



First
Nations
Children's
Action
Research and
Education
Service

FNCARES

ANNUAL REPORT 2020 2021



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF EDUCATION



First
Nations
Children's
Action
Research and
Education
Service

This report reflects activities from August 2020–July 2021

Copyright © 2021. All Rights Reserved

First Nations Children's Action Research and Education Service

Faculty of Education, University of Alberta

Email: fncares@ualberta.ca

Web: fncaringsociety.com/fncares

Facebook: [facebook.com/fncares](https://www.facebook.com/fncares)

Twitter: [@fncares](https://twitter.com/fncares)

CONTENTS

About Us	3
A Message from the Director	4
Activities Carried out this Year	5
Education and Engagement Events	5
Indigenous Knowledge Portal	9
Research	10
Media	11
Resource Development and Distribution	11
Film Distribution	12
Publications	12



ABOUT US

The First Nations Children’s Action Research and Education Service (FNCARES) is a partnership between the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society (Caring Society) of Canada and the University of Alberta’s Faculty of Education. Established in 2012 by Dr. Cindy Blackstock, FNCARES draws on well-established research on the structural drivers of disadvantage for First Nations children, youth, and families to develop community-based solutions to ongoing discrimination and inequities.

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



Cindy Blackstock (Director) and Spirit Bear



Melisa Brittain (Research Associate)



First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA FACULTY OF EDUCATION

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Residential school survivors knew the children were buried there because some of them dug their graves. Survivors told their truths to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in hopes that the public, the government, and churches would hear them and take measures to remedy historic and contemporary crimes and injustices toward First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. The truth was too confronting to the public narrative of a benevolent Canada, so it was not heard until the bodies were discovered. The challenge now is to ensure the public does not think that the injustices are just in the past, and to spur them to take action to press governments, churches, and others to implement the solutions required to remedy the ongoing injustices.

This past year, FNCARES has continued its research and public education work so that this generation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit truth-tellers are listened to, and that evidence-informed solutions are acted upon. Our work to develop, evaluate, and implement child-friendly curriculum that centres the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action is important for working towards these larger goals.

The pandemic has meant that we had to hold most events on-line, but it also afforded us an opportunity to think more creatively about how this new virtual space could be leveraged to reach a wider array of people and communities. We were able to host a premiere screening of *Spirit Bear and Children Make History* for children and families in Alberta and throughout the country, and to collaborate with Wahkohtowin Law and Governance Lodge on a seminar on Bill C-92, the *Act Respecting First Nations, Métis and Inuit children, youth and families*. We were also pleased to co-host a screening of the film *(Dis)placed: Indigenous youth and the child welfare system* with the Alberta College of Social Workers and the Canadian Association of Social Workers. The screening also signalled the launch of a learning guide to accompany the film.

We were very honoured to collaborate with the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) on the Touchstones of Hope Dialogue Series, which brought together experts from Native American, Alaskan Native, and First Nations communities on topics in child welfare ranging from self-determination to funding.

In addition, our work to evaluate the impact of children's engagement in reconciliation efforts continues, and we are excited to build upon our research findings by launching *The Spirit Bear Virtual School for Teachers* later this year.

We wish to thank NICWA, the University of Alberta's Faculty of Education, Wahkohtowin Law and Governance Lodge, the Alberta College of Social Workers, Nicholas Ng-A-Fook and Lisa Howell from the University of Ottawa Department of Education, and the children and families throughout Canada who continue to inspire our work. Special thanks to Melisa Brittain for ensuring that FNCARES continued to contribute during the pandemic.

Respectfully,
Cindy Blackstock

ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT THIS YEAR

Education and Engagement Events

***Spirit Bear and Children Make History* – Virtual Film Launches and Webinars**

Spirit Bear and Children Make History (2020, 26 min.) is a stop-motion animation film based on the book by the same name. It was adapted for screen by Michif animator Amanda Strong and Cindy Blackstock. The film tells the story of Spirit Bear hopping a train to Ottawa and banding together with children and animals to end injustice against First Nations children at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. Based on a real case that resulted in Canada being ordered to end its discriminatory underfunding of services for First Nations kids, this film was made especially for children, but is essential viewing for all Canadians.



