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Editorial: Heeding the Calls to Action

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Editorial: Heeding the Calls to Action

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The articles in Volume 8, Issue 2 of the *First Peoples Child & Family Review* cover a variety of topics, from discrimination in the *Indian Act* to personal narratives of struggle and success. Yet despite the diversity, the articles are connected by common themes and conclusions. The authors advocate that social issues like Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), child welfare policy, and incarceration, among others, can be positively addressed through the recognition of Aboriginal cultural practices and traditional knowledge. In addition, each article touches upon colonization, the effects of residential schools and intergenerational trauma, and the need for healing based in Aboriginal teachings, values, and culture. The authors ground their recommendations in the lived experiences of Aboriginal individuals and communities. The voices and experiences of these Aboriginal peoples must be taken as the starting point for effective policy change and practice.

In “Improving Substance Use Treatment for First Nations, Métis and Inuit Women,” authors Poole, Chansonneuve and Hache provide recommendations arising from a virtual inquiry project. Over a 15 month period, 30+ researchers, service providers, health system planners, and Aboriginal health advocates came together in a virtual community to discuss how to improve supports for First Nations, Métis and Inuit women with substance use problems at risk of having a child affected by FASD. This virtual inquiry project showed the potential to develop recommendations that can address the complexities of FASD prevention in Indigenous contexts by accounting for the varied influences on women’s substance use and the continuum of treatment options. Ultimately, the participants’ recommendations for increasing community capacity, improving access to holistic and supportive treatments, and raising awareness seek to improve Canada’s substance use system of care to better support needs of Aboriginal women.

In “Defining Permanency and Aboriginal Youth in Foster Care,” authors Stangeland and Walsh address the debate regarding culturally appropriate practices for permanency for Aboriginal children and youth. They argue that achieving permanency for all children is not simply an ideal, but a matter of social justice. Current conversations surround the significance of all stakeholders being meaningfully engaged in Aboriginal youth permanency planning. There is, however, a noticeable gap in the literature regarding Aboriginal youth permanency and culture, such as maintaining ties to tradition, ethnicity, language, and religion. Stangeland and Walsh challenge how permanency is conceptualized and operationalized by calling for Aboriginal youth in foster care to be consulted about their definitions and needs for permanency. The insights of these youth will provide practitioners with knowledge on the development

and evaluation of specific permanency models for Aboriginal youth in foster care.

Moving on, Hyatt speaks to the significance of cultural healing of Aboriginal peoples incarcerated in Canadian prisons. She begins by addressing some of the factors that contribute to the overrepresentation rates, such as age, education, and unemployment. However, these factors, which also contribute to incarceration of non-Aboriginal peoples, fail to fully explain the historical role of stigmatized oppression currently impacting Aboriginal communities. Hyatt argues cultural assimilation and the loss of Aboriginal culture is a key factor in the disproportionate incarceration rate of Aboriginal people. Since the 1980's when Aboriginal spirituality was introduced within Canadian prisons, a number of issues and barriers have arisen facing the Aboriginal spiritual practices, Elders, and program resources designed to support healing from trauma. Although Canadian prisons are evolving and making an effort to provide Aboriginal people with ways to access their culture and practice their traditions, the current cultural practices must include a dialogue regarding the impacts of colonization on Aboriginal culture, education, employment, addictions, and incarceration.

From dialogue to voice, the remaining articles offer narratives by female authors seeking to create change through honouring traditional teachings surrounding kinship, governance, and ways of being. In "Indian Rights for Indian Babies," author Gehl addresses the sex discrimination of the unstated paternity policy in the *Indian Act*. The article draws on her personal experience as a plaintiff: Gehl is challenging the continued sex discrimination in the *Indian Act* on a matter of unknown paternity. A 27-year advocate, she moves through a historical analysis of colonial policy and law and shares the efforts Indigenous women, other *Ogitchidaa Kwewag* – Warrior Women, have taken on in challenging this long time sex discrimination. She highlights the distinctions between unstated paternity, such as unreported and unnamed paternity cases, and unacknowledged, unestablished, unrecognized or unknown paternity. Gehl shares briefly how she has challenged the assumption of non-Indian paternity in situations where the paternity of the applicant is unknown and unstated.

In the narrative "Mining Our Lives for the Diamonds," author Wesley-Esquimaux questions whether we feel compelled into action – "a deeper understanding or a powerful sense of duty" – to create change. Today the diamonds we mine on our journey are "those sparkling truths that hold a brighter future for our nations." She addresses the need for our collective to shoulder the generational pain and fears of our children and Elders, to acknowledge, accept, and take responsibility for the violence, dysfunction, and addictions that permeate our homes, workplaces, and communities. Her article is a deeply personal call to "go back and speak to our fears and explain how we overcome the darkness." In this light, there is a freedom – an ability to move forward in a good way. By "mining our lives for the diamonds," we can choose to seek the courage, grace, and love that brought us to the present. Wesley-Esquimaux makes a final plea for these "victorizing" stories of the survival, courage, and will to live powerful lives to be *mined* and shared.

Finally, author Johnson recounts a narrative titled "Making Space for Community-Based Practice Experience and Spirit in the Academy" by sharing four experiences of an Indigenous social work academic employed at a Canadian university. Johnson discusses the significance of valuing community-based practice and spiritual experiences prior to entering the academy. Despite having 24 years of social work practice experience, she was shocked that her experience accounted "for nothing but a couple of employment lines in my curriculum vitae (CV)," which fails to account for spiritual or cultural

experiences, or teachings gained through community-based practices or relationship-building experiences. She recounts her journey in education and how her teachings continue to support her to make a difference for Indigenous peoples from within a university's walls. Johnson identifies some of the challenges facing racialized female academics and calls for the development of Indigenous mentors, culture, spirituality, relationships, knowledge, skills and ways of knowing and being in the academic environment. Lastly, Johnson shares seven teachings for new Indigenous academics on spiritual and cultural health in research grant applications, teaching, scholarly and service activities.

Read together, the articles in this edition of the Journal move through the life cycle to explore supports for women and mothers, youth, and adults. Wesley-Esquimaux's article reminds us of our responsibilities to our Elders, communities, and Nations. The authors impress upon us the need for Aboriginal peoples' experiences to be understood within the context of colonization and its intergenerational effects. In this light, mainstream or generalized approaches are inadequate in meeting the needs of Aboriginal peoples. Social programs and policies must recognize the diversity between and among First Nations, Métis, and Inuit by honouring the knowledges, values, and cultures of the peoples being served.