

**First Nations Child & Family Caring Society
Crisis Response in First Nations Child and Family Services**



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For the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada
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Honouring

This work is dedicated to the many Aboriginal heroes who courageously, generously and lovingly supported our children and families throughout the ages.

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Crisis Response in First Nations Child and Family Services

Forward

In recent years, Canada's voluntary sector has garnered increased recognition for its important and unique contributions to our nation's economy and civil society. Offering a diverse range of essential community services and innovative programs, voluntary sector organizations play important roles in the areas of health, education, faith, recreation, environmental protection, social services, human rights, social justice, arts and culture. Ranging from small grassroots community-based groups to national organizations, the varied activities of the voluntary sector include providing crucial support for children aid societies, economic and community development projects, school breakfast programs, immigration and refugee services, food banks, literacy initiatives, hospice and home care agencies, and the operation of shelters from violence and homelessness. Some voluntary organizations work to provide financial support for other voluntary groups while others work to represent the specific interest and concerns of their communities and clients by advocating changes to public policies and educating the broader population. However, until recently, there has been a significant lack of information about the nature and extent of access to voluntary sector services and programs by First Nations children, youth and families living on-reserve.

The opportunity to fill this gap in the literature began with Blackstock's (2003b) paper studying voluntary sector programs and services for First Nations peoples on-reserve in British Columbia. For a population facing significantly disproportionate social and economic inequalities, Blackstock's (2003b) findings revealed a blatant lack of voluntary sector services and supports for First Nations children, youth and families living on-reserves in British Columbia. The opportunity to expand this study in order to explore the nature and extent of

collaboration between the voluntary sector and First Nations communities on a national level was realized with First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada's release of *Caring across the boundaries: Promoting access to voluntary sector resources for First Nations children and families* (Nadjiwan & Blackstock, 2003). Guided by Blackstock's (2003b) initial work in British Columbia, findings from three surveys distributed across 51 voluntary sector organization, 118 First Nations child and family service organizations and 16 federal government employees with ties to First Nations communities provided the first national data reflecting voluntary sector activity and collaboration with First Nation child and family service agencies. In addition, key informant interviews from each of the targeted groups provided valuable information regarding the barriers limiting collaboration, how they can be overcome, and the possible nature and form of collaborative relations between the voluntary sector and First Nations child and family service agencies.

Based on the voluntary sector research conducted by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, the principle objectives of this report are as follows:

- 1) To describe the implications of the Voluntary Sector Initiative(VSI) research conducted by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society in terms of describing the existing infrastructure available on-reserve to support the quality of life for First Nations children, youth and families.
- 2) To describe the implications in assessing the comparability of crisis response resources available on and off-reserve.
- 3) To describe the implications of the VSI and other relevant research in informing the definition of communities in crisis from various sources by:
 - a. Conducting a literature review on definitions of communities in crisis;
 - b. Compiling indicators of communities in crisis;
 - c. Identifying potential sources of services and funding for communities in crisis including government and voluntary sector resources.

- 4) To describe the implications of this research for First Nations child and family service agencies providing services on-reserves.
- 5) Where multi-sectoral responses require development, to identify the essential features of respectful relationship building that supports and affirms community responses to crisis situations.
- 6) To provide policy recommendations to support the implementation of the First Nations Child and Family Services Agency Joint National Policy Review (June 2000) recommendation on communities in crisis.

Introduction

It is a widely held belief that all Canadians benefit from the services and programs provided by Canada's voluntary sector. With approximately 78,000 registered charitable organizations, more than 100,000 legally incorporated non-profit groups, and numerous grassroots associations, Canada's voluntary sector works to provide services and programs addressing a wide range of social, economic, environmental and political concerns (Hall & Banting, 2000). Ranging from small grassroots groups to complex organizations such as hospitals, universities, and social service organizations, many Canadians come into contact with the voluntary sector through community and recreational activities, employment counseling, educational programs, social services supports for children, youth and families, legal advocacy, home care services or business associations. Guided by the common values of philanthropy, altruism, charity, reciprocity and mutuality (Shield & Evans, 1998), the flexible, responsive nature of voluntary sector organizations works to foster strong networks of community participation, reciprocity (mutual aid), and trust among people, thereby enhancing our capacity to engage in cooperative and collaborative projects for the common good (Hall & Banting, 2000; Putnam, 1995, 1993).

While the importance and value of the voluntary sector's role in building bridges of cooperation and collaboration among people and communities is undisputable, there is a growing awareness of the need for culturally appropriate voluntary sector supports and services for First Nations children, youth, and families living on-reserve. Against the backdrop of Canada's colonial legacy, First Nations peoples, unlike any other visible minority group in Canada, are struggling with the devastating pandemic of HIV/AIDS, and persistently high rates of homelessness, poverty, teen pregnancy, suicide, alcohol and drug use, violence, incarceration, child welfare placement and school drop-out (Health Canada, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, 2003; Bennett & Blackstock, 2002; Health Canada, 2002). These extensive social disadvantages are compounded by the disproportionate difficulty First Nations peoples

experience in securing educational opportunities, meaningful employment and equal income levels (Kunz, Milan & Achetagne, 2000). As the experiences of racism, discrimination and stereotyping continue to impact the lives of First Nations peoples in Canada, entire communities have been weakened by the extreme over-representation of First Nations children in the care of the child welfare system. For example, Blackstock (2003a) reports that while First Nations children currently represent fewer than approximately 8% of the population of children in Canada, modest estimates indicated that they account for at least 35% of all children in the child welfare system. In 1999, the office of the Children's Advocate reported that of the 3,030 Saskatchewan children and youth in care, 73% were First Nations (Saskatchewan Children's Advocate, 2000). In Winnipeg, First Nations children represent 37% of children in care yet account for only 6.3% of the child population in the city. Put another way, a First Nations child living in the city of Winnipeg is six times more likely to be removed from their family as a non-Aboriginal child (Hallett, 2000).

In a country consistently ranked among the best places to live in the world, First Nations peoples living in Canada continue to experience myriad and profound forms of social, economic, and political inequalities. The persistent and disproportionate representation of First Nations children within the child welfare system has also served to disrupt the traditional social structures of family, and severely undermine the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being of First Nations communities. These current realities suggest the urgent need for culturally congruent services and programs capable of supporting the journey of healing needed in order to restore vibrant communities and healthy environments for First Nations children, youth and families. However, the alarming lack of culturally-based voluntary sector services on-reserves presents significant obstacles for First Nations children, youth and families attempting to overcome the significant social problems created after more than 500 years of colonial intrusion.

The purpose of this report is six-fold. One primary objective is to explore the key implications of the voluntary sector initiative research documented in *Caring across the boundaries: Promoting access to voluntary sector resources for First Nations children and families* (Nadjiwan & Blackstock, 2003) in terms of describing the existing infrastructure available on-reserve to support the quality of life for First Nations children, youth and families.

