

2023/2024
Annual Report



First Nations Child &
Family Caring Society

Please note that this annual report reflects activities from September 2023 to August 2024.

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Honouring

Alanis Obomsawin

Amanda Strong and Spotted Fawn
Productions

Anderson Family, Norway House Cree Nation

Atkinson Foundation

Anne Levesque, University of Ottawa

Assembly of Seven Generations (A7G)

Barbara McIsaac, McIsaac Law

Beechwood Cemetery

Canadian Paediatric Society

Carrier Sekani Child and Family Services

Carters Professional Corporations

City of Ottawa

City of Prince George

Claudette Commanda

Collie Historical Research

Colas

Collure Family

David Hodges

David Stern, Lewis Birnberg Hanet, LLP

David Taylor, Conway Baxter LLP

David Wilson, Conway Baxter LLP

Donate a Car

Family of Neebin Armstrong

inPath

Institute of Fiscal Studies & Democracy (IFSD)

J.W. McConnell Foundation

Kevin Droz, Conway Baxter LLP

Kinosao Sipi Minisowin Agency

Koostachin Family, Attawapiskat First Nation

Leah Gryfe Designs

Lheidli T'enneh First Nation

Lisa Howell, University of Ottawa

McGill University

Mélanie Vincent

National Film Board

National Indian Child Welfare Association
(NICWA)

Nicholas Ng-A-Fook, University of Ottawa

The Olive Tree Foundation (Mohamed and
Opheera Nasir Endowment Fund)

Ontario Children's Advancement Coalition

Ouseley Harvey Clipsham Deep LLP

Pokoloko

Project of Heart

Rideau Hall

Sandy Tunwell, Accountrain Inc.

Sarah Clarke, Clarke Child and Family Law

Social Sciences and Humanities Research
Council

Steam Labs

TopHat

The Exploration Place

The Bryce Family

University of Alberta, Faculty of Education

University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education

Wahkotowin Law and Governance Lodge

Youth in Care Canada

Key Accomplishments

Reconciliation in Action



In honour of Orange Shirt Day and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, the Caring Society partnered with Assembly of Seven Generations and Beechwood Cemetery to host an event on September 30 in Ottawa that was attended by over **1,000 people**.



We hosted our annual Have a Heart Day event which was celebrated with **more than 800 local students** and over **40 schools, workplaces and organizations** held events nationwide, with a collective effort of 4,000 letters mailed to the Prime Minister's Office.



#BearWitnessDay and **#JordansPrinciple** were trending on Twitter on Bear Witness Day as individuals, groups, communities, schools and workplaces honoured Jordan River Anderson and learned about Jordan's Principle.



To support community participation in Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams, we distributed **more than 500 packets of wildflower seeds** across Canada! These were used to plant Heart Gardens in honour of residential school survivors.



In honour of residential school survivors and support the legacy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, **over 750 hearts were planted** in heart gardens hosted by schools, organizations community centres and workplaces.

Spirit Bear and Friends



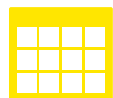
Spirit Bear and friends cut the ribbon on a Spirit Bear exhibit at The Exploration Place Museum and Science Centre in Prince George, BC!



Spirit Bear released not one but **TWO animated films** and launched Spirit Bear TV. Spirit Bear's third film, Spirit Bear: Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams, was released in November 2023 and fourth film, Spirit Bear: Echoes of the Past, hit the big screens in June 2024.



Since its launch in July 2022, we've released **11 episodes** in the "Ask an Expert" second season as part of our Spirit Bear Podcast.



Over **2,000 copies** of Spirit Bear's 2024 calendar, Spirit Bear's Guide to Reconciliation were distributed to individuals, child and family service agencies, school boards and educators across Canada.



Spirit Bear's four children's books continue to be made available for free online in English, French and some First Nations languages and we have sold over **3,500 copies of Spirit Bear's books** with all proceeds supporting child- and youth-led reconciliation initiatives.



Ten Reconciliation Ambearristers found new homes in schools and community centers across Canada, with some going as far as elementary schools in Sweden! Each hosted bear accompanies the group as they learn about and promote the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action.

Big Win for the Kids



The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal has issued **28 non-compliance and procedural orders** since the 2016 landmark ruling, one of which were issued this past year.



Jordan's Principle continues to be positive and life-changing for First Nations children and their families. In an effort to ensure Canada ceases its discrimination and complies with the Canadian Human

Rights Tribunal's orders, the Caring Society filed a non-compliance motion on Jordan's Principle in December 2023.



The Caring Society intervened on the appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada regarding *An Act Respecting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children, youth, and families*

with the position that, despite its shortcomings, the Act is constitutional. The Caring Society honours all those who argued in favour of justice for Indigenous children in this important case.

Making New Friends



Through our awards and scholarships, we were able to recognize **16 fantastic schools and individuals** who are taking action towards reconciliation and to ensure equity for First Nations children.



We completed over **95 virtual and in-person** in **10 provinces** and **four countries!**

The Caring Society now has more than **77,510 social media friends**, gaining followers across Twitter, Facebook and Instagram platforms.



We participated in over **100 media engagements**, appearing in both Canadian and international media.



We published **four newsletters** featuring over **35 articles**. We distributed newsletters to over **250 First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies**, Caring Society members, and educators.

About Us

Building on the interest of First Nations child and family services leaders to create a national networking organization, the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada (the Caring Society) was developed at the Squamish First Nation in 1998 at a national meeting of First Nations child and family service agencies. Meeting delegates agreed that a national non-profit organization was required to provide research, policy, professional development, and networking to support First Nations child and family service agencies in caring for First Nations children, youth, and families. An interim board was elected, and the plan was approved at a second national meeting at Kingsclear First Nation in 1999.

The Caring Society works to ensure the safety and well-being of First Nations youth and their families through education initiatives, public policy campaigns and providing quality resources to support communities. Using a reconciliation framework that addresses contemporary hardships for First Nations families in ways that uplift all Canadians, the Caring Society champions culturally based equity for First Nations children and their families so that they can grow up safely at home, be healthy, achieve their dreams, celebrate their languages and culture and be proud of who they are. The Caring Society proudly works with our partners in Canada and around the world to promote the rights of Indigenous children.

The Caring Society Board of Directors

Raymond Shingoose, President

Kenn Richard, Vice-President

Judy Levi, Treasurer of the Board

Elsie Flette

Arlene Johnson

Koren Lightning-Earle

Jessica Saunders

Mary Teegee

André Bear

The Caring Society Staff

Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director

Melisa Brittain, Policy and Research Coordinator

Harmony Eshkawkogan, Administrative Assistant

Jennifer King, Director of Programs and Operations

Brittany Mathews, Director of Reconciliation and Policy

Sunny Mathews, Reconciliation Dog

Tammy Morgan, Finance Officer and Human Resources Coordinator

Jessica Raby, Education and Public Engagement Coordinator

Daxton Rhead, Administrative Support

Stephanie Wellman, Reconciliation and Research Coordinator

The Caring Society also acknowledges the contributions of **Molly Rasmussen** for her dedication and service to the Caring Society and First Nations children, youth, and families.

Spirit Bear and Friends!

fncaringsociety.com/SpiritBear

This past year, Spirit Bear has been working hard to expand his reconciliation education resources, with an especially exciting addition to his growing catalogue. Created for all ages, Spirit Bear’s educational resources span from children’s books, stop motion animation films, the Spirit Bear Virtual School, a podcast, and the newly released Spirit Bear and Children Make History exhibit and 3D digital interactive experience, Bear Shares. All of Spirit Bear’s resources are available for free on the Caring Society’s website, and on his personal social media, where thousands of his friends follow along on his learning journey.

(Below) Spirit Bear Exhibit at The Exploration Place Museum and Science Centre, Prince George, BC; (right) Youth emcees Sloan and Kashyana with Spirit Bear’s mascot.

Spirit Bear (*Bearrister*)

A member of the Carrier Sekani Family Tribal Council, Spirit Bear represents 165,000 First Nations children impacted by the First Nations child welfare case as well as the thousands of other children who have committed to learning about the case and have taken action in support of reconciliation. Spirit Bear joined the Caring Society team in 2008 and immediately committed himself to witnessing all the hearings at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, serving as a reminder that the case is centred around children. Since then, Spirit Bear has been awarded an honorary “*Bearrister*” degree from Osgoode Law School and was officially admitted to the “Bear” by the Indigenous Bar Association in 2017. In his seldom time off, Spirit Bear enjoys baking cookies, fishing and picking huckleberries!

