in 15 residential schools and found that the death rate was 24%. If Bryce tracked the health of the children over a three -year period then the death rate increased to 42% (RCAP, 1996). The only meaningful response from Indian Affairs to Bryce's report, which was confirmed by the findings of a non medical government of Canada investigator F.H. Paget in 1908, was that Indian Affairs eliminated the Chief Medical Officer position (RCAP, 1996).

Queens Counsel SH Blake later noted in that the Department failed "to obviate the preventable causes of death, [it] brings itself within unpleasant nearness to manslaughter.[16]"

Over 100,000 First Nations children attended the schools throughout their over one hundred years of operation. Although the schools began slowly closing in the 1940's, it was only in 1996 that the last school operated by the federal government closed in Saskatchewan making it a very recent experience in the lives of many First Nations children, youth and families (INAC, 2002). The residential schools' legacy is one of multi-generational and multi-dimensional grief and dysfunction that is evident at many levels of community life as described by Rosemary Kirby an Inuit Teacher in Paulatuk during her submission to the Berger Commission:

> There was a time after being raised in residential schools when an Eskimo person felt that they were useless. They were worthless, that what they were something to be ashamed of, and so we grew up to feel ashamed of being Eskimos, being ashamed of being Indian[17]

The child welfare system moved in to provide services to First Nations children and their families on reserve beginning in the mid 1950's. Unfortunately, the philosophy that Aboriginal children are best cared for by non-Aboriginal caregivers that underpinned the residential school system also pervaded the child welfare system. Social workers, lacking any critical awareness of the colonial factors that resulted in such pervasive poverty and multi-dimensional grief and despair on reserves removed large numbers of Aboriginal children and placed them in non-Aboriginal homes – often permanently. One, and regrettably not unique, example is a BC provincial social worker who in the 1970's actually chartered a bus and removed 38 children in one day from the Spallumcheen First Nation (Union of BC Indian Chiefs, 2002). These mass removals which occurred throughout Canada became termed as the "sixties scoop" and contributed to the further erosion of community morale and capacity to care for their

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children. In reviewing the circumstances of the 60's scoop, Manitoba Judge Edwin Kimmelman described the practice as "cultural genocide" (Balfour, 2004).

Fifty years after provincial child welfare authorities began looking out for the safety and well being of First Nations children and youth there is very limited evidence that the situation has improved. First Nations children are more likely to be incarcerated than graduate from high school continue to have inequitable service access on reserve and are at higher risk for health problems. There are currently between 22,000 and 28,000 Aboriginal children in the care of child welfare authorities in Canada (Bennett and Blackstock, 2003). This figure is shocking when one considers that there were approximately 9,000 children in residential schools at the height of those operations in 1939 (Milloy, 1999). In it's 1998 report the B.C. Children's Commission found that only 2.5% of Aboriginal children in care were placed in Aboriginal homes despite a statutory requirement that social workers place children in Aboriginal homes unless safely unable to do so (Childrens' Commission, 1998).

There are other problems as well; Aboriginal youth in Canada have one of the highest youth suicide rates of culturally identifiable groups in the world (Chandler, 2002). Poverty is a significant issue on reserves and off reserves as well. In its report to the Vancouver Richmond Aboriginal Health Board, the Vancouver Aboriginal Council estimated that of the 4300 Aboriginal children aged 0-6 years in the area eight children out of ten live in poverty (Vancouver Aboriginal Council, August 2000). The issue of poverty is critical as the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children acknowledges saying:

> " Poverty and despair provide fertile soil for child abuse and neglect and the social problems families suffer across the country tend to be even more concentrated in Aboriginal communities. The destruction of native social systems by the mainstream society has left many Aboriginal children vulnerable and many Aboriginal communities mistrustful of child welfare interventions. Canada has made little progress in improving the outcomes for Aboriginal children.[18]"

In its report for the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children held in May 2002 in New York, the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children noted " a steady deterioration of the supports required to enable children with special needs to enjoy the very rights afforded them under the Convention. In fact, support and services for children with special needs, Aboriginal and First Nations children, and other disadvantaged children, and their families are being rolled back in many places[19]." At almost every level an evaluation of current conditions faced by First Nations children and families reflects a failing of contemporary social work practice and calls for the affirmation of First Nations knowledge in caring for their children, investments in sustainable community development including self- government and self-determination frameworks.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples provided significant recommendations to move away from the Indian Act toward reconciliation and the recognition of Aboriginal self-determination, however, as Hurley and Wherrett (2000) argue Canada's implementation of the recommendations has been inadequate "In April 1999, the United Nations Human Rights Committee also expressed concern that Canada had "not yet implemented the recommendations of the [RCAP]," and recommended "that decisive and urgent action be taken towards the full implementation of the RCAP recommendations on land and resource allocation.[20]"

The continuing reality for First Nations peoples is that the government of Canada still imposes significant restrictions to the freedom and self determination of First Nations peoples whilst neglecting to vigorously correct structural discrimination in government policies. For example,

Canada still defines who is, and who is not, an Indian pursuant to the *Indian Act*, it legislates First Nations forms of governance, and regulates the provision of services to First Nations peoples through funding regimes or direct legislative powers.

Whilst communities are actively engaged in processes of restitution and recovery they build upon an amazing resilience which has survived them through conditions that arguably meet the definition of genocide contained in Article 2 of the 1948 *United Nations Convention on the Prevention of the Crime of Genocide* that reads as follows:

> *…genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:*
>
> *(a) Killing members of the group*
>
> *(b) Causing serous bodily or mental harm to members of the group*
>
> *(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;*
>
> *(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;*
>
> *Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.*[21]"

This resilience is admirable and necessary to meet the challenges ahead. However, as First Nations regroup to address the impacts of colonization there continues to be pervasive silence in the Canadian and international community to First Nations' past and present experience of colonization. The domestic and international community mostly turned its head to the hypocrisy between what Canada committed to in numerous international human, political and cultural rights declarations and its treatment of First Nations peoples. As recently as 2002 Amnesty International Canada noted in its report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination that "In its report to the Committee, the Canadian government has recognized that the status and treatment of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada gives rise to questions about Canada's record of compliance with the Convention [UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination][22]" Astonishingly, Canada filed this report in the same year that the Honourable Robert Nault, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development stated "there is no evidence in these modern times of racism in Canada.[23]" Far from being significantly admonished for its violations of international conventions, Canada's reputation as a peacemaker and observer of human rights grew during its time of oppression and assimilation of First Nations to a point where it is often cited as a positive example for other countries to emulate.