A second objective is to describe the implications in assessing the comparability of crisis response resources available to First Nations peoples on and off reserve. The implications of the VSI and other relevant research in informing the definition of communities in crisis from various sources will be discussed and explored through a literature review on definitions of communities in crisis, compiling indicators of communities in crisis, and identifying potential sources of services and funding for communities in crisis (including government and voluntary sector resources). Fourth, the implications of this research into communities in crisis will be examined to determine the implications it has for First Nations child and family service agencies providing services on-reserves. Fifth, where multi-sectoral responses are required development, the essential features of respectful relationship building will be discussed with a view to determining what works to support and affirm community responses to crisis situations. Finally, policy recommendations contained in the *First Nations Child and Family Services Agency Joint National Policy Review* (McDonald & Ladd, et.al 2000) will be explored with a view to supporting their implementation. It is important to note that as the definition of crisis and the results of crisis are dependent on the degree of existing infrastructure, this report will consider the impact of community wide crisis that have implications for children as well as more specific crisis such as multiple youth suicides which are more specific to the role of First Nations child and family service agencies.

Mapping the Implications of Existing Infrastructure

As one of the first sustained efforts to initiate a dialogue between the voluntary sector and First Nations children, youth and families living on-reserve, the publication of *Caring across the boundaries: Promoting access to voluntary sector resources for First Nations children and families* (Nadjiwan & Blackstock, 2003) revealed a significant lack of voluntary sector initiatives on-reserves across Canada. In addition to the extremely limited voluntary sector resources and supports, the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society reported a corresponding dearth of infrastructure capable of supporting the quality of life for First Nations children, youth and families (Nadjiwan & Blackstock, 2003).

Given the seriousness of the problems currently impacting First Nations peoples, the

blatant lack of voluntary sector services and supporting infrastructure prompts the question of why First Nations communities have been excluded from the valuable benefits and supports provide by voluntary sector organizations. Put another way, if the voluntary sector is committed to the values of democracy, active citizenship, equality, diversity, inclusion and social justice in order to “create a climate for improving and enhancing the lives of all Canadians,” (Voluntary Sector Initiative, 2001), why have First Nations children, youth and families living on-reserve been excluded? In response to this question, Nadjiwan and Blackstock (2003) reveal that the possible lack of voluntary sector supports for First Nations children, youth and families extends from a pervasive lack of information within the sector on First Nations children and families as well as apprehension in forming cross cultural relationships. First Nations also expressed a need to learn more about voluntary sector resources. A cross cutting issue is that although federal and provincial governments value social inclusion, few government funders adequately resource relationship building in voluntary sector project funding or in First Nations child and family service agency funding and thus cross cultural collaborations are limited.

In response to the current lack of services designed to meet the needs of First Nations children, youth and families, there is a long tradition of shared responsibility and mutual aid that is part of First Nations communities (Nadjiwan and Blackstock, 2003; National Aboriginal Voluntary Organization and Voluntary Sector Initiative, 2002). Recognizing the unity and interdependence of life, the cooperative and respectful sharing of material, social and spiritual knowledge, skills and gifts ensured a collaborative and harmonious existence. Understanding the value of giving in return for the gifts given by the Creator has also provided the foundational strength needed to endure more than 500 years of colonial assaults ranging from outright warfare to theft, duplicity, racism, exploitation and coercion. Today, the tradition of mutual aid continues within First Nations communities. However, without voluntary sector support, Nadjiwan and Blackstock (2003) related that many First Nations communities must rely on community-based fundraising techniques such as raffles, 50/50 draws, and bake sales in order to purchase wheelchairs and/or support recreational programs. In many instances, these same methods of fundraising are used to assist families with the funeral costs or help families re-start following the stress, trauma and loss resulting from natural disasters such as floods or fires. While these community-based efforts provide a traditional and foundational infrastructure of support on

many reserve communities, Nadjiwan and Blackstock (2003) note that the astounding poverty that many First Nations peoples are currently experiencing suggests that it is unreasonable to assume that they can provide the level and structure of funding and support that is needed given the severely limited assistance received from the voluntary sector and provincial/municipal services. However, for many First Nations communities, limited state funds and community-based fundraising provide the only source of revenue to support children, youth and families living on-reserve. In addition, Nadjiwan and Blackstock (2003) relate that these same funds must also support numerous community-based programs and services including, housing, community development projects, environmental programs, employment and education, recreation, social assistance and child welfare.

The precarious nature of funding and its relation to the infrastructure needed to support First Nations children, youth and families is especially evident in the development of First Nation Child and Family Service Agencies (FNFCSA). Established during the 1980s, FNFCSA were designed to stem the massive losses experienced by First Nations children and families through the atrocities of the residential schooling system and cultural dislocation perpetuated by child welfare authorities during what has come to be euphemistically known as the “60s scoop” (Downey, 1999; Milloy, 1999; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Miller, 1996; Monture-Angus, 1995; Kimelman, 1985, Johnston, 1983). As a concerted effort to address the urgent need for culturally based child welfare services on-reserve, there are now more than 100 FNFCSA providing culturally competent support for First Nations children, youth and families. However, Nadjiwan and Blackstock (2003) reveal that the nuances of the jurisdictional issues governing funding for FNFCSA serves to weaken the adequacy of services for First Nations children, youth and families. As Nadjiwan and Blackstock (2003) explain, First Nation child welfare agencies are federally funded and receive their jurisdictional authority from provincial/territorial statutes. The lack of connection between what FNFCSA are mandated to do through the receipt of federal funds and what is required of FNFCSA through provincial/territorial statutes frequently severely limits the range, scope and level of supportive services designed to care for and protect First Nations children, youth and families.

Following the national study jointly conducted by the Assembly of First Nations and the

Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) (McDonald & Ladd, et al., 2000), Nadjiwan and Blackstock (2003) note that the most crucial services weakened by the federal and provincial/territorial disconnection are those specifically designed to care and protect children and youth deemed to be at risk while remaining in their family residence. As a range of services referred to as “least disruptive measures,” the ability to ensure the well-being of children and youth in their own homes or with extended family/kin is perhaps the most foundational structural mechanism needed to redress the historical injustices experiences by First Nations peoples in relation to the child welfare system and protect First Nations cultural identity and cultural heritage (Canada, 1996). However, without adequate financial resources to support the services and programs designed to care for children and youth within their own families, communities and culture, more and more First Nations are entering the Canadian system of child welfare. While federal and provincial governments and child welfare agencies across Canada have firmly committed to developing initiatives that provide alternatives to the removal of First Nations children, limited funding and high service demands have resulted in a critical situation – the number of children in care on-reserve has increased 71.5% between 1995 and 2001 (Blackstock, 2003a; McKenzie, 2002; Nadjiwan & Blackstock, 2003). This means that there are three-times the number of Aboriginal children in child welfare care than there was at the height of the residential school regime.

Nadjiwan and Blackstock (2003) also note that while FNCFSA must deal with limited funding and a corresponding lack of resources to address the current realities facing First Nations children, youth and families, they also face the added tension of having to navigate federal government obligations in order to use provincial/territorial child welfare legislation that is frequently incompatible with the traditional and customary forms of child care within the context of First Nations communities. These tensions are compounded by the fact that FNCFSA are frequently one of the few culturally congruent agencies on many reserves and are often called upon to assist in meeting a range of community concerns. Although the value and standards of excellence many FNCFSA have achieved has become widely recognized, there still exists a profound need for additional culturally congruent supports and resources in order to enhance their ability to provide structural support for First Nations children, youth and families. According to Nadjiwan and Blackstock (2003), the collaborative efforts of both the voluntary

sector and First Nations communities has the potential to foster a mutually beneficial relationship – one in which the respectful sharing of skills and knowledge functions to create and sustain the infrastructure needed to support First Nations children, youth and families, thereby improving the lives of *all* people living in Canada.

Crisis Response Resources – On and Off-reserve

In recent years, the rapid influx of Aboriginal peoples (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) into Canadian urban centres has garnered increasing attention (Richards, 2001; Statistics Canada, 2001, 1993; Lee, 2000; Drost, 1995; Canada, 1993). Although Peters (2000) notes that Aboriginal peoples have always been living in urban centers, the relatively recent upstart of government studies, round table discussion groups, surveys, housing commission reports, and reviews by social action organizations have all revealed a significant lack of employment, health, housing, educational and social services designed to meet the needs of Aboriginal peoples living in urban centers. Increasingly, it has become evident that Canada's tradition of piecemeal policy development and uncoordinated social service delivery has been unable to harness the significant benefits of urban Aboriginal peoples' contributions to the economy and social fabric of Canadian urban communities. In addition, access to the possible benefits of urban living has frequently been shadowed by the legacy of colonization and the impact of systemic racism in the lives of Aboriginal peoples. Combined with a political climate of fiscal restraint, modern-day *laissez-faire* economics, unwavering faith in privatization and deregulation, and ongoing disputes over federal, provincial and municipal jurisdiction, the lack of services and supports has resulted in a crisis situation characterized by the extreme and rapid growth of poverty, high unemployment and underemployment, low educational attainment, escalating health concerns, increasing dependence on social assistance income, and unaffordable housing.

In response to the escalating crises facing many urban Aboriginal peoples, the design and implementation of targeted services and programs has been further complicated by the considerable plurality that exists within the group as evidenced in the diversity of languages, cultural practices, legal status, ancestry, spiritual beliefs, political ideologies and social concerns. However, the crisis situation precipitated by innumerable social, economic and political

inequalities has also presented numerous opportunities capable of enhancing the lives of experienced by urban Aboriginal peoples. In turn, there emerges the possibility of creating vibrant urban communities for all Canadians.

By positioning the crisis situation as a source of opportunity, the federal government has committed to the process of community-building through the creation of innovative and sustainable programs and services designed to address the needs of Aboriginal peoples in urban areas. In 1998, for example, the federal government announced the establishment of the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) and, in 2003, the government renewed its commitment to urban Aboriginal peoples with a cash infusion of \$25 million in order to “build partnerships to better address the needs of urban Aboriginal people in Canada” (Canada, 2003). Working with provincial and municipal governments, local Aboriginal organizations, the private sector and non-profit organizations, the federal government’s horizontal management style and respectful relationship-building has the potential to coordinate services and support the design of programs to meet the localized needs of urban Aboriginal peoples living in major centres across Canada (Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg, Toronto and Thunder Bay). In addition, the government has initiated substantial financial support for the Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centres Initiative. Having identified urban Aboriginal youth as the fastest growing population in all of Canada, Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centres will be established in partnership with the National Association of Friendship Centers, the Métis National Council and the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami in order to address and prevent the ongoing crises precipitated among youth as a result of chronic unemployment, high rates of school drop-out, alcohol and drug use, teen pregnancy, and disproportionate involvement in the criminal justice system.

It appears that as the population of Aboriginal peoples living in urban centres continues to grow, there is a corresponding effort to establish networks of organizations supporting programs and services capable of addressing their varying social, economic, cultural and political needs and concerns. In many ways, it seems that by framing the crisis facing many urban Aboriginal peoples as a source of opportunity, the development of collaborative partnerships between the federal, provincial, municipal governments, local Aboriginal organizations, the

private sector, and non-profit organizations has the potential to provide the foundational intrapersonal and external environmental supports needed to ameliorate the situation. However, the extensive promotion of partnerships between all levels of government and the coordination of multi-sector responses to address the needs of urban Aboriginal peoples raises the question of why these same forms of collaborative and multi-sector partnerships are not available on-reserve to First Nations communities in crisis. As the research conducted by Nadjiwan and Blackstock (2003) reveals, both multi-sector financial support and voluntary sector partnerships are virtually non-existent among First Nations communities. Given the fact that the social crises experienced by urban Aboriginal peoples are extremely similar to the crises currently being experienced by First Nations communities (and vice versa), why have First Nations peoples living on-reserve been denied similar funding opportunities and program initiatives? Why does the state acknowledge the benefits of horizontal management in relation to urban Aboriginal peoples yet persist in dictating funding restrictions that limit the provision of services and supports for First Nations communities in crisis?

Implications for First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies

On-reserve, the lack of collaborative government relationships, the dearth of private sector support, and the virtual absence of voluntary sector services, programs and resources tends to create an extremely precarious situation for many First Nations communities attempting to respond to crisis situations. While the responsive measures taken to address the situation among many urban Aboriginal peoples clearly indicates how linkages between social institutions, departments and organizations are capable of creating environmental coping resources capable of leading to the positive resolution of crisis situations, the development and maintenance of these similar linkages are absurdly lacking on too many First Nations reserves. Frequently, First Nations child and family service agencies (FNCFSA) are the only on-reserve organization providing culturally relevant services and supports to children, youth and families. As a result, the resources and supports needed to care for children, youth and families experiencing crisis situations frequently becomes the sole responsibility of FNCFSA. With limited human and financial resources and lacking the structural supports needed to build and sustain the urgently

needed cooperative partnerships and collaborative relationships, FNCFSA are often called upon to provide educational programs, school-based crisis intervention, bereavement counseling, and emergency services for people in crisis. However, without the supportive infrastructure needed to respond effectively to crisis situations, the ability of FNCFSA to enhance coping skills that facilitate the resolution of traumatic events is severely limited.

In providing emergency relief for communities around the world, Rupen Das, Director for World Vision Canada (n/d), suggests that without the supportive environmental systems that are needed to foster the coping skills that facilitate the resolution of traumatic events, a crisis state will ensue – regardless of the magnitude of any particular event. And while any community's capacity to cope with crises is largely dependent on access to supportive structures and services, the lack of crisis response resources on many First Nations reserves is further complicated by varying degrees of remoteness and isolation. Here, Blagg's (2000) work in the design of crisis intervention strategies addressing Aboriginal family violence in Western Australia suggests that a reserve's proximity to an urban centre also impacts the community's ability to cope with events likely to precipitate a state of crisis. For example, an acute situational event such as a multiple car accident in a metropolitan city is less likely to escalate into a crisis situation as emergency services and equipment are readily available. The same accident occurring on in a rural and remote community has the potential to result in multiple fatalities as the response time of police and emergency services is frequently delayed and the range of responses is often significantly limited. In isolated kin-based communities without environmental support structures, the impact of a car accident resulting in multiple fatalities may result in a wide-spread and acute state of crisis.

For First Nations agencies attempting to provide supportive services and programs, the lack of crisis response resources has serious implications for the health and well-being of children, youth and families living on-reserve. In attempting to respond to the crisis situations emerging as a result of repetitive family violence, escalating rates of youth suicide, poverty, homelessness, or unmet mental health needs, FNCFSA must frequently function in chronically stressful work environments characterized by inadequate financial resources, staff shortages, "burn out" among front line workers, and a significant lack of collaborative relationships with

voluntary sector institutions.

Communities in Crisis

In reviewing the available literature on communities in crisis, three questions were asked:

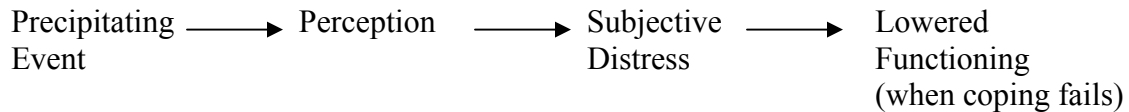
1. What are the definitions of communities in crisis?
2. What are the indicators of communities in crisis?
3. What are the multi-dimensions of community crisis response?
4. What are the potential sources of supportive services and funding for communities in crisis?

In order to answer these questions, an interdisciplinary academic perspective provided a framework to help understand the basic concept of crisis and the characteristics or indicators of communities in crisis. The potential sources of services and funding that might be available for a community in crisis are also considered.

What is a Crisis?

While the term crisis is frequently used to describe everyday experiences of stress, Gilliland and James (1988, p.3) define crisis as “a perception of an event or situation as an intolerable difficulty that exceeds the resources and coping mechanism of the person.” Caplan (1961, p.18) explains crisis as “an obstacle that is, for a time, insurmountable by the use of customary methods of problem solving.” During a crisis, Caplan (1961) explains that a time of disorganization and upset is experienced while attempts at a solution are made. Put simply, a crisis is “an upset in the steady state of the individual” (Caplan, 1961, p.18). Hoff (1995, p.4) defines a crisis as “an acute emotional upset arising from situational, developmental, or socio-cultural sources resulting in a temporary inability to cope by means of one’s usual problem-solving devices.” Kanel (2003) explains the concept of crisis in three parts in order to highlight its different features. As Kanel (2003, p.1) asserts that a crisis is, “(1) a precipitating event occurs; (2) the perception of this event leads subjective distress; and (3) usual coping methods fail, leading the person experiencing the event to function psychologically, emotionally, or behaviorally at a lower level than before the precipitating event occurred.” According to Kanel

(2003, p.2), understanding the three parts of a crisis provides a model for understanding the process of crisis formation:



As a process, the formation of a crisis situation seems to implicitly focus on the negative or dangerous aspects of crises, effectively conjuring up images of out of control panic. However, Kanel (2003) and Hoff (1995) maintain that a state of crisis can be defined as both danger and opportunity. This definition has been taken from the Chinese language where the word “crisis” is written with two symbols: one meaning danger and the other meaning opportunity (Figure 1.1). This dichotomous understanding of crisis denotes the potential risks while simultaneously pointing to the possible benefits of a crisis situation.

Figure 1.1 The Chinese Symbol for Crisis



Origins of Crisis

In order to outline the potential sources of support and resources that are needed to effectively assist communities in crisis, some insight into the origins or root sources of crises is needed. Here, it seems reasonable to suppose that by thinking about the possible reasons that problems begin, we might enhance our ability to develop strategies about the social resources and supports needed to positively impact the outcome of a crisis. In addition, by examining the possible origins of crises, we might also begin to develop understandings about the risk factors or indicators associated with a crisis.

According to Hoff (1995), the origins of crisis frequently fall into three general categories: situational, transitional, and cultural/social-structural. In a situational crisis, Gilliland and James (1988) explain that a crisis emerges in conjunction with the occurrence of extraordinary events that a person, family or community has no way of predicting or controlling. While a situational crisis may have varying degrees of intensity, it can be identified by four main characteristics: (1) sudden onset, (2) unexpectedness, (3) quality of emergency and (4) potential impact on the community (Slaikeu, 1990, p.64). Here, situational crises may originate in the attempt to deal with natural or man-made disasters (for example, fire, flood, snowstorms, war), violent crimes (rape, assault, mugging) diagnosis of a serious or fatal illness, or the death of a loved one (Slaikeu, 1990; Raphael, 1986; Baldwin, 1978). The precipitating events of transitional or developmental crises may originate in life-stage passages (for example, the transition from childhood to puberty and adolescence, marriage, parenthood, divorce, retirement). Although transitional crises can be anticipated and prepared for, and while each individual's response to the challenges presented during the transition from one life stages to another is unique, Hoff (1995) notes that natural changes in roles, body image, self-image and perception of the world has the potential to evoke depression, turmoil, or withdrawal. Frequently, the challenges and changes met, for example, in the transition to adolescence are severely acute for young people growing up in communities riddled with multiple socio-economic stressors. Finally, crises arising from cultural/social-structural sources originate from outside the individual and are frequently beyond the control of a single individual. In these situations, people frequently experience heightened psychological vulnerability and increased difficulty in making sense of the precipitating event than when the crisis is situational or transitional (Hoff, 1995; Perloff, 1983). Crises from cultural/social-structural sources involve discriminatory treatment on the basis of, for example, ethnicity, gender, age, ability, or sexual orientation. Embedded within the societal devaluation of diversity and difference, cultural/social-structural crises are evident in, for example, the experience of violence against women, hate crimes against homosexuals, racial discrimination in the labour market and in the workplace, in educational institutions, and in efforts to secure the basic necessities of housing and health services. Hoff (1995) notes that other examples of cultural/social-structural crises include institutionalization and forced relocation

related to economic factors and determined on the basis of class, and/or ethnicity. One of the most disturbing features of cultural/social-structural crises stemming from the experience of personal and institutional discrimination and racism is the process of internalized oppression whereby a person or target group experiencing discrimination or racism unconsciously believes that the myths, misinformation and stereotypes directed at them are true. The result is often self-hatred, self-destructive behaviour, a sense of helplessness and/or horizontal violence (violence perpetrated on people of one's own group) (Bishop, 2002; Freire, 1970).

Indicators of Communities in Crisis

In just the same way that individuals are entwined with family and friends, so families and friends are connected to communities. The violent murder of a young woman in a small town may impact the whole community in addition to creating a situational crisis among her family and friends. Similarly, the death of young person by suicide frequently evokes a tremendous amount of grief and fear within a small, isolated community. In a metropolitan centre, the abduction of a young child invariably incites widespread fear for the safety of children.

While the ripple effect of traumatic events may frequently evoke a crisis response throughout a village, town or urban centre, the socio-economic inequalities that exist among racial and ethnic groups is capable of evoking large-scale and volatile crises within communities. Hoff (1995) cites the example of the violent Los Angeles race riots that erupted on April 29, 1992, when four white police officers were acquitted of felony assault while arresting black motorist, Rodney King. Immediately following the announcement of the verdict, the city of Los Angeles experienced three days of violence - a racial confrontation resulting in loss of life and more than one billion dollars in damage.

In many ways, similar incidents taint Canada's contemporary relationship with First Nations peoples. For example, in the summer of 1990, a standoff was triggered between the Mohawk community of Kanesatake, the tactical intervention squad of the Sûreté du Québec (the Quebec Provincial Police) and (eventually) the Canadian army. In what has become known as "the Oka crisis," the Mohawk's protest against the encroachment of the Oka Golf Club onto their

ancestral burial grounds resulted in a violent 78-day confrontation that garnered international attention (York & Pindera, 1991). Five years later, the First Nation peoples of Stoney Point occupied Ipperwash Provincial Park in an effort to reclaim their sacred burial grounds. In the confrontation between the people of Stoney Point First Nation and more than 200 Ontario Provincial Police (including the elite Tactics and Rescue unit), First Nations protester, Dudley George, was killed. While a wrongful death civil suit was brought by the George family against the Ontario government and the Ontario Provincial Police, the release of a videotape containing racist comments made by police officers during the standoff suggests that a crisis state continues to exist between First Nations peoples, the state and police (Edwards, 2001). The recent and violent events surrounding Mi'kmaq First Nation of Burnt Church lobster fishing during 1999 might also suggest that the social and economic inequalities First Nations peoples continue to experience is a primary factor in triggering large-scale community crises.

Additionally, environmental hazards impact the health and wellbeing of many First Nations children. The World Health Organization (1999) indicates that many indigenous peoples worldwide face significant environmental health hazards. Many First Nations communities are proximal to industrial sites such as ports, lumber mills, mines, toxic waste dumps, and military bases which present a whole range of possible hazards to communities that could impact on children and youth. Additionally, communities proximal to urban areas often have highways, airports, and seaways proximal or passing through reserve lands. These transportation links introduce the possibility of accidents, spillage of toxic substances, and the introduction of contaminants into water systems which can have significant impacts for children. Additionally, pollutants that find their way into traditional food sources such as fish, game and plants have direct impacts on children's health or indirectly through prenatal diet (Canadian Institute on Child Health, no date).

While the widespread social and economic deprivations that threaten basic survival have become markers of acute crisis states in too many First Nations communities, the precipitating realities of pervasive family violence and epidemic rates of suicide among youth frequently exacerbate a chronically stressful community environment (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Health Canada, 1997; Kirmayer, 1994; La Rocque, 1994;). Frequently lacking culturally relevant school

and community-based educational/prevention programs and support services (crisis centres, safe houses, grief counseling, healing interventions), child and family service agencies are often the only on-reserve organization capable of providing crisis response resources.

An overview of the crisis literature suggests that a community's ability to manage and resolve crises depends on a number of readily available and accessible social and community services and resources (Hoff, 1995; Maguire, 1991; Caplan, 1964; Australia, 2000). The absence of these "supplies" increases a community's vulnerability to crisis and impairs adaptive crisis resolution. As the Australian Government (2000) found, working within indigenous community cultures and beliefs, and utilizing community resources wherever possible, were key aspects of effective crisis responses in indigenous families. As evident in the above examples, crises originating from cultural/social-structural origins frequently indicate that a wide range of environmental coping resources designed to positively impact underlying social and economic inequalities is severely lacking or virtually non-existent within the context of the community. While a number of indicators may work to identify a community at risk, Hoff (1995) suggests the three interconnected factors are:

- Social and economic instability of individual family units within the community.
- Low level at which individual and family intrapersonal needs are met within a community.
- Inadequate community resources to meet the social, housing, economic and health and recreational needs of individuals and families.

Without these foundational social and environmental supports and resources, community crises will remain unresolved. In communities of people whose lives are characterized by chronic underemployment and unemployment in addition to the persistent exposure to discrimination, inadequate or non-existent intra-personal, and socio-economic supports and resources tends to create a crisis-prone environment. However, crises exacerbated by cultural/social-structural inequalities and/or the virtual absence of supportive community services systems also present the opportunity to explore the ways and means we might begin to enhance the strength and social capital within the context of disenfranchised communities.

In a related study, Stanley (2003) reviews the impacts of the conceptualization of child maltreatment programs that are predicated on Euro-western pedagogy focusing on the interaction

between child and parent fail to adequately consider the following related dimensions that have particular relevance in indigenous communities:

- Parental history
- Child and family interaction with community
- Broader societal issues

First Nations child and family services in Canada are required to follow provincial child welfare legislation that gives significant weight to parental child interactions with minimal program emphasis on other dimensions. In addition, DIAND funding formulas for child welfare are geared to support provincial legislation and do not adequately resource programs to that address the remaining dimensions of child maltreatment. In this scenario, it is difficult to imagine how First Nations child and family service agencies could adequately respond to crisis that impact children and families that occur outside of the child-family loci of relationship.

Thus a review of the literature would suggest that arriving at one definition of communities in crisis would not adequately reflect the diverse contexts in which First Nations child and family service agencies operate. Rather an approach that considers the following factors is suggested:

- Degree of community infrastructure including but not limited to: emergency services, child and family supports, band schools, health care, transportation, food banks, facilities that could act as emergency housing for children if needed.
- Degree of community recovery from the impacts of colonization.
- Inventory of possible hazards that could create a crisis for children in communities impacting on FNCFSA including but not limited to: environmental hazards, transportation and industry, socio-economic stress, political unrest, propensity for floods, fires, earthquakes, pervasive impacts from colonization such as high youth suicide rates, family distress and violence.
- Whether a community emergency response plan exists that incorporates the FNCFSA and has provided baseline education to community members on how to support children and youth during and after a crisis.

- Proximity to culturally appropriate specialized crisis response services such as trauma Elders, counselors, suicide prevention programs, alternate care givers, and grief counselors.
- The amount of training and support provided to FNCFSA to prevent and respond to crisis situations in community.

The precipitating event must be considered but it should not on its own form the definition of crisis as the degree of readiness and community infrastructure play key roles in influencing what is and what is not a crisis situation.

Multiple Dimensions of Crisis Response

A survey of the literature reveals three key dimensions to effective community response (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2004; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2004; Australia, 2000.)

- **Prevention and Preparation:** This involves the identification of possible crisis; the development of holistic response programs to respond to various crisis scenarios that integrate community resources with those available from municipal, provincial/territorial and federal governments; developing communications systems, addressing service and resource gaps critical to effective crisis response and training and public education. These responses must be multi-sectoral, incorporate clearly defined roles and responsibilities and include families themselves in developing safety readiness plans. As the American Academy of Pediatrics, 2004 notes “It’s important for all family members to know how to react in an emergency because the best protection is knowing what to do”. In terms of children and youth on-reserve, the First Nations child and family service agency would work with entities such as Chiefs and Council, band schools, Aboriginal Head Start, health programs as well as the provincial or territorial child welfare authority. In general, the greater the number of resources, the increased capacity to respond. Where agencies are the only, or amongst the few, culturally based services on reserve for children and their families, they will be called upon to play a greater role in the crisis response.

- **Crisis Response:** This would involve responding to the crisis event and being able to coordinate effective responses as the nature and extent of the crisis evolve reflecting the tools and resources available to respond. This step is critical given the added vulnerability children and youth face in crisis situations, it also requires that community members be aware of how they can respond to support children and youth in crisis. Contingencies such as children being separated from caregivers, experiencing emotional, spiritual, physical and mental harm must be addressed. Planning should also account for a possible reduction in the number of services available (for example, a community wide natural disaster could render foster homes unavailable, result in agency staff being unavailable, or disrupting communication pathways.)
- **Responding to the Aftermath of Crisis:** Particularly important for children, youth and families this phase helps families understand what happened and address the resulting emotional, physical, spiritual and mental harm that occurred as a result of the event. It also helps staff deal with their reactions to the crisis and assists them in providing optimal support to other community members that will turn to them for support. As the American Academy of Pediatrics reminds us, children may experience the impacts of the traumatic event far after it is over. This requires that agencies develop short and long term plans to assist children and families to readjust to the “new reality” and to help the community learn from the best practices and mistakes arising from crisis to inform future response procedures (FEMA, 2004).

Potential Sources of Services & Funding for Communities in Crisis

An overview of the literature clearly points to the preventative benefit of enhancing systems of social support for communities in crisis (Kanel, 2003; Maguire, 1991; Caplan, 1964, 1974). Working with the unique needs of community members, the enhancement of adaptive crisis resolution has been facilitated through the development of individual and family support groups for people undergoing similar crises (Gambe & Getzel, 1989; Taylor et. al., 1988; Gustein, 1987; Kilpatrick & Pippin, 1987; Halpern, 1986). Given the significant disruption of

typical coping patterns experienced by communities in response to natural disasters, collaborative interdisciplinary teams have worked to design tailored response models for disaster prevention, aid, and follow-up supports and services (Kaniasty & Norris, 1993). Collaborative creativity and collective knowledge sharing has created and maintained powerful networks of supportive community infrastructure through the design of community kitchens, child care co-ops, youth drop-in centres, housing activist groups, family centres, literacy and employment programs, community gardening projects, and co-operative community-based business ventures (Ricks et al., 1999). Supportive services for children, youth and families in rural/remote communities have also been enhanced by providing counseling services and 24-hour crisis intervention.

In considering general needs of communities in crisis and various types of supportive services that might enhance intrapersonal and external environments, the voluntary sector appears to be one of the strongest potential service providers. Here, the talent of voluntary sector organizations to create and sustain innovative systems of support, advocate on behalf of communities, and provide services to vulnerable populations appears to be intrinsically aligned with the needs of communities in crisis. By working in conjunction with voluntary sector organizations and by combining sources of funding from both the state and philanthropic foundations, the dynamic complexities and difficult realities of communities in crisis might be ameliorated. However, Nadjiwan and Blackstock (2003) reveal that this scenario outlining the voluntary sector as a possible provider of supportive services for communities in crisis along with funding provided by the state and philanthropic foundations presents two main difficulties when applied to First Nations communities in crisis. First, Nadjiwan and Blackstock (2003, p. 66) found that many FNCFSA throughout Canada stressed the profound importance of culturally appropriate services delivery to First Nations children, youth and their families. At the same time, voluntary sector organizations working to improve the quality of life for children, youth and families reported “do not know” or “not applicable” in response to questions regarding the needs of First Nations children, youth and families. Second, Nadjiwan and Blackstock (2003) reveal that funding opportunities for First Nations communities is limited by government regimes and agreements which reduce funding to First Nations child and family service agencies if the agency receives funds from other sources. In addition, FNCFSA reported a lack of

knowledge about accessing financial support from philanthropic foundations or from federal/provincial funds directed to the voluntary sector - despite the fact that 53% of FNCFSA reported being incorporated as nonprofit organizations (Nadjiwan & Blackstock, 2003).

Service & Funding Implications for First Nations Child & Family Service Agencies

Although the voluntary sector has clearly identified their mandate to work with First Nations communities and their mission to be instrumental in the development of programs and services that are essential parts of a caring society, their lack of involvement on First Nations reserves places an onerous responsibility on FNCFSA. As one of the few on-reserve organizations providing culturally congruent services for children, youth and families, First Nation child welfare workers are often already responding to community needs which would typically be outside of the mandate of provincial child welfare organization. With extremely high work loads, large catchment areas of responsibility, limited funding opportunities and little time for collaborative problem-solving efforts, First Nations child welfare workers are keenly aware of the need for staff, support workers, and the preventative resources required to respond to the innumerable crises precipitated by the extreme rates of suicide and suicidal behavior among youth, pandemic rates of HIV/AIDS among First Nations women and children, poverty, substandard housing, family violence, alcohol/substance use, lack of educational opportunities, chronic unemployment and underemployment, self-harm and sexual abuse (Anderson, 2003; Health Canada, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, 2003; Nadjiwan and Blackstock, 2003; Matiation, 1999). While lacking environmental resources needed to resolve the crises impacting the lives of First Nations children, youth and families, child welfare workers also face a staggering increase in the number of on-reserve First Nations children coming into the care of FNCFSA (Nadjiwan & Blackstock, 2003). The implications of the lack of voluntary sector services and supports on-reserves suggests that FNCFSA dedicated to assisting children, youth and families who are frequently experiencing crises within the context of living in communities of crisis will continue to present complex difficulties. In turn, the lack of environmental support systems in many First Nations child and family service agencies may have a tendency to foster chronically crisis-prone environments.

An additional stress is that there has not, to our knowledge, been funding provided to First Nations child and family service agencies to develop crisis response programs in partnership with community governments, agencies and community members. This means that there has not been the development of coordinated crisis response programs that integrate First Nations child and family service agencies as key players in ensuring the safety and well being of children and youth. Nor has there been the development of culturally based family empowerment tools such as the American Academy of Pediatrics Family Readiness Kit (2004.)

While the lack of voluntary sector support on First Nations reserves throughout Canada tends to complicate the already complex work of FNCFSA, the situation is severely aggravated by an outdated and inequitable funding formula (McDonald & Ladd, et al., 2000). Under the current funding arrangements, First Nations child and family services agencies are required to enter into tripartite agreements as stipulated by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Affairs (DIAND) policy Directive 20-1. According to Directive 20-1, FNCFSA enter into agreements with provincial/territorial governments in order to obtain the authority to provide services for children and families on-reserve and are accountable to their respective provinces and territories for their standards of practice and quality of care (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2001). In addition, First Nations child and family service agencies are encouraged to develop and incorporate standards for culturally-based child and family services and ensure that the provision of services on-reserve are comparable to those provided by the provincial child welfare system. These services include, for example, children's programs, family violence prevention, adult education and other services that "address individual and family well-being" (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2001). In accordance with Directive 20-1, FNCFSA also must also enter a second set of agreements with the federal government in order to fund the provision of services for children and families on-reserve.

Effectively positioning FNCFSA in a federally financed contracting regime with the provinces, Directive 20-1's mandatory requirement of adherence to provincial/territorial child welfare legislation appears to counter First Nations full jurisdictional control over child welfare on-reserve, effectively limiting the range, level, and scope of services. This situation is also severely aggravated by the "one size fits all" federal funding formula contained within Directive

20-1. Following the *First Nations Child and Family Services Joint National Policy Review: Final Report*, findings reveal that the same level of funding is provided to FNCFS agencies “regardless of how broad, intense or costly, the range of service is” (McDonald & Ladd et al., 2000). In addition, McDonald and Ladd et al (2000) also reveal that while First Nation Child and Family Service agencies have been mandated to provide a comparable range of on-reserve services under Directive 20-1, they receive 22% less funding than their non-Aboriginal provincial counterparts. With annual agency operating expenditures rising at an average rate of 6.2%, funding inequities are compounded by the fact that there has been no corresponding “cost of living” increase adjustments incorporated into the federal funding to FNCFS since 1994/1995 (McDonald & Ladd et al., 2000).

Without the ability to respond to regional variations in agency size, work load, case work analysis, provincial/territorial programming requirements, or population demographics, the inequitable funding formulas dictated by Directive 20-1 tends to severely limit the range, level, and scope of services that FNCFS agencies are able to provide. Understandably, the impact of persistent funding inequities also effectively limits the ability of FNCFS agencies to respond to crises within their communities. Without sufficient funding, agencies are unable to increase staff, update information systems and technology, provide access to specialized education and training, or dedicate the time, resources and collaborative supports needed to design and implement crises responses and preventative programming.

While the lack of voluntary sector supports combined with inequitable funding arrangements clearly limits the supportive infrastructure that FNCFS agencies urgently need to respond to crises within their communities, the rigidity of funding options tends to suggest that First Nations communities do not have the same basic human rights to access the same voluntary sector services that work to improve the lives of every other Canadian. As Nadjiwan and Blackstock (2003) have noted, current government formulas frequently level a financial penalty if FNCFS access other mechanisms of funding. This suggests that the voluntary sector has been positioned as a separate entity rather than in partnership with the government, working to enhance breadth of services and supports that the government can provide (Nadjiwan & Blackstock, 2003). Put another way, the government’s decision to cut funding if voluntary or

philanthropic foundation monies are accessed suggests that the voluntary sector is being used to fill the gap between what the private/corporate sector will not do and what the government refuses to do or fund adequately. This system of government pulling funds as First Nations child and family service agencies diversify funding is not typical of what happens when a municipality locates other dollars to augment the quality of life for citizens. Current funding regimes require review to ensure that access to a comparable range of services reflects the same value added role that the voluntary and corporate sectors play in the lives of children living off-reserves. Additionally, federal funding formulas for First Nations child and family service agencies must support the relationship building needed across sectors in order to optimize crisis response.

It is not acceptable that under current arrangements, First Nations child and family service agencies are under-funded, restricted in their application for provincial venues of funding ineligible for municipal financial support, the implications are clear: bake sales, raffles, bingo revenues, 50/50 draws and community dinners will remain primary venues FNCFSAs employ in their attempt to augment limited government funding. (Nadjiwan & Blackstock, 2003).

Building Respectful Multi-Sector Relationships

While the implications surrounding the lack of voluntary sector services and the nuances of funding seems to imply that FNCFSAs assume responsibility for resolving the disconnection between the voluntary sector, First Nations communities and the state, the resolution of the crises facing too many communities in one segment of the Canadian population cannot be addressed in isolation. Here, collaborative relationships create the possibility of sharing knowledge, developing new understandings and creating transformative solutions. However, in a cross cultural context, new frameworks for the nurturing of collaborative relationships must take hold. The following points attempt to outline the essential features of collaborative multi-sector relationships capable of actualizing the mutually beneficial creation and empowerment of healthy communities.

- *Recognizing, Affirming and Reaffirming Human Rights* – in Canada, the fundamental human right to equality is protected by the Canadian Human Rights Act, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and legal international human rights agreements that Canada has

signed. This legal framework protects the rights that all individuals have, including First Nations peoples, to create a life free from the disadvantages of discrimination on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, sexual orientation, marital/family status or ability. This process of recognizing, affirming and reaffirming the equal rights of Indigenous peoples to live in freedom from discrimination and oppression has also been enshrined in *United Nations draft declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples* (United Nations, 1994). In a collaborative relationship, it is imperative to recognize, respect and reaffirm the human rights of First Nations peoples by actively working to prevent discrimination via proactive measures that have the potential to transform systems and structures in ways that ensure the inclusion of *all* peoples.

- *Developing Knowledge and Trust* – in exploring the nature and extent of access to voluntary sector services by First Nations children, youth and families, Nadjiwan and Blackstock (2003) revealed the foremost barrier to collaboration was a pervasive lack of information/ knowledge about First Nations peoples. In just the same way the First Nations child welfare workers and agencies have a responsibility to gather information about the role of the voluntary sector, so voluntary sector workers and organizations have an obligation to learn about the history, contemporary realities, needs and unique aspirations of First Nations peoples. In the co-creation of knowledge, the combination of mutual learning efforts and abilities works to create a spirit of trust. In turn, the critical component of trust fosters the creation of an environment capable of supporting outreach, dialogue and the exchange of information that is needed to overcome stereotypes, and mutual assumptions.

- *Creating Culturally Congruent Services & Programming* – while the belief that “one size fits all” has tended to characterize the top down bureaucratic approach to service delivery among the many and diverse First Nations communities, the need for culturally congruent services and programs is especially urgent given the severity of community crisis indicators. In part, it may seem reasonable to suppose that because we share the basic human requirements of food, shelter and safety, the design of supportive environments and programs dedicated to ensuring that these primary

needs are met will necessarily work to the benefit all people, across all cultures. However, working in conjunction with the concerted effort to build knowledge and trusting relationships, the mobilization of community knowledge, strengths and capacity has the potential to dispel the illusion of First Nations peoples as a hegemonic or monolithic entity and promote a conscious awareness of the unique values, norms, traditions and experiential understandings within the specific culture and community. As a consequence, we can begin to create services, programs, alternatives and solutions that are truly grounded each distinct culture.

- *Supporting Self-Determination & Self-Government* – developing a mutual foundation of knowledge, working to build trusting relationships, and developing a working level of cultural competency suggests a process of collaboration committed to the full and meaningful participation of First Nations peoples in the co-creation of services and programs designed to meet the needs delineated by the community. However, in shifting the emphasis from “doing for” to “doing with,” the design of culturally congruent services and programs tends remain silent about the understanding and support needed regarding the theoretical foundations necessitating cultural congruent services and program design in the first place. Here, First Nations’ inherent rights to self-determination and self-government must be recognized in the development of culturally congruent services and programs that authentically support increasing community control of organizations that help preserve and strengthen the culture. By working with First Nations communities to support land claims and strengthen their control over the delivery of child and family services, education, health services, and policing/justice, we can begin to address what it means to live responsibly in the present with a view toward building a just future for First Nations children and youth.

Implementing Recommendations

In the *Joint National Policy Review Final Report*, McDonald and Ladd, et al.(2000) outline 17 recommendations that have the potential to enhance the ability of First Nations

specific agencies to effectively serve children, youth and families. The importance of working to strengthen the quality of service provision and programming is indisputable given the fact many First Nations child and family service agencies are the only on-reserve organizations providing culturally relevant support structures for children, youth and families. Taking into consideration the brutally painful legacy of community disruption created by the one-sided child welfare practices of the past, the dedication of FNCFS agencies in providing care in the context of the community and culture has become an essential mechanism in redressing a legacy of injustices and working to strengthen First Nations communities. However, without structural systems of support, limited funding and restricted financial options combined with a growing demand for services has created numerous difficulties and concerns for FNCFS.

In an attempt to explore areas of concern and identify areas of possible of improving upon the impact of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development's (DIAND) national policies governing FNCFS, the 17 recommendations put forth in the *Joint National Policy Review Final Report* focus on four themes: governance, legislation and standards, communications and funding (McDonald and Ladd, et al., 2000). While a significant finding revealed that DIAND's Directive 20-1 is inflexible, outdated and provides insufficient support, the crisis state in many First Nations communities clearly indicates the urgent need to support the implementation of the recommendations set forth in the *Joint National Policy Review Final Report* (McDonald and Ladd, et al., 2000).

Recommendation 1 – Comparable Funding

In response to the acute social and economic realities that often create a crisis situation in many First Nations communities and frequently place a large number of children at risk, the *Joint National Policy Review Final Report* (McDonald and Ladd, et al., 2000) recommends the design of a new funding method capable of assisting FNCFS agencies who are frequently the first and often the only line of response in a crisis situation. Moreover, we need to design and establish a funding formula that is capable of addressing unique regional variations agency size, work load, case work analysis, provincial/territorial programming requirements, and population demographics while giving immediate priority to equalizing funding to First Nations agencies.

Combined with an average of 22% less funding than their non-Aboriginal agency counterparts, First Nations child and family service agencies have received no allowance for additional capital funds for increased cost of living adjustments since the 1994/1995 fiscal year (McDonald and Ladd, et al.). *For all First Nations agencies and especially ones responding to crisis situations, funding inequities have created an increasingly untenable situation. There must also be funds allocated for all agencies to develop crisis prevention, response and crisis aftermath programs with governments (First Nations, provincial/territorial, federal), proximal municipalities, agencies (such as schools, daycare, police, health programs, youth centres) and families themselves which ensure the safety and well being of children throughout the crisis prevention, response and aftermath continuum.*

Recommendation 2 – Building Community Capacity

The crisis situation in many First Nations communities indicates the urgent need for the development of responsive services and programs capable supporting families, protecting children and youth, and promoting community healing. Frequently, the responsibility for the delivery of these services has fallen squarely on the shoulders of many FNCFS agencies. However, Directive 20-1 has failed to provide the capital funds needed to develop community infrastructure, support community-based wellness programs, provide holistic services for youth, or design on-reserve child care options. *We support the recommendation that capital funds be dedicated to the development of community infrastructure that is capable of supporting community-guided approaches to healing. Additionally, funds should be allocated to First Nations to develop culturally based crisis prevention and response materials ensuring that they are available in the referent indigenous languages, English and French.*

Recommendation 3 – Moving to Prevention

The urgency of the crisis situation in many First Nations communities along with a corresponding increase in the demand for services and a lack of supportive resources and funding has the potential to create a reactive rather than proactive stance in the provision of services and in the design of programs to address the needs of children, youth and families. Here, findings

from the *Joint National Policy Review Final Report* (McDonald and Ladd, et al., 2000) suggest a more flexible approach to funding that allows FNCFS to re-allocate funds or create a separate line of funding dedicated to prevention research, the documentation and exchange of best practices, and the development of innovative services and programs for children, youth and families at risk. *We support the recommendation of flexible funding arrangements that are capable of facilitating preventative research, promoting the exchange of knowledge surrounding best practices, and supporting the development of preventative programming.*

Recommendation 4 – Building Relationships

While the crisis situation in many First Nations communities frequently increases the need for child, youth and family services, Directive 20-1 provides no mechanism for First Nations agencies to develop collaborative relationships or foster organizational linkages. In many cases, the everyday work of responding to crisis in chronically stressful environments completely taxes the already extremely limited resources available. In communities experiencing repeated incidents of family violence, homelessness, chronic unemployment, poverty, and exposure to systemic discrimination, the additional realities of insufficient agency funding, staff shortages, “burn out” among front line workers, and woefully inadequate structural supports within the community often prohibit allocation of resources to establish collaborative relationships, cooperative partnerships, and networks of support. Here, the *Joint National Policy Review Final Report* points to the need to dedicate human and financial resources in order to facilitate the education and awareness, the development of community communication plans. Further relationship building must be integrated into the funding formula as a funded line item in order to support collaborations between First Nations child and family service agencies and other organizations on and off reserve. DIAND should also work collaboratively with other departments to ensure that the voluntary sector receives the support it needs to enter into respectful relationships with First Nations that benefit children, youth and families. *We support the recommendation to create the resources and supports needed to foster inter-agency and community collaboration. We agree that formal structures and processes are needed to facilitate collaboration with other departments, organizations and agencies and create linkages within*

and between First Nations communities/organizations and the voluntary sector. Furthermore, expenses incurred by FNCFSA during times of crisis should be reimbursed at actual costs.

Coordination of Government Response

First Nations child and family service agencies exist in a broader community context. As noted earlier, crisis response programs are by nature interdisciplinary. There is a need for the First Nations child and family service agency crisis response to be coordinated with other organizations. It was unclear from the literature, if collaborative crisis response programs had been developed in partnership between First Nations and the federal government or to what degree First Nations child and family service agencies had been involved in said projects. *The federal government should clearly identify its existing policies, programs and resources related to crisis response in First Nations communities on- reserve and provide that information to First Nations child and family service agencies to aid them in optimizing their role. In the event that federal policies, programs and resources do not exist, there is a strong recommendation to develop them in partnership with First Nations and incorporate the views of First Nations child and family service agencies.*

Discussion: Strengths & Limitations

In a discussion of strategies for social research, Morgan (1983) reminds us that research is primarily a process of interaction and engagement with different forms of knowledge. By viewing the object of our knowledge in different ways, there emerges the possibility of realizing new potentials and possibilities. In this research process, Nadjiwan and Blackstock's (2003) *Caring across the boundaries: Promoting access to voluntary sector resources for First Nations children and families* provided the foundational body of knowledge needed to continue exploring the potentials and possibilities of voluntary sector support for First Nations children, youth and families living on-reserve. In the process of examining the significant base of knowledge developed by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, and by exploring the emerging literature addressing the realities and concerns of First Nations peoples living on-reserve, this review report offers preliminary suggestions and recommendations regarding the

development of respectful and mutually beneficial relationships between the voluntary sector and First Nations communities. The profound need for this relationship is especially evident given the painful realities facing many First Nations communities. As this study indicates, there is a need for real change and a real need to support the effort required to “see” the world differently by creating relationships that foster justice, equal access to services, improved opportunities and inclusion in the democratic process. There are benefits for the voluntary sector as well including exposure to innovative culturally based ways of caring for children, different systems of community care (volunteerism), program governance/management and augmenting organizational skills and reach through partnership arrangements with First Nations.

As the literature on effective crisis response notes, enhanced relationships between First Nations and the voluntary sector alone will not be enough to ensure that communities can adequately respond to crisis situations involving children. Investment in coordinated and multi-disciplinary strategies and programs that include the corporate and government sectors and affirm the role of families themselves to respond to crisis situations are urgently needed.

While examining knowledge from new perspectives has provided the opportunity to make visible the realities of First Nations communities in Canada and explore the emancipatory possibilities available in a relationship between the voluntary sector and First Nations communities, the research process also presented challenges. In part, time constraints have limited the breadth and depth of this work. Given the dearth of information addressing collaborative relationships and ventures between the voluntary sector and First Nation communities, considerable time is required to do justice to the extensive body of interdisciplinary knowledge that has the potential to inform the development of collaborative relationships and supportive services for communities in crisis. In addition, there is now a significant body of scholarship that faithfully reflects the experiences of First Nations communities and illuminates their projects of discovery, political change and journeys of healing. This body of literature warrants the time and support needed to generate new ideas, map out new ways of conceptualizing collaborative relationships across cultures, and engage in the cross-disciplinary discussions that have the potential to change how we think about addressing social problems. By fostering an environment that seeks to strengthen our capacity to

communicate across our differences in order to cooperatively engage in problem-solving, there emerges the possibility of solidifying respectful connections that have the potential to support the social change that is urgently needed to create a better world for us *all* and ensure a just future for our First Nations children and youth.

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