

First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada

Annual Report 2011/12



FIRST NATIONS CHILD & FAMILY CARING SOCIETY OF CANADA

Front cover photo: Sign made by students who participated in the 2011 *Our Dreams Matter Too* walk in Ottawa, Ontario.

This annual report reflects activities from September 2011 to August 2012.

Copyright © 2012. All Rights Reserved.

First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada
309 Cooper Street, Suite 401, Ottawa, ON K2P 0G5
tel: 613-230-5885
fax: 613-230-3080
info@fncaringsociety.com
www.fncaringsociety.com

Honouring

The First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada (the Caring Society) expresses its sincere appreciation to First Nations child and family service agencies, our members, funding organizations and partners who have made outstanding contributions to the well-being of Aboriginal children, youth and families in 2011/12. Special thanks to children and youth across Canada who are standing with First Nations children and families and to:

Amnesty International Canada	Ministry for Child and Family Development,
Ashoka Foundation	British Columbia
Assembly of First Nations	Natasha Scott
Anderson Family, Norway House Cree Nation	National Association of Friendship Centres
Atkinson Charitable Foundation	National Collaborating Centre on Aboriginal
Canadian Paediatric Society	Health
CUPE	National Indian Child Welfare Association (USA)
Editorial Board of <i>The First Peoples Child and</i>	National Union
<i>Family Review</i>	Northern British Columbia Touchstones
Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work,	of Hope Advisory Committee
University of Toronto	Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children
Harold Tarbell	and Youth, Ontario
J.W. McConnell Family Foundation	Ousley, Hanvey and Deep, LLP
KAIROS Canada	Paul Champ Law
Andrew Koostachin, Jenny Nakogee and family	Public Service Alliance of Canada
Laura Hynds	The Printing House
Leah Gryfe Designs	Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Teachers' Federation
Liam Sharp, Liam Sharp Photography	Sandy Tunwell Accounting
Manitoba First Nations CFS Gala Committee	SNAICC (Australia)
Many Hands, One Dream Coalition	Stikeman Elliott, LLP
Melanie Vincent	Sisters of Service
	United Food and Commercial Workers Union



The Caring Society Made a Difference for Children in 2011/12

The Caring Society, in collaboration with our partners and many members of the public, is proud to achieve the following in 2011/12:

- welcomed over 10 million hits on our website, making it one of the most utilized child welfare resources in Canada,
- completed over 50 presentations in Canada, the United States and Australia to over 10,000 people,
- shipped 577 information packages to people across Canada last year,
- witnessed the Federal Court of Canada overturn the decision of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal to dismiss the human rights case alleging that Canada discriminates against First Nations children via inequitable child welfare funding and policies on reserve,
- engaged thousands of children and young people across Canada to stand with First Nations children so they can have the same chance to grow up safely at home, be healthy, go to good schools and be proud of who they are,
- continued our work on the implementation of Jordan's Principle and Shannen's Dream,
- supported the University of Toronto Factor-Inwentash School of Social Work in completing an evaluation of the Touchstones of Hope movement to redevelop child welfare in northern British Columbia to improve outcomes for First Nations children. More information is available at www.bctouchstones.ca,
- published *The First Peoples Child and Family Review* and updated our research database.

**Please support the Caring Society
by becoming a member
or making a donation at
www.fnccaringociety.com**



Did you know?

- The First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada is the only national organization serving Aboriginal children and families.
- The Caring Society has four full-time staff, one part-time staff member and many volunteers.
- The Caring Society is an independent organization and receives no federal government funding.
- Website hits to **fnCARINGSOCIETY.COM** have increased 500 percent since 2009. This year, the Caring Society website received over 10.3 million hits, making it the most visited website resource for First Nations children, youth and families.
- More than 26,000 registered individual and organizational supporters of our various campaigns represent the support of millions of people who want to see a better future for First Nations children, youth and families.
- We have done over 200 presentations since 2010 to educate the public on First Nations children, youth and families.
- Jordan's Principle and Shannen's Dream are two of the most widely supported child policies in Canadian history.
- The First Nations Child & Family Caring Society takes pride in the integrity of our financial management and our rigorous financial audits.