Spirit Bear Exhibit

fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear/spirit-bear-and-children-make-history-exhibit

On June 21, National Indigenous Peoples Day, Spirit Bear gathered with friends to celebrate his biggest adventure yet: the launch of the *Spirit Bear and Children Make History Exhibit* at The Exploration Place Museum and Science





Centre in Prince George, British Columbia. Developed in partnership with Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, Carrier Sekani Family Services, Spotted Fawn Productions, and The Exploration Place, the *Spirit Bear and Children Make History Exhibit* tells the true story of how children of all diversities are standing with First Nations kids to end inequities in First Nations children's services so they can grow up healthy and proud.

The exhibit showcases hand-made puppets and sets from Spirit Bear's four stop-motion animation films by award-winning Indigenous studio Spotted Fawn Productions, alongside archival material from the Tribunal case, Jordan's Principle, Shannen's Dream, and important lessons from history. Carrier Sekani Family Services recruited Indigenous youth to be tour guides for the summer. Tour guide training included a meet-and-greet and personal tour of the exhibit-in-progress by Amanda Strong, head of Spotted Fawn Productions!

We were honoured to welcome many special guests to the launch on June 21, such as Chief Dolleen Logan of Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, Regional Chief Terry Teegee, Mayor Simon Yu, and Phyllis Webstad, founder of Orange Shirt Day. Youth emcees Sloan and Kashyana did a wonderful job of overseeing the event. Guests were also treated to a surprise visit from Spirit Bear himself – looking larger than life! Spirit Bear's fresh look is courtesy of Dusty Hagerud of Color Sound Lab, in collaboration with Spotted Fawn Productions.

Stay tuned – Spirit Bear looks forward to visiting more communities and events soon.

The final surprise of the evening was the unveiling of a NEW interactive Spirit Bear experience. Bear Shares invites children and youth the chance to get to know Spirit Bear like they never before. Bear Shares was developed in collaboration with our friends at Spotted Fawn Productions, and Steam Labs, a non-profit organization that specializes in technology and education experiences. Users are invited to visit Spirit Bear at three locations based on his films. Each location has questions that select and ask Spirit Bear. Developed to run both locally on online, Bear Shares is also now on the Caring Society's website!

Interact with Spirit Bear at fncaringociety.com/spirit-bear/bear-shares.

(Top left) Cindy Blackstock, Phyliss Webstad, and Spirit Bear at the opening of the Spirit Bear Exhibit; (bottom left) Kids playing with Spirit Bear's interactive, Bear Shares; (below) Spirit Bear's new interactive, Bear Shares.



The Spirit Bear and Children Make History exhibit is on display at The Exploration Place until mid-November. We are already at work with our partners to build on the success of this first showing to make *Spirit and Children Make History* a travelling exhibit. The Caring Society extends its warmest thanks to Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, Carrier Sekani Family Services, Spotted Fawn Productions, The Exploration Place, and Color Sound Lab for their incredible work on the exhibit and launch event.

Spirit Bear at the Movies

fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear/films

We are thrilled to report the release of two new Spirit Bear films in 2023/24. *Spirit Bear: Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams*, was released on November 20, 2023 – World Children’s Day! The third film in the Spirit Bear series, *Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams* follows Spirit Bear as he meets new friends and learns about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action. The film is dedicated to all of the children and families affected by residential schools and the veterans who fought for peace and justice for all people in Canada.

November 20 also marked the launch of the Spirit Bear TV! All of Spirit Bear’s films, animations, and other short videos are now available to watch for free at vimeo.com/spiritbeartv. Spirit Bear TV is dedicated to two *beary* special friends and champions

of children’s rights, Joan Glode and Landon Pearson. You can learn more about the films and the newly released Spirit Bear TV by visiting fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear/films.

Spirit Bear released film number four, *Echoes of the Past*, on June 1. We think it’s his best yet! In *Echoes of the Past*, Spirit Bear travels to Songhees and Esquimalt territories (Victoria, British Columbia) and witnesses a statue of John A. Macdonald, Canada’s first Prime Minister, being removed from the steps of Victoria City Hall. Some people want to save the statue, and others are glad to see it going, leading Spirit Bear to ask: What does it mean to reconcile history? *Echoes of the Past* introduces new characters like Cubby Springs, a spunky reporter, and Echo the Fox, who helps Spirit Bear and others learn from the past. The film also features its first 3D animated character, Robin, who tags along for the fun.

We are proud to report that Spirit Bear’s films have, collectively, played at 25 festivals since the release of the first film in 2020. Most recently, *Spirit Bear and Children Make History*, screened at the Birrarangga Film Festival, held in partnership with the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, in June 2024. Also of note, *Spirit Bear: Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams* received an Award of Commendation at the Canadian and International Short Film Festival in December 2023.



Find all Spirit Bear's films on Spirit Bear TV at vimeo.com/spiritbeartv.

- *Spirit Bear and Children Make History* (2020)
- *Fishing for Knowledge, Catching Dreams* (2022)
- *Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams* (2023)
- *Echoes of the Past* (2024)



Spirit Bear Virtual School

fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear/spirit-bear-virtual-school

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. First Launched in August 2023, the Spirit Bear Virtual School is an online resource to support learning about the Caring Society's campaigns and initiatives for social justice and reconciliation. While these resources are 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*, 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*, 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. We are currently finishing up the *Shannen's Dream Learning Guide*, which will be available in the Fall of 2024.

Along with many other resources and learning opportunities, the school offers video interviews 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.

Watch on the SBVS for the launch of our new film *My Voice Matters: Changing the World Through Child & Youth Activism*, which will be released this Fall.



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 FNCARES section on page 27.



Spirit Bear Podcast

fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear-podcast

The Spirit Bear Podcast continues to be a great way of diversifying the ways in which we share information. Since its launch in July of 2022, we've released eleven episodes in our second season, the "Ask an Expert" series which features conversations between Dr. Cindy Blackstock and various experts with their fingers on the pulse of important developments related to child and family well-being. The latest episodes include:

- **Compensation update:** Cindy finds herself in the interviewee chair as she provides important updates for listeners following the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal's endorsement of the revised Final Settlement Agreement on compensation.

- **Jordan's Principle:** Cindy welcomes back Dr. Helaina Gaspard of the Institute for Fiscal Studies and Democracy to discuss what we can learn from assessing available federal government data on Jordan's Principle to ensure that First Nations children's needs are met.
- **Substance use interventions:** Drs. Barbara Fallon and Ashley Vander Morris, and Genevieve Sansone return for a discussion on the importance of culturally appropriate, community-based substance use interventions for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities.
- **Prevention services:** In light of some of the monies that are finally starting to reach First Nations communities, and within the overall context of Bill C-92, the delivery of effective, community-based prevention services is as timely as ever. Laurence Allard discusses how Nations who may be starting from ground zero can go from "0 to 60" when it comes to delivering holistic prevention services.
- **Bill C-92:** On the heels of the Supreme Court of Canada decision which found Bill C-92 to be constitutionally valid, Cindy was joined by Drs. Naomi Metallic and Hadley Friedland who discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the Bill, and its policy implications for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit seeking to exercise jurisdiction over child and family services.

We have a special, youth-led third season put on in partnership with the Ontario Children's Advancement Coalition to be released later this year. We're so fortunate to have Ashley Bach and Cheyanne Ratnam co-hosting the latest series, "Beyond Binaries," which centers around people, sectors, and systems interconnected with child welfare, to bring a bird's-eye view through the lens of anti-racism, truth and reconciliation, intersectionality, and equity. Keep an eye on our social media and website for the official release!

Spirit Bear's Pawblishing Services

Spirit Bear, the Caring Society and friends *pawblished* some amazing reconciliation books and resources this past year! These resources address a gap in reconciliation education. There are few Canadian books for younger children linking reconciliation with social justice in the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its Calls to Action.

Spirit Bear's Books

fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear/books-learning-guides

We are happy to report it was another successful year for Spirit Bear's book series! The Caring Society has sold nearly 3,500 copies of Spirit Bear's books this past year. All four of Spirit Bear's books are sold by both local and national retailers, and directly from our distributor, University of Toronto Press.

English and French covers of Spirit Bear's four books.



