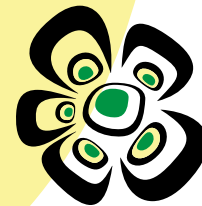


**FNCARES**  
Annual Report  
**2022**  
**2023**



First  
Nations  
Children's  
Action  
Research and  
Education  
Service



**UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA**  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION



First  
Nations  
Children's  
Action  
Research and  
Education  
Service

This report reflects activities from August 2022–August 2023

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**First Nations Children's Action Research and Education Service**

Faculty of Education, University of Alberta

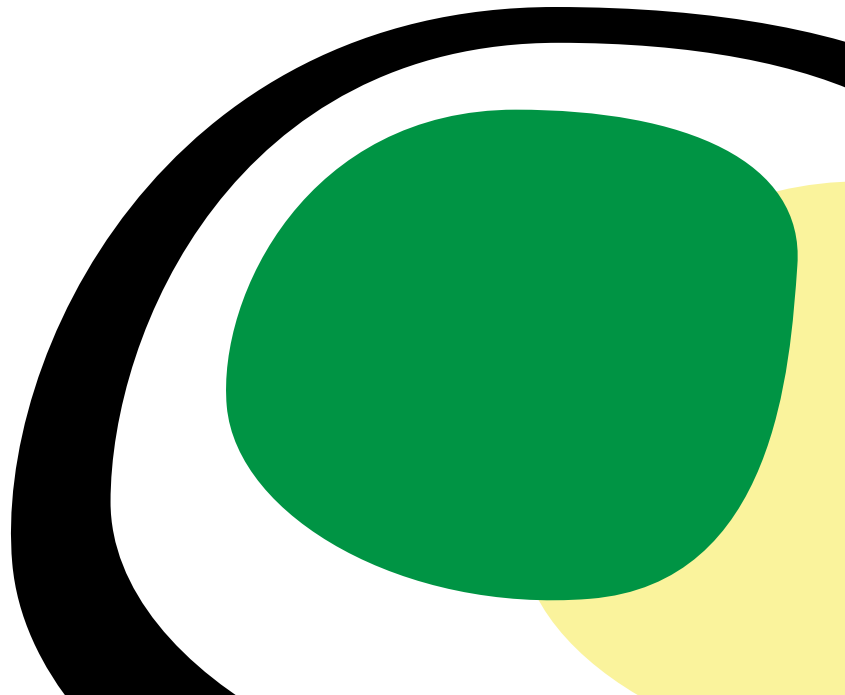
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## ABOUT US

The First Nations Children's Action Research and Education Service (FNCARES) is a partnership between the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society (Caring Society) of Canada and the University of Alberta's Faculty of Education. Established in 2012 by Dr. Cindy Blackstock, FNCARES draws on well-established research on the structural drivers of disadvantage for First Nations children, youth, and families to develop community-based solutions to ongoing discrimination and inequities. We respect and support First Nations self-determination and are committed to engaging communities, including children and youth, as partners and co-researchers in all stages of each project.

FNCARES works with community partners to organize and host numerous public events each year for both adults and children. These include lectures, workshops, panel discussions, film screenings and book launches, and other educational events that are free and open to the public. We also develop resources to educate about the structural drivers of disadvantage and encourage discussion and actions that promote culturally based equity and justice for First Nations children and youth.



*Cindy Blackstock (Director) and  
Melisa Brittain (Research Associate)  
on Orange Shirt Day at Beechwood  
Cemetery, Ottawa.*

## A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

This year, we were delighted to launch the long-awaited *Spirit Bear Virtual School*, a resource developed in response to research findings from our SSHRC-funded project *Just because we're small doesn't mean we can't stand tall: Reconciliation in the elementary classroom*, which is wrapping up this year. We were honoured to work on this project with University of Ottawa Education researchers Dr. Lisa Howell and Dr. Nicholas Ng-A-Fook, along with educators across the country, to understand the impact of the Caring Society's social-justice based reconciliation campaigns on young learners and create resources to assist educators, and all Canadians, in taking action based on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and promote culturally-based equity for First Nations children and families. Along with creating the *Spirit Bear Virtual School* and its many resources, the research team is continuing to share the study's findings through academic conferences, journal articles, and community events.