About us

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



Using a reconciliation framework that respectfully engages First Nation and non-Aboriginal peoples, the Caring Society provides high quality resources to support First Nations communities to empower children, youth and families. The award-winning Caring Society is proud to work with our partners in Canada and around the world to promote the rights of Indigenous children, youth and families.

The Caring Society Board of Directors

Elsie Flette

President
Southern First Nation Authority,
Manitoba

Joan Glode

Vice-President
Mi'kmaw Family and Children's
Services

Bill Gillespie

Treasurer
Southern First Nation Authority,
Manitoba

Lise Haddock

Board Member
Lalum'utul'smun'een

Carolyn Peacock

Alberta Contact Person
Yellowhead Tribal Services

Raymond Shingoose

Board Member
Yorkton Tribal Council Child
and Family Services

Linda Deer and Robin Deconte

Board Members
Kahnawake Shakotiiia'takehnhas
Community Services
and Kitigan Zibi
Child and Family Services

Kenn Richard

Board Member
Native Child and Family
Services of Toronto

Landon Pearson

Board Member
Carleton University

Deborah Parker Loewen

Board Member
Saskatchewan Member
at Large

Judy Levi

Board Member
Coordinator,
New Brunswick
First Nations Child
and Family Services



The Caring Society Staff

Cindy Blackstock

Executive Director

Ottawa

Marlyn Bennett

Director of Research

Winnipeg

Tammy Morgan

Executive Assistant

Ottawa

Andrea Auger

Touchstones of Hope Coordinator

Ottawa

Jennifer King

Education and Public Engagement

Coordinator

Ottawa

Project Highlights for 2011/12

Research

- Collaboration with University of Alberta to create a research centre on structural issues affecting First Nations children
- Collaboration with University of Toronto on Northern British Columbia Touchstones of Hope evaluation
- Evaluation of Children's Aid Society of Ottawa implementation of Touchstones of Hope
- Production of two issues of *The First Peoples Child and Family Review*

Child Rights

- Jordan's Principle
- Shannen's Dream
- Human rights case on First Nations child welfare funding
- Submission to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child for Canada's periodic review
- Have a Heart day and Our Dreams Matter Too walks for equity

Education

- Quarterly newsletter
- Resource-rich website with over 10.3 million hits
- More than 50 presentations reaching 10,000 people in three countries
- Touchstones of Hope workshops in Newfoundland, Quebec, British Columbia and Ontario

Projects and Services: Living our Mission Statement

First Nations Child Welfare Research and Knowledge Mobilization

The Caring Society provides and distributes high quality research and information regarding Aboriginal children, youth and families.

The First Peoples Child and Family Review



This marks the ninth year of commitment to sharing published research conducted by First Nations students, professors, community researchers and our allied colleagues. In 2012, two issues of the journal were published (Volume 6, numbers 1 and 2, 2011). A total of 16 articles including a poem and a book review have been published in these two issues. The statistics for the journal are as follows:

Manuscript submissions:

Number of submissions received: **18**

Number of submissions published: **13**

Peer reviewer interactions:

Number of reviewers approached to review submissions: **34**

Number of reviewers who provided responses: **19**

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council provided nearly \$90,000 over three years to assist in the development of the journal and to hire Aboriginal interns. Funding of \$37,000 was also obtained from the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research with a future contribution of \$10,000 for two upcoming issues related to mental health and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, with the possibility of future funding for a third issue that focuses on building intergenerational strengths. The University of Alberta will be providing up to \$20,000 worth of copy-editing services. Over the next few months, the journal will also be moving all journal contents to the new Open Journal System (OJS). OJS assists with every stage of the refereed publishing process, from submissions through to online publication and indexing.

We were also proud to release the first of a series of videos on *The First Peoples Child and Family Review*. This introductory video provides information about the journal, how to submit a manuscript for consideration, the peer review process, and upcoming calls for papers.



