
SYILX CHILD & FAMILY PLAN



OKANAGAN NATION ALLIANCE CHILD & FAMILY WELLNESS

Prepared by the ONA Wellness Committee

January 2014



Syilx Child & Family Plan

Okanagan Nation Alliance Wellness

Cover Photos (Left to right): Spirit of Syilx Unity Run 2012, Teya Gabriel and her Grandpa TC Alec, Black and White photo courtesy of Betty Terbasket Family.

Executive Summary Photos (Left to Right): 1. Courtesy of En'owkin Centre Archives-Harvey Collection-Spaxomin Standing is Henry Michel and Julia Garcia. Attel Moon is sitting and holding Willie McLeod. Photo taken at Quilchena BC. 2. Shelly Boyd and sk^wəlcnitk^w cllswempike7 at the Salmon Feast 2011 3. Justin George drumming at Shingle Creek.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development of this Plan for the delivery of Syilx child and family services has been a community initiative in the broadest sense of the word with everyone from our leaders to our children helping move the process towards completion.

Gratitude is offered to the Chiefs Executive Council for leadership and vision, and to the Chiefs and Councils of each band for support and involvement.

The Syilx people themselves provided the vital input and direction that guided the shape of this Plan and the emerging Syilx Child and Family Services Department. Grateful acknowledgement is made to all those in every ONA community including Elders, parents, youth and children who shared both their concerns and their hopes and dreams.

Beginning in 2005, the dedication of the ONA Wellness Committee made possible the hard work of bringing together all elements of the Plan and the preparation of this document. Over the years, committee members have included the following representatives for each of the communities:

- **LSIB:** Gwen Bailey, Jim McArthur, Lisa Montgomery, Amber Page, Jackie Tallio, Eliza Terbasket
- **OIB:** Veronica McGinnis, Jackie McPherson
- **OKIB:** Molly Bonneau, Molly Brewer, Judy GoodSky, Cathy Gottfriedson, Norm Hatlevik, Judy Marchand, Laurie Peters, Jack Spotted Eagle, Marie Tonasket
- **ONA:** Jennifer Houde, Assunta Rosal
- **PIB:** Ted Cutbill, Emory Gabriel, Phyllis Isaac, Lynn Kruger, Inez Pierre, Jack Spotted Eagle, Laurie Wilson, Dorothy Ward
- **UNB:** Cindy Lindley, Dianne Louis, Tim Manual, Brenda Ned, Duane Tom
- **USIB:** Charlotte Mitchell
- **WFN:** Cathryn Aune, Pam Crema, Carol Derickson, Margaret Eli, Elaine Herbert, Linda Jones, Janine Lott, Buffy Mills

Enduring gratitude and the upmost respect is paid to our ancestors who preserved knowledge of our cultural family practices and carried the Syilx spirit forward to the present day. We also give gratitude for the little ones whose spirits are waking up in the light of the renewed love and culture being nurtured in our communities.

And finally, we pay tribute to the stelsqilx: the people-to-be, the children of the future whose wellbeing we are planning for today.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



BACKGROUND TO THIS PLAN

As the Indigenous people of this territory, the Okanagan Nation has the clearly mandated goal of reinstating self-government and implementing law-making authority in keeping with Syilx occupation of this land from time immemorial. The Nation's inherent rights and responsibilities extend to our lands and resources, and also to our people and culture.

The Ministry of Children and Families (MCFD) has agreed that negotiations between themselves and the Okanagan Nation Alliance will be based on the principle of Nation-to-Nation. The culmination of this process will see the ONA take control of Indigenous child and family services in our territory. The project of creating a plan for child and family wellness is part of the overarching mandate of the ONA Wellness Department. This plan is one of three wellness plans being developed by the department. The Okanagan/Syilx Nation Health Plan was released in 2010, and a youth mental health plan is currently in development. *Refer to Appendix C & E*

Today we find ourselves in an environment ready for change and innovation. There is widespread recognition that the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children in care is due to the legacy of colonization. This legacy has led to institutionalized racism as identified by two recent audits of federal and provincial child welfare.¹ Current child welfare systems are not set up to address systemic prejudices. Our families need support and prevention programs. They do not need to be subjected to paternalistic approaches to child welfare that

¹ In 2008, both the Auditor General of BC and the Auditor General of Canada issued reports about the state of Aboriginal child and family services in their respective jurisdictions that identified systemic issues with accountability, gaps in services and lack of prevention resources to address the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children in care.

eliminate parental rights and authority and lead to the removal of children from their homes. Families should not be left outside the process. This approach to child welfare is indicative of the larger structural violence that continues to be perpetuated against Indigenous peoples.

Around the world, Indigenous peoples are working to decolonize their child and family services with promising results. Here in our own communities, healing is being built on existing support structures that have endured and kept the spirit of communality alive. The healing of our families necessarily comes from within and from a return to community and cultural revitalization.

Taking direction from our communities, our captiv^wl, and our traditional social structures, this plan lays out a uniquely Syilx approach to service delivery that will support our people to reclaim and strengthen our family systems.

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PROCESS

Working under the direction of the Chiefs Executive Council, the ONA Wellness Committee has charted a course of community-engagement and accountability in the development of this Plan. Community input and discussion has been central to the process of creating our own Syilx child and family services. The voices of Elders and staff, of families and youth, have informed and inspired our new organization.

Between 2008 and 2012, more than two-dozen focus groups were held in communities, and the ONA hosted three Nation-wide forums. In partnership with the ONA, the En'owkin Centre delivered a series of learning sessions on specific aspects of Syilx culture as they pertain to the health of our families. These sessions have been made available as a handbook for community use. Elders were interviewed about their experiences with family life. Environmental scans of current service capacity and challenges were conducted with each band.

The Syilx people identified three areas of focus for service delivery:

(1) Raise Healthy Children: Teach them the culture. Promote active living. Create relationships with Elders.

(2) Support Healthy Families: Focus on prevention. Support natural caregivers. Make sure our communities know the resources available to them. Provide home support that starts with prenatal moms and continues until children start school.

(3) Do Intervention Differently: Identify protocols for how suspected child abuse and neglect are reported. Work with extended families. Keep kids in community and in the culture. Custom care plans instead of stranger care (foster care).

INDIGENOUS BEST PRACTICE

There is widespread recognition that social work practices that lead to the apprehension of children and the replacement of family and community with stranger care has not produced good outcomes. In response, communities around the world are developing alternative approaches that liberate and strengthen families.

Secwepemc social work scholar Elaine Hebert was contracted to provide an overview of progressive social work practices that have been found to demonstrate a higher degree of success in resolving family issues. Best practices in Indigenous approaches are based on recognition of the impact of colonization and systemic issues. Different approaches have emerged, but two perspectives are common to all of them:

- (1) the application of a strengths-based perspective, and
- (2) the use of cultural safety.

SYILX INNOVATION

Like Indigenous people elsewhere, the ONA has designed and implemented programs supporting our own Syilx approaches to service delivery. These programs create a culturally safe environment and work across sectors. Increasingly, they are being recognized as best practices in First Nations service delivery in British Columbia.

- *Səxʷkənxit əlx • The Okanagan Nation Response Team* – Team of frontline workers responds to community crisis, provides education workshops that encourage healthy lifestyle choices, and raise awareness about issues impacting youth such as suicide, depression and intergenerational trauma.
- *R'Native Voice Youth Program: Speak Out and Be Heard* – This mental health workshop series strengthens youth identity and resiliency by supporting youth to think about who they are as individuals, within their families, and within their communities. Syilx culture provides the framework for this program and a cultural perspective for looking at topics important to youth.
- *Family Decision Making Program* – Brings together members of a child's family for a circle process that supports development of a family-directed care plan.
- *Child and Youth Mental Health Program* – Supports children and youth to obtain equitable, timely access to culturally relevant mental health services.

The success of the ONA's Indigenous programs has clearly established the effectiveness of working in a manner that respects our cultural knowledge and history and takes a collaborative and supportive approach to reclaim and strengthen our family systems.