We were also excited to partner with Andrew Eckart of the Class Action Clinic at the University of Windsor to host a webinar on the proliferation of class action lawsuits affecting First Nations people entitled "First Nations and Class Actions: Reconciliation or Wreckonciliation?" Andrew described what class actions are, what they can accomplish,

the rights of class members, and the limitations of this legal tool.

Continuing our exploration into the intersection between colonialism and undue influence, we hosted the second of two webinars featuring Dr. Steven Hassan, founder of Freedom of Mind Resource Center and author of *The Cult of Trump*. This presentation focused on how undue influence and authoritarian control are used to convince people to do unethical things, how undue influence works in relation to First Nations and Indigenous Services Canada, and how First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples have strongly resisted colonial attempts to convert and assimilate them from the start.

This year, again, we focused a lot of energy on creating informative and accessible resources that we make available for free on our website. Along with ensuring that all our webinars are available free online to reach the largest audience possible, we also co-created the *Spirit Bear Virtual School* website and all its resources, including a curriculum, a learning guide, and two videos featuring early years educators discussing how they engage their students in reconciliation and social justice learning in the kindergarten classroom. In addition, we created an infographic called "Escaping Undue Influence in the Public Service"

specifically for Indigenous Services Canada workers who raised their concerns about how to maintain their moral values and obligation to serve the public while working within a bureaucratic system designed to maintain the colonial status quo.

We extend our gratitude to our many academic and community partners for all their support, and we are grateful to the University of Alberta's Faculty of Education for their ongoing commitment to ensuring FNCARES can continue its work into the future.

Respectfully,  
Cindy Blackstock



# ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT THIS YEAR

## Education and Engagement Events

### *Spirit Bear Virtual School Launch*

The *Spirit Bear Virtual School* is now open!

On August 23, 2023, we launched the *Spirit Bear Virtual School*,<sup>1</sup> a new online resource to support learning about the Caring Society's campaigns and initiatives for social justice and reconciliation. In response to research findings that said educators would benefit from resources designed specifically for teaching the Caring Society campaigns, FNCARES and the Caring Society, along with University of Ottawa researchers Drs. Lisa Howell and Nicholas Ng-A-Fook, created the *Spirit Bear Virtual School*

and its resources. While these resources were specially designed for elementary educators, they are adaptable for older learners and accessible to everyone.

On the website, you will find *Spirit Bear's Beary Caring Curriculum*,<sup>2</sup> which is grounded in five guiding principles known as the "Touchstones for Learning," adapted from the Touchstones of Hope reconciliation process of truth-telling, acknowledging, restoring, and relating. Another key resource is the *Jordan's Principle Learning Guide*,<sup>3</sup> which invites everyone to learn about the case on First Nations child welfare and Jordan's Principle, and to participate in ending discrimination against First Nations children and youth.

Along with many other resources and learning opportunities, the school offers *video interviews*<sup>4</sup> with early years educators Dr. Michelle McKay and Klara Redford, who discuss their use of the Caring Society's campaigns and resources in their Kindergarten classrooms, the enormous capacity young children have to understand love, fairness, and justice, and how learning about historical and ongoing injustices must start in kindergarten.

The *Spirit Bear Virtual School* was created to address findings from the *Just because we're small doesn't mean we can't stand tall* research project, which you can read about in the Research section below.

Visit the *Spirit Bear Virtual School*, and keep your eyes open for the *Shannen's Dream Learning Guide* and French translations of the website and resources, coming soon.

Missed the *Spirit Bear Virtual School* launch? [Watch it here.](#)<sup>5</sup>

Find the [list of resources](#) discussed during the launch [here.](#)<sup>6</sup>



- 1 <https://fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear/spirit-bear-virtual-school>
- 2 <https://fncaringsociety.com/publications/spirit-bears-beary-caring-curriculum>
- 3 <https://fncaringsociety.com/publications/jordans-principle-learning-guide>
- 4 <https://fncaringsociety.com/SpiritBearVirtualSchool/MoreLearningOpportunities>
- 5 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUriHNaUdVI&feature=youtu.be>
- 6 <https://fncaringsociety.com/publications/spirit-bear-virtual-school-launch-links-resources>

## First Nations and Class Actions: Reconciliation or Wreckonciliation?

There is currently a proliferation of class action lawsuits affecting First Nations peoples, but most of us know very little about what they are, what they can accomplish, what their limitations are, and what rights class members and representative plaintiffs have (or do not have). To address this gap in knowledge, FNCARES hosted a webinar on April 18, 2023, featuring Andrew Eckart, Staff Lawyer at the Class Action Clinic (University of Windsor) and Dr. Cindy Blackstock (Caring Society and FNCARES) to take a closer look at class action lawsuits and answer some of our questions.