Research Activities

The Caring Society is proud to collaborate with the University of Alberta to develop a research site devoted to addressing structural risks affecting First Nations children and families. The research site will provide an important resource for research on the structural risks undermining the success of First Nations children, youth and families and translate it to evidence-informed practice. The intent is to equip front-line administrators, professionals and community members with practical tools to address the impacts of poverty, inadequate housing, mental health and substance misuse. The research site is in the developmental stages and is expected to be operational in the coming year.

The Director of Research completed an evaluation of the relationships developed by the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa with the First Nations, Inuit and Métis populations within Ottawa. Key informant interviews were conducted in August 2011. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed between September and December 2011 and the report was published in January 2012.

As part of our commitment to supporting quality research, Caring Society staff participated in the peer review process for numerous organizations and publications, for example, Child Welfare, Children and Youth Services Review, the Creating Hope Society, the Critical Social Work Journal, the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health; Indigenous Social Work Review, the Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence, the International Journal of Circumpolar Health, and the Journal on Developmental Disabilities. In addition, the Caring Society participated on research advisory groups, reviewed research grant applications and responded to information requests relating to aspects of the Caring Society work and to First Nations children, youth and families.

Research and Information Database

The Caring Society maintains a free annotated database on Aboriginal children, youth and families. The database currently has over 2,500 articles with up to 50 new articles each year.

Scholars, students and members of the public frequently use the database to inform their own research, write papers or learn more about Aboriginal children, youth and families in Canada. The database can be accessed at fncaringsociety.com/publications-database.

Supporting Students in Academic Placements

The Caring Society believes strongly in supporting students pursuing post-secondary education. Academic placements provide students with hands-on work experience to help guide their professional and scholarly development. Over the years, we have been honoured to host students from faculties of social work, law, native studies, and management. During the 2011/12 year, we were proud to host eight students in their academic placements and we are looking forward to hosting at least two more academic placement students in September of 2012. All Caring Society staff members take an active role to ensure that students receive an optimal learning experience during their time with us. We offer our heartfelt appreciation to all of the students, their academic placement supervisors and the universities for the contributions these young people have made to our learning and to our organization.



Reconciliation in Child Welfare: Touchstones of Hope



The Reconciliation in Child Welfare: Touchstones of Hope movement promotes grassroots involvement in the process of reconciliation to benefit children. The movement now includes the Touchstones of Hope Tool Kit which provides steps on how to engage in reconciliation in child welfare in communities and organizations using the Touchstones of Hope guiding principles (culture and language, holistic approach, structural interventions, self determination and non discrimination). The Caring Society has also encouraged the Touchstones for Youth to promote youth leadership in reconciliation and the Bachelor of Social Work curriculum geared toward integrating reconciliation into university curricula.

In 2011/12, the Caring Society collaborated with our community and government partners in the following activities related to the Touchstones of Hope movement:

Touchstones Engagement Workshops

Touchstones Engagement Workshops were developed for organizations wanting to learn about Aboriginal peoples and create ways for their work to engage and reflect the needs of Aboriginal peoples. These workshops started in 2010 as a collaboration with Kids Help Phone and have expanded to include organizations such as the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies and the Foster Families Association 2012 Annual Conference. These one- to two-day workshops introduce participants to the knowledge and tools needed to meaningfully participate in reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in order to improve the well-being of Aboriginal children. Participants are provided with historical and contemporary information on Aboriginal peoples in Canada, research on the factors disadvantaging Aboriginal children and ways to make a difference. This information helps participants to create a new vision of working with Aboriginal children and families based on the distinct culture and context of local Aboriginal communities. Participants are then provided with tools to assist them in bringing the vision to fruition and evaluating results. The workshops are a useful precursor for groups interested in using reconciliation as a model to inform large-scale and sustainable systems change to uplift Aboriginal children, such as the Touchstones of Hope movement being piloted in northern British Columbia and other parts of the province (www.bctouchstones.ca).