A SYILX PLAN

Building on the groundwork laid by our cultural values, guidance provided by both the community, and latest best practices in Indigenous family wellness, an operational model has emerged that will enable us, once again, to exercise jurisdiction over our children and families. This Plan proposes a uniquely Syilx approach to service delivery that addresses complex root causes and reinforces our community's ability to create healthy environments where children are safe and thrive. The Syilx culture, the nsyilxcən language, and the Enowkin'wixw process are the foundation upon which this Plan rests. Families are at the

centre. Cultural practices are embedded within the service delivery approach. Support and prevention are prioritized.

CHIEF *skemxist* (BLACK BEAR) represents the traditions and cultural practices, the concept of reflection and contemplation on "what is", informed by an understanding of the past and how that is connected to the future. It is this understanding that then shapes development of protocols. In this section of the health plan, the focus is the environmental context, the analysis of data, research, key findings and the establishment of priorities.

CHIEF *spitem* (BITTER ROOT) describes relationships, and the interconnectedness among *tmix** including but not limited to the people, the animals, the plants, the land, the air and the water. This provides the "context" in which individuals, families and communities endeavor to live in harmony with each other, and with their relatives – the animals, the plants and the land. This section of our plan provides a description of the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) including its structure; capacity and existing programs, and profiles of the seven Okanagan member Bands and the Wellness Committee. The need for the health plan and the phases of the health plan are also described.



CHIEF *w'tyxtix* (KING SALMON) exemplifies the process of preparing (readiness), determining the objective (aim), and then taking action (act). In this section, the Findings, Action Plan and the Conclusions are presented.

CHIEF *siya?* (SASKATOON BERRY) embodies the spirit of creative energy, vision and innovation that can be associated with Youth. In this section of our health plan we provide those components that relate to the Nation's vision and the innovation associated with the use of the Syilx Cultural Framework to assist in the understanding of the health plan.

Family Decision Making (FDM) is the guiding principle of the Syilx Child and Family Services. Beginning from the premise of collective responsibility, FDM treats the wider network of kin and community as a source of strength and seeks to actively involve them in child and

family wellness. This approach has been happening in this region since long before contact. It delivers services within a Syilx philosophy that respects the autonomy of families and recognizes their strengths and resiliency.

LOCAL AUTHORITY

In keeping with community feedback and Syilx cultural practices, the organization will administer services, but each band will manage the implementation and delivery of the programs locally. The friendship centres will participate through Community Tables and their involvement in the Nation Advisory Council (with oversight provided by an Ombudsman). There are three Community Tables – one in each region.

Nation Advisory Council:

- Guides the organization, establishes outcomes, standards and evaluation processes for child and family services;
- Works with Community Tables to design services and evaluate outcomes;
- Includes one representative appointed by each band and friendship centre, as well as two Nation Elders.

Community Tables:

- Established by the bands and friendship centre located within each of the three regions.
- Works with Advisory Council to design community services, establish outcomes, negotiate contracts, oversee service delivery, review and evaluate.
- Includes at least one Elder and one Youth.

SERVICE DELIVERY

As we move forward, the service delivery continuum will be developed within the Enowkwn'wix process and will prioritize the following.

- Prevention and early intervention support services.
- Family preservation and reunification.
- Placement options that meet needs for cultural and family attachment.
- Custom care placements that protect rights to land, language and culture.

Service delivery based on Family Decision Making is innovative, develops capacity, has a positive impact on children, their families and communities, and is convergent with Okanagan cultural practices. Given what we know about the circumstances contributing to family breakdown, child serving systems must be an integral part of community planning and comprehensive planning needs to address key issues such as housing, education, health and economic development. Pragmatic short-term solutions such as safe houses, emergency housing, mental health services for children and families, support services, and equitable resources for extended family members must be considered a priority.

Within a five-year timeframe, Syilx Child and Family Services will move to offering the following service delivery streams:

- Child and Youth with Special Needs
- Early Childhood Development
- Youth Justice
- Child and Youth Mental Health
- Adoptions

TRANSITION PLAN

The Okanagan Nation is proposing a phased-in approach as we move towards full responsibility for statutory services that builds upon the success of programs currently being delivered. While more planning is required before ONA can assume full delegation status, the start-up phase of operations includes a transition plan that increases ability to deliver direct services concurrent with ongoing planning activities. Initially, Syilx Child and Family Services will deliver C3 services.² Working in partnership with MCFD, ONA's existing programs will evolve under the umbrella of Family Decision-Making and expand to provide a full spectrum of voluntary support services. Over a three-to-five year timeframe, operations will transition to delivering C4 to C6 services. In the final phases of the plan, service delivery will expand to include both on and off reserve.

The ONA is proposing the development of three teams (North, Central, South). Each team will include one or two Family Decision Making Social Workers (delegated), a Family Reunification worker, a Developmental Clinician, a Wraparound coordinator and a Program Administrative Assistant. A full-time Practice Manager will supervise the teams. ONA will second two MCFD lead managers: the Practice Manager, and an Implementation Operations Manager to assist with the transition from C4 to C6 services. The ONA proposes that MCFD transfer all non-delegated services and any corresponding contracts. A key focus of the first phase is building capacity at the local level through the establishment of Community Tables will be established in each of the three regions.

Decision-making power must accompany our new responsibilities and this includes the ability to re-tool funding in a manner that is consistent with this plan. In other words funds cannot come with stipulations attached. It is the fiduciary responsibility of the federal government to fund delivery of child and family services to the Syilx people. Federal governments have delegated this responsibility to the province along with a transfer of funds for the delivery of this service. Provincial government then uses these funds to deliver child and family services that, in theory, are accessible to all people living in BC. Current government-funded programs are not responsive or accountable to the Aboriginal people that they serve. Despite MCFD's inclusion of responsiveness and accountability in their guiding principles, we still struggle with inappropriate services. MCFD must disentangle

² In BC, there are progressively higher levels of delegation for child protection agencies beginning with C3 and continuing up to C6, which is full delegation.

C3 = Family support (Resource development, voluntary service delivery)

C4 = Guardianship services for children in care

C6 = Child protection services (Investigations, interventions, court processes)

these funds, making them available for the development of programs by Syilx Child and Family Services.

CONCLUSION

With the creation of the Syilx Child and Family Services, the people of the Okanagan Nation have the opportunity to engage and become leaders in a collaborative, strength-based, culturally-appropriate serving system that will focus on ensuring children from prenatal to young adulthood have the support and resources they need to thrive and succeed. This is how we decolonize our family systems and support our communities to practice Sqilxw: Our people's way. This is how we carry on the work of preparing for the stelsqilx: the people-to-be.

skamxist • BLACK BEAR

THE PERSPECTIVE OF WISE REFLECTION, CUSTOMS AND CULTURE



Photo: BC Archives, Vernon Coldstream Ranch, children of hop pickers:

BACKGROUND

“NO MORE CHILDREN LEAVING OUR COMMUNITIES!” – ONA CHILDREN FIRST FORUM

Change Is Necessary

The Peoples of the Okanagan Nation have voiced strong support for the development of child and family services that are founded in Syilx cultural practices. Building on work that began more than a decade ago, the ONA Wellness Committee has developed this Plan for shifting the delivery of child and family services for Aboriginal peoples to an Okanagan Nation organization that is built on a solid foundation of Syilx values.

The heart-breaking outcomes of the current child welfare system are well known within our communities and well documented by media, academics and government review bodies. The legacy of colonization that underlies many of our daily challenges as Indigenous peoples continues to permeate the government’s approach to child welfare. The statistics speak of the ensuing tragedy. Aboriginal children in BC are 12.5 times more likely to be in care than a non-Aboriginal child, and while our children comprise 8% of the province’s children, they make up more than 50% of those in care. It is clear the system is not working in the best interests of our children and families.