Alberta virtual film premiere and interview with Cindy Blackstock

On the evening of November 18, 2020, we premiered *Spirit Bear and Children Make History* in an online event that reached over 200 households in Canada. After a screening of the film, Cindy Blackstock joined Melisa Brittain in the Kiwi Productions studio (Edmonton) for a live in-studio interview, where Cindy answered questions submitted from viewers across the country. Thank you to Kiwi Productions for making this a reality on very short notice, and to our partners at the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society for providing the film.



Melisa Brittain interviewing Cindy Blackstock in Kiwi Productions Studio

Virtual film launch in schools across Canada

In partnership with the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society, we launched the film *Spirit Bear and Children Make History* in schools across Canada between November 16 and 27, 2020. Over 700 teachers registered to watch the film with their students and use the [Lesson Plans for the Book and Film](#) to explore major themes presented in the story and prepare students to share their learning with their community and take action towards reconciliation.

Following the film screenings, teachers and students tuned into one of two livestream webinars featuring Cindy Blackstock and Spirit Bear plus three special guests: Theland Kicknosway, who is the voice of Spirit Bear in the film, Raiyah Patel, a young person who has participated in the Caring Society's campaigns for many years, and Danielle Fontaine, a retired teacher who attended the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal hearings on equity for First Nations children with her students.

- Film info and trailer: fncaringsociety.com/films
- Video of the webinar for schools: youtube.com/watch?v=Qklyet01mWo
- Lesson Plans for the Book and Film: fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/lesson_plans_for_the_book_and_film.pdf
- Purchase *Spirit Bear and Children Make History*: winnipegfilmgroup.com/product/spirit-bear-and-children-make-history-dvd/

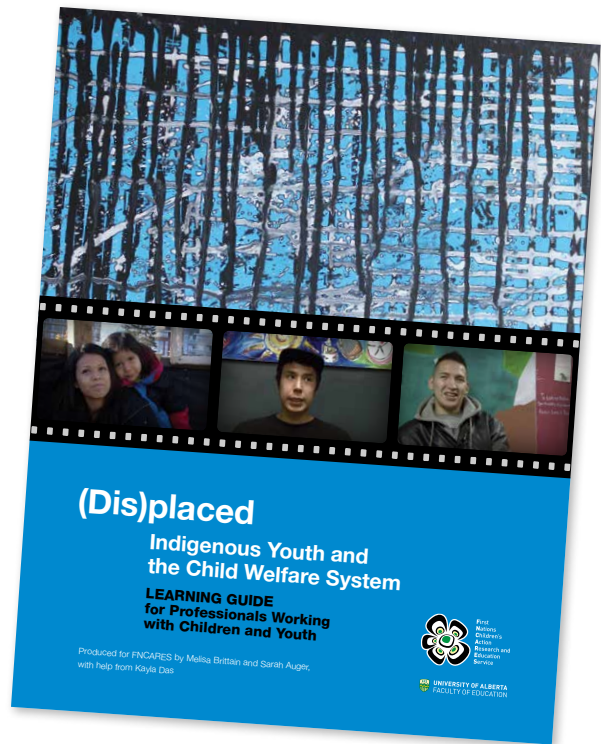


Webinar presenters for virtual film launch, clockwise from bottom right: Theland Kicknosway, Raiyah Patel, Emily Williams, Cindy Blackstock, Danielle Fontaine

(Dis)placed Film Screening and Learning Guide Launch

On November 24, 2020, FNCARES partnered with the Alberta College of Social Workers (ACSW) and the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) for a webinar launch of our *Learning Guide for Professionals Working with Indigenous Children and Youth*. The learning guide was developed to accompany our film *(Dis)placed: Indigenous youth and the child welfare system* (2017, 42 min). Over 750 social work professionals and others attended from across Canada, and more than 330 have watched the webinar 'on demand' since then.

The webinar featured an opening prayer by Elder Wil Campbell, a screening of the film, an introduction to the learning guide by Melisa Brittain (the film's director), and a lively panel discussion with leading social workers, educators, and child advocates: Cindy Blackstock (Caring Society), Bernadette Lahtail (Creating Hope Society), Julie Mann-Johnson (University of Calgary) and Michelle Briegel (Mount Royal University). These panelists also contributed to writing the learning guide. Other collaborators on the learning guide were Kayla Das, Charity Lui, Derek Chewka, Crystal Beaverbones, and Andrea Auger. This learning guide is a revision of the *Teaching Guide for Grades 9-12* (2019) written by Sarah Auger (University of Alberta) and Melisa Brittain (FNCARES).