Dr. Cindy Blackstock began the webinar by discussing some of the questions that



Cindy Blackstock  
and Andrew Eckart

arose for her when class action cases were brought against Canada after the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (Tribunal) had ordered Canada to end its discrimination (2016 CHRT 2)<sup>7</sup> caused by its flawed and underfunded First Nations Child and Family Services program and its narrow interpretation and implementation of **Jordan's Principle**.<sup>8</sup> Andrew Eckart followed with a presentation explaining, in detail, the basics of class action lawsuits, including the differences between a class action and an individual suing to get justice, the rights of class members, if one can object to a settlement offer, and much, much more.

During the Q & A session, Dr. Blackstock asked if class actions have the same potential as the Tribunal to fix systemic problems, and Andrew Eckart said that they *do* have this potential, since settlement agreements can capture all kinds of remedies and compensation. He pointed to the ongoing impacts of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, where representative plaintiffs worked with council to come up with a process and solutions that would engender broad social change and ensure that what happened to them never happens to other people in Canada. With a defendant who is willing to participate in behavioural change, said Eckart, class actions can contribute a great deal to systemic change while also

providing some compensation for people harmed in the first place.

Visit the **Class Action Clinic**,<sup>9</sup> the first clinic of its kind in North America, to find out more about the work they do for class members.<sup>10,11</sup>

Watch video of the **First Nations and Class Actions**<sup>10</sup> webinar and read the First Nations and Class Actions **Resource List**.<sup>11</sup>

## Mind Control and Colonization – Part II

On August 10, 2022, FNCARES and the Caring Society hosted a second webinar on Mind Control and Colonization. Dr. Steven Hassan, founder of **Freedom of Mind Resource Center**<sup>12</sup> and internationally recognized expert on cults, brainwashing, and authoritarian control, joined Dr. Cindy Blackstock and Brittany Mathews from the Caring Society to discuss how undue influence gets people to do unethical things and defend them, and how mind control and undue influence work in relation to First Nations, Indigenous Services Canada, and all Canadians.

7 <https://fncaringsociety.com/publications/2016-chrt-2-2016-tcdp-2>

8 <https://jordansprinciple.ca>

9 <https://classactionclinic.com>

10 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FPt0ch4ECTQ>

11 <https://fncaringsociety.com/publications/first-nations-and-class-actions-resource-list>

12 <https://freedomofmind.com>

Mind Control and Colonization – Part 1 discussed what mind control and undue influence are, and their relationship to colonization in Canada. In Part II, we focused on the following questions:

- How does undue influence get people to do unethical things and defend them?
- How do mind control and undue influence work in relation to First Nations and Indigenous Services Canada?
- Do social psychology experiments help us understand how undue influence and mind control work?
- How can you recognize undue influence in yourself and others, and how can you intervene?
- What types of remedies already exist within our communities?



## Research

### Just because we're small doesn't mean we can't stand tall: Reconciliation education in the elementary classroom

This research project studied the impacts of the Caring Society's social justice-based reconciliation campaigns on elementary teachers and students who have actively participated in the campaigns over the years to ensure equity for First Nations children. The project set out to understand whether the Caring Society's campaigns were used in a way that respects the intelligence of children and helps to develop their critical thinking skills while also developing skills for carrying out respectful advocacy. Principle Investigator Dr. Cindy Blackstock wanted to ensure that the campaigns promoted human rights while also respecting them by drawing out children's innate tendency to show "loving justice," a term used by the late Anishinaabe Elder Elmer Courchene to describe the response children have to injustice, and how we can all learn from them.