Northern British Columbia Touchstones of Hope

The Caring Society has worked with the Government of British Columbia and First Nations in northern British Columbia on the Touchstones of Hope movement since 2008. The goal of the movement is to re-design child welfare to support First Nations community-based visions of healthy children and families. First Nation communities take the lead in articulating their vision of healthy children and families while actively engaging government and other stakeholders to develop and implement a strategic plan to achieve the vision. Five community sessions were held in British Columbia during the pilot period from 2009 to 2010 including sessions in Terrace, Fort St. James, Prince George, and Haida Gwaii. Dr. Michael Saini from the University of Toronto conducted a thorough evaluation



of the Touchstones of Hope movement using data from five community sessions along with survey data and interviews with key stakeholders. The evaluation was completed in 2012 and results suggest that the Touchstones movement has made significant improvements in the relationships among First Nations and government agencies working in child protection, resulting in better front-line practice. The evaluation is available at www.bctouchstones.ca.

The Touchstones of Hope movement is designed to be run by, and for, First Nations communities and thus it is entirely sustainable as a British Columbia initiative. The Caring Society provides technical assistance as the movement migrates to other parts of British Columbia and is considered by other jurisdictions across Canada. We also maintain the Northern British Columbia Touchstones of Hope website and create quarterly newsletters. (See www.bctouchstones.ca for more information.)

Touchstones of Hope Resources

New Touchstones of Hope resources that are available on the Northern British Columbia Touchstones of Hope website and the Caring Society website include:

- The Northern British Columbia Touchstones of Hope report 2008–2011;
- *Touchstones of Hope: Participatory Action Research to Explore Experiences of First Nation Communities in Northern British Columbia – Evaluation Report*;
- Information on the Touchstones of Hope Tool Kit 2011 – instructions on how to start and support a reconciliation movement; contains 75–100 resources including how-to guides, presentations on research and other information relevant to the Touchstones movement, train-the-trainer resources to prepare community members to facilitate community sessions, vision implementation plans, sample budgets and other practical information to guide the movement.

Child and Youth Rights

The Caring Society believes all children, including First Nations children, have a right to grow up safely in their families, go to good schools, and to 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 Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP). The Government of Canada has ratified the UNCRC and has expressed support for UNDRIP and thus we work actively to ensure the realization of these rights for First Nations children, youth and families.



Jordan's Principle

The Caring Society is working with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and Norway House Cree Nation to promote Jordan's Principle. This child-first principle for resolving governmental jurisdictional disputes regarding funding for children's services has been endorsed by over 2,600 individuals and organizations. In May 2007, NDP MP

Jean Crowder (NDP) tabled a Private Member's motion in the House of Commons in support of Jordan's Principle. Jordan's father, Ernest Andersen, and his sister, Jerlene, were in the public gallery with children and families from Norway House Cree Nation on December 12, 2007 to witness the motion being passed unanimously by the House of Commons. As Ernest Anderson so rightly pointed out, the good done in Jordan's name that day would be nothing but a moral victory unless the provincial and federal governments implemented it. A month later, British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell became the first Premier to announce full support for Jordan's Principle and table an implementation plan. This was followed by the other western provinces and then Ontario announcing their support for Jordan's Principle on April 22, 2009. Unfortunately, the Government of Canada has narrowed Jordan's Principle to apply only to children with complex medical needs. In keeping with Motion 296, we support the application of Jordan's Principle across all federal, provincial, and territorial government services and will continue to work with other partners to ensure full and proper implementation.

To date, over 6,400 people and organizations have supported Jordan's Principle, making it one of the most broadly supported initiatives in the history of children's rights in Canada.

Canadian Human Rights Tribunal



i am a witness
www.
fnwitness
.ca

In February of 2007, the AFN (www.afn.ca) and the Caring Society filed a human rights case against the Government of Canada (Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada or AANDC), alleging that child welfare funding inequities in First Nations child welfare amounted to racial discrimination. The case was filed as a last resort. First Nations had worked with Canada for over a decade to document the inequality and its related harms to First Nations children and families and to develop solutions to fix the problem. Canada failed to implement either solution despite supporting the solutions when they were released and running surplus budgets in the billions of dollars or spending billions on fighter jets and other discretionary expenses. Meanwhile, Canada's own documents linked the inequities in child welfare funding with the record number of First Nations children being removed from their families. The children could not wait any longer for Canada to do the right thing so the complaint was filed in order to force Canada to uphold its obligations to First Nations children pursuant to domestic and international human rights law. The complaint will set a precedent for addressing other areas of funding inequities affecting First Nations children and their families such as education, health, water and housing.

The Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC), which vets human rights complaints, referred the matter to the independent Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (Tribunal) for a full hearing in September 2008. In line with its legislation, the CHRC viewed this case as so essential to human rights in Canada that it joined the case before the Tribunal representing the public good. Canada repeatedly tried to get the case dismissed on legal technicalities arguing that child welfare services delivered to First Nations should not be compared to those delivered to all other Canadians (known as the "comparator argument") and that where discrimination occurs, it is the service delivery agency, not the funder, who should be held accountable even when inequitable funding is the source of the discrimination (known as the "funding is not a service argument"). The Federal Court refused two applications by



the Government of Canada to get the case dismissed before the Canadian Government brought a motion to dismiss on the same grounds at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal in December 2009. The Tribunal heard the case in June of 2010 and ruled in Canada's favour on the comparator issue in March 2011. Should this decision stand, First Nations citizens would be denied the benefits of human rights protections afforded to all other Canadians pursuant to the *Canadian Human Rights Act*. Therefore CHRC, AFN and the Caring Society appealed the decision to Federal Court and in April 2012, the Tribunal decision was overturned, clearing the way for a full hearing on the discrimination matter before a differently constituted Tribunal panel.

Canada appealed this decision to the Federal Court of Appeal but in the meantime, the Tribunal will hear preliminary motions and set dates for a full and public hearing on the discrimination case. Canada is already signaling it will rely heavily on procedural issues to try to slow down or thwart the process in that it is challenging all the expert reports filed by First Nations and the Canadian Human Rights Commission. Nonetheless, the hearings will proceed and when they occur, it will mark the first time in history that the Canadian Government will be held accountable for its current treatment of First Nations children before a judicial body capable of making enforceable orders. Government officials will join First Nations and other experts in testifying under oath and thus the case provides an important opportunity for the public to learn about Canada's relationship with First Nations children in a transparent manner.

Canada also opposed an effort by the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network to televise the case suggesting that testimony by government officials may damage working relationships with First Nations. The Tribunal granted Canada a full ban on broadcasting in 2009 but this decision was reversed by the Federal Court in 2011. The Caring Society applauds this decision as it ensures First Nations children, youth and families will be able to watch this historic case wherever they live in Canada.

The decision to allow broadcasting is also widely welcomed by Canadians as the case has garnered significant public attention. The Caring Society developed the online *I am a witness* campaign (www.fnwitness.ca) to compliment the case. To date, over 10,500 caring organizations and individuals have committed to following the First Nations child welfare human rights case and making up their own minds as to whether the Canadian government is treating First Nations children fairly. The *I am a witness* website posts all of the legal documents and relevant reports and then invites caring individuals of any age and organizations to register as a witness. Being a witness means following the case and then deciding whether or not the federal government is treating First Nations children fairly. There are currently over 10,500 individuals and organizations from all over the world following the case. Children and young people in Canada are taking a very active role in the case by attending the case and writing letters to elected officials asking why First Nations children get less funding for child welfare than other children. During the last Federal Court hearing in February of 2012, over 600 children gathered on Parliament Hill with homemade signs to read letters they had written supporting equity for education, child welfare and health for First Nations children and youth. Many of the children also attended the hearings and learned first-hand how the Canadian judicial system is being leveraged to uphold the rights afforded children under the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.



