

First Peoples Child & Family Review

An Interdisciplinary Journal Honouring the Voices, Perspectives, and Knowledges of First Peoples through Research, Critical Analyses, Stories, Standpoints and Media Reviews

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Editorial: What can we achieve if we aim high enough?

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In a special presentation to the Toronto Youth Corps in 1972, Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl spoke to why we should believe in one another. Frankl argued that to see what human beings are truly capable of, we must aim north of our destination—when we believe in each other’s greatness, we account for drift and crosswinds, and promote one another to become who we are truly capable of being. This belief in one another is critical to bringing reconciliation to fruition. Likewise, engaging in reconciliation offers us opportunities to uplift one another as we reimagine our communities and our country as places founded on love, equity and respect. Reconciliation, characterized by the acknowledgement and redressing of harms, and the paving of a new path towards well-being for Indigenous communities, is at the core of *First Peoples Child & Family Review*. This volume, while not guided by a particular theme, is replete with reminders of how we can engage meaningfully in reconciliation—within the academy, in community research, and as citizens.

Starting the issue is “The Neglected Human,” a commentary by a young woman and student at the University of Toronto, Muriam Fancy. In her article, Fancy discusses the historic and continuing discrimination against First Nations children. Citing the residential schools system and underfunded and inadequate First Nations child welfare services, she argues, “[i]t has always been harder for the Indigenous peoples to receive the most basic treatment as human beings in Canada and the Indigenous child is no exception to this oppressive, unwritten rule.” Fancy brings our attention to the January 2016 ruling by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal which found that the federal government of Canada discriminates against First Nations children living on reserves by underfunding of child welfare services. For Fancy, this ruling is an opportunity for us to come together to create meaningful, positive change for First Nations children and their families. Echoing Frankl’s esteem in human beings, she writes: “It seems that we as Canadians do not yet know what we are capable of when standing in solidarity with a community that has faced generations of unimaginable brutality; our ability to make change at all levels of life faces no barriers when we stand together.”

Following Fancy’s commentary, we turn to research that reminds us that, to be respectful and successful working with Indigenous communities, approaches must recognize and reflect the distinct realities of a given community. In “Understanding the Environment: Domestic Violence and Prevention in

Urban Aboriginal Communities,” Goulet, Lorenzetti, Walsh, Wells, and Claussen examine the unique risks and protective factors related to domestic violence in urban Aboriginal contexts. In their meta-analysis, the authors identify a number of shared risk and protective factors in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities; however, they also find that a complex history and legacy of colonization is critical to understanding domestic violence in urban Aboriginal contexts. Concluding that existing research does not reflect the needs of Aboriginal women, they argue that future research and prevention should be community-led, reflect the current and historic realities of the population, and build on traditional cultural knowledge and practices. Standing behind this argument, we at the Caring Society encourage researchers and communities looking to address issues like domestic violence against Aboriginal women to turn their eye to long-standing inequities in services for Aboriginal communities that places First Nations young people at greater risk for poverty and disadvantage, including violence. Addressing structural barriers that hinder the well-being and success of First Nations children is a critical step towards building healthy communities.

This leads us to an example of successful cultural adaptation. “Odemiwin: Understanding and Supporting Childhood Stimulation in an Algonquin Community” tells the story of a research and health team working in collaboration with community to develop a locally adapted child stimulation activity in the Algonquin community of Rapid Lake. Through their research, the authors learned that while there was a lack of continuity in the transmission of parenting knowledge and practices across generations, Algonquin parents and caregivers weren’t simply lacking in parenting know-how, but held different perspectives and assumptions about how to stimulate and teach their children. They also learned that a common developmental screening tool was perceived by parents and caregivers in the community as a test of their competence rather than a tool to support child development. Recognizing the cultural bias of the tool, the research team worked in collaboration with community members to develop a locally adapted child stimulation activity. They framed the activity in a way that was meaningful to caregivers, grounded in traditional Algonquin concepts of health and well-being, and promoted community-wide involvement in childhood stimulation and play. Hence, this article reminds us that as we strive towards better health and social outcomes for Indigenous children, families and communities, it is necessary to be mindful of our assumptions, and acknowledge the cultural lens through which we see and relate to the world.

Bringing the volume to a close are two articles which exemplify reconciliation in action on a personal and community level. In “Aboriginal Graduate Student and a Non-Aboriginal Faculty Supervisor: A Relationship Examined,” an Indigenous graduate student and a non-Indigenous faculty advisor share their experience working together, and creating a meaningful and fruitful relationship. Through mutual respect, openness in sharing their experience, and a desire to understand one another, Danica Lee and John Poulsen developed a trusting, reciprocal relationship that enabled them to offer each other consistent feedback, and to learn from one another. “More Than a Social Justice Project: The Continued Road Towards Truth and Reconciliation” describes community members coming together for a conference aimed at transforming the legacy of residential schools in London, Ontario, and reimagining their community as a place of reconciliation. As author Sarah Burm writes, “[The] conference was more than a social justice project; it was an opportunity to allow humanity to win out over inhumanity; to show what reconciliation can look like when we push the conversation, not only with our words, but with our actions.” These stories are but two microcosms of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples taking place across the country. As we find our place, individually and collectively, in

reconciliation, we should ask ourselves, *what can we achieve if we aim high enough?*

We can make justice and equity for First Nations children and families a reality if we can only first conceive of it in our hearts and minds. Let us heed Fancy's call to action. Let us stand together as human beings, and reimagine our communities and country as places where every child and family has the services and supports they need to be healthy and lead a good life. Let us make our intentions manifest and work together in respectful, collaborative and non-discriminatory ways to develop services and approaches that reflect the distinct needs, values, and cultures of communities, so that children and their families can feel proud of who they are, and where they come from, and strive forward with dignity, confidence and self-respect.