To carry out this project, the Caring Society and FNCARES teamed up with educators across Canada with experience in social justice and Indigenous education. And to ensure the research was conducted at arms-length, Dr. Nicholas Ng-A-Fook

and Dr. Lisa Howell from the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Education headed up a team that conducted the interviews with teachers, transcribed and analysed interview data, and piloted resources.

One of the main findings of this study challenges myths that elementary students are too young to talk about and understand injustice, and that teaching about the residential school system and ongoing injustices and harms faced by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples somehow causes harm to young children. Contrary to these myths, says Dr. Howell, our research found "that when children learn about past injustices and current inequities [for First Nations children and families through the Caring Society's campaigns], instead of feeling shame or guilt, they feel empowered. They feel empowered to learn more, to stand in solidarity with First Nations Inuit, and Métis peoples, and they come to an understanding that their voices have power and that they are agents of change in making Canada a more equitable, safe, and comfy place for children to be proud of."

The research also found that teachers would benefit a great deal from having resources that focus specifically on teaching the Caring Society campaigns: Jordan's Principle, Shannen's Dream, and I am a Witness. In response to this finding, we developed the *Spirit Bear Virtual School*,<sup>15</sup> an online resource that supports

13 <https://bit.ly/3QB0pQm>

14 <http://fncaringsociety.com/publications/mind-control-and-colonization-information-sheets>

15 <https://fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear/spirit-bear-virtual-school>



educators across Canada in their learning about the Caring Society's campaigns and initiatives for social justice. The foundation for the school is *Spirit Bear's Beary Caring Curriculum*,<sup>16</sup> a social justice curriculum for learning and taking action based on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, sovereignty, responsible citizenship, rights, and the Touchstones of Hope reconciliation process of truth-telling, acknowledging, restoring, and relating. The *Jordan's Principle Learning Guide*<sup>17</sup> is also available on the website, and the Shannen's Dream Learning Guide will be completed in winter 2024. The website also houses **videos and other resources**<sup>18</sup>

that will help everyone learn from teachers who have already taught with Spirit Bear resources about how to bring Spirit Bear into their classroom or community. The website and key resources will soon be available in French, and we have even bigger plans for the *Spirit Bear Virtual School* in the future.

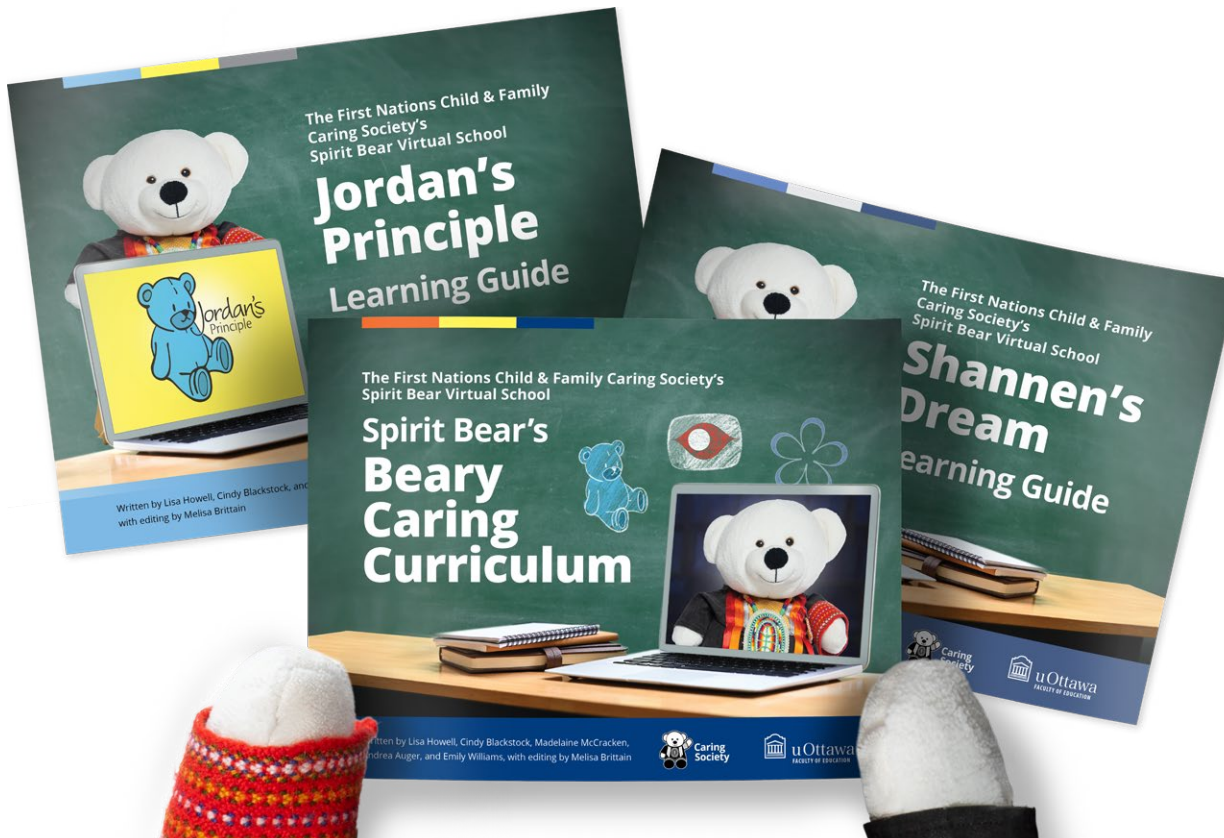
Drs. Lisa Howell and Nicholas Ng-A-Fook have published research findings in their article in *Studies in Social Justice*<sup>19</sup> (17:1, 2023) and on the *EdCan Network*<sup>20</sup> (along with Barbara Giroux), and they are busy completing another article and disseminating findings at conferences over the next year.