Why was there so much silence? Why when, as a country, we did so much to ensure international human rights abroad didn't our Canadian concepts of humanity and justice apply at home? Where were the human rights, health, cultural and social organizations of the voluntary sector? Why weren't Canadians outraged when there was so much evidence of human, cultural and physical genocide – and why is there so much silence today?

Instead of the focused analysis these questions would seem to deserve, the trend in government and in Canadian society more broadly is to simply assume colonization is over and requires no further response. In doing so we miss an opportunity to fundamentally explore how the voluntary sector can act as a vital protective factor against gross human rights abuses in Canada and it negates the opportunity of the sector's involvement in ensuring a high quality of life for all Canadians. Without active reflection on colonization coupled with a deliberate commitment to change, the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples will continue to be largely unimplemented and the world for First Nations children will remain the same.

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First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies:
Working to Close the Incomplete Circle of Support Services on Reserves

> *…we will make mistakes because we have embarked on a journey that has an uncertain outcome. But we also believe that we will correct these mistakes because we do not have a massive bureaucracy to move first. The Federal and Provincial governments believe they have experts who can teach us and guide us but the truth is that we have much to teach them…*[24]
>
> *Debbie Foxcroft, Founding Director of Nuu-chah-nulth USMA child and family services and current First Nations child and family service consultant*

During the past 30 years over 100 First Nations child and family service agencies (FNCFSA) have developed throughout Canada in an effort to stem the tide of children and youth being raised in non-Aboriginal homes and to build on the cultures of communities to affirm and restore community capacity to care for their children and youth. The 19 FNCFSA in British Columbia face considerable challenges, including inadequate resources, in meeting the significant community requirements arising from colonization (MacDonald, 1999). Like other First Nations child and family service agencies in Canada, FNCFSA in BC are funded by the federal government pursuant to a national funding formula known as Directive 20-1 Chapter 5 and receive their legal authority to delivery services through the provincial child welfare statute. A national review of the funding formula found that the there is inadequate funding for a statutory range of protective services intended to keep children safely in their homes known as least disruptive measures (MacDonald, Ladd et. al., 2000). Seventeen improvements to the Directive were made however there has only been very marginal implementation with no new funding having been identified to support FNCFSA. The provincial government typically does not fund on reserve service delivery and there is very limited funding for municipal types of services on reserves such as recreation parks and libraries. This means that agencies can not draw upon the resources of a diversified public sector to meet the needs of children – they have to respond to significant community need on the basis of federal funding only.

There are other social supports on-reserves but these are often limited to forms of civic engagement that are based on the traditional cultural concepts of interdependence – neighbors helping neighbors types of support. There is very limited evidence of funded non profit organizations on reserves (Lemont 2002).

Figure 1: Contrasting Social Supports for Children on and Off Reserves in Canada

Sector	Off Reserve Supports	On Reserve Supports
Public Sector	Federal programs Provincial programs Municipal services	Federal programs based on population count
Corporate Sector	G-8 economy provides family incomes of $37,757 for non Aboriginal workers in Canada (Campaign, 2000)	Limited corporate sector annual family income 7,165.00 per annum (Beavon and Cooke, 2001)
Voluntary Sector	90 Billion dollars per year in annual revenue (Turner, 2001)	Extremely negligible evidence of VS service delivery or funding of FN based forms of volunteerism (Nadjiwan and Blackstock, 2003)

Economic development is also limited by the *Indian Act* and lack of resolution of Treaties resulting in a corporate sector that is often based on a very limited number of small businesses or resource based industries such as fishing and logging.

The layering of these factors means that counter to prevailing stereotypes that view First Nations as preferred beneficiaries of Canada's resources, children on reserve have significantly less resources available to them than children off reserve as demonstrated in Figure 1.

Given this inequality of access to resources it is not difficult to understand why First Nations families are finding redressing the impacts of colonization so challenging. After all, it is likely that Canadian families would experience significant decreases in quality of life if they had to make do with the very limited social supports available to First Nations families on reserve.

Despite the significant contributions of the FNCFSA, they cannot meet the overwhelming need on their own. There is a need for a greater range of resources that are designed and delivered by First Nations or in respectful partnership with the private, voluntary or government sectors. The following section explores the nature of the diverse voluntary sector in Canada with a particular focus on how voluntary sector objectives may impact First Nations children, families and communities.

The Voluntary Sector

The voluntary sector has the most direct influence on government policy and on the development of public policy as a whole (Milne, 2002). The Voluntary Sector Roundtable emphasizes the important role of the voluntary sector in Canadian society stating that "The long term goal is to strengthen the role of the voluntary sector as the third pillar of Canada's social and economic order – equal in importance to both the government and private sector."[25] This role is supported in general by Canadians who in the Scan on Research on Public Attitudes toward the Voluntary Sector (2001) held the following views about the sector:

- 90% of those surveyed agreed that the importance of charitable organizations in Canadian society was increasing.
- 79% felt that voluntary sector organizations understood the needs of Canadians better than governments
- 59% indicated that chartable organizations do a better job of meeting the needs of Canadians than governments.
- 58% agreed that the voluntary sector should speak out on issues such as the environment, health care and poverty.[26]

The socio- economic influence of the Canadian voluntary sector is confirmed by the Delaney Turner (2001) who noted:

There are currently 75,000 registered charities, 100,000 non-profit organizations and 1.3 million employed in the voluntary sector. 6.5 million people were involved as volunteers, contributing approximately 1 billion hours each year. The organizations, some of which were run by a mixture of volunteer paid staff, varied in size from very small to very large. They are involved in a wide range of activities and services, including social services, health, sports, international cooperation and aid and faith based organizations. The economic impact of the sector is tremendous with 90 billion dollars in annual revenues, 109 billion dollars in assets and 22 million people making in-kind or financial donations to the sector[27]

In British Columbia, Volunteer BC (2002) reports that there are over 22,000 voluntary sector organizations collectively representing over one million hours of volunteer service valued at over 2.7 Billion dollars. This significant pool of resources is deployed throughout British Columbia to benefit a myriad of causes including social welfare and justice, recreation and sport, the arts, and the environment. Although there is no data indicating how many of these organizations have as their specific mandate the well being of children, youth and families anecdotal evidence indicates the numbers are significant. First Call, a cross-sectoral coalition of child, youth

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and family organizations lists over 50 provincial child, youth and family serving VS organizations amongst its members and the United Way of British Columbia lists hundreds of community child, youth and family organizations on its website (First Call, 2002, United Way of BC, 2002).