Spirit Bear has published eight picture books since 2017:

- *Spirit Bear and Children Make History* (1st edition 2017, 2nd edition 2020)
- *Spirit Bear et les enfants passent à l'histoire* (1st edition 2018. 2nd edition 2021)
- *Spirit Bear: Fishing for Knowledge, Catching Dreams* (2018)
- *Spirit Bear : Pêcher le savoir, attraper des rêves* (2019)
- *Spirit Bear: Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams* (2019)
- *Spirit Bear : Rendre hommage aux souvenirs, semer des rêves* (2019)
- *Spirit Bear: Echoes of the Past* (2020)

To maintain our mission of providing accessible resources, all of Spirit Bear's books are available to read for free on the Caring Society website in English, French and multiple First Nations languages. Books are also available in eBook format for readers to access on eReader platforms such as Kindle, Kobo and Apple. Each book is also accompanied by a corresponding

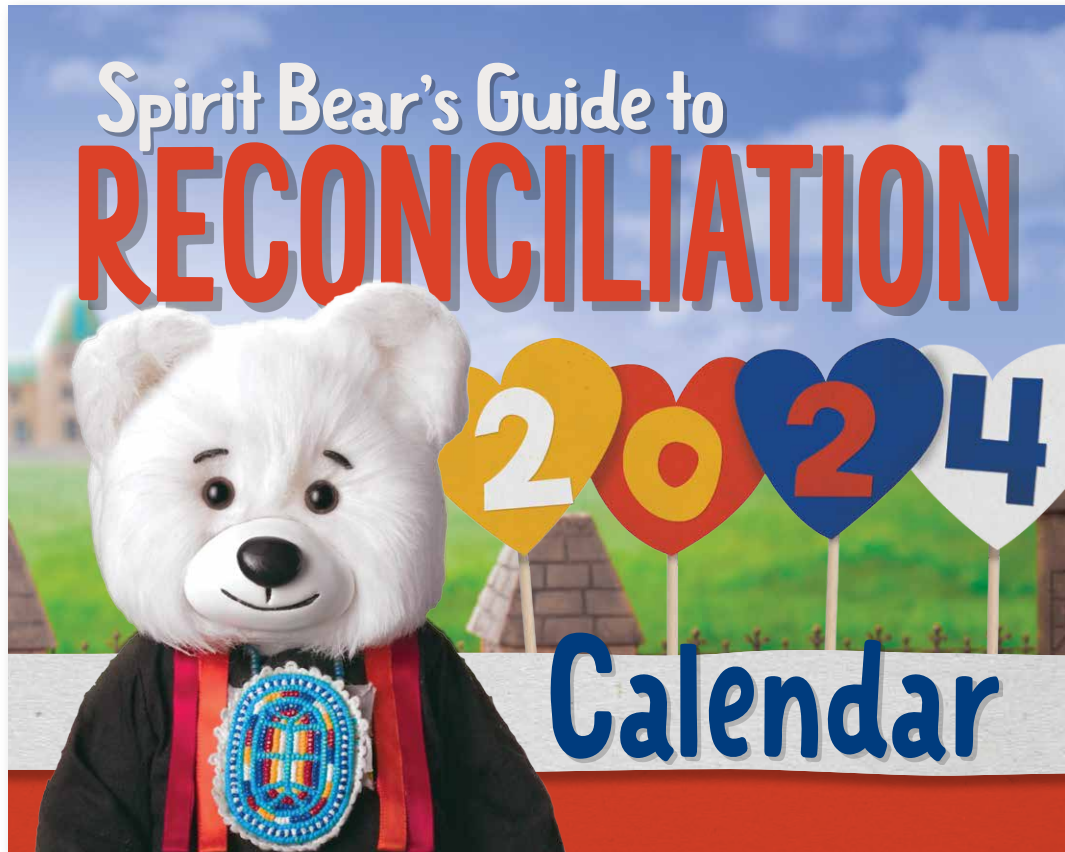
learning guide to supplement educators and communities teaching children and youth about equity, fairness, reconciliation and ways to end discrimination against First Nations kids. Similarly, the learning guides are all available for free on our website!

Spirit Bear's Guide to Reconciliation: 2024 Calendar

fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear/calendar

Spirit Bear's Guide to Reconciliation Calendar, our sixth calendar, saw another successful year of distribution! In 2024, the Caring Society distributed 1,500 English calendars and 500 French calendars to individuals, child and family service agencies, educators, and school boards across the country. As with past years, we were also able to donate a portion of the calendars to groups or individuals who would otherwise not have the means to purchase them.

This year, all the images selected for the calendar came from Spirit Bear's third stop-motion animation film, *Spirit Bear: Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams*. Alongside the beautiful imagery, each month of the calendar highlights a different way individuals, families and communities can make meaningful differences toward reconciliation.



Due to such high demand in previous years, a set of stickers was included with every calendar purchased. Ranging from holiday celebrations, annual campaigns and even our very own Reconciliation dog Sunny, the stickers are a beloved addition cherished particularly by children and youth. Alongside the calendar and stickers, we were thrilled to offer a free activity book offering drawing and writing activities for kids to learn about their place in reconciliation in fun and meaningful ways. The activity book is also available for free on our website year-round.

Many thanks to Leah Gryfe for designing the calendar and Mélanie Vincent for providing the French translation!

Reconciliation Ambearristers Initiative

fncaringsociety.com/Reconciliation-Ambearristers

An Ambearrister himself, Spirit Bear has worked hard to ensure First Nations children get the services and supports they need, when they need them. But there is

more work to do, and he can't do it alone! The Reconciliation Ambearrister Initiative supports groups in making a difference for First Nations children through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action. Utilizing a child-friendly approach, Ambearristers help to encourage groups to foster and build relationships with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Elders and Knowledge Keepers toward a shared vision of reconciliation.

In 2024, over 10 Ambearristers found new homes across the country. School and community groups, organizations and individuals have sent updates sharing how they have welcomed their Ambearrister into their reconciliation journey. This year, updates have included numerous photos, social media posts, and write-ups from schools and community groups. As new Ambearristers join the growing community of people (and bears) working toward reconciliation, they're names and photos are added to the gallery on our website.

From participating in Orange Shirt Day events to classroom sharing circles, Reconciliation Ambearristers have been hard at work engaging children, youth and adults to help make the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action a reality. We can't wait to see what the next year brings!



Child- and Youth-Led Campaigns

The Caring Society believes that all children, including First Nations children, have a right to grow up safely with their families, go to good schools, and be healthy and proud of who they are. These rights are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The Canadian government has ratified the UNCRC and committed to implementing the UNDRIP. With this in mind, the Caring Society works to ensure the realization of the rights of First Nations children and youth and their families.

As a child and youth-focused organization, the Caring Society believes in the powerful role of young people in bringing about positive change. To that end, each of our yearly campaigns invite young people from across the country to use their voices and participate in social justice movements in support of First Nations children and young people. Here is a snapshot of some of the latest accomplishments and activities to come out of our child and youth-led campaigns this year.



I Am a Witness: Canadian Human Rights Tribunal

fnwitness.ca

In January 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (the Tribunal or CHRT) ruled in a landmark human rights case that the Canadian government is racially discriminating against 165,000 First Nations children in its flawed and inequitable provision of the First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) program and failing to properly implement Jordan's Principle to ensure equitable access to services. Since this decision (2016 CHRT 2), the Tribunal has issued 28 non-compliance and procedural orders.

Since September 2023, the following developments ensuring Canada's discrimination in the FNCFS program and Jordan's Principle has stopped have taken place:

- **September 2023:** the Tribunal issued 2023 CHRT 44 providing detailed reasonings following its letter-decision finding that the revised Final Settlement Agreement on compensation satisfies its compensation orders.

- **October 24, 2023:** the Federal Court approved the \$23.4 billion Revised Final Settlement Agreement (FSA) on compensation, with detailed ruling following on November 20, 2023.
- **December 12, 2023:** the Caring Society filed a non-compliance motion with the Tribunal regarding the Government of Canada's chronic and wilful failure to adhere to the Tribunal's order on Jordan's Principle.

Public education remains a key part of the Caring Society's work on the human rights complaint. The Caring Society maintains an ongoing and detailed timeline chronicling the case and information sheets to accompany each Tribunal order.

Revised Final Settlement Agreement on Compensation

On September 26, 2023, the Tribunal released its ruling, 2023 CHRT 44, providing detailed reasonings following its letter-decision finding that the revised FSA on compensation satisfies its compensation orders.