To learn more about the research process and findings, read the articles noted above and **this interim report**,<sup>21</sup> and watch **this short video**<sup>22</sup> by Dr. Lisa Howell.

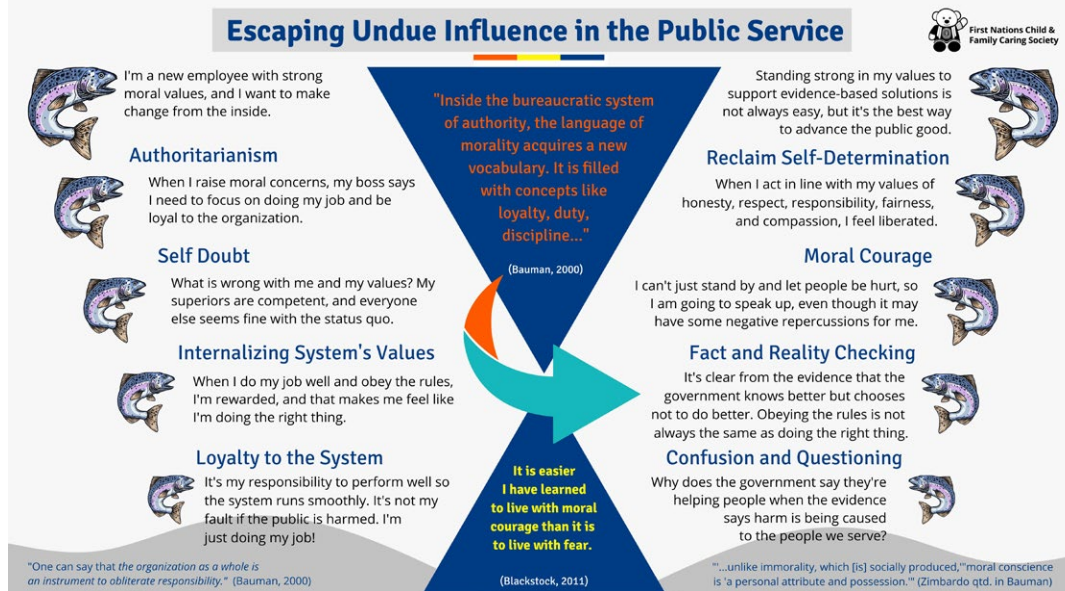
## Resource Development

### Escaping Undue Influence in the Public Service – Infographic

Public service employees often start their employment thinking they can make a change from within. However, once inside, they are discouraged from questioning the system and their superiors, and they are encouraged to obey the rules to help the system run as smoothly as possible.



- 16 <https://fncaringociety.com/publications/spirit-bears-beary-caring-curriculum>
- 17 <https://fncaringociety.com/publications/jordans-principle-learning-guide>
- 18 <https://fncaringociety.com/SpiritBearVirtualSchool/MoreLearningOpportunities>
- 19 <https://journals.library.brocku.ca/index.php/SSJ/article/view/4044>
- 20 <https://www.edcan.ca/articles/professional-learning-in-a-community-of-relations/>
- 21 <https://fncaringociety.com/publications/research-report-just-because-were-small-doesnt-mean-we-cant-stand-tall-reconciliation>
- 22 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hsNUQzjCgqU>



The infographic above<sup>23</sup> provides ideas about how to resist colonial undue influence in the public service through fact and reality checking, and by acting in line with values that support evidence-based solutions to advance the public good.

Find the infographic and other related resources on the **Mind Control & Colonization: Escaping Undue Influence web page**.<sup>24</sup>

### Spirit Bear Virtual School Videos

Along with contributions to the *Spirit Bear Virtual School's* curriculum and learning guides, FNCARES also collaborated on the creation of two videos for educators.

#### Getting Started with Spirit Bear: Michelle McKay on Reconciliation in the Kindergarten Classroom

In **this video**,<sup>25</sup> Dr. Lisa Howell interviews Dr. Michelle McKay, early years educator, about her use of Spirit Bear resources in the kindergarten classroom and the amazing capacity younger children have to understand issues of social justice, equity,

and fairness. The insights shared in the video will support teachers taking up the Caring Society's campaigns and resources in their classrooms and beyond.

#### Stories from Practice: Spirit Bear and the Kindergarten Classroom

In **this video**,<sup>26</sup> Dr. Lisa Howell interviews early years educators Klara Redford and Dr. Michelle McKay about the huge capacity young children have to understand love, fairness, and justice, and how learning about historical and ongoing injustices must start in kindergarten. They also discuss ways they have engaged kindergarten students in the Caring Society's campaigns and how reconciliation and social justice learning is not "in addition to" the other work teachers do, but should rather be integrated into everything they teach.

23 <https://fncaringssociety.com/publications/overcoming-undue-influence-public-service>  
 24 <https://fncaringssociety.com/fncares/mind-control-colonization-escaping-undue-influence>  
 25 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1eQw4fg5VY>  
 26 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WeE9A7CqM2Y>

Created specifically for the *Spirit Bear Virtual School*, ***Getting Started with Spirit Bear***<sup>27</sup> and ***Stories from Practice***<sup>28</sup> are available for free and suitable for anyone who wishes to gain a better understanding of how to use the Spirit Bear resources to teach young children about social justice and reconciliation.



Top to bottom:  
Klara Redford,  
Dr. Lisa Howell,  
Dr. Michelle McKay



## Publications

### ***First Peoples Child & Family Review***

This online, peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary journal honours the voices of First Peoples and their allies and supporters. Focusing on research, practice, and policy concerning First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children and families, the journal is published bi-annually and hosted through the Open Journal System.

The Fall 2022 issue focuses on disrupting Westernized approaches in social work and counselling practices to provide systemic solutions that integrate cultural wellness and center equity-based and culturally respectful approaches. The Winter 2023 special issue is a partnership with the NSW/ACT Aboriginal Legal Service, Jumbunna and Law, University of Technology, Sydney, and the Public Interest Advocacy Centre Australia, and focuses on the critical role of Indigenous voices in child protection decision-making.

You can find these issues and all others on the ***First Peoples Child & Family Review website***.<sup>29</sup>

27 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1eQw4fg5VY>

28 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WeE9A7CqM2Y>

29 <https://fpcfr.com/index.php/FPCFR/issue/view/41>

30 <https://fncaringociety.com/knowledge-portal/publications-database>

## Knowledge Portal


The Knowledge Portal contains a searchable database hosted by the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society that provides access to resources on Indigenous children and families in Canada. The database includes an annotated bibliography of journal articles, literature reviews, reports, guides, films, books, and links to all the Caring Society's educational resources as well as to external resources. It also provides links to all legal documents generated by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal on First Nations child welfare and to the *First Peoples Child & Family Review*. The Caring Society follows the First Nations principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP) of data and information and provides open access to all the documents included in the database.

**Search the Publication Database.**<sup>30</sup>



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