Why is the current system not working? The disproportionate number of Aboriginal children in care is due primarily to the legacy of colonization reflected by systemic issues such as poverty, unresolved intergenerational trauma, addictions and the persistence of institutionalized racism of the kind identified by two recent audits of federal and provincial child welfare that found inflexible policies, gaps in service, and funding that was both

inadequate and inequitable relative to the non-Aboriginal population. Current child welfare is not set up to address systemic issues. Our families need support and prevention programs but these areas are notoriously underfunded and instead a paternalistic approach is taken that focuses on removing children from their homes and leaves the family out of the process except as the recipient of services.

There Is Another Way

Today we find ourselves in an environment ready for change and innovation. Internationally, Indigenous peoples are standing together to affirm our rights. In particular, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizes the right of families and communities to retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, training, education and well-being of their children.

Across Canada, First Nations are working to decolonize their child and family services with promising results. Due to mounting pressure from First Nations and the continued failure of the child welfare system to meet the needs of Aboriginal children and families, the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) is talking about funding changes and more support for prevention. And in BC, the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) has agreed to a Nation-to-Nation principle that will see the Okanagan Nation take control of Aboriginal child and family services in our territory.

Working under the direction of the Chiefs Executive Council, the ONA Wellness Committee has charted a course of community engagement and accountability, informed by Syilx principles and values, in order to develop this Plan to guide our Nation as we move to provide the sustainable services – meaningful and substantively resourced – that our children and families have been without.

*“ENSURING THE SAFETY
OF THE CHILD =
RESTORING THE FAMILY’S
HEART”. –captikwl session*

Taking direction from our people, our captikwł and our traditional social structures, the Plan seeks to create a uniquely Okanagan Nation approach that will support our people to revitalize, invigorate and strengthen family systems and child rearing practices.

The message delivered by our community and the message that emerges from our cultural values is the same: A Syilx approach to child and family services must be holistic. This is also the recommendation that emerges from a review of contemporary best practices in Indigenous child and family services. Families must be put at the centre. Cultural practices must be respected and embedded within the service delivery approach. Support and prevention must be prioritized. More responsive ways of working with families must be created if outcomes are to change.

THERE IS A COMMONALITY TO WHAT PEOPLE WANT – AND WE HAVE THE ABILITY TO DO THIS IN A GOOD WAY. –ENOWKIN SESSION

In keeping with this collective wisdom, the approach put forward in this Plan is founded on Okanagan practices. Our emerging model is based on the premise of collective responsibility and treats the extended family network of kin and community as a source of strength and seeks to actively involve them in making decisions about the care of their children. This approach is based on the principles of respect, trust and inclusion that inform our traditional decision-making process of Enowkin'wix^w. Our new model of service delivery incorporates a worldview that understands both Indigenous ways and the historical impacts of colonization with its subsequent intergenerational trauma. Our model honors the autonomy of the family and uses resources in ways that are consistent with the goal of strengthening Syilx family systems.

This Plan calls for the delivery of culturally based services within a Nation-to-Nation context that builds on the strengths of our families and communities to create a better future – a future where we can ensure our children remain in their communities. With this approach, we begin to decolonize child and family services, moving away from the prescriptive, protection-based approach still in use by MCFD, to a Syilx approach that addresses complex root causes and reinforces our community's ability to create healthy environments where children are safe and thrive.

GIVE THE CHILDREN THEIR HEARTS BACK. –ENOWKIN SESSION

Our Nation has the tenacity to drive the process. Our communities are ready. It is time to reduce the harm being done to our children and families. It is time to take over and do things in a different way.

Steps Taken To Arrive At This Plan

Consult the people:

A process of community engagement has been one cornerstone of the Committee's work. In this, we have been guided by the teachings of Enowkin'wix^w as found in the captik^{wł} *How Food Was Given*. This is our own Indigenous method of decision-making and it provides a means of reducing conflict while ensuring that diverse views are heard and incorporated into the final action plan. Informed by the past, Enowkin'wix^w also considers the impact of our decisions now and on future generations. Throughout the process of developing this Plan, we relied on Enowkin'wix^w as both an organizing principle and practice.



Photo: Wellness Forum 2012

Since 2008 the Committee has held three Nation-wide forums to seek direction and share learnings. More than two-dozen focus groups were held in our communities and needs assessments were also done. An in-depth series of interviews with Elders from each of our communities was conducted to gather insights about traditional Okanagan child rearing practices. Nsyilxcən language speakers were consulted to share their understanding of how family roles and responsibilities are embedded in the language itself. A series of five sessions were held with teachers from the Enowkin Centre on aspects of Syilx history and culture as they pertain to the health and well-being of our children and families; and the learnings from these sessions were printed as a handbook for use in our communities. Once this Plan was drafted, the community engagement continued as the Plan was presented to communities for discussion and input. There is a commitment to continually go back to the people.

Look to our roots:

In keeping with directions from the community, the Plan is based on Syilx ways of knowing and being. Our captikwł have been central to the process of developing the Plan. The worldview of our captikwł is profoundly interconnected and these ancient stories are rich with teachings. The values and principles that emerge from them are not only relevant today; they are central to the ongoing work of strengthening our family systems.

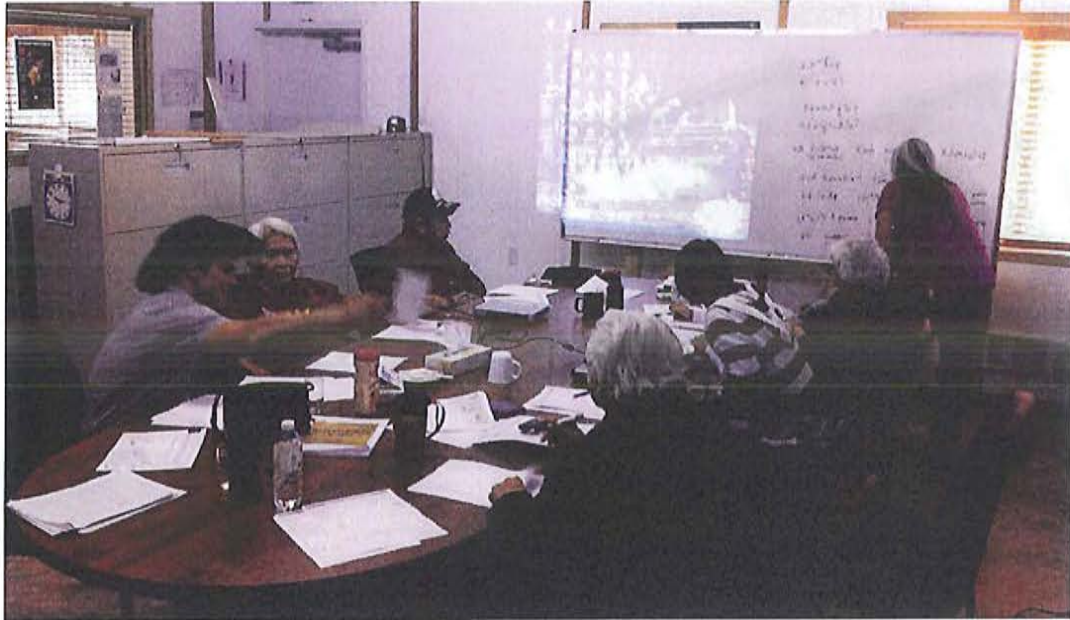


Photo: Language Session with Elders at Enowkin

THE LANGUAGE BELONGS TO EACH ONE OF US: GIVE IT LIFE. – NSYILXCEN SESSION

Likewise, our nsyilxcən language holds teachings that shape this Plan. Elders and nsyilxcən speakers described how the words for mother and father, for auntie and uncle, for siblings and for grandparents, all hold within them the roles that family members are meant to fulfill towards one another. Nsyilxcen is action-oriented – our responsibilities and principles of relationship are embedded within the language itself. When we use these words, when we learn what they mean, we participate in the act of bringing the language back to our communities.

The Syilx culture, the nsyilxcən language, the Enowkin'wixw process, these are all functional today – and they are the foundation upon which this Plan rests.