Following this, the revised FSA was submitted to the Federal Court for final approval. On October 24, 2023, the Federal Court approved the \$23.4 billion revised FSA on compensation for First Nations children and families who experienced discrimination

because of Canada's inequitable provision of the First Nations Child and Family Services program and flawed, narrow implementation of Jordan's Principle.

Moving forward, the Caring Society retains the right to make representations in Federal Court regarding victims entitled to the Tribunal-ordered human rights compensation and is not a party to the class action. The class action lawyers, alongside the Settlement Implementation Committee, will take the lead role on compensation implementation.

While the Federal Court has approved the revised FSA, there are still additional steps before any compensation will be paid to the victims. The Federal Court must first approve the Distribution Protocol, which sets out compensation eligibility criteria, procedures, the necessary forms to be filled out, and the supports for beneficiaries. Once the Distribution Protocol is approved, the application process will begin.

The revised FSA also requires Canada to fund supports, like mental wellness, navigator, and application supports. While the Caring Society provided recommendations to class action parties about the types of supports needed, it is ultimately up to the Assembly of First Nations and class action parties to adopt them.

Although the Caring Society has a limited role in compensation moving forward, we have developed and maintain resources regarding compensation, which can be accessed at fncaringsociety.com/i-am-witness/resources.

Long-Term Reform of the First Nations Child and Family Services Program and Jordan's Principle

While the Tribunal has ceased jurisdiction on compensation, it continues to retain jurisdiction over the long-term reform of the FNCFS program and Jordan's Principle to ensure Canada's discrimination ends and does not reoccur.

As outlined in previous annual reports, the Parties to the Tribunal complaint signed an Agreement-in-Principle (AIP) on the Long-Term Reform of the FNCFS program and Jordan's Principle in December 2021. The AIP set out a one-year timeline to reach an FSA to meet the Tribunal's orders, end Canada's discriminatory conduct, and ensure the discrimination is not repeated. In December 2022, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) passed a resolution calling on Canada to extend the timelines for reaching an FSA.

In August 2023, the Tribunal requested the Parties submit further reports stemming from its March 2023 request on Canada's implementation of certain orders with regard to long-term reform. The Parties include the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), Chiefs of Ontario (COO), Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) and Canada. The Caring Society responded on October 10, 2023 raising three areas of concerns: (1) shortcoming in Canada's implement of reforms to the FNCFS program; (2) shortcoming in Canada's approach to Jordan's Principle; and (3) barriers faced in

accessing capital under 2021 CHRT 41. The Caring Society also raised that, although the Caring Society and AFN reached a Joint Path Forward in March 2023, Canada had been unable to secure a mandate. Although the Caring Society indicated that it believes there continues to be a possibility for engaging in productive negotiations, at the time of writing, it was the view of the Caring Society that the parties were not actively negotiation.

In December 2023, after having exhausted all other available measures to ensure that Canada's implementation of Jordan's Principle was aligned with the needs and best interests of kids and in keeping with substantive equality, the Caring Society filed a non-compliance motion with the Tribunal. Conditions in the AIP required the Caring Society to withdraw from the negotiating table to bring the non-compliance motion. However, the Caring Society has made clear that it remains ready to negotiate with the Parties on the long-term reform. Details about the non-compliance motion on Jordan's Principle is discussed in the Jordan's Principle section of this Annual Report.

On July 11, 2024, Canada, the AFN, COO and NAN signed the draft FSA on the Long-Term Reform of the FNCFS Program. The Caring Society is not a party to the draft FSA. After reviewing the draft FSA, the Caring Society put together a series of resources with important considerations for First Nations leadership and technicians to contemplate when reviewing the draft FSA. This included:

- Draft FSA Review Guide, providing key questions for readers to consider in their review of the draft FSA;
- an infographic outlining the governance structure contemplated in the draft FSA;
- an infographic that explains how capital funding for First Nations and First Nations-authorized service providers is contemplated in the draft FSA;
- an information sheet that addresses the myths and realities of the draft FSA;
- an infographic that breaks down the dispute resolution process that is proposed to replace the Tribunal under the draft FSA;
- an information sheet called *Letting Canada off the Hook?* that further explains the implications of the dispute resolution process proposed in the draft FSA on the Tribunal's jurisdiction; and

- a report card identifying the Caring Society's overall assessment of the draft FSA.

The Caring Society created a dedicated webpage to house these resources and more as they become available, which can be accessed at fncaringsociety.com/fncfs-resources.

The Caring Society's Positions on the Long-Term Reform of First Nations Child and Family Services Program

In keeping with the Caring Society's commitment to transparency and accountability, in March 2024, the Caring Society released its positions on the long-term reform of the FNCFS program to stop the discrimination against First Nations children, youth, and families, and prevent it from happening again.

The document sets out the Caring Society's key positions on the necessary building blocks to achieve the best outcomes for First Nations children, youth, and families based on the current community-informed and evidence-based research on child and family services. This includes ensuring that Canada provides funding pursuant to the reformed funding structure as a minimum standard, on an ongoing basis, free of any adverse or discriminatory effects, and that there are enforcement mechanisms in place, including an accessible dispute resolution process to hold Canada accountable and ensure First Nations children, youth, and families can enjoy these rights in perpetuity.

After its initial release, the Caring Society updated the document in May 2024 and June 2024 to reflect current positions as more information became available. The document can be read at fncaringsociety.com/publications/updated-reformed-approach-first-nations-child-and-family-services-june-2024.

An Act Respecting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children, youth, and families

On February 9, 2024, the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) upheld the constitutionality of *An Act Respecting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children, youth, and families* (the Act). The Caring Society was an intervenor on the appeal to the SCC, as it was before the Quebec Court of Appeal. The Caring Society's position was that, despite its shortcomings, the Act is constitutional.

The Caring Society has noted since the Act was passed that the framework established by the federal government contains significant gaps, including securing a funding structure that will eliminate discrimination and prevent its recurrence. While the SCC ruling is an important step forward for First Nations children, youth, and families, it does not address this vital topic. This unanimous decision does, however, provide a framework for resolving the uncertainties that remain in this incomplete framework. Specifically, the decision references UNDRIP, which Canada has incorporated into law, and the honour



of the Crown, which Parliament recognizes is engaged. This requires the Crown to take a broad approach to implement the self-government rights over child and family services and must act diligently in doing so.

The Caring Society maintains resources on the Act, including information sheets on the SCC decision, which can be accessed at fncaringsociety.com/i-am-witness/resources.



Jordan's Principle

jordansprinciple.ca

Jordan's Principle is a child-first principle, and as of 2016, a legal rule that ensures First Nations children can access the supports they need, when they need them. Jordan River Anderson was a young boy from Norway House Cree Nation who was born with multiple complex medical needs who spent most of his life in the hospital while the federal and provincial governments fought over who would pay for his at-home care. Jordan ended up passing away at the age of five, never having spent a day in a family home.

In 2007 Jordan's family gifted his name for a child-first principle to ensure that what

happened to Jordan would not happen to other kids like him. In its landmark ruling on the matter (2016 CHRT 2), the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found Canada's implementation of Jordan's Principle to be discriminatory and ordered Canada to take immediate measures to implement the full and proper scope of Jordan's Principle. Since then, the Tribunal issued more than 28 procedural and non-compliance orders against Canada.

In December 2023, after having exhausted all other available measures to ensure that Canada's implementation of Jordan's Principle was aligned with the needs and best interests of kids and in keeping with substantive equality, the Caring Society filed a non-compliance motion with the Tribunal. In its motion, the Caring Society cited the following concerns regarding Canada's wilful and chronic failure to comply with the Tribunal's orders:

- deliberate narrowing of the Tribunal's orders by imposing additional eligibility criteria and request processing criteria;
- ineffective methods for receiving and processing Jordan's Principle requests by phone or other formats;
- chronic failure to adhere to the Tribunal's timelines for determining requests including in urgent cases;
- failure to adhere to reasonable timeframes to fund approved requests;

- failure to adopt sufficient accountability measures to ensure the Tribunal's orders are upheld; and
- attempting to shield itself from non-compliance by relying on the *Financial Administration Act* and other administrative measures.

The Caring Society is seeking orders from the Tribunal related to urgency; timeliness in determinations, reimbursements/payments, and backlogged requests; and accountability measures. Canada opposes the Caring Society's motion. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) opposes most of the Caring Society's non-compliance motion and has requested that all relief sought by the Caring Society be dismissed. The AFN has also requested that the Tribunal ensure that any relief ordered be interim in nature, subject to a final settlement agreement or an expiry date of March 31, 2025.