Their collective efforts have undoubtedly contributed to the well being of children and families but as the sectors' influence on Canadian public policy increases so too does its responsibility to ensure that the voices and needs of First Nations peoples are included in the reshaping of Canada (Centre of Philanthropy, 2002).

The most significant development in the area of Aboriginal involvement in the voluntary sector is the establishment of the Aboriginal Reference Group for the Voluntary Sector Initiative in 2001. This reference group draws its mandate from a strategic plan developed by a selected group of Aboriginal peoples in July of 2001. The strategic plan stresses the importance of engaging the diversity of Aboriginal peoples within Canada through a national consultation process to determine Aboriginal concepts of volunteerism, voluntary activity and unearthing means of supporting the Aboriginal voluntary sector (Voluntary Sector Initiative, 2002). The consultation process is envisioned to be respectful of linguistic, literary and cultural diversity and to incorporate the views of as many Aboriginal peoples as possible. Regrettably, although some progress has been made on an awareness video to advance this project, according to Aboriginal Reference Group meeting minutes dated November 2001 and January 2002, progress in achieving the strategic objectives has been impeded by inadequate human and financial resources (VSI 2001; VSI, January, 2002; VSI, November, 2002). It is important that the works of this table be adequately resourced so that the stated objectives to affirm promote and support Aboriginal volunteerism and voluntary sector organizations can be achieved. In addition, efforts to promote effective and respectful collaborations across cultural lines between Aboriginal peoples and non Aboriginal voluntary sector organizations and the philanthropic community are required. Enhanced collaboration could serve to address immediate community needs which are outside of the current capacity of the Aboriginal voluntary sector or are better met through partnership arrangements.

According to leading collaboration theorist Rosebeth Kanter, a critical part of forming effective collaborations is information. In the case of collaboration between First Nations and the voluntary sector this would include gathering information on their collective historical experiences, contemporary contexts, organizational missions, values and structures. Unfortunately, voluntary sector industry publications appear to lack any meaningful information and discussion on these important issues. There is also a dearth of research on current engagement patterns between First Nations and the voluntary sector in general and in regards to the needs of children, youth and families on reserve in particular. In fact, I was unable to locate any Canadian or international studies that had explored the nature and extent of engagement between the child, youth and family serving voluntary sector and First Nations peoples on reserve. This gap in information inspired my own research and the following section describes the results of a survey research project in 2002 to assess the level of current engagement between the child, youth and family serving voluntary sector and First Nations child and family service agencies in British Columbia. The project also highlighted ideas on how to inform and promote collaborative relationships between First Nations child and family service agencies and the voluntary sector.

Methodology

In the absence of relevant research to inform research design, a survey based research design was selected. Two separate surveys were developed, one for child, youth and family voluntary sector organizations and another for First Nations child and family service agencies. Although there were questions that were

specific to each research group, whenever possible, efforts were made to include consistent questions in both surveys to facilitate cross comparisons of results.

Some respondents were contacted after the completion of the survey to clarify interview responses to inform aggregate data analysis. Conversations with colleagues in the voluntary sector and in First Nations child and family service agencies also helped shape data analysis and findings. Confidentiality of participating organizations is ensured through the presentation of survey findings in aggregate form only.

Nature and Extent of Collaboration between FNCFSA and the Voluntary Sector in British Columbia: Survey Findings

Yes, I see a need for other non-profit organizations in a community. Our agency can't do it all because of time constraints and funding issues. Too many jurisdictional issues to deal with when working on and off reserve

First Nations Child and Family Service Agency Survey Respondent

The First Nations child and family service survey was sent to 19 First Nations child and family service agencies (FNCFSA) 6 of which completed the survey. Two other FNCFSA responded indicating that although to date there had not been any collaboration between their agency and the voluntary sector they felt their agencies were too new to complete the survey.

Of the six agencies completing the survey, three were fully delegated (delivering a full range of child protection services) and three were partially delegated (support services to families and foster home recruitment). The agencies served 47 First Nations located in the northern interior, northwest coast, central interior, lower mainland and island regions of the province. One agency was located in a remote community, two were in rural areas serving rural communities and three were located in, or proximal to, urban environments.

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Only one agency had a child population size exceeding 1000 status Indian children on reserve. As funding for preventative services and community development are allocated under Directive 20-1 according to population count this is the only agency that received full operations funding. Of the remaining five First Nations CFS agencies, two received 25% of operational funding, two received 50% operational funding and the other received 75% of operational funding. FNCFSA that do not receive full funding under the operations formula have a very limited pool of resources for preventative services and community development.

Of the responding child, youth and family serving voluntary organizations, two are members of provincial organizations based in Vancouver and the others provided services on a regional basis in Northern Interior, Vancouver and Vancouver Island. The mission statements of the organizations varied, however, all stressed a capacity building approach to child, youth or families including wording such as "promote and advance" "independence and empowerment" and "fostering full potential" and "recognizing that children are our future."

The participation of the First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies and voluntary sector organizations is critical to this study and their frank and open conversation is a generous gift to others in the sector interested in fostering positive collaborative relationships in future. To follow is a summary of the research findings, presented in aggregate, in order to protect the confidentiality of respondents.

Perception of First Nation Community Needs and Service Requirements

The First Nations child and family service agencies identified the following key needs in the communities they served:

Poverty

Five of the six First Nations child and family service agencies cited poverty as the most significant issue facing the children,

youth and families in their communities.

Substance Abuse

One agency identified this as the most significant issue, while four more ranked it second to poverty in importance. The lack of culturally based addictions services for adults and children are key concerns.

Low rates of Education Success

Low rates of educational success were identified as a key issue by four First Nations child and family service agencies. This reflects provincial statistics indicating that only one of four First Nations youth will graduate high school.

FNCFSA also identified the following key issues impacting children and families on reserve: sexual abuse, youth suicide, mental health, racism, neglect, physical illness or disability and bingo.

When voluntary sector respondents were asked how aware they were of the needs of First Nations children, families and communities on reserve all five said "somewhat." Sample responses include:

- Need for intensive family preservation work to enable children to reside in home rather than be removed.
- From our perspective mostly, articulated needs from the band was for parenting support.
- Some First Nations children come to our tutoring programs. There is a greater rate of school dropout in FN communities.
- Have direct experience working with a diversity of FN youth, though I would be reticent to identify any specific needs without consultation with them.

All First Nations child and family service agencies identified that there was a need for additional services to meet community needs such as: cultural programs, substance abuse programs, education services, mental health/suicide intervention programs, safe homes, recreational opportunities, employment services, parenting and family skill development programs and supports,.

Is there a Role for the Voluntary Sector on Reserve?

The FNCFSA were in unanimous agreement that the voluntary sector had a role in meeting the needs of First Nations children, youth and families on reserve. Sample responses from FNCFSA include:

- Yes, I see a need for other nonprofit organizations in a community. Our agency can't do it all because of time constraints and funding issues. Too many jurisdictional issues to deal with when working on and off reserve.
- Yes, meal programs for on-reserve schools, transportation is a HUGE need (no public transit) hitchhiking is the only transit in remote communities. VS could fund community buses, after school programming, sports equipment, field trips and exchange options to provide hope to youth.
- Yes, when population size does not support the creation of an entire program on reserve partnerships may contribute to their development and success.
- Yes, issues of poverty and limited resources.

When voluntary sector respondents were asked what role, if any, they saw for the voluntary sector in responding to the needs of First Nations children, youth and families on reserve, all agreed that the sector did have a role. Two of the voluntary sector organizations identified public education as a key contribution the sector could make. Other suggestions included providing services, or to "act as flow through agency to transition the knowledge or funding they have to other organizations depending on the size of the population group."

Current Nature and Extent of Collaboration

Both sets of respondents were asked to report on the current nature and extent of collaboration between voluntary sector and FNCFSA in meeting the needs of First Nations children, youth and families

resident on reserve. Of the five voluntary sector agencies responding to the survey three indicated that they were aware of the number of First Nations reserves in their catchment area and, of these, two organizations were aware of the number of First Nations child and family service agencies. Two of the voluntary sector participants report that FNCFSA contacted their organization regarding services this past year whilst three reported contacting FNCFSA in the same time period. None of the participating voluntary sector agencies had worked with a First Nations child and family service agency to provide services to an on-reserve client in the past year.

Out of the six First Nations child and family service agency respondents, two agencies reported two occasions each where services were provided by the voluntary sector to residents on reserve this past year. The four voluntary sector organizations involved provided family support or mental health services to community members. The relationship quality was described as varied from fair to excellent with most on the latter end of the continuum. One FNCFSA commented that "some families are more comfortable working out family issues with people they don't see on a social basis. [The voluntary sector organization] skills are good." Another noted that the First Nation had a desire to develop the capacity to deliver the services on reserve to reflect, more closely, the cultural context of the clients they serve.

The two FNCFSA that had collaborated with the voluntary sector to provide services collectively represented 7 of the 47 First Nations serviced by agencies participating in this survey. This limited engagement likely means the citizens of the remaining 40 First Nations did not receive services from the sector this past year as FNCFSA act as the primary service referral agent for children, youth and families on-reserve. It is important to note that FNCFSA in urban areas were the least likely to report collaboration with the child, youth and family serving voluntary sector debunking the myth that distance is a significant barrier to relationship building.

Opportunities and Barriers in Collaboration

The following section reviews respondent perceptions of the barriers and opportunities to collaboration between FNCFSA and the child, youth and family serving voluntary sector in order to promote future respectful collaboration.

In identifying the main barriers to forming relationships with the voluntary sector, FNCFSA identified the following key issues:

- Voluntary Sector lack of knowledge on the needs of First Nations children, youth and families living on reserve.
- Voluntary sector lack of cultural knowledge.
- Voluntary sector lack of knowledge of First Nations child and family service agencies.

Other issues include FNCFSA lack of information on the voluntary sector, lack of time to form collaborative relationships, and distance of voluntary sector agencies to on-reserve communities.

In contrast when the voluntary sector respondents identified the main barriers to building relationships with FNCFSA, a slightly different series of factors emerged as priority areas:

- Four of five respondents listed lack of time as the top barrier to forming collaborative relationships with FNCFCS.
- Four respondents indicated voluntary sector lack of knowledge of First Nations Child and Family Service agencies as a key factor.

Lack of cultural knowledge, or awareness of needs of First Nations children, youth and families were also frequently cited as barriers. Other issues noted were distance between VS and reserve communities, and not wanting to assume that voluntary sector organizations would be welcome so they have not asked.

FNCFSA offered the following suggestions to enhance collaboration:

- Dollars to develop our own voluntary

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sector based on examples of voluntarism in the [First Nations] community

- Inter-agency community meetings
- Knowledge and information on both sides. Information needs to be provided to the VS on FNCFSA. Information for the public and voluntary sector on the needs of First Nations children and families on reserve.
- Best way [for the voluntary sector] to help community is to work with the community as well as [First Nation program] departments such as child and family services, health, income assistance, and employment services.
- Ask [First Nations] communities what their needs are…look for volunteers and leaders within each of the communities, develop a relationship and partnership. Share with them the non-profit's experiences – good and bad and together decide what might work for community.

First Nations child and family service agencies identified that a shared vision of community development that builds on the assets of the community is a cornerstone of successful collaboration. Building community capacity not dependency was strongly emphasized. In order to achieve this, respondents believed that the voluntary sector "must have knowledge of cultural and traditional ways of that community. Must be non-judgmental of how a community and family functions. Must not try to force their own values/morals on our community." There must also be a willingness by voluntary sector organizations to support First Nations directed resources and voluntary activity.

The voluntary organizations described the following characteristics of successful collaborations with FNCFSA:

- Need to know about organizational details of both organizations.
- Collaboration in articulating the problem, designing and delivering a program
- Knowing what the expectations are of each party and negotiating how mandates and missions work together.
- Some way of developing the relationship – this has taken us and continues to take a lot of time.
- A clear definition of community needs and assets as defined by FNCFSA.

In reflecting on what would assist relationship building between the voluntary sector and FNCFSA, two respondents indicated that there needs to be a forum to facilitate relationship building "If FNCFS wanted to work with the sector then a respectful space to meet and create relationship [is needed] which has as it's main goal relationship building but as well includes some form of concrete, easy to deliver, project." Another respondent suggested "It's also important that all the collaborators have a firm understanding of the history of each of the groups involved so that you don't get blinded by a romantic idea of what is happening. A realistic clear-eyed grasp of the situation at hand is always a good place to start." Other suggestions included; additional information regarding First Nations issues, a team approach that resourced opportunities for First Nations to be hired by voluntary sector organizations, integration of First Nations cultural and context into training programs for voluntary sector staff, and additional financial and human resources.

Discussion

While there were differences in some responses, the data indicates that there is very little evidence of engagement between child, youth and family serving voluntary sector organizations and First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies in BC. This is distressing and puzzling given the significant needs of First Nations children, youth and families and the sector's desire to be inclusive, and responsive to the needs of all Canadians. The second key finding is one of hope, and that is that all respondents, First Nations and Voluntary Sector, agreed there was a role for the sector in building on the assets of communities to respond to the needs of children, youth and families and have identified a myriad of ways to foster collaboration.

The identification of barriers by survey respondents partially explains the lack of engagement, however, as many organizations have successfully overcome these barriers in other settings they do not account for the significant and pervasive absence of the voluntary sector in the face of such profound need.

As the sample size of voluntary sector organizations is small there is no definitive way of explaining the social exclusion based on the data, therefore, in order to promote further dialogue on the etiological drivers of the social exclusion of First Nations children, youth, and families, four possible rationales are explored:

1. Lack of Information
2. The Liberal Tradition of the Voluntary Sector
3. Differing Values and Beliefs on Volunteerism
4. Colonization, Racism and Reconciliation

Although I have organized these into four separate discussions, it is my belief that it is in the blending of these and other possible dimensions that the experience of both the voluntary sector and First Nations child and family service agencies is likely best reflected.

Lack of Information

The First Nations Child and Family Service Agency and the Voluntary Sector respondents both identified the lack of knowledge of the voluntary sector on First Nations cultures, child and family serving organizations, and community needs as a key factor that limits voluntary sector engagement. Information has also been identified by key collaboration theorist Rosbeth Kanter(1993) as critical component in the effective development and maintenance of organizational collaborative relationships. So in light of the need for information in order to facilitate collaboration what do we know about the historical/cultural knowledge of leaders in the voluntary sector and their access to reliable information to support further learning?

Although there is no specific information to assess the nature and extent of historical knowledge, particularly regarding First Nations peoples, amongst Voluntary Sector leaders and organizations, we can draw some information from national studies. In 1998, the Dominion Institute and the Canada Council for Unity commissioned Ipsos-Reid to conduct a poll on the Canadian's knowledge of their history. Interestingly, this test of Canadian history contained no questions regarding Aboriginal peoples. Nonetheless only half of respondents passed the test. An Ipsos-Reid poll in September 2001 indicated that 76% of Canadians are embarrassed by their lack of knowledge about Canadian history (Ipsos-Reid, 2001). So why do we know so little about our history, what are our institutions of knowledge such as schools and the media doing about it and what implications does this have for the shaping of Canadian society?

Canadian historian and author, Jack Granatstein, sums up the historical academic curricula in the elementary and secondary schools of the nation as follows:

> "…astonishingly four provinces have no compulsory Canadian history courses in their high schools. Others bury it in a mishmash of civic, pop sociology and English as a Second Language, eliminating anything that might offend students, parents and school trustees, in an attempt to produce an airbrushed past free of warts (except for the officially approved historical sins that can be used for present-day social engineering.[28])

If elementary and high school provide Canadians with an inadequate understanding of Canadian history then what about the colleges and universities that graduate many of the voluntary sector leaders. Former University of British Columbia History Professor, Michael Ignatieff, points to the exclusionary telling of Canadian history in the university system as playing a key role in perpetuating Canadian historical ignorance:

> "[T]he other reason the history I

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> was teaching wasn't national history was that it left out almost all of the people. It was a history of the politics, diplomacy and warfare that lead to the creation of British North America and the Canadian political system. While this has to be core of any national history it leaves out a lot…and as for the aboriginal peoples, whose civilization had marked the history of the Pacific Northwest, if my students wanted to study them, they had to head over to the anthropology department. Their achievements – and their tragedy- had no place in the Canadian story[29]."

Historical ignorance allows Canadian governments and the voluntary sector to claim a higher level of morality and justice on the international stage and to hold tight to the values of democracy, freedom, compassion and peace upon which we found our national identity. We call on countries such as South Africa to end apartheid, the G-8 to end child poverty and China to recognize the distinctness of Tibet and yet Canada is home to the *Indian Act*, First Nations children live in conditions that lag far behind other Canadians, and little progress has been made to recognize Aboriginal rights and title in this country. Aziz Choudry offers this assessment of the contemporary relationship between the voluntary sector and First Nations peoples "Many social justice campaigns, NGO's and activists in these countries operate from a state of colonial denial and refuse to make links between human rights abuses overseas, economic (in) justice, and the colonization of the lands and peoples where they live[30]" Choudry emphasizes that it is not possible to understand the contemporary context or experience of Aboriginal people in Canada without having a knowledge of the history.

Considering the significant socio-economic needs in Aboriginal communities, access to meaningful information on Aboriginal peoples in reports such as RCAP, and the desire for the voluntary sector to serve all Canadians it is unconscionable for the sector to continue to bathe comfortably in its own ignorance.

It is also important to note that survey results suggested that First Nations child and family service agencies also required further information on the voluntary sector. In contrast to information on First Nations, accurate, and reliable information on the child, youth and family serving sector is available through non-profit organizations and networks at the community, provincial and national levels. However, a need for focused dissemination of information to First Nations child and family service agencies is clearly indicated.

If voluntary sector leaders are invested in renewed relationships between Canada's non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal peoples then they must actively seek out multiple sources of historical truth and perspective on which to base their future actions. If the enthusiastic support for increased collaboration and learning from both FNCFSA and voluntary sector agencies participating in this project are any indication we have reason to be hopeful – now we must mobilize it into deliberate and thoughtful action.

The Liberal Tradition: The Mask of Inequality and Diversity

The voluntary sector is largely premised on the liberal tradition that seeks to affirm individual rights through organizational governance and service delivery structures that do not discriminate on the basis of issues such as race, religion, gender or political affiliation (Taylor, 1994). This is admirable but it also assumes a lot. For example, the liberal approach considers that service recipients all share a cultural framework founded in the liberal tradition, it assumes misapplication of liberal ideology will be obvious and preventable, and that everyone is starting from the same socio-economic advantage.

The problem is that these assumptions are likely only half-truths even when applied to non-Aboriginal Canadians let alone applied to First Nations whom experience political, economic and social oppression

to a degree that is not shared by other Canadians. Thus the difficulty arises in that the liberal tradition propagates and supports inequality through the equal treatment of unequals. This type of ethical blindness is easily sustained couched in language of equality and universality when a void of reliable organizational ethical auditing procedures exists (Bird, 1996).

The perpetuation of inequality, although often not deliberate, can be as destructive in its consequences as intentional discrimination. In the case of the voluntary sector that tends to provide services in the liberal tradition, this may result in the exclusion of the First Nations children, youth and families as service recipients or in a cultural mismatch between services provided and the cultural context of the service recipient. A conversation with a non- Aboriginal director of a child and youth voluntary sector organization provides some insight into how the liberal tradition manifests in practice. Upon hearing about the disproportionate numbers of First Nations children in care that were serviced by the organization she remarked "we don't focus on First Nations children, we look out for the interests of all children." While looking out for the interests of all children is admirable it can lead to the development of universal programs that fail to consider the inequalities and contexts experienced, in this case, by over 40% of the organization's clients.

An over reliance on universal descriptors such as Aboriginal, Indigenous or Native to guide voluntary service governance or service delivery can also mask the significant differences between Aboriginal peoples in Canada resulting in a myriad of services and programs that do not adequately respond to various constituencies. Take for example the issue of the nature and extent of engagement between the voluntary sector and First Nations child and family service agencies that is reviewed in this paper. If the question was framed to measure whether or not voluntary sector organizations provide services to Aboriginal peoples, I would hypothesize that the engagement rates would have been somewhat higher in light of the higher profile of urban Aboriginal voluntary sector organizations. By asking specifically about voluntary engagement with on- reserve First Nations child and family service organizations a significant gap was identified. Another example is Michael Chandler's research on Aboriginal youth suicide in First Nations communities in British Columbia. His study found that although Aboriginal youth in Canada are at higher risk per capita of youth suicide than any other culturally identifiable group in the world, there were First Nations in BC that had a zero youth suicide rate over the past 13 years. In comparing First Nations with high suicide rates with those where youth suicide was not a concern, Dr. Chandler found that decreased suicide rates were highly correlated with increased community self-government and self-determination (Chandler, 2002). This finding supports other research suggesting that community self-government precede improvements in economic and social well being in First Nations communities (Cornell & Kalt, 2002). If Chandler did not unpack the term Aboriginal to examine differences in suicide rates amongst diverse First Nations communities this critical preventative factor for youth suicide would have not been identified.

Another example of misuse of taxonomy is the tendency to include First Nations as part of the "multi-cultural" community in Canada. While at first glance it may seem appropriate to lump First Nations in with other peoples of color, the First Nations experience and impacts of colonization, assimilation and expropriation of lands supported by Canadian legal, political and social instruments is so significant that cross comparisons with immigrant groups is not substantiated (Bennett &Blackstock, 2002). So although the multi-cultural service delivery approach offers the value of simplicity for the service provider it essentially denies the diverse realities of the service user and in this way perpetuates the homogeneity of diversity that the multi-cultural approach seeks to admonish.

The liberal tradition whilst wanting to

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achieve notions of non discrimination can result in a lack of recognition that the services provided are not culturally neutral and the needs and contexts of the target population are not consistent and universal. Respecting difference and responding to difference does take time and it is definitely more complicated than presumptions of homogeneity and equality however it is also incumbent on the sector to do. The lack of engagement of the voluntary sector with First Nations child and family service agencies is a strong signal that current approaches need rethinking and redesign if the sector wishes to contribute to the well being of all Canadian children, youth and families.

Differing Values and Concepts of Volunteerism

The principles of institutionalized volunteerism are significantly correlated with the presence and strength of Christian based religions, particularly the Protestant faith. This is believed to be based on the protestant notion that one volunteers his/her faith to the church whereas other Christian faiths such as the Catholic Church view their teachings as universal and thus not elective (Woolley, 2001). If a fundamental principal of the faith is volunteerism then it is not surprising that civil society reflects these principals in their concepts and constructs in countries and regions with a strong Protestant tradition – such as in Canada.

So if Woolley is right and concepts of volunteerism, and by extension voluntary organizations, are significantly correlated to Protestant teachings then what does this mean when these organizations provide services to First Nations peoples? This will likely vary in accordance to the degree to which the organization acknowledges that it is not culturally neutral and adopts strategies to abort inappropriate projection of values and beliefs. At a macro level – if voluntary sector organizations founded on these predicates are inadequately reflective and responsive to changing cultural contexts, services can be experienced as irrelevant, incoherent, or actively challenging to the values and beliefs of clients. Take for example, the tendency for child and family services to be structured to respond to the needs of the nuclear family versus extended family and kinship networks. If services are provided to individuals devoid of the context of community then application in communally based cultures is questionable.

As noted in *Strategic Planning for Aboriginal Input*, a document produced in July 2001 by Aboriginal participants for the Voluntary Sector Initiative, concepts of volunteerism can be influenced by differing values and beliefs. For example, civic engagement in First Nations communities is based on a strong tradition of interdependent communal life reflective of cultural values, beliefs and practices. Volunteering in the Euro-western concept implies choice however in First Nations communities' civic engagement is not, strictly speaking, elective – it is an expectation necessary to ensure the sustainability of community. Both of these traditions are valid however if the voluntary sector organizes itself strictly around the Euro-western framework it effectively fails to recognize and support other forms of civic engagement. The implications of this are reflected in the findings on the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating which found that although 3 out of 10 Canadians volunteered with organizations 7 out of 10 indicated that they participated in other forms of civic engagement (NSGVP, 1997). The current narrow focus on institutionalized volunteerism, volunteering through an organizational structure, effectively marginalizes the efforts of four out of ten Canadians. This can, and does, result in First Nations communities being denied recognition of traditional forms of volunteerism and financial resources to support said activities.

There has been much debate on what constitutes a voluntary sector organization in Canada but this has mostly been confined to whether the organization has volunteers or relies on paid staff. The debate on how to support First Nations cultural constructs of volunteerism within a multi-cultural

Canada requires further thoughtful deliberation by the sector, government funders and the philanthropic community.

Colonization, Racism and Reconciliation

On January 7, 1998 Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Jane Stewart, read the following passage in the statement of reconciliation on the floor of the House of Parliament:

> Reconciliation is an ongoing process. In renewing our partnership, we must ensure that the mistakes that marked our past relationship are not repeated. The Government of Canada recognizes that policies that sought to assimilate Aboriginal people, women and men, were not the way to build a strong country. We must instead continue to find ways in which Aboriginal people can participate fully in the economic, political, cultural and social life of Canada in a manner that preserves and enhances the collective identities of Aboriginal communities, and allows them to evolve and flourish in the future. Working together to achieve our shared goals will benefit all Canadians, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike[31].

This statement was to signal a new beginning, a relationship between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Canadians informed by history and founded on respect and honour. Although, there is significant debate as to whether the statement went far enough in apologizing for Canada's colonial policies and whether the government has met its commitments in the statement, it is important that the statement was made. It indicates a need for the redistribution of power to restore First Nations self-determination and calls for a significant renovation of the relationship between Aboriginal peoples, the state and other Canadians. Many agree, including government, that empowerment, often termed capacity building, should be supported in First Nations communities -the difficulty is that empowering First Nations peoples necessarily results in the disempowerment of the colonial interests of government and mainstream Canadian society and it is here that road forward is often blocked.

A revitalization of reconciliation begins with understanding the harm in a way that can not be rationalized or tolerated. It requires accepting responsibility for the past and for involvement in the solutions that pave the way forward. For the voluntary sector this means accepting responsibility for their knowledge and lack of knowledge; for past actions and inactions; and its collective and individual relationships with First Nations peoples.

It also calls for a greater understanding of the insidious normalcy that clothes racism and how it envelopes itself in the language of safety, community and justice making it so damaging and pervasive in public affairs. Zygmunt Bauman's definition of racism emphasizes how it can become so normalized in our daily experience that we hardly notice it at all:

> "Racism stands apart by a practice of which it is a part and which it rationalizes: a practice that combines strategies of architecture and gardening with that of medicine – in the service of the construction of an artificial social order, through cutting out the elements of the present reality that neither fit the visualized perfect reality, nor can be changed so that they do so[32].

As a part of a constructed reality, racism can permeate and influence our construction of just and safe communities (Bauman, 2001). At a time when threat appears to come from the most unexpected directions, community is a word we all feel good about – a blanket that wraps around us making us feel safe and secure. As Bauman (2001) argues the need to maintain that feel good sense of community at a local, regional or national level can result in a progressive tendency to protect that concept of community by rejecting and oppressing peoples or ideas

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that are inconsistent with it. In this way we become morally blind to the realities experienced by the others and either fail to see the connections between our actions and their situation or rationalize those actions as being necessary to ensure community safety. The massacre at Wounded Knee discussed earlier in this chapter is a good example of how mass murder of Indian peoples was rationalized as being necessary to ensure the safety of the settlers. In more recent times, the unarmed protest by First Nations peoples to protect an ancient burial site at Ipperwash Provincial Park in Ontario in 1995 brought out the Ontario Provincial Police Tactics and Rescue Squad resulting in the shooting of an unarmed Ojibwe protestor, Dudley George and the beating of two others (Edwards, 2001). Media surrounding the killing of Dudley George and the subsequent criminal prosecution of a police officer has put in focus again how race influences perceptions of threat resulting in excessive use of force by mainstream society. An inquiry is finally going to be held into the shooting of Dudley George; however, there are few indications that the inquiry, or other processes, will meaningfully redress the collective rights violations of First Nations peoples that gave rise to the Ipperwash Crisis in the first place. Canadian human rights mechanisms continue to focus on individual rights violations making it very difficult to address collective rights violations resulting from structural discrimination and oppression.

As this study highlights, the voluntary sector community has somehow constructed structural barriers between it and First Nations peoples in Canada. This social exclusion persisted over time regardless of the degree of devastation experienced by Aboriginal peoples, including the pervasive deaths of children in residential schools. Even today, statistics outlining the landscape of harm facing First Nations children – racism, poverty, social exclusion, institutionalization and lack of social support – are normalized. We have edged our collective tolerance for rights violations of Aboriginal children and youth upwards to a point where it is hard to imagine how bad things need to get to implore the focused action and attention required to redress those conditions. This exclusion and moral blindness are so antithetical to the role and values of the voluntary sector that we are compelled to understand why it happened – why it is happening now and what can we do to make sure it does not happen again.

I have had many informal conversations with leaders, staff and volunteers of non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal voluntary sector organizations which provide some insight into the silent supports that exclude Aboriginal peoples. Although all the non-Aboriginal people I spoke with were well intended and supported social inclusion, many acknowledged a distinct discomfort when thinking of how to involve Aboriginal people in their organizations. Some thought the discomfort had to do with lack of information, or that the whole "Aboriginal issue" is too complex. Others said it was because they do not want to do more harm or because they found it difficult to recruit Aboriginal people for their organizations – still others simply did not know why that discomfort exists.

It is important to acknowledge that this discomfort in crossing the cultural boundary is real in the voluntary sector as it can lead to a decision to not involve the Aboriginal community or, after one or two failed attempts at engagement, to simply stop trying. One voluntary sector leader described how this surfaced in their organization saying that each year during the board strategic planning session the issue of needing to engage more Aboriginal people in the organization would surface. The board would agree that this was important; someone would ask if anyone there knew someone Aboriginal who they could contact, no one did – so it was put off until next year.

An Aboriginal man shared how the exclusion occurs in even high level meetings of those involved in children's services. He was the only Aboriginal participant in a group that were setting national priorities for action. He shared the data and stories mapping out the significant, and disproportionate, risks faced by Aboriginal children and the solutions that

had been developed to redress those risks. After he finished there was silence –no one said anything – and then they moved on with the rest of the discussion. At the end of the day, the experiences of the Aboriginal children he spoke about were not among the top ten priorities for action.

Another Aboriginal man said that still in Canadian society one of his key roles is to be a contradiction – to be what the stereotypes say he can not be – educated, articulate, generous, caring about peoples across cultures and not wearing regalia all the time. Like many of my Aboriginal friends, he gets comments like "you're different from the rest [Indians]" or "you are good at walking in both worlds." Although these are often offered as well meaning compliments, they reflect a failure to appreciate the implied power imbalance when "walking in two worlds" is only an honourable duty for Aboriginal and visible minority peoples and not for mainstream Canadians. They fail to understand that the brilliance they see before them is not an exception amongst Aboriginal peoples, it is a glimpse at what was lost in Canadian society when Aboriginal peoples and their gifts of knowledge and caring were relegated to the other.

I have experienced what I call the set aside – where non-Aboriginal peoples, not understanding the harm, or wanting to avoid discomfort, set aside the concerns of Aboriginal peoples. Over the years I have participated in many non-Aboriginal working groups in the voluntary sector and find that the conversation of rights violations is too often centered on those violations that affect non-Aboriginal Canadians whose basic rights have already been recognized. Legitimate middle class concerns such as ensuring family friendly work places, and improving recreation parks overshadow the need to eliminate the race based Indian Act or the significant risk factors facing Aboriginal children. As Aboriginal peoples our rights violations are too often only an uncomfortable interruption in the conversation of the privileged. And so it is in many rights based publications that our story is often relegated to the back chapter of a book under the headings vulnerable, at risk and marginalized.

The sharing of these stories underscores the reality that even amongst enlightened social organizations where there is a desire to engage with the Aboriginal community there is often too little shared commitment, information and action. There are positive exceptions of course, and these need to be highly recognized and supported, but in doing so they should inspire more generalized action within the sector and not lull us back into complacency.

It is natural, when working in cross cultural contexts for there to be some apprehension over cultural etiquette, understanding, and language and also an important calling to understand local history and context but the sector, through its' work in areas such as international development, the arts, and international projects on child well being, has routinely demonstrated success in collaborating with distinct cultures worldwide. For some reason, it seems more difficult for people working in the voluntary sector to collaborate with First Nations in Canada than it is to work with people abroad including Brazil and Peru – countries that parallel the ranking of First Nations living on-reserve in Canada.

The whole question is likely complex and varied but perhaps part of the answer is that Bauman is right – that for many Canadians acknowledging the history of First Nations not only brings a great appreciation for First Nations peoples and cultures of this land it also calls to account the values of justice, peace, honesty, democracy, equality, and individualism upon which we found our identity as a country, as a voluntary sector, and as Canadians. It explains why as a country we celebrate aspects of Aboriginal and First Nations culture that are consistent with our perceived values as evidenced by things such as the prolific presence of Aboriginal art in the airports, museums, and government buildings whilst we turn away from the conversations of reconciliation, restitution, inclusion, and accountability. Too often, it is the celebration and inclusion of First Nations arts without the celebration

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and inclusion of First Nations peoples. It is the masquerade of acceptance and humanitarianism toward First Nations that Canada sends out to the world blinding itself to its continued need to have First Nations fit into Euro-western constructs of humanity. It is what assimilation looks like today.

First Nations are no longer willing to be set aside or be asked to be only what other Canadians believe they should be, and nor, do I believe and hope is the voluntary sector willing to support their exclusion. For the voluntary sector, achieving this means actively challenging our sense of comfort, in making room in our mental circle of humanity for those who are not included in our current concepts of the voluntary community, acknowledging our past exclusion and vigilantly watching for those moments when our community secures its barriers to rebuff an inconsistent ideology, action, person or group of persons. Most difficult of all it is to understand that racism can, and does, exist even when there is good will and in the absence of stereotypically concrete signals– it is often pervasive and insidious. It can be normalized within the broader community context and is only loud and violent to those who are oppressed. Its continued existence is perpetuated by the ethical blindness of society's watchdogs such as the voluntary sector and our collective silence as citizens.

Breaking the silence requires promoting the voices of First Nations to quicken our national moral deliberation and action. Frederick Douglass, a former slave, who was asked to provide an Independence Day address in 1852 eloquently, informs the courageous conversation ahead:

> it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of that nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced[33].

Some may say that such bold actions are unnecessary to address violations of civil, cultural and human rights in a modern civilized country such as Canada– but we also know that the major civil change called for in RCAP has not happened in its absence. And we also know from the fine examples of Ghandi and King that often civil change and development has been preceded by courageous, loud, and often controversial conversation framed within non violent resistance.

In all dimensions, the voluntary sector's role in reconciliation must be shaped by an understanding that First Nations peoples are knowledgeable, resilient and valuable peoples in their own right. And despite the ravages of colonization and assimilation we are not a broken people waiting to be fixed by Euro-western "community development" approaches. We have our own answers, they need to be heard, respected, resourced and they need to guide the involvement of the voluntary sector. This includes setting the pace for change. It is true that for many First Nations communities the road back to the restoration of peace and harmony for children, youth and families is a long one –and voluntary sector organizations working in collaboration with First Nations should not be deterred should their acts of giving not show any immediate change. The goal is to affirm and strengthen what works for community and to be patient and respectful as community increasingly embraces confident action toward a future they define.

Conclusion

> *If you have come here to help me,*
>
> *You are wasting your time....*
>
> *But if you have come because*
>
> *Your liberation is bound up with mine,*
>
> *Then let us work together.*
>
> Lilla Watson, a Brisbane –based Aboriginal educator and activist[34]

What is it that is so powerful that separates us from one another? That makes us believe

that as long as one is not hurting and can not hear the cries of another then all is well. What makes us believe these are matters best dealt with by chosen leaders and not by the rest of us? What is the story, the fact, or the picture that needs to flash upon our collective consciousness to understand that loving and caring about us means loving and caring for them?

Reconciliation is not just about doing right by oppressed peoples it is about breathing life into our oppressed humanity. It is about making authentic those things we believe that are most important about ourselves. In these times of increased conflict it is essential to a sustainable future for all of us.

For the voluntary sector, it means understanding that social inclusion and reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples in Canada are not discretionary – it is essentially required to make real our collective mission to ensure a sustainable quality of life for all of humanity and the environment that we share. Without it we remain tangled in contradiction and we contribute to the marginalization of another generation of Aboriginal children.

It is not too complicated-it begins with a first step. Becoming eager students of history, and willing partners, who understand that they have just as much to learn from First Nations as they themselves have to give – it is the balance of giving and receiving that is the foundation of the balance of power and the basis for respect.

It requires an understanding of the rich diversity that exists within the Aboriginal community and developing partnerships based on respect that are reflective of history and recognize the capacity of Aboriginal peoples to act in their own best interests.

On a broader level, it calls for the sector to question its identity. To learn from the history we both share as Aboriginal and non Aboriginal peoples in Canada and to involve ourselves in solutions that lead to respectful coexistence.

It is important to understand the seductive power of not doing anything. After all, historically the sector has principally relied on this strategy as the primary response to the harms experienced by Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The voluntary sector needs to actively defend against the many rationalizations that make standing still OK by reminding ourselves that standing still has had devastating consequences for Aboriginal children and youth. As frightening as doing something might feel, we can not feel morally absolved in standing silent – we must with our entire humanity embrace what hurts so that we can ensure a world fit for children – all of our children.

The voluntary sector, with its wisdom, resources and influence, has a unique opportunity to be part of the solution-to put redressing the social exclusion of First Nations children, youth and families at the top of the national agenda. It is simply too important to set aside again – a generation of children are depending on our willingness to do the difficult but not impossible task of shaping a respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal Canadians. ***What example will we set for them?***

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Cindy was honoured to participate in numerous provincial and national research projects. She has published numerous research papers, articles and curriculum related to Aboriginal child welfare in Canada. Current professional interests include being a member of the NGO Working Group of the United Nations Convention on the

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