Research:

Seeking to incorporate the latest thinking in Indigenous child and family wellness, the Committee retained Secwepemc social work scholar Elaine Hebert to prepare a discussion paper providing (1) an overview and analysis of recent audits and reports related to government service delivery for Aboriginal children and families, and (2) a review of

progressive Indigenous approaches to decolonizing child and family services. The resulting document both informed and stimulated dialogue.

In support of discussions around governance options for the new organization, the ONA retained Ojibway legal consultant Val Waboose to prepare a paper. This paper provides an overview of governance models in place in other Aboriginal child and family service organizations across Canada. *See Appendix F*



LOOK TO OUR STORIES

GO UNDERGROUND TO THE ROOT AND TRACE IT BACK THAT WAY. –ELDER TOMMY GREGOIRE

The Four Food Chiefs

Our cultural ways of knowing have been passed from one generation to the next through our *captikwł*, our stories. Within these stories are found our values, our protocols and our laws. In creating this Plan, our *captikwł* have been a source of guidance and inspiration.

In the *captikwł* called *How Food Was Given*, *Kul'nchut'n*, the creator, sends *Senklip*, coyote, to tell the plants and animals that new people are coming and that the *Stelsqilxw*, the people-to-be, will need help to survive. The chiefs of all the plants and animals gather together to discuss what to do. Chief *Skemxist*, Black Bear, is the oldest. He is chief of all the animals that walk on the earth and he brings the perspective of wisdom and culture. Chief *Spitlem*, Bitter Root, brings the perspective of community and interconnectedness. Chief *Siya*, Saskatoon Berry, brings the perspective of creativity and innovation. And Chief *N'tyxtix*, Salmon, brings the perspective of action.

In *How Food Was Given*, these different perspectives come together to shape the discussion and decision-making through which the Four Food Chiefs offer their lives so that we, the people-to-be, can exist.

The Four Food Chiefs can be described as having the following attributes. Please note this list is not meant to be exhaustive and is open for personal interpretation.

How Food Was Given

In this story, *Kul'nchut'n* (creator) visited the *Four* (including but not limited to the people, animal plants, air and water). *Kul'nchut'n* (creator) sent *Senklip* (coyote) to prepare for the future of the *Stelsqilxw* (people-to-be). *Kul'nchut'n* told the *Four* that people were coming. The four chiefs: *Skemxist* (Black Bear), *Siya* (Saskatoon Berry), *Spitlem* (Bitter Root), *N'tyxtix* (King Salmon) then came together and made a plan for how to feed *Stelsqilxw* (people to be). The story then tells how the differing perspectives of the four chiefs were brought together to inform the discussion, the problem solving, the decision making and the action plan.

Chief Skemxist Black Bear	Chief of all 4-legged creatures	Elder Custom	Protocols Culture Contemplation Thinking
Chief Siya Saskatoon Berry	Chief of all things growing above the Land	Youth Innovation	We CAN do it No barriers Think BIG Creative
Chief Spitlem Bitterroot	Chief of all Roots	Female Relationships	Interconnectedness Nurturing Compassion Inclusive
Chief N'tyxtix King Salmon	Chief of all that is in the Water	Male Action	Get it done Efficient Planning Focused Timely

The Enowkin'wix^w Process

The Four Food Chiefs story illustrates our Syilx decision-making model of Enowkin'wix^w. This consensus-based practice teaches us how to come together for finding common ground, visioning, strategizing and taking action. Enowkin'wix^w ensures that all views are heard because they are all important for achieving balance. At times the differing perspectives may be in opposition to each other but the process embraces this tension and uses it to seek understanding of diverse perspectives and shape a shared approach. Enowkin'wix^w provides a means of reducing conflict while ensuring that all views are incorporated when important decisions are being made.

Enowkin'wix^w is always fluid and cannot be prescribed but it has consistent principles. This dynamic practice relies on the input of all community members. It acknowledges the contributions of each member and allows all voices to be included and respected. The focus is on finding common ground. The process seeks to restore harmony to the group through consensus as opposed to the Western view that consensus is about compromise. Participants commit to see the process to its end and only when an action plan incorporating all views emerges is the process complete.

The importance of this cultural practice to the development of this Plan and the service delivery model espoused in it cannot be overstated. Enowkin'wix^w is the model we use in supporting our families to increase their capacity to make decisions for their children. It is also the process we chose to follow in doing the work of developing a new approach to child and family services: Clarify why we are here, find common ground, get baggage out of the way, do the research, get the input, vision, strategize and create an action plan.

A Syilx Document – “We dream in spirals”

Cycles in nature, such as the seasons, are a main teacher of Indigenous peoples and form the basis of belief systems. Circles are inherently non-hierarchical and inclusive. They represent respect, equality, continuity and interconnectedness. Colonialism, on the other hand, is based on straight lines and linear thinking. It is inherently hierarchical and exclusive. While this report is a colonial form of communicating, we have worked to infuse Syilx perspectives throughout and to leave room for spiral thinking.

Indigenous worldviews reflect interconnectedness between all living things. Circles are based on the premise that each person has an experience that can benefit or enlighten another. The input and insight of community members has been key to the development of this Plan. The quotes that recur throughout this document reflect this truth.

In keeping with the central role of our own Indigenous process of Enowkin'wix^w in charting this new course, the Plan is organized according to the perspectives of the Four Food Chiefs. These perspectives – culture, relationships, innovation and action – describe the stages of thought and exploration that gave rise to this Plan and the new operational model and implementation plan put forward within it.

Chief Skemxist: In keeping with the perspective of wise reflection, customs and culture, this first section provides background about the process of creating this Plan, the impact of colonization on our children and families, and the Syilx principles and practices that have informed the work.

Chief Spitlem: The second section comes from the perspective of inter-connectedness and it details the community engagement processes that were undertaken as part of this work and summarizes the direction and guidance that the people provided.

Chief Siya: The perspective of creativity, vision and innovation informs the third section which shares emerging best practices. It also highlights programs that the ONA has already developed as its own Indigenous response to supporting children and families including the Family Decision-Making approach. This section also considers governance options for our children and family service delivery.

Chief Ntyxtix: The final section comes from the perspective of action. It details the operational model and implementation plan that have been developed as well as returning again, in conclusion, to the words of the people.

IMPACTS OF COLONIZATION

HISTORY TORE OUR FAMILIES APART, NOW WE ARE BRINGING THEM BACK TOGETHER.

-ONA HISTORY FORUM

Traditionally, Syilx people had a very organized way of life with our children at the heart. All of the family – grandparents, aunts and uncles, as well as moms and dads – were responsible for the children. Children were not taught forcibly or punished for not understanding, they were taught with patience. Learning was made easy at first and gradually became harder but only as the child could understand. At different times in the child's life, different relatives were responsible for teaching them. They were taught to respect life and to understand that disrespect brought unhappy consequences. This integrated extended family approach to child rearing was the basis of good government. It meant that we carried the laws inside us – that we had been taught how to act and live right without having someone force us.

COLONIZATION CHANGED WHAT IT MEANT TO BE A FAMILY. -ONA HISTORY FORUM

Colonization divided us from one another and from our way of life. The devastation of small pox came first (1780-1811), leaving communities made up mostly of the very young and the very old. The fur trade (1812-1850) brought a money economy that turned animals into commodities, took men away from their families and changed our clothes, homes and diet.



Photo: Unidentified family photo courtesy of En'owkin Centre Archives-Jack Collection-Westbank

INTERMARRIAGE WITH SETTLERS CHANGED VALUE SYSTEMS AND FAMILY RELATIONS.

-ONA HISTORY FORUM

In the new colonial system, women and children were thought of as property. By 1880, the people had moved from pit houses and teepees to European-style log cabins and this fundamentally changed the experiences of Syilx families as they went from communal living with extended family members to living only with their nuclear families.

EXTENDED FAMILIES BECAME MORE DIVIDED AND THE FORMER SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR ONE ANOTHER DIMINISHED. -ONA HISTORY FORUM

Without ever signing a treaty we were confined to reserves. We were forcibly separated from the resources we relied on and our abundant, self-sufficient economy collapsed. Soon residential school tore our families and social structure apart and further disrupted the intergenerational transmission of knowledge.