As interested parties, the COO and NAN are not taking a position on the motion, and the Canadian Human Rights Commission broadly supports the motion. On June 3, 2024, the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) filed a motion to intervene and was granted interested party status on July 2, 2024 with participation limited to the Caring Society's non-compliance motion and Canada's cross-motion. The Tribunal has indicated that a hearing will take place September 10–12, 2024, following the AFN's request to amend the schedule in April, and then following the FNLC's request to intervene.

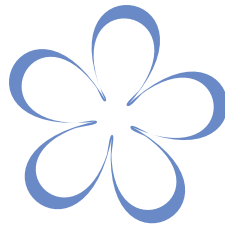
The concerns identified in the Caring Society's non-compliance motion are informed by the experiences of families, service providers, service coordinators, and Nations who are encountering systemic roadblocks in trying to ensure their children can access the supports they need. This year, the Caring Society also participated in a study in collaboration with the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) and the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) to survey 219 paediatricians and residents' knowledge of and experience accessing supports through Jordan's Principle. The study found that many participants reported challenges including difficulties with access, delayed determinations, and denials. Specifically, respondents indicated that these delays can lead to negative outcomes for kids, including medical complications, unnecessary time spent away from family, and poor mental health.

With ISC having yet to establish a formal complaints process for Jordan's Principle, the Caring Society continues to operate as ad-hoc compliance mechanism on behalf of families (children and youth), Service Coordinators, and communities. A transparent and accessible complaints mechanism through which families and Service Coordinators can submit difficulties they are having with Jordan's Principle is a priority for the Caring Society, and it is part of the requested relief in the Caring Society's non-compliance motion. In the interim, the Caring Society continues to flag compliance issues and relay concerns received

from families and Service Coordinators to ensure ISC implements Jordan's Principle according to the Tribunal orders.

Public education remains a key part of our work on Jordan's Principle. In light of the non-compliance motion, the Caring Society released an evergreen information sheet highlighting the parties' positions and requested relief as part of the proceedings.

As in previous years, the Caring Society continues to prioritize public education and connection with Service Coordinators, First Nations organizations, academic researchers, and healthcare professionals and service providers. The Caring Society also provided several presentations at community gatherings and conferences and produced various parliamentary and legislative submissions.



Shannen's Dream

shannensdream.ca

Shannen Koostachin, a youth education advocate from Attawapiskat First Nation in Ontario, had a dream: safe and comfy schools and culturally based education for First Nations children and youth. Shannen and her peers in Attawapiskat First Nation fought for

a new school after a diesel spill contaminated their school, making the students and teachers sick. Shannen sadly passed away in 2010 at the age of 15 and never saw the new school, which was finally built in 2014. With the support of her loving family, friends and community, Shannen's Dream was named in her honour and is a campaign to make sure all First Nations children across Canada have "safe and comfy" schools and receive a good quality education that makes them proud of who they are.

Many First Nations schools receive less funding per student than provincial and territorial schools. Many also do not provide a safe and appropriate learning environment. Shannen worked tirelessly to try to convince the federal government to give First Nations children a proper education. Shannen remains an important role model for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and young people who continue to carry her dream for safe and comfy schools for all First Nations children in Canada.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls on Canada to provide culturally based education for First Nations children and calls on individual Canadians to learn more about Indigenous peoples in Canada as a starting place for meaningful reconciliation. In this spirit, the Caring Society continues to provide updated education resources for learners and teachers of all ages to take part in activities that foster reconciliation and culturally based equity for Indigenous children and youth.

In celebration of Shannen’s Dream, the Caring Society hosts the annual event; School is a Time for Dreams. This event invites people from all over the country to support equitable education for First Nations and all young people in Canada.

Reconciling History

fncaringsociety.com/reconciling-history

The Reconciling History initiative invites people to learn from the past in the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and its Calls to Action by learning about Canada’s treatment of Indigenous children and families in ways that link lessons of history to contemporary injustices. By learning about the complete and accurate story of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, we can all have a better understanding of how we can contribute to reconciliation in meaningful ways.

The Caring Society was honoured to partner once more with Assembly of Seven Generations (A7G) and Beechwood Cemetery to host our third public education event in honour of Orange Shirt Day and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30. Read more below about this year’s activities!

This year, we were honoured to work with Defining Moments Canada to develop the downtown Reconciling History Walking Tour into a storymap. The Reconciling History

Walking Tour is a free, self-guided walking route in downtown Ottawa. Each point of interest along the route is an opportunity to learn about the role of non-Indigenous peoples and the federal government in residential schools, and the lessons we can glean from history to address contemporary injustices experienced by Indigenous peoples. Defining Moments Canada brought this tour to an online, interactive format that allows people everywhere to take part in the tour.

Take part in the StoryMapped Reconciling History Walking Tour at definingmomentscanada.ca/bryce100/reconciling-history-walking-tour.



Touchstones of Hope

fncaringsociety.com/touchstones-hope

Touchstones of Hope continues to be an important tool for communities, organizations, and institutions to learn about and commit to reconciliation in the context of their work. Although its origins began in the child welfare context, Touchstones of Hope has made its way to

a wide range of organizational settings and contexts, and the Caring Society continues to provide Touchstones of Hope sessions to organizations by request.

In June of 2024, Caring Society staff brought the Touchstones of Hope movement to Rideau Hall as part of training offered to student guides to coincide with the launch of our collaborative Heart Garden on the grounds. Staff spoke about certain elements of Canada’s colonialism and its historic and contemporary relationships with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities in addition to a discussion about the legacy of the residential school system. The students then learned about the Touchstones of Hope philosophy for ethical reconciliation, in keeping with the principle that true, meaningful reconciliation involves more than just apologizing for past harms, but committing to restoring systems and relationships. Following this training, the students felt empowered and confident to speak to visitors to Rideau Hall about the importance of learning from the past to create a better future for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children, youth, and families.

Resources and Public Engagement

Caring Society's Strategic Directions: 2024–2029

fncaringsociety.com/about/who-we-are

The Caring Society renews its Strategic Directions at least every five years. Last updated in 2019, it was time for a refresh! Developed through joint input from the Caring Society Board and staff, our updated Strategic Directions affirm our commitment to promoting the safety and well-being of First Nations children, young people, families, communities and Nations.

Consistent with the Caring Society's stance that "governments don't create change, they respond to it," our updated Strategic Directions highlight meaningful reconciliation as crucial to ending Canada's discrimination, preventing its reoccurrence, and ensuring equity in public services for First Nations children and youth. The Spirit Bear Virtual School and Reconciling History initiative are examples of ways the Caring Society looks to engage the public and prepare people to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice, and other reconciliation-based recommendations. In particular, the Caring Society seeks to honour and support the

role of children and youth in reconciliation; by building on cultural strength and support effective interventions, this includes working on areas of priority as identified by young people and supporting youth organizations and aspirations.

Shaking the Movers

The Caring Society was thrilled to be able to help facilitate our second Shaking the Movers workshop this year! First established in 2007, Shaking the Movers is an annual youth-driven and youth-led workshop hosted by the Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights at Carleton University. The workshops invite young people to consider elements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in relation to their experiences as young people and in alignment with a particular theme each year. Themes are chosen by members of the Child Rights Academic Network based on feedback from the young people who participated in the previous year's workshops.

This year, the Caring Society was so fortunate to have been able to partner with Sections 4 and 5 students from Kitigan Zibi Kikinamadinan, who provided insightful contributions to this year's theme:

Reconciliation and places where we belong. Drawing on their experiences as First Nations youth living and attending school on reserve, the students discussed topics including access to clean water, the housing crisis, social media use, and forest fires and environmental degradation. The students emphasized the need to work together as a community to help address the issues to make sure that the next generations can live a good life, on their lands, in their communities.

You will also find the 2024 Shaking the Movers Report at fncaringsociety.com/publications/shaking-movers-2024-report-reconciliation-and-places-where-we-belong.

Learn more about Shaking the Movers at carleton.ca/landonpearsoncentre/shaking-the-movers.



First Peoples Child & Family Review

fpcfr.ca

Twenty years after publishing its first issue, it is with deep gratitude to all the authors, editors, contributors, and readers that the Caring Society announces the final publication of the *First Peoples Child & Family Review* (FPCFR). In

the very first FPCFR issue published in 2004, Dr. Cindy Blackstock wrote in the foreword:

There can be no more important knowledge than that which guides the care of our children. Precious always, perhaps even more precious now because together, as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, we have before us the responsibility to create a relationship between Aboriginal

and non-Aboriginal children based on respectful coexistence as distinct and valued peoples.

This precious knowledge graciously shared with the FPCFR formed the journal's mission: to centre Indigenous knowledges, perspectives and voices that promoted innovation in matters affecting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children, families, and communities. This work may have been unexpected in other academic journals, but it ultimately created space in the academic world for the knowledge, perspectives, and voices of Indigenous peoples.

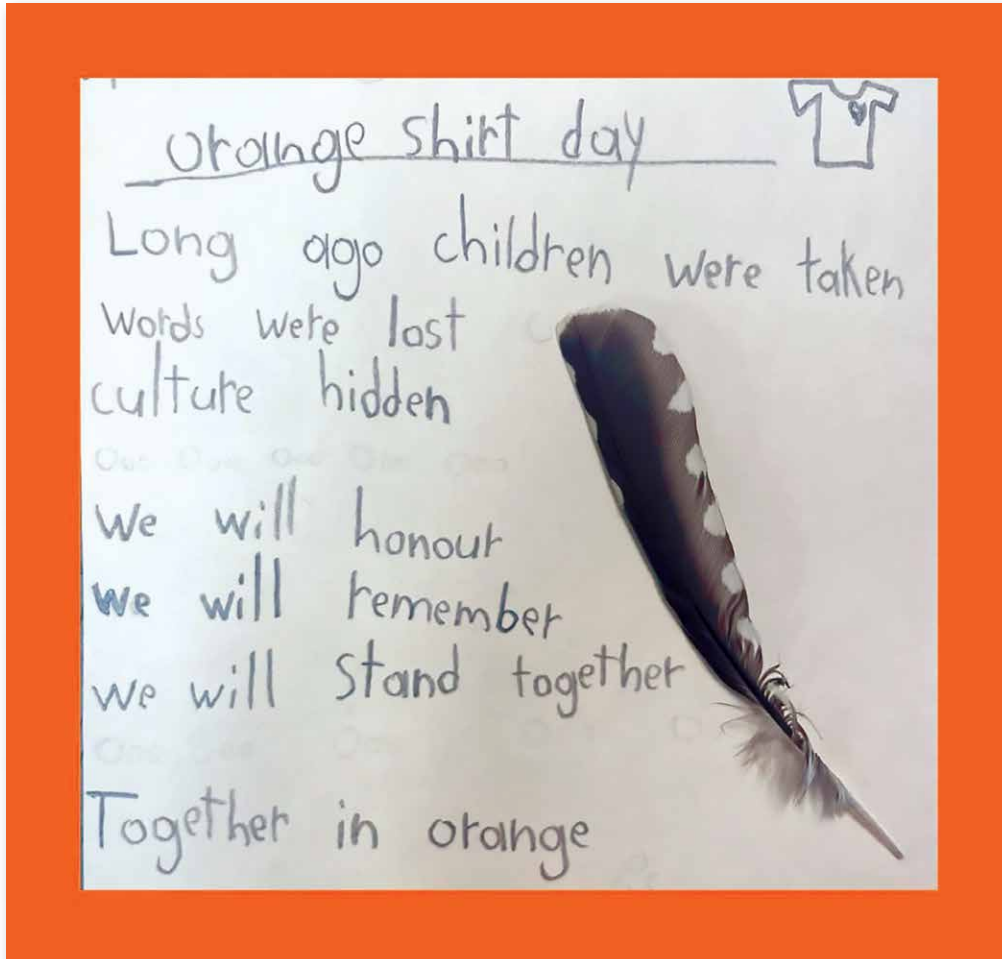
The final issue, vol. 19, no. 1, represents the best of FPCFR's work over the past 20 years, with articles and videos offering critical perspectives on the wellbeing of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children and young people.

Indigenous Kids Rights Path

indigenoukidsrightspath.ca

Launched in 2015, the Indigenous Kids Rights Path is an online portal that aims to support kids and youth in learning about their rights and offers resources and contacts in the event that they feel their rights are not being respected. The Indigenous Kids Rights Path also supports anyone wanting to learn more about the rights of Indigenous peoples and children's rights.

"Orange Shirt Day" by Hazel CK, age 8, featured in vol. 19, no. 1 of the First Peoples Child & Family Review.



Events

fncaringsociety.com/events

The Caring Society annual events support campaigns like Jordan's Principle, I am a Witness and Shannen's Dream. The events also honour residential school survivors and their families, as well as the legacy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The Caring Society provides information and resources to make it easier for people to participate in these events in their communities, schools, workplaces and at home.



Have a Heart Day

fncaringsociety.com/have-a-heart

The Caring Society is always so thrilled to witness young people across the country gathering together on Have a Heart Day! Celebrated each year on February 14, Have a Heart Day calls on caring individuals to stand together for love and fairness for First Nations kids. Since 2012, children and youth from across the country have written thousands of letters to their elected officials, urging them to stop the discrimination and

ensure that First Nations kids can grow up safely at home, be healthy, get a good education, and be proud of who they are.

This year was no different; we are so proud to share that over 40 schools and organizations across the country held their own Have a Heart Day event for a grand total of just under 4,000 letters mailed to the Prime Minister's Office. You can see what initiatives took place in your community by checking out the hashtags **#HaveaHeartDay** and **#JourneeAyezUnCoeur** or via our interactive map at fncaringsociety.com/have-heart-day-map.

The Caring Society held its annual local Have a Heart Day event on unceded Algonquin territory. More than 800 children and youth from 19 different schools and community



organizations returned to the Meridian @ Centrepointe Theatre to share their letters and speeches. Special thanks to Odeshkun Thusky from Kitigan Zibi School who did a fantastic job as our master of ceremonies! We are also grateful to Senators Francis and Senior who attended the event on February 14 and made sure that the children's letters made it to the Prime Minister's Office. Here's to another year of advocating for loving justice for First Nations children!

(Below left) Students sharing their speeches at the 12th annual Have a Heart Day gathering; (below right) Spirit Bear posing next to the mailbox made by students from Kitigan Zibi School



Elderbeary Day

fncaringsociety.com/elderbeary-day

March 20 marked the Caring Society's sixth annual Elderbeary Day! Elderbeary Day invites people of all ages to honour and celebrate the contributions of our Elders, who do so much to help teach and raise our children and youth. Participants can choose to thank their Elders in whichever way they prefer, whether that be through acts of service, spending quality time together, or expressing gratitude through letters or drawings. We were so thrilled to see so many classes, organizations, and individuals across the country sharing how they chose to honour and appreciate the contributions of their Elders by using the hashtags **#ElderbearyDay** and **#JournéeOursonAîné** on social media platforms.



Bear Witness Day

fncaringsociety.com/bear-witness-day

Celebrated annually on May 10, people from across Canada honoured Bear Witness Day and helped to raise awareness of Jordan River Anderson and equity for First Nations kids like him.

We were thrilled to see caring individuals and organizations across the country hosting events with their teddy bears and stuffed animal friends to honour Jordan River Anderson and his family. Using the hashtags **#JordansPrinciple** and **#BearWitnessDay** on social media, we saw many children and youth celebrate by baking cookies with Spirit Bear's *bearcipes*, decorating bear crowns, and watching Spirit Bear's films. Many children and youth wrote letters to federal elected officials asking for the implementation of the Spirit Bear Plan and also to their provincial leaders urging them to make May 10 Spirit Bear Day in every province and territory. Year after year, it remains clear that children and youth continue to "Bear Witness" to ensure Jordan's Principle is fully implemented.

To mark Bear Witness Day this year, Senator Francis made a statement at the Senate to

introduce a motion recognizing May 10 as Bear Witness Day. We are hopeful that the proposed motion will be adopted by the Chamber next year! Special thanks to Senator Francis and Jean Castro Werry for their devotion and work on the motion.



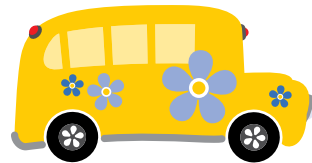
Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams

fncaringsociety.com/honouring-memories-planting-dreams

Celebrated each May and June, Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams invites people across the country to honour residential school Survivors and their families, learn about the residential school system and its legacy, and commit to meaningfully advancing reconciliation. By planting a Heart Garden, individuals, families, and organizations have a physical reminder of their commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. This year, more people registered more than 750 hearts on our website across British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario. That's a lot of people committing to the Calls to Action! As in previous years, those who participated shared photos of their Heart Gardens using the hashtags **#HeartGarden** and **#HonouringMemoriesPlantingDreams**.



This year, the Caring Society was also fortunate work with staff of the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General to plant a Heart Garden on the grounds of Rideau Hall, where the TRC's Closing Ceremonies were held in 2015. Throughout the summer, visitors to the grounds can learn about the residential school system, the Heart Garden initiative and demonstrate their own commitment to reconciliation by planting a paper heart in the garden. With the Caring Society's support, colleagues in the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General produced a plaque that explains the importance of truth telling and concrete actions to support reconciliation. The plaque includes text in Algonquin, Michif, Inuktitut, English, and French and provides links to external research and resources to help guide individuals in learning more about reconciliation. We are looking forward to continuing to work with Rideau Hall to set up a permanent Heart Garden fixture in the near future!



School is a Time for Dreams

fncaringsociety.com/school-time-dreams

Annually every March and April, children, youth, schools, organizations and communities across Canada participate in School is a Time for Dreams in support of equitable education

(Top and bottom left) The Heart Garden on the grounds of Rideau Hall.

for First Nations young people in Canada. The campaign also honours Shannen Koostachin and her dream for safe and comfy schools for all First Nations children.

Throughout the months of March and April, participants read and watched Spirit Bear's second book and film, *Fishing for Knowledge*, to learn about Shannen and her work advocating for quality and culturally based education for First Nations children and youth. As part of the campaign, students also create public service announcements and share messages about what they want to be when they grow up. Many students also write letters to their elected officials to demand equitable access to quality and culturally based education for First Nations kids.

This year, individuals, organizations and communities were invited to host a Shannen's Dream gathering to celebrate *Shannen's Dream Day of Action* on April 27. Of note, students from St. Kateri Tekakwitha Elementary School created an entire day of learning for their peers, featuring activity stations where kids could learn about Shannen's Dream, share what they want to be when they grow up, collaborate on a mural and write letters to the government. We are always left feeling so inspired by the ways young people take up this campaign!



Orange Shirt Day

fncaringsociety.com/orange-shirt-day

The Caring Society was honoured to partner once more with Assembly of Seven Generations (A7G) and Beechwood Cemetery to host our third public education event in honour of Orange Shirt Day and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30. This year's activities included the following activities:

- Reconciling History walking tours at Beechwood Cemetery and throughout Downtown Ottawa facilitated by young people from A7G. The tours are an opportunity to learn more about the role of the federal government and bureaucracy in the residential school system and the lessons we can learn from history to address contemporary injustices experienced by First Nations, Métis and Inuit.
- Showings of the newly released *Spirit Bear: Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams*.

- Opportunities for people of all ages could demonstrate their commitment to reconciliation through art and letter-writing to elected officials, calling on them to fully implement the TRC Calls to Action.

We were also honoured to unveil the Children's Sacred Forest at Beechwood Cemetery. At 2:15 pm on September 30, participants witnessed the unveiling of the Children's Sacred Forest and accompanying stone to honour the children who passed away at residential schools. Written and designed with the guidance of Claudette Commanda and the TRC Commissioner Marie Wilson, we hope that it serves as one of many places of honouring and remembrance. Special thank you to Joan Tenasco from Kitigan Zibi for sharing her knowledge in translating the plaque.

(Above left and middle) Unveiling the Children's Sacred Forest; right photo; (above right) A7G youth leading Reconciling History tours.

13th Annual Caring Society Gala

fncaringsociety.com/Gala

The 13th Annual Caring Society Gala took place on October 25, 2023, at the Victoria Inn and Convention Centre in Winnipeg Manitoba. Hosted by the Kinosao Sipi Minisowin Agency, (KSMA), 600 people of all ages came out to enjoy an evening of music, dancing, art, and fashion in support of equity for First Nations children. In addition to the silent auction and live art auction (always a highlight!), KSMA added a fashion show and photo booth to the night's activities. Without a doubt, the guest of honour was the giant teddy bear stationed at door to greet guests as they arrived. Our board members were especially delighted to see him! The Caring Society extends our heartfelt thanks to KSMA, and to the performers, artists, and guests who helped to make the night so special.

The Caring Society Gala is an annual fundraiser hosted by the First Nations child welfare agencies of Manitoba. The 14th Annual Caring Society Gala is scheduled for January 14, 2025, in Winnipeg.

Gala Education Workshop: Liability Concerns for First Nations – Prevention Services and Jordan’s Principle

As in past years, the Caring Society hosted an afternoon education workshop for guests

attending the gala and people working in the field of child wellbeing. The topic for 2023 was liability. Cindy Blackstock (Caring Society), Koren Lightning-Earle (Wahkotowin Law and Governance Lodge), and Mary Teegee (Carrier Sekani Family Services) took center stage to discuss potential liability concerns for First Nations and their employees who take on prevention funding as part of Canada’s reformed funding model for the First Nations Child and Family Services Program or assume responsibility for Jordan’s Principle.

The Caring Society also published an information sheet providing general information on potential liability concerns, which can be read at [fncaringssociety.com/publications/liability-and-prevention-services](https://www.fncaringssociety.com/publications/liability-and-prevention-services).

(Left to right) Uncle Huckleberry, Era Bear, Cindy the Sheep, Spirit Bear, Cedar Bear, Cubby Springs, Memengwe and Mary in Spirit Bear: Echoes of the Past.



Awards and Scholarships

fncaringsociety.com/awards-scholarships

The Caring Society proudly acknowledges the work of individuals and groups, including children and youth, to support the best outcomes for Indigenous children and families. We work in partnership with families, communities, schools, and other individuals in recognizing the outstanding work of our awards and scholarships.



Jordan's Principle Scholarship

fncaringsociety.com/awards-scholarships/jordans-principle-scholarship

Named in loving memory of Jordan River Anderson and in partnership with Jordan's family, the Caring Society was proud to present the seventh annual Jordan's Principle Scholarship for First Nations students to Alvin Laboucan, Jordan Barnaby, Tyler Ermineskin, and Zoey Germain. Two \$5,000 scholarships and two \$2,500 scholarships were awarded to assist First Nations youth with post-secondary education costs this year. Additional scholarships for 2024 were

made possible by donations in memory of Joan Glode, a fierce advocate for First Nations children, and HANSAmEd Limited.

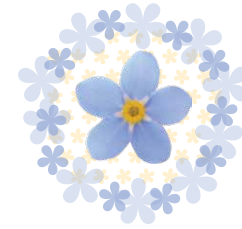
This scholarship is awarded to First Nations students studying children's holistic health and wellbeing. May they always hold Jordan River Anderson in their hearts and minds, and remain champions for Jordan's Principle and equity for all Indigenous children.



Neebin's Music Fund

fncaringsociety.com/awards-scholarships/neebins-music-fund

In 2023, the family of Neebin Armstrong, the Caring Society, and inPath (inpath.ca) came together to honour Neebin's memory by establishing a fund for Indigenous youth to create music and share it with their communities and the rest of the world. The inaugural winners – Faith Desmoulin, DYLN, and Lovina Tootoosis – were announced in Fall of 2023. We look forward to opening applications for the next round of Neebin's Music Fund in 2025!



Shannen's Dream Scholarship

fncaringsociety.com/awards-scholarships/shannens-dream-scholarship

The Shannen's Dream Scholarship is named in loving memory of Shannen Koostachin from Attawapiskat First Nation who sparked a national movement for safe and comfy schools for First Nations students. The third annual Shannen's Dream Scholarship was awarded to Aleria McKay, Jaimey Jacobs, Rainingbird Daniels, and Taylor Nicholls.

As a pay-it-forward scholarship, recipients must make a fair and measurable contribution to the Shannen's Dream campaign or related First Nations initiative as a condition of receiving the award. The Shannen's Dream Scholarship is made possible by a generous donation from the Collure family from Richmond Hill, Ontario who approached the Caring Society with the idea, and Canadian EdTech company TopHat.



Spirit Bear Award

fncaringsociety.com/awards-scholarships/spirit-bear-award

Spirit Bear proudly presented the sixth annual Spirit Bear Award this year. The Spirit Bear Award recognizes groups of young people who demonstrate a commitment to reconciliation and the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action. Three prizes of \$500 were given to children and youth and the prizes can be used toward their continued work toward

reconciliation or as the group of young people sees fit. Thank you to the Olive Tree Foundation (Mohamed and Opheera Nasir Endowment Fund) for generously donating \$1,000 towards the award! Three groups were awarded the Spirit Bear Award in recognition of their hard work:

- Bateman Mahihkanak Dance Troupe
- Mckenna Bonner
- VACFSS Youth Advisory Committee

Two additional groups were selected for an honourable mention:

- Mrs. Condon Grade 2 Class
- Ms. Sanche's Grade 8 Class

Congratulations to these young people and all who were nominated for the Spirit Bear Award. Spirit Bear appreciates everyone's continued dedication and commitment to reconciliation!



First Nations Children's Action Research Education Services

fncaringsociety.com/fncares

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.

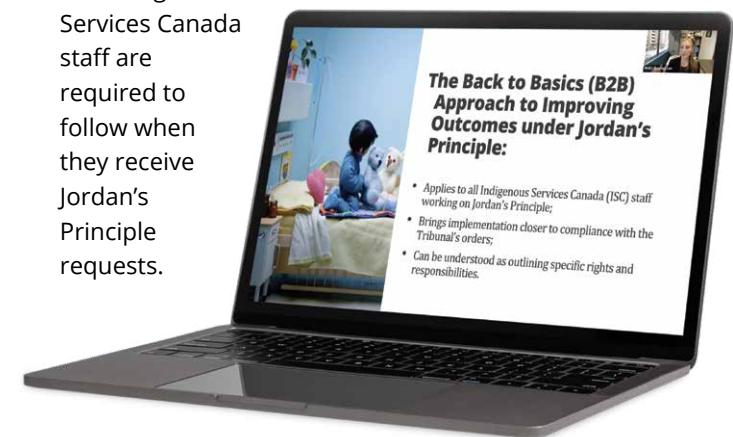
Education and Engagement Events

Jordan's Principle: Back-to-Basics Webinar

While Jordan's Principle has improved the lives of many First Nations children and families, Canada still fails to fully and properly implement it. In some cases, this has resulted in delays of services and supports for First Nations children. On October 23, 2023, we held a webinar on issues First Nations children face when trying to access services and supports through Jordan's Principle, as well as information about who is eligible, how to place a request, and much more.

We were honoured to host the following speakers:

- Dr. Cindy Blackstock introduced the topic and context for the presentation.
- Dr. Helaina Gaspard from the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy presented her research on Jordan's Principle and substantive equality.
- Dr. Ryan Giroux, a Métis Paediatrician, who presented findings from research by the Canadian Paediatric Society on paediatricians' knowledge, behaviour, and experiences of accessing Jordan's Principle for First Nations children and youth.
- Molly Rasmussen of the Caring Society presented on the Back-to-Basics Approach that Indigenous Services Canada staff are required to follow when they receive Jordan's Principle requests.



Jennifer King of the Caring Society moderated the Q&A session, where she and the presenters provided information that focused on answering the questions and concerns of those who attended the webinar.

Watch the webinar here at bit.ly/BacktoBasicsWebinar.

Find a list of resources mentioned during the webinar at fncaringsociety.com/publications/jordans-principle-back-basics-webinar-resources.

Some research team members, from left to right: Cindy Blackstock, Sunny Mathews (held by Cindy), Madelaine McCracken, Nicholas Ng-A-Fook, Melisa Brittain, Spirit Bear (held by Melisa), Lisa Howell, and Sylvia Smith.

Research

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

Our SSHRC-funded research project studying the impacts of the Caring Society's social justice-based reconciliation campaigns on elementary teachers and students wrapped up in March 2024. The research responds to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action on education that called for a commitment to "[b]uilding student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect" while "[i]dentifying teacher training needs" and "[s]haring information

and best practices" on reconciliation (Call to Action 63). As Principle Investigator, Dr. Cindy Blackstock wanted to ensure that the campaigns promote the human rights of First Nations children and families while also respecting the rights of children involved in the campaigns and drawing out their 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.

The unprecedented participation of elementary teachers and students in Caring Society campaigns offered a unique opportunity to advance knowledge about the impacts of reconciliation-based education on children and provide evidence-based research about how we can best move forward to foster



mutual respect and build capacity for empathy and intercultural understanding within classrooms as early as possible. To this end, 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.

By interviewing teachers who had used the Caring Society's campaigns in their classrooms for several years, researchers found that children and youth who learn about discrimination towards First Nations children and their families through the Caring Society's campaigns feel a sense of power and agency as they realize that, by using their voices, they can contribute to positive change. This finding challenges the myth 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. As students work toward ending structural discrimination against First Nations children, they become leaders, speakers, organizers and activists in their schools and communities, and they often continue to stand against injustice as they become adults.

Teachers reported seeing many positive impacts on their students, including feelings of empathy, compassion, respect, and a commitment to stand in solidarity with First Nations children and youth. Teachers also shared how the campaigns provided them and their students with opportunities to engage in meaningful social justice actions in response to the TRC Calls to Action.

Teachers interviewed for the study expressed a desire for more streamlined resources for teaching the campaigns, and the Caring Society, alongside the University of Ottawa and teachers within the Ottawa-Gatineau region, responding by developing a curriculum and learning guides, films, and other resources for teaching the campaigns. These are all available on the Spirit Bear Virtual School website at fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear/spirit-bear-virtual-school.

To date, Drs. Lisa Howell and Nicholas Ng-A-Fook, along with Caring Society staff, have presented research findings and resources at conferences and webinars, and have published one academic article (journals.library.brocku.ca/index.php/SSJ/article/view/4044) and have submitted another for peer review.

For more information, read an interim research report at bit.ly/JustBecauseWereSmall and a short video on research findings at bit.ly/JustBecauseWereSmallVideo.

Resource Development

FNCARES supports the Caring Society in the collection and dissemination of research and resources relevant to First Nations children, youth, and families. We develop free and accessible resources in the form of information sheets, infographic posters, and videos of public presentations. Visit the Caring Society's Knowledge Portal (fncaringsociety.com/knowledge-portal) to see all of our information sheets and search our Publications Database (fncaringsociety.com/knowledge-portal/publications-database) for resources using keywords, or browse publications by type, age group, theme, or publication year.

Future Directions

Our vision of Canada is one where all First Nations children are loved, respected, and honoured. We know just what to do to make that vision a reality and it will require the education and active engagement of caring Canadians and organizations to make it happen. Over the next year we look forward to making the following visions a reality:

Continue to work with the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and the Canadian federal government on First Nations child welfare and the full implementation of Jordan's Principle.

- Continue working partners to further develop the Spirit Bear Exhibit into a first-class travelling exhibit.
- Further promote Spirit Bear's stop motion animated films, especially the recently released films 3 and 4, to new audiences and engage educational distributors.
- Expand the Reconciliation *Ambassadors* program and promote reconciliation initiatives for the Caring Society's ever-growing bear family.
- Continue expanding the Reconciling History project to truthfully portray Canada's collective past in order to honour reconciliation.

- Support First Nations child and family service agencies, governments, and stakeholders' engagement in the Touchstones of Hope movement.
- Expand the Touchstones of Hope Reconciliation in Canada and Reconciliation + Children and Youth platforms to include more of the Caring Society's initiatives.
- Expand the tools we use to share information and resources, including through videos, webinars, and our podcast.
- Develop more educational resources for Shannen's Dream, Jordan's Principle and the promotion of children's engagement in research and positive social change.
- Expand the available educator resources and make these resources more accessible.
- Host School is a Time for Dreams, Have a Heart Day, Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams, Elderbeary Day and Bear Witness Day for another year!

A warm thank you to our members, volunteers and the many thousands of caring people of all ages who have joined the effort to ensure culturally based equity for First Nations children, youth, and their families.



Want to Make a Difference for First Nations Children?

Go online to fncaringsociety.com to learn more and join the movement for culturally based equity for First Nations children, young people, and families. You will find seven ways you can make a difference for Indigenous children and youth, as well as information and resources to make it easier for you to participate in these campaigns in your community, school, workplace, or home! Think about supporting the Caring Society by becoming a member at fncaringsociety.com/what-you-can-do/become-member or [making an online donation at fncaringsociety.com/donate](https://fncaringsociety.com/donate).



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