Shannen's Dream

The Auditor General of Canada has found that First Nations children do not receive equitable education funding on reserves and the Parliamentary Budget Officer has raised serious concerns about the condition of many schools on reserves. First Nations children often have fewer teachers, books and learning resources and many go to rundown schools or live in communities where there is no school at all. These inequities have persisted for many years so thousands of First Nations and other children and youth are joining the Shannen's Dream campaign to educate Canadians and promote positive change. This child- and youth-led movement was started by teen education activist Shannen Koostachin of Attawapiskat First Nation who wanted "safe and comfy schools" and equitable education for First Nations children. Shannen never went to a proper school. The only school in her community sat on a diesel-contaminated site bordered by an active airstrip. The school was closed by health officials in 2000 so the federal government brought up portable trailers and put them on the playground of the contaminated school. Over time, the condition of the portables deteriorated, making learning almost impossible. The children of Attawapiskat thought that if the federal government heard first-hand how bad things were, they would build a new school and provide equitable education. Shannen helped organize the younger children in her community to write letters to the Minister of Indian Affairs and she created YouTube videos inviting non-Aboriginal children to join the letter-writing campaign. Thousands of children responded and in the winter of 2009, the Government of Canada promised the children of Attawapiskat a new school and construction began in 2012. Shannen was mindful of all the other First Nations children who did not have good schools so she vowed to continue the campaign. For her efforts, Shannen was one of 45 children in the world to be nominated for the International Children's Peace Prize awarded by the Nobel Laureates. Tragically, Shannen passed away in a traffic accident in 2010. Inspired by Shannen's passionate message, the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada was proud to partner with Shannen's family, community and many supporters to launch Shannen's Dream on Wednesday, November 17, 2010 in Ottawa. Shannen's Dream calls on caring Canadians of all ages, especially children and youth, to sign up to support Shannen's call for safe and comfy schools and culturally based equitable education.

Thousands of caring children and adults are working to ensure Shannen's Dream comes true by educating others, participating in awareness walks and writing letters to elected officials to encourage them to implement an Opposition Motion supporting Shannen's Dream, passed unanimously by the House of Commons on February 27, 2012. We are particularly thankful to the students, early childhood educators, teachers, school administrators, professional organizations and post-secondary instructors who have embraced Shannen's Dream.

To date over 8300 people and organizations have supported Shannen's Dream, making it one of the most broadly supported child rights initiatives in Canadian history.

International Relationships

In preparation for Canada's periodic review by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), scheduled for September 26 and 27, 2012, the Caring Society collaborated with KAIROS and the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth in Ontario to support six First Nations youth to travel to Geneva to meet with the UNCRC and share their views on Canada's implementation of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. The youth were Collin Starblanket (Starblanket First Nation, Saskatchewan), Helen Knott (Dene Tsaa, British Columbia), Kendall White (Temagami First Nation, Ontario), John-Paul Chalykoff (Michipicoten First Nation, Ontario), Madelynn Slade (Michel Cree, Alberta), and Chelsea Edwards (Attawapiskat First Nation, Ontario.) The Caring Society believes strongly that children and young people have a right to actively monitor UN human rights and we were so honoured to participate with these youth and meet the UNCRC. For more information go to: fncaringsociety.com/youth-ambassadors.

A key goal of the Caring Society is to ensure that First Nations are aware of, and included in, international discussions relevant to First Nations children, youth and families. In 2011/12, Cindy Blackstock was honoured to travel to New Zealand, Australia and the United States in order to learn from people and organizations working with Indigenous children and families as well as to share the experiences of First Nations in Canada. She also travelled to Stockholm to present at the World Conference on Social Work.

We value our relationships with the international community and look forward to working with our international partners to uphold the rights of Indigenous children and families.



Children Have Power!

The Caring Society believes that sustainable reconciliation requires the active involvement of First Nations and other children and young people. We also believe that children and young people have a right to know about and participate in matters affecting them. With this in mind, we are truly honoured to stand with First Nations and other children and youth in Canada as they learn about First Nations peoples in Canada and take action to ensure that all First Nations children grow up safely in their families, go to good schools and are healthy and proud of who they are.

We believe strongly that children and youth must be supported to think critically about social justice issues and other matters in society, so we work with educators to ensure children and youth are well informed on issues affecting First Nations peoples and that they have opportunities to discuss these matters with their families and other caring adults. With this approach, children and young people in Canada have made enormous contributions to promoting the equity of First Nations children and youth in 2011/12. The children and young people have not only been informing themselves about First Nations children and youth, they have also been educating other Canadians through presentations to schools and student associations, and speaking to conference delegates. Some of the cross-Canada awareness raising includes raising funds with a bike tour, lemonade stands and bake sales.