PEOPLE RETREATED INTO SILENCE. WE WERE SILENCED EVEN AMONGST OURSELVES.

–ONA HISTORY FORUM

During this time, some families met in secret to share stories, but most did not and the stories weren't passed on – and neither were the knowledge, laws and protocols embedded in them. Furthermore, language trauma caused by residential school experiences where people were punished for speaking nsyilxcən meant that anyone who managed to retain the language as they grew to adulthood had to work past their embedded childhood trauma to speak or teach the language.

TRAUMA BECAME NORMALIZED. – ONA HISTORY FORUM

Today, we know that colonization is responsible for the systemic collapse of Indigenous families and community structures. We also know that, despite this, federal and provincial systems do not fully acknowledge the effects of colonial history and instead systematically blame Indigenous people for their inability to conform to mainstream cultural norms.

The disproportionate number of Indigenous children in care reflects these historical and current disadvantages. Colonization has contributed to the risk factors that lead to the removal of our children from their homes. Residential schools caused generations to grow up without the opportunities to develop parenting skills. Poverty, relative isolation, unemployment and inadequate housing all contribute to family disruption. Changing outcomes for Indigenous children and families requires addressing these systemic issues. When families experience difficulties, they need to be given the resources and support to ensure the cycle is broken and our children are raised in their home communities and culture.

PRINCIPLE-DRIVEN PLANNING

DO IT OUR PEOPLE'S WAY. –FOCUS GROUP FEEDBACK

Based on Syilx principles and values

In the captik^{wł} *How Food Was Given*, the Four Food Chiefs bring their diverse perspectives together to figure out how to care for the people-to-be. With this Plan, we are also making decisions about how to care for the people-to-be: our children now and in the future. In doing so, our planning process has been based on recognition and respect for Syilx principles and values.

In Okanagan, the word “community” can be loosely translated to mean *We are of one skin*. Traditionally in Syilx society, the child was at the centre of a circle of protective layers created by the family, the community, and the Nation. When the residential school experience and other colonial social policy removed the child from the centre, the impact on the outer layers of family and community was devastating.

The intent of this new Plan is to redress that devastation, put the child at the centre and empower the surrounding protective layers of family, community and Nation. In doing this work, we have drawn heavily on the words of the people, Syilx customs, our captik^{wł}, the Enowkin'wix^w process and our nsyilxcən language.

MAKE THE CULTURE FUNCTIONAL. –FOCUS GROUP FEEDBACK

When we use nsyilxcən, when we practice Enowkin'wix^w, when we tell our captik^{wł}, we breathe life into the ember that is waiting to come alive again; we act against the years of oppression when the colonial governments attempted to silence our stories and strip us of the knowledge of our ancestors. When we talk about how we are going to reclaim and restore Syilx family systems, we are breathing life into our words, into our actions and into the people.

More than looking to our culture for guidance in creating this Plan, we have sought to incorporate Syilx ways of doing things into the very work itself. The captik^{wł} provided insight into many things including child-rearing practices. The Enowkin'wix^w process became the means by which the work was organized. When discussions were held, participants were asked to identify which of the Four Food Chief perspectives best represented their own way of seeing things. Like-minded thinkers sat together and shared their thoughts before all views were shared with the group. This reduced tension and encouraged everyone to speak. Using the Four Food Chiefs' perspectives helped us include all community perspectives. Enowkin'wix^w is how we will come to consensus. The process itself was an act of decolonization.

The perspective of Chief Skemxist speaks to the wisdom found in our customs and culture. This section has drawn upon what has been said consistently by our ancestors and is being repeated by many of our people today. In concluding and moving on to the Chief Spitlem section, we take with us Syilx principles and practices that have been a stable foundation for us for thousands of years.

spet'lam • BITTER ROOT

THE PERSPECTIVE OF INTER-CONNECTEDNESS AND RELATIONSHIPS

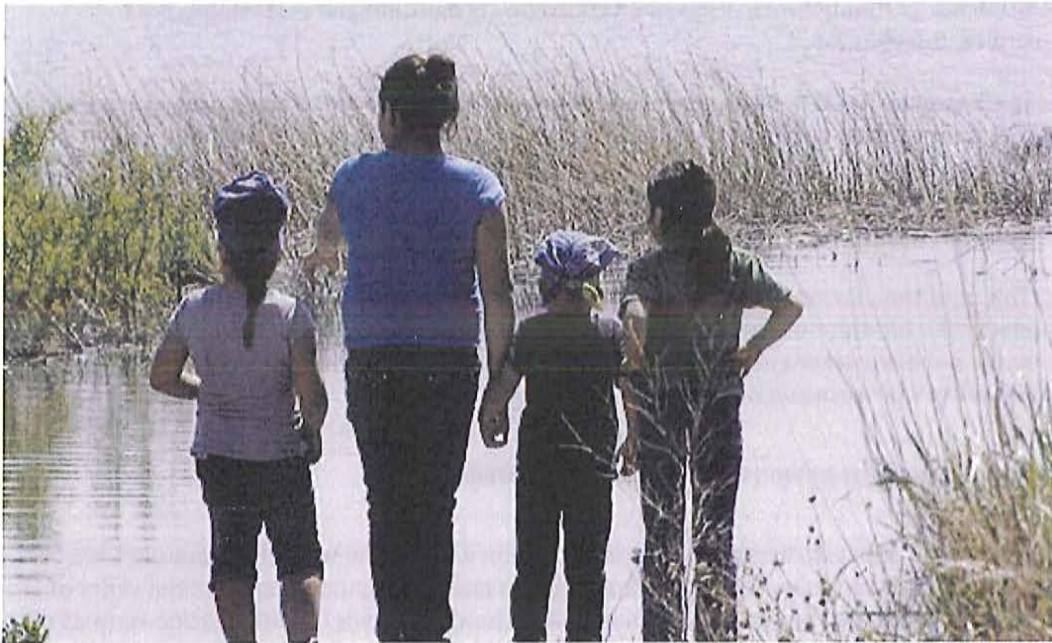


Photo Courtesy of Billie Kruger

LISTEN TO THE PEOPLE

MORE GRASSROOTS. –FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

In undertaking this work, the ONA Wellness Committee has followed a community-driven process informed by the principle that “local knowledge equals local authority.” Engaging the community is time intensive, but it is also the most important piece of the work. Listening to the people is the only way to design services that are meaningful and appropriate.

The nation-wide Children First Forum held in 2008 was an important step in beginning to develop a new strategy for child and family services. Focus groups in 2006 had found a high level of agreement in the Nation that the ONA should pursue its own child and family service delivery. As the ONA began to engage band leadership about moving forward, it became clear that an information sharing session would be helpful. The forum provided an opportunity both for learning and for gaining input from community members. The main message that came through was: “No more children leaving our communities!” There was strong direction that a holistic approach should be taken and that it should be based on Syilx laws and customs emerging from the captikwł.

As a result of the forum, the ONA determined to follow our own process, developing a service delivery system that is culturally appropriate and meets the needs of our children and families by basing the work on Syilx principles and committing to a process of community engagement.

In the four years since the Children First Forum, community members have been engaged in a number of ways.

- **Focus Groups** were held in ONA communities with a total of 18 focus groups conducted over a two-year period. Transcripts are provided in the Appendix.
- **Nation Learning Sessions** were co-hosted with En'owkin to further learning and discussion on key subjects related to designing our own Indigenous child and family services. *Refer to Appendix D*
- **Elder Interviews** regarding traditional child rearing practices were conducted with a respected Elder in each of the seven ONA communities.
- **Nation-Wide Forums** were held beginning with the Children First Forum in 2008 and subsequent forums convened in 2010 and 2011.
- **Environmental Scans** were conducted in each community. For the results of these, please see Appendix #.
- **Learning Resource on Syilx Families** summarizing the Nation Learning Sessions was printed for community distribution. The resource, called *Go Back To the Root: A Learning Resource on Syilx Families* is available through the ONA Wellness Department.