The film features the voices of Indigenous youth as they reflect on their prior involvement with the child welfare system and their multiple strategies of resistance to assimilation. The learning guide is ideal for professional workshops or individual use, containing crucial background information on the historical and contemporary colonial contexts for the overwhelmingly high number of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children in the child welfare system, and the importance of cultural continuity for their wellbeing. It includes sample questions and activities, asks professionals to reflect on their own ethical values and beliefs in light of ongoing colonial practices in child welfare, and encourages participants to take part in social justice and solidarity work to help end ongoing inequities and discrimination.

Many thanks to the panelists, and to Charity Lui (ACSW), Heather Johnson (ACSW), and Alexandra Zannis (CASW), for all their work planning and hosting this event. Thanks, also, to the following partners: Creating Hope Society of Alberta, University of Calgary, Mount Royal University, Child Welfare League of Canada, and Child & Youth Care Association of Alberta.

As always, we want to send our greatest appreciation to the young people in the film – Tyler Blackface, Tia Ledesma and Donovan Waskahat – for sharing their truths, so that we can all continue to learn from them and make changes to help ensure the best possible outcomes for Indigenous children, youth, and families.

- Anyone can register to watch the webinar (excluding the film) for free by following this link and registering: casw-acts.ca/en/webinar/displaced-learning-guide-film-screening-and-learning-guide-launch
- Find the free Learning Guide here: fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/displaced_learning_guide_for_professionals_-_online.pdf
- To preview and/or purchase the film, contact Vtape: vtape.org/video?vi=8693

Bill C-92: The Good, the Bad & the Unknowns – Part II

On April 22, 2021, FNCARES partnered with Wahkohtowin Law and Governance Lodge and the Faculties of Law and Native Studies at the University of Alberta on Part II of our series on *Bill C-92: An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*. In this webinar, Cindy Blackstock, Hadley Friedland, and Koren Lightning-Earle discussed emerging issues with Bill C-92 since it became law on January 1, 2020. Discussion included issues pertaining to jurisdiction, national standards, and the government's ongoing non-compliance with elements of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal's ruling on First Nations child welfare, as it relates to Bill C-92. Over 270 registered for the live webinar, and another 300 viewers have watched since the video was posted on YouTube at the beginning of July.

Thanks to the presenters, and to moderator Shelby Thomas, for an excellent panel discussion. And thank you to Aileen Reilly (Faculty of Law) and Jade Brown-Tootoosis (Faculty of Native Studies) for all their hard work to make this event a success.

- Watch *Bill C-92, The good, the bad and the unknowns – Part I*: youtube.com/watch?v=I7tMq0ta0D0
- Watch *Bill C-92, The good, the bad and the unknowns – Part II*: youtube.com/watch?v=NiVKyTB_c5U
- For additional resources on the implementation of Bill C-92, check out Wahkohtowin Law and Governance Lodge's website, where they regularly share excellent resources: ualberta.ca/wahkohtowin/research-areas.html



Clockwise from top right: Shelby Thomas, Hadley Friedland, Koren Lightning-Earle, Cindy Blackstock

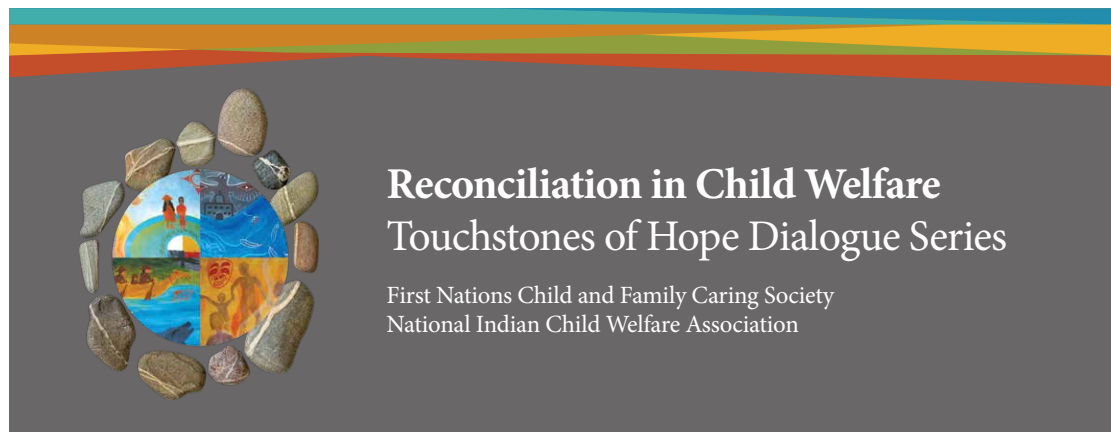
Reconciliation in Child Welfare: Touchstones of Hope Dialogue Series

This year, the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society is partnering with the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) on a webinar series aimed at engaging Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples from Canada and the United States in conversations about the five principles at the foundation of the Touchstones of Hope in child welfare: Self-Determination; Culture and Language; Holistic Approach; Structural Interventions; and Non-Discrimination.

Hosted by Jocelyn Formsma (Executive Director of the National Association of Friendship Centres), this seven-part, bi-monthly series brings together experts from Native American, Alaskan Native, and First Nations communities to share their knowledge and experiences embedding Indigenous ways of caring for children and families into child and family services, policies, and practices.

Upcoming dialogues include: "Touchstones of Hope: Culture and Language" on September 21 and "Touchstones of Hope: Structural Interventions" on November 16.

- Read more, watch videos of past sessions, and sign up for future sessions here: nicwa.org/touchstones-of-hope-dialogues/



Indigenous Knowledge Portal

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

Search the Indigenous Knowledge Portal:
fncaringsociety.com/ikp



Research

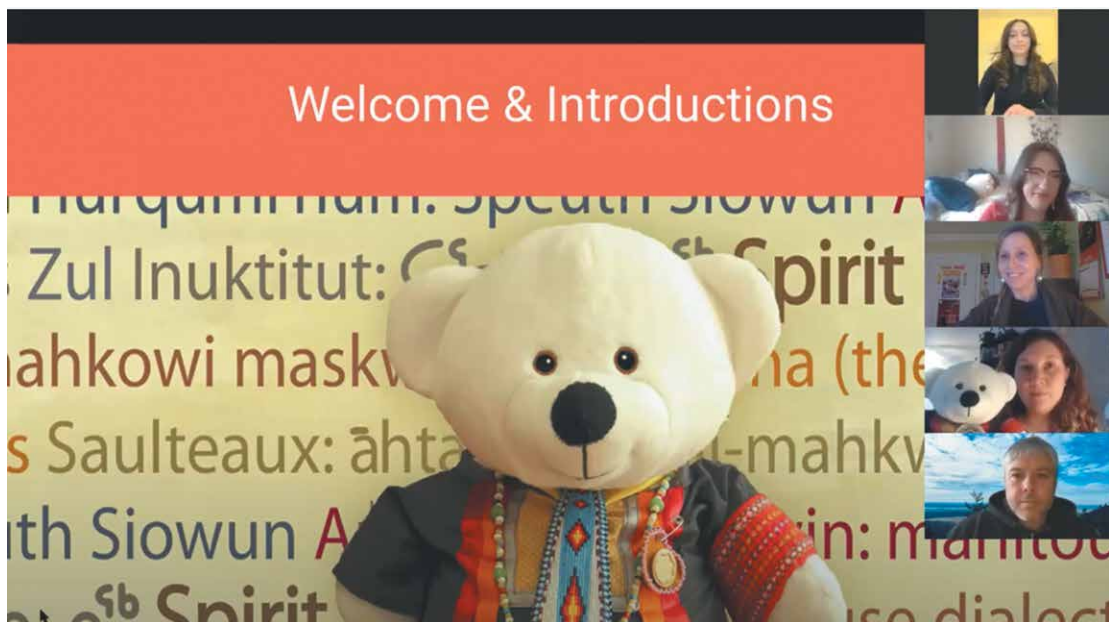
Just because we're small doesn't mean we can't stand tall: Reconciliation education in the elementary classroom

This SSHRC-funded research project studies the impacts of the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society's social justice-based reconciliation campaigns on elementary students and teachers. Led by Dr. Cindy Blackstock (McGill University) and co-investigators Dr. Nicholas Ng-A-Fook and Dr. Sue Bennett (University of Ottawa), this project will advance knowledge about implementing a social-justice reconciliation approach within elementary school curriculum frameworks and standards and create knowledge and resources that school boards and educators can use to implement this education in elementary classrooms.

Phase I of the study found that, for the most part, teachers and students who engaged in the Caring Society campaigns had positive and transformative learning experiences. Researchers also found that teachers would benefit a great deal from the following: a centralized place for access to resources on the campaigns; learning guides specific to each campaign; opportunities to access other educators teaching the campaigns; and access to mentors who could help guide them as they learn to teach the material in their classrooms.

In response to these findings, the research team is developing an interactive online resource for teachers and educational professionals called *The Spirit Bear Virtual School for Teachers*. On this website, educators will find the *Spirit Bear Beary Caring Curriculum* and lesson plans for each campaign; they will meet fellow teachers who have experience in elementary and secondary education for reconciliation; and they will have access to webinars designed to help them teach the curriculum. Our research team is currently working on a draft of the curriculum and lesson plans, and we hope to launch the *Spirit Bear Virtual School for Teachers* by the end of 2021. In the meantime, we are working with teachers to get feedback on the resources as they are drafted.

- To find out more, watch the *Spirit Bear Virtual School Webinar*, where researchers speak about the research project and the development of the *Spirit Bear Virtual School for Teachers*: youtube.com/watch?v=R0LcrGsxBHE



Presenters at Spirit Bear Virtual School webinar from top: Raiyah Patel, Madelaine McCracken, Lisa Howell, Andrea Auger and Spirit Bear, Nicholas Ng-A-Fook



A Call to Self-Reflection and Action

BY JULIE MANN-JOHNSON, MELISA BRITAIN AND MELISA BRITAIN, PhD



Cover of Unleashed Learning Guide for Professionals Working with Children and Youth (Loving Change)

JULIE: Melisa Brittain is a filmmaker, researcher, academic, and educator doing important work highlighting social justice issues. I have shared Melisa's film (*Displaced*), Indigenous youth and the child welfare system with students and have won the critical thinking it inspires. I have collaborated with Melisa to identify ways that the film might help to improve our knowledge about the historical and current impacts of the child welfare system on Indigenous children and families, and how this knowledge might inform positive change in social work policy and practice. Melisa and I chatted virtually about the motivation for making (*Displaced*), and the impact the film and accompanying learning guide could have for social work. Here is a summary of our discussion.

JULIE: Can you talk about the film and how it came about? Why did you want to make this film?

MELISA: In 2014, I attended a conference session given by a group of peer researchers involved in a project called Uncovering Colonial Legacies: Voices of Indigenous Youth in Child Welfare (*Displaced*). As I listened to the young

people talking about their experiences with the child welfare system and connecting their personal experiences to the larger history of colonialism in Canada, I realized if I could contribute to getting their voices out to a wider audience, but without these young people having to constantly re-live difficult experiences in front of strangers. After their presentation, I invited the group back to my place for dinner, and so we got to know each other, I asked them if they might want to make a film about their work. They agreed, and along with Lori First Chagot (Urban Society for Indigenous Youth), and Davida Maria and Lisa Henderson (University of Calgary), we created the film and launched it in 2016.

JULIE: It sounds like you really worked on building relationships with them. Can you talk a bit more about the collaborative process of making the film that came out of that initial meeting?

MELISA: Once we decided to make the film, I filmed interviews with the young people in settings where they were comfortable. They gave feedback on the interview footage about what they wanted left in and taken out. These were three young people who agreed to have their interviews included in the film: Ta Ladonna, Tyler Blackfoot and Shannon Wisakoh. I also incorporated interviews with former (Herman) social worker Roxanne Olson and First Nations child advocate Cindy Blackstock, along with the colonial context of the child welfare system. We got feedback from everyone in the initial group and other community members to create the final cut of the film.

We've since published two learning guides to accompany the film. The first is a Teaching Guide for Grades 9 to 11; The second is a Learning Guide for Professionals Working with Children and Youth, produced through a collaborative process with social work and education professionals in Alberta. Both guides are designed to work for individuals

Media

"A Call to Self-Reflection and Action" – Interview with Julie Mann-Johnson for *The Advocate*

For the summer 2021 issue of the Alberta Association of Social Worker's quarterly magazine, *The Advocate*, Julie Mann-Johnson (University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work) interviewed Melisa Brittain (FNCARES) about the film (*Displaced: Indigenous Youth and the Child Welfare System*), and the learning guide for professionals launched in fall 2020.

The interview focuses on the collaborative filmmaking process, highlights the connections between residential schools and current child welfare practices, and discusses what agencies and social workers can do to disrupt this pattern of colonization, including reflecting on and challenging their own practices and working to meet the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action on child welfare.

- Find the article here (pages 40-42): issuu.com/acsw/docs/acsw_advocate_summer_2021

Resource Development and Distribution

Spirit Bear and Children Make History: Lesson Plans for the book and film

FNCARES worked with the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society to develop a learning guide for Spirit Bear's first film: *Spirit Bear and Children Make History*. The learning guide is intended for grades 2 to 6 and consists of three lessons where students engage closely with the film and the book by the same name. The lessons conclude with a flexible culminating task where students share their learning with their community and take action towards reconciliation.

- Access the free lesson plans here: fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/lesson_plans_for_the_book_and_film.pdf
- Access a free online copy of the book in English, Cree, Carrier, French or Hungarian here: fncaringsociety.com/SpiritBear/children-make-history

Spirit Bear and Children Make History Lesson Plans for the Book and Film



By Emily Williams, Melisa Brittain & Spirit Bear



First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada

Film Distribution



Our film *(Dis)placed: Indigenous Youth and the Child Welfare System* (2017, 42 min., closed captioned), a collaboration with Indigenous young people sharing their experiences with the child welfare system, continues to draw interest from across Canada. With the publication of the learning guide for professionals in 2020, distribution increased once again, with streaming licenses sold to

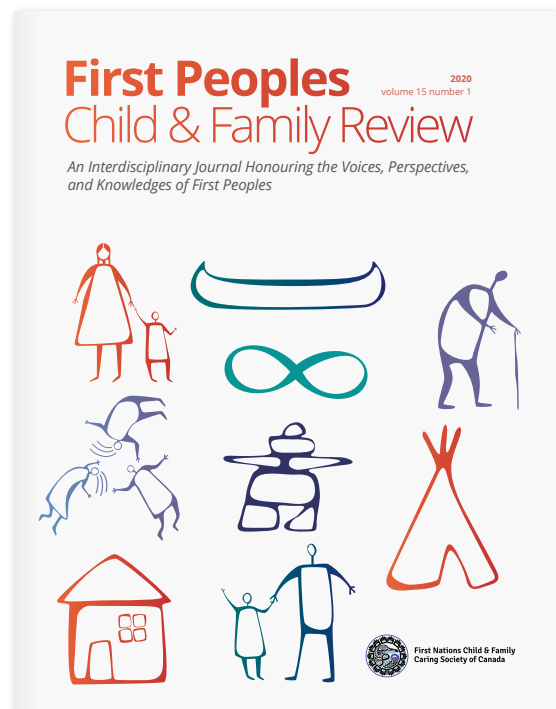
provincial and territorial government departments, libraries, post-secondary institutions, and small organizations working with Indigenous children and families. Indigenous Services Canada has acquired the film for employee training purposes, creating a version with French subtitles and making the film accessible for all its employees through visual describe and closed captioning.

- Contact Vtape to purchase your copy: vtape.org/video?vi=8693

Publications

First Peoples Child & Family Review

This online, peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary journal honours the voices of First Peoples and their allies and supporters. Focusing on research, practice, and policy concerning First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children and families, the journal is published bi-annually and hosted through the Open Journal System (OJS). The two volumes published in 2020 focus on various topics, including the resurgent vitality of Indigenous worldviews and lifeways; rights and responsibilities; and the capacity of Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to collaborate in pursuit of justice, equity, and the holistic wellbeing of Indigenous families and communities. The journal is SSHRC-funded and was first published in 2004.





First Nations Children's Action Research and Education Service
Faculty of Education, University of Alberta

 fncares@ualberta.ca  fncaringsociety.com/fncares  facebook.com/fncares  [@fncares](https://twitter.com/fncares)