The Caring Society facilitated two child participation days: Have a Heart day for First Nations children on February 14, 2012 and Our Dreams Matter Too walk on June 11, 2012. Both were designed to be peaceful and child-friendly activities that are completely free to participate in.

Have a Heart day

Have a Heart day for First Nations children occurred on February 14, 2012. Children, young people and adults were invited to create Valentine's cards to support First Nations children to grow up safely at home, go to good schools, be healthy and proud of who they are and to send them to the Prime Minister and Members of Parliament. We estimate that thousands of cards were sent and were honoured by the hundreds of children, youth and adults who participated in the Have a Heart gathering on Parliament Hill on February 14, 2012. Children and youth read their Valentine's Day cards and messages, sang songs and read recipes for a better Canada. The writings of the children were so powerful that they were compiled into a book the children titled *Children Have Power! Voices of Children Standing in Solidarity with First Nations Children*. This book is being used as a teaching resource along with social justice curriculum for teachers throughout Ontario and Quebec and has also been distributed internationally to persons and organizations in Switzerland, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand and the United States.



Photos above: Children gather outside of Parliament Hill on February 14, 2012 to celebrate Have a Heart day and announce the release of their book *Children's Voices have Power: Voices of Children Standing in Solidarity with First Nations Children*.

Right: Pages from the book.



Our Dreams Matter Too walk

The first annual Our Dreams Matter Too walk occurred on June 11, 2012, calling for culturally based equity for First Nations children and youth. Hosting a walk is easy and free. The idea is to write letters to elected officials to support First Nations children to grow up safely at home, go to good schools and be healthy and proud of who they are and then walk together to the post office to mail them. People across Canada took up the challenge and the response was phenomenal with over 50 Our Dreams Matter Too walks and 5,500 participants across Canada!



At the Our Dreams Matter Too walk in Ottawa, over 1,200 students from 12 schools in Ontario and Quebec walked to Parliament Hill. While the Caring Society played a support role in coordinating the event, the Ottawa walk was organized by, and for, children and youth. Wellington Street was closed to traffic as walkers marched safely toward Parliament, drumming, singing songs and blowing bubbles representing the dreams of First Nations children and youth.

More than 60 schools and early childhood centres across Canada took part in Caring Society activities and the movement for culturally based equity since February 2012. To acknowledge schools that made a significant contribution to learning or engagement, traditional hand drums, donated by Laura Hynds, Harold Tarbell, and a child in foster care from British Columbia have been gifted to participating schools. The children and youth have been so honoured to receive the drums and use them in celebrations at the school and to promote the equity of First Nations children and youth.

Future Directions

We envision a Canada where all First Nations children are treated with equity, respect and justice. We know just what to do to make that vision a reality and it will require the active engagement of caring Canadians and organizations to make it happen. The First Nations Child & Family Caring Society blends high quality research, public education and skilful policy change in ways that fuel the social movement of equity for First Nations children. Over the next year, we look forward to making the following visions a reality:

- publishing our new strategic directions for 2012–2017,
- improving our website compatibility with mobile devices,
- researching and educating about First Nations children, youth and families,
- having more material available in French,
- continuing to engage children and young people in matters affecting them,
- ensuring that the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal finally gets to decide whether Canada's inequitable funding and policies for First Nations child welfare are discriminatory,
- supporting implementation of Jordan's Principle and Shannen's Dream!

We also very excited to announce that the Caring Society moved in February 2012 to our new office location at 401–309 Cooper Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K2P 0G5. If you are in the area, please stop by for a visit! We would love to offer you a coffee, learn more about what you are doing and share our latest activities.

Want to Make a Difference for Aboriginal Children?

Go to www.fncaringsociety.com 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 Aboriginal children and youth in under 15 minutes and consider supporting the Caring Society work by becoming a member or making a donation.





www.fncairingsociety.com

First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada
309 Cooper Street, Suite 401, Ottawa, ON K2P 0G5
tel: 613-230-5885 | fax: 613-230-3080 | info@fncairingsociety.com