FOCUS GROUPS

DECOLONIZE OUR FAMILY SYSTEMS. – PIB FOCUS GROUP



Photo: Focus Group Penticton, BC

What the People Said

Conducting focus groups and engaging a wide range of community members throughout the Nation has been central to the process of developing a vision for this plan. The input has provided guidance and direction for the development of our own Syilx organization for serving the wellbeing of our children and families.

Vision:

A diverse range of perspectives were heard but the direction emerging from all of the groups supported the same vision: Create families and communities in which our kids can grow up healthy, safe and happy.

Participants:

In 18 focus groups held over a two-year period, we heard from Elders, leaders, parents, grandparents, youth, children and staff from health and social development programs.

Overview:

Support for families was seen as key to ending the cycle of breakdown initiated by colonization and the residential school experience. People spoke about the need to address the way residential school denied children the opportunity to learn parenting skills and created intergenerational trauma. Teaching parenting skills was seen as fundamental. As one participant said: "No child comes with a manual for how to raise them."

EVERYONE WANTS BETTER OUTCOMES FOR OUR CHILDREN. –LSIB FOCUS GROUP

There was broad support for focusing on prevention instead of intervention and many good ideas for working collaboratively with families instead of the current adversarial system. People spoke frankly about the challenges faced by communities including teenage parents, drug use and parents with undiagnosed FASD. While there was a great deal of empathy for the difficulties faced by families today, some participants also expressed a no-nonsense attitude about the need for parents to take their responsibilities seriously. When intervention is needed, extended families should be involved and children should stay in the community. It was suggested that the mandate of the organization should be to stop the cycle of intergenerational trauma with this generation.

PREVENTATIVE WORK NEEDS TO BE DONE BEFORE THE CRISIS STARTS. FAMILIES KNOW WHO NEEDS THE SUPPORT. EVERYONE KNOWS. – UNB FOCUS GROUP

Four main themes emerged from the focus groups.

- 1. Raise Healthy Children:* Teach them the culture. Promote active living. Create relationships with Elders.
- 2. Support Healthy Families:* Focus on prevention. Support natural caregivers. Make sure our communities know the resources available to them. Provide home support that starts with prenatal moms and continues until children start school.
- 3. Do Intervention Differently:* Identify protocols for how suspected child abuse and neglect are reported. Work with extended families. Keep kids in community and in the culture. Custom care plans instead of foster care with strangers.
- 4. Create A Syilx Organization:* Okanagan laws as the foundation of the organization. Integrate services (health, social, education, housing, income security). Properly resourced with full jurisdiction. Build capacity in communities.

A more detailed account of the thoughts and insights shared by community members can be found in **Appendix: Summary of Feedback from Focus Groups.**

ELDER INTERVIEWS

MY MOM AND GRANDMA WERE MY FIRST TEACHERS BECAUSE I LIVED WITH MY GRANDMA MOST OF THE TIME. –ELDER INTERVIEWS (HS 2407)

The Elder Interview Project was undertaken by the ONA Wellness Department so that the experiences and insights of our Elders can guide us as we develop this new organization. The eldest Elder from each of the Okanagan communities was interviewed to learn about:

- how they were raised,
- how Syilx communities supported families,
- and how issues of children at risk were addressed in the past.

The Elder Interview Project represents an important collection of memories and insights pertaining to our history. To ensure the safe and ethical storage of this legacy, the final report and the full transcripts of these interviews are stored in two locations: at the ONA Library in Kelowna and at the ONA Wellness Department Office in Penticton.

Okanagan Concept of Families

Many of the Elders told of being raised by extended family due to divorce or the death of a parent. They spoke about a concept of family that is different from the mainstream concept of family. *"Your first cousins are like your brother and sister. That's the way we were brought up."* (ME 10155) As one Elder explained: *"Yes, that's the way everything was everyone helped one another, if the person had to go working or something, the children stayed with the grandmother or other aunts would look after them."* (TQ 2900-3115)

THE WHOLE COMMUNITY, THEY WERE CLOSE. –ELDER INTERVIEWS (MG 3008)

In the experience of these Elders it was a common practice to care for the children of others. *"Everybody had somebody. Didn't matter if they were family or not family if anybody needed help they would help them in any way they could."* (JM 10433) Once they became parents themselves, the majority of the Elders interviewed had also raised children that were not biologically their own. Some of them raised their younger siblings or other relatives. Some raised foster kids.

Comments such as the following provide insight into the Okanagan family experience. *"Yes, people would stay here for a few days, sometimes they would travel quite a distance, the roads weren't the best then, they would stay for maybe a month, everybody was welcome and everyone helped each other, my grandmother would be tanning hides and those ladies would help her out."* (TQ 2500)

Based on the Elders' explanations, it is clear that that the Okanagan concept of family includes maternal and paternal grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. And if no family was available, then family friends or concerned people intervened to aid the children or whoever needed help. The Elders spoke about how communities supported families during their childhoods.

"We helped one another. If you were sick your neighbour, your uncle, your dad, your grandpa, whoever, would come and help you get wood. They would bring a pile of wood for you. They helped like that. They helped each other." (CP 13029)

Teaching Children

The Elders' childhood experiences provide insight into the Okanagan worldview. Children were taught by example and with kindness. They told about the gentleness of the adults who taught them. *"Nobody used a harsh voice in my grandma's house."* (HS 2407) They described how children should learn by doing. *"You need to introduce it to them when they're little and you keep doing that with them and you do different things each time. Introduce something different but you repeat that process and you repeat it and eventually they know how to do it on their own."* (HS 12519)

They spoke about the extended family members who taught them and the things that they were taught. *"The teachings came more or less from my grand-aunt and my grand-uncle and my grandfather and my grandmother.... How to keep a house and how to cook, to help with the cooking and the old ways that we're supposed to watch everything they do. It's just like a learning experience.... They always told us what they're cooking, all the time, different things. Even before we helped they tell us what they're cooking."* (MG 1549)

They described being taught by example and how well that works with children. *"After they become grown up, because they're living with it, they learn it without you teaching them, it just comes natural."* (JS 4700) They spoke about age differentiation for learning tasks like how to hunt. They talked about how responsibility was instilled and how they were expected to help out and care for siblings and other children. They were taught that Elders were to be respected whether they were family or not.

They learned the behavior that was expected of children and they described how they were disciplined when they did something wrong. *"They would tell me right away, this is what you're doing wrong and don't do it. They won't yell and scream at you. They'll say, no don't do it. This is how you do it. And if I'm doing something wrong, they come and show me how and they will talk to me all the time and teach me..."* (MB 39334) They also explained that, when their own family wasn't around, other community members would correct a mistake or misbehavior. *"I listened to them just as well as I did my Elders on my side and my family."* (MG 3934)

WHEN I WAS YOUNGER I HEARD A LOTS ABOUT THIS CAPTIK^{wl}, THE TALK ABOUT IT MOST ABOUT COYOTE MISCHIEF AND WHATNOT. -ELDER INTERVIEWS (TQ 2015)

Storytelling, visiting, listening to family history, these were integral aspects of the Elders' childhood experiences. The Elders shared memories of sitting around with extended family and visitors after a meal was finished and the dishes cleaned up and the children being included in listening to stories about how the people lived, how they got their food, history stories and also captik^{wł} stories.

NATION-WIDE LEARNING SESSIONS

GIVE THE CHILDREN THEIR HEARTS BACK. –REVITALIZATION SESSION

As part of the work of creating an organization that incorporates Syilx values, the ONA partnered with the En'owkin Centre for a series of learning sessions that framed themes pertaining to our children and families from a Syilx perspective. Participants came from all of the bands of the Nation and among them represented many decades of experience working with our families. The sessions explored Syilx culture and experiences while at the same time incorporating Syilx ways of doing things within the sessions themselves.

Teachers and community members alike have been saying: "Make the culture functional." In keeping with this, group discussions were conducted according to the principles of our own Indigenous process of Enowkin'wix^w. The perspectives of the Four Food Chiefs were used to ensure that all voices were heard and respected. Another way of using the culture is to speak the language, so efforts were made throughout the sessions to use nsyilxcən whenever possible. The first session focused on our captik^w. Subsequent sessions focused on nsyilxcən words for children and families and a Syilx-specific history of colonization and revitalization.

In the final session, participants spent time reflecting on the shape that our new child and family service delivery should take. They felt strongly that programs and services should be developed based on culture-centered insights, values and practices. The following were identified as being foundational.

- Keep children and families at the core of everything we do.
- Provide support to families *where they are at*.
- Focus on cultural activities as a way of bringing people together, recreating community social fabric and reinforcing Syilx values and principles.

RESILIENCY IS COMING BACK FROM TRAUMA. –SYILX HISTORY SESSION

Participants engaged in a wrap-up discussion about how to serve children and families in ways that are in keeping with our culture and with what our people want. They spoke about restoring our family and community systems through a holistic approach that recognizes that we all have gifts, we all have choice and we all have strong spirit – we just have to put in the time to find it.

ALL THE ANSWERS EXIST IN OUR COMMUNITIES. –SYILX HISTORY SESSION

Participants talked about the need to be clear about what our model is going to look like and to create a model that correlates with the role of the Grandmothers. They said that it will take a lot of time and input – both spiritually and physically – but that it is a good time for change, which we have gotten lazy over the last 100 years (residential school, alcohol, relationships) and that now it is time to be healthy, to learn the language, the songs, ceremonies and activities. The group talked about the need to come from the heart and to acknowledge the importance of Indigenous knowledge in our communities.

At the conclusion of these sessions, participants felt changed by the teachings and discussions and wanted to share their learnings with our communities so a Handbook summarizing the sessions was created for distribution to the communities of the Nation. *Go Back to the Root: A Learning Resource on Syilx Families* is available from the ONA.



COMING TOGETHER: NATIONWIDE FORUMS

Following on from the Children First Forum in 2008, the Wellness Committee convened additional forums in 2010 and 2011, bringing together Elders, community members and ONA staff to further explore relevant aspects of taking responsibility for our own child and families services.

The forum, Planning for the Children, was held for two days in May 2010 and featured break-out sessions with teachings and discussions related to four key topics.

- Captikwł,
- Okanagan Innovation
- Service Delivery
- Governance

The captikwł session considered the captikwł of Grizzly Bear and Lazy Boy. Participants explored ways in which the story can teach us today. The Okanagan Innovation session discussed roots of abuse but focused on how bringing Syilx culture back is working hand-in-hand with programs that are supporting our families. Service Delivery included a discussion of the findings in Elaine Hebert's paper on current practices in decolonizing child welfare and also explored how to structure service delivery. The Governance session focused on options for implementing de-centralized operational models.

The two-day forum in November 2011 included a focus on Aboriginal early childhood education. The forum was an opportunity to share the current status of the new Syilx child and family services. The sessions provided participants with opportunities to discuss key needs within communities and ideas for approaches to better support our children, including means of incorporating cultural teachings and practices. The forum included a presentation by Jeannette Armstrong that touched on the importance of truth seeking in community healing, especially given what our people have been through. She talked about traditional Syilx methods of disciplining children and the need for programs that support family reconciliation.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCANS

As part of the planning process for developing Syilx child and family services, Environmental Scans were conducted in six of the seven Okanagan Nation communities to help provide a comprehensive overview of the current environment within member bands. As a strategic planning tool, the scans help provide an understanding of our Nation's internal needs and assets related to our children and families, and lay the basis for identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). The full text of the environmental scans is included in the Appendix.

Overview

Overall, the Environmental Scans show that a wide range of services for children and families are being delivered in our communities. Communities are working to ensure good integration of services that link child and family programs with other departments including health, education, housing and social development.

Challenges persist. Poverty is an issue on many of our reserves and this translates into too many children living below the poverty line, sometimes in homes marked by violence and substance abuse. Healing still needs to occur between all generations of our extended families so that we can more fully take up our shared responsibilities. The grief and loss associated with intergenerational traumas continues to result in higher rates of suicide and substance-related deaths.

In terms of relations with MCFD, much work has been done by our communities to create partnerships with social workers and RCMP. All of the bands are targeting the codification of child and family welfare practices with MCFD, and some draft protocols are in process.

Many of our communities offer the health and wellness services provided by ONA including Aboriginal Child and Youth Mental Health, Aboriginal Early Childhood Development, Family Decision Making Program, the Okanagan Nation Response Team, Health Hub, and R'Native Voice. Other commonly offered services provided by the bands include after school programs, family programs, and counseling. Communities recognize the need to locate services close together to facilitate ease of access for families.

All of our communities (with the exception of USIB) have both a daycare and a band school. As well as all the other benefits of culturally appropriate education, this reinforces integration and linkages between services and families. For example, OKIB has access to every major family through their daycare and school.

A highlight for our communities is the inclusion of culture and language in their work as they further efforts to do things from a cultural perspective. As well, many communities identified member participation in community and cultural events as an important strength.

Our communities suffer from a lack of sustainable funding and this impacts children and their families when programs get started and then are unable to continue. Off-reserve services such as those provided Friendship Centres and Interior Health are also accessed by our communities and, for some, these present transportation issues. In particular, four of our rural communities have accessibility issues (LSIB, USIB, UNIB, and OIB in Oliver).

Bands are finding creative ways to address challenges and fill in the gaps. For example, PIB has a Family Enrichment Worker who is funded from multiple sources to work with high-risk families. Also, LSIB has created an effective Family Heads Model for ensuring community involvement and support.

A recurring theme in each community was regular efforts to re-assess the needs of community and make plans to address them. To learn more about the services offered by each community and their self-identified gaps and strengths, please refer to the Environmental Scans included in the Appendix.

siya? • SASKATOON BERRY

THE PERSPECTIVE OF CREATIVITY, VISION AND INNOVATION



A DECOLONIZATION PLAN

IT'S TIME TO DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY. –CHILDREN FIRST FORUM

There is growing recognition that social work practices that lead to the apprehension of children and the replacement of their family community with stranger care has not produced good outcomes. In response, social workers and communities around the world are developing alternative options that move away from mainstream models. This trend holds the promise of decolonizing child welfare systems and creating services that liberate and strengthen families.

In order to incorporate the latest thinking in Indigenous child and family wellness into the development of our own Syilx child and family services, the ONA contracted Secwepmc social work scholar Elaine Hebert to review current approaches to decolonizing child welfare practices. The subsequent paper provides a detailed account of decolonization theory and an overview of progressive social work practices being employed by Indigenous peoples. This section begins with a summary of her findings. It then highlights responsive programs that have been developed by the ONA as part of our emerging Syilx approach to promoting well-being. The section concludes by providing a range of options for governing our new child and family wellness services.

How to Decolonize Child Wellness

Establishing a decolonization plan requires recognizing that the disproportionate number of Indigenous children in care is due primarily to the legacy of colonization reflected by systemic issues such as racism, poverty, inadequate housing, unresolved intergenerational trauma, addictions, violence, and limited social support. Current child serving systems are

not set up to address systemic issues, indeed they can barely deal with prevention. They do not allow for enough community input and decision-making; families are left out of the process, except as the recipient of services.

As a starting point, decolonization requires that Indigenous peoples become educated to the generational effects of colonization. A decolonizing context is one that addresses both the intergenerational and current impacts of colonization. In working towards decolonization, we are not relegating ourselves to the status of victims. Rather, we are actively working to transform our lives and our communities. In terms of child wellness, decolonization means seeking alternative models that humanize the way in which we work with children and families in need.

The following two perspectives are common to the practice of child welfare from a decolonization standpoint. They are increasingly being used in community development work of all kinds.

Strength-Based Perspective

Applying a strength-based perspective encourages families to recognize the knowledge, capacities and resources that they already possess. This is especially important for families who do not conform to dominant norms because it allows for a conceptualization of strengths that are unique to the worldview of the family. In terms of child wellness, it facilitates early collaboration with families as well as supporting the achievement of goals that increase child safety.

Cultural Safety

Cultural safety draws attention to unequal power relations in the positions of different groups. Learning to practice cultural safety requires self-reflection and prompts critical examination of assumptions. Culturally safe service delivery adopts practices that redress the power imbalance and increase the autonomy and sense of safety experienced by families.

Indigenous Best Practice Around the World

In the experience of other Indigenous peoples, a variety of child welfare models have been found to engender a higher degree of success in resolving family issues. When used in Indigenous communities, all of these models have been found to successfully reduce the number of children in care and also reduce recidivism.

There is no doubt that children and families can benefit greatly when resources and services are integrated and organizations work together. In Canada, researchers have found such community-wide, cross-sectorial problem-solving strategies to be more successful than mainstream practices when working with Aboriginal youth. The process either successfully averted children from going into care or reduced the time a child remained in care. The process also contributed to repatriating children back to their home community.

The paper prepared for the ONA by Elaine Hebert focuses on three emerging models: Signs of Safety, Family Group Conferencing and Wraparound. *See Appendix B: Indigenous Best Practices* for an overview of these findings. Note that the full paper is available upon request from the ONA.

(1) Signs of Safety

This collaboration-grounded approach to child protection work developed in Australia. It expands the investigation of risk to encompass strengths and signs of safety that can be built upon to stabilize the situation of a child and their family.

(2) Family Group Conferencing

Family Group Conferencing (FGC) encourages community-based solutions whereby extended families are supported to develop effective service plans that safeguard children and promote their welfare. FGC rests on the premise that child wellbeing is enhanced by strengthening families and their networks of support.

(3) Wraparound Approach

Developed in the US, this approach identifies services and natural supports within the child's life that can be brought together in an individualized plan. Wraparound can be an effective process for early intervention as well as addressing more complex needs.

A Syilx Approach

Like Indigenous people elsewhere, the ONA has designed and implemented a number of indigenized approaches to service delivery that create a culturally safe environment and work across sectors. An integrated approach is essential because we understand that you can't address the wellbeing of our children without addressing areas such as health, education, housing and income security. The programs described below have been implemented in the past decade but all build upon Syilx values. The success of these programs has clearly established the effectiveness of working with our children and families in a manner that respects Indigenous knowledge and history and takes a collaborative and supportive approach. See *Appendix: Syilx Indigenous Approaches to Program Development* for more details about each of these programs.

Səxʷkənxit əlx • The Okanagan Nation Response Team

This team of Okanagan frontline workers is able to respond to crises in the community when they occur. The team is comprised of youth, elders, knowledge keepers, Nysilxcen speakers and frontline workers. They also deliver community education on topics including depression, suicide, alcohol and drug addiction as well as prevention strategies.

R'Native Voice Youth Program

Research indicates that knowledge and pride in one's culture and heritage can reduce the likelihood of Indigenous youth engaging in high-risk behaviours. This series of workshops teaches youth about their culture and connects them to their communities. Topics include self esteem, stress, goal setting, lateral violence and racism.

Family Decision Making Program

Family Decision Making is a voluntary, family-driven process that empowers families to actively participate in decisions that affect their lives. Supports are identified and follow up measures are put in place. By helping families work out problems together in a culturally safe environment, Family Decision Making builds relationships, increases community capacity to raise healthy people and ensures our children grow up knowing who they are.

Child and Youth Mental Health Program

This program supports Indigenous children and youth to obtain equitable, timely access to appropriate mental health services that are culturally relevant. The program works on several fronts to create awareness and inform families and communities of services.

Nsyilxan Family Fishing Camp

The revival of the Okanagan Nation Sockeye Salmon fishery presented the opportunity to hold a family fishing camp in July 2011 as a means to strengthen connections and rebuild traditional forms of community harvesting within a learning context that includes language revitalization and cultural protocols and practices.

Aboriginal Early Childhood Development (AECD) Strategy

The AECD Strategy explores how the Nation can transform the care we provide for our children in their earliest years. The Strategy supports the dream voiced repeatedly by our people of childcare programs grounded in Syilx values and embedding in cultural ways of knowing and doing.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

DO NOT CREATE ANOTHER COLONIAL INSTITUTION. –FOCUS GROUP FEEDBACK

As the Indigenous people of this territory, the Okanagan Nation has the clearly mandated goal of reinstating self-government and implementing meaningful law-making authority in keeping with Syilx occupation of this land from time immemorial. The Nation's inherent rights and responsibilities extend to our lands and resources, and also to our people and culture. The vision of the Okanagan Nation is to exercise full jurisdiction over Syilx lands and people, and the ONA is currently doing the work of reaffirming sovereign un-ceded governance. This is the foundational principle of our Nation-to-Nation approach to child and family wellness. As a Nation, we assert jurisdiction over Aboriginal child and family services in our territory.

It is within this context of emerging self-government that the Nation is moving to create Okanagan child and family wellness services within a holistic plan that is based on community engagement and Syilx values.

In reviewing governance options for this new organization, research was conducted into what other First Nations are doing regarding the shape of their relationship with the federal and provincial governments, and the internal structure of their child and family services organizations.

Canada's history of abuse and neglect of Aboriginal children began to turn a corner in the early 1990s when INAC established Directive 20-1 to provide funding for First Nations communities to control and manage their own child and family service agencies in accordance with provincial child welfare laws. In the ensuing decades, many First Nations have begun delivering child and family services and a number of different jurisdiction and funding models have emerged.

The Wellness Committee retained Waboose Consulting to conduct a review of the different models of jurisdiction in place across Canada including:

- Tripartite Agreements and Treaties
- Band By-Law
- Delegated Agencies

A summary of the findings can be found in *Appendix F: Governance Overview*.

Delegated Agencies

By far, most First Nations child and family service agencies in Canada are created by an agreement between the Nation and the federal and provincial governments that delegates authority for the provision of services. The agency operates according to provincial child welfare legislation (in BC this is the Child, Family and Community Services Act), and the federal government provides funding. In BC, there are three progressively higher levels of delegation for agencies with C3 being partial delegation and C6 being full delegation.³

According to Cindy Blackstock, a leader in Indigenous child and family wellness, a member of the Gitksan Nation, and Executive Director of the First Nations Children and Families Caring Society, the delegated model achieves two things:

- (1) It gives First Nations an opportunity to apply provincial laws in ways that are as consistent as possible with the Nation's own values, beliefs and customs.
- (2) It serves as a capacity-building measure while Nations pursue the ultimate goal of self-government.

Exercise Jurisdiction

The Committee's review of jurisdiction models in place across Canada found that while some communities have more jurisdiction, and others have negotiated more resources than are available under Directive 20-1, the goal of full jurisdiction with the right to enact laws independent of provincial standards, has yet to be attained by any First Nation. At the same time, research conducted by the Committee demonstrates that within the limits of the current political context, those First Nations that have begun to deliver child and family services based on their own cultural framework have seen improved outcomes for their communities.

Based on research and community input, the Wellness Committee recommended to the Chiefs Executive Council that the ONA work with Canada and BC to advance our goals of autonomy and self-governance in the area of child and family services.

As the Indigenous people of Syilx territory, the Okanagan Nation has an undeniable responsibility and mandate to ensure the cultural integrity, safety, and well being of all our children and families. In working with the federal and provincial governments to establish an Okanagan child and family wellness agency, the Nation asserts that this participation

³ In BC, there are progressively higher levels of delegation for child protection agencies beginning with C3 and continuing up to C6, which is full delegation.

C3 = Family support (Resource development, voluntary service delivery)

C4 = Guardianship services for children in care

C6 = Child protection services (Investigations, interventions, court processes)

does not diminish or otherwise derogate from the inherent right of self-government or any other right protected by the Constitution Act.

A Syilx Organization

Syilx teachings tell us that traditionally the most powerful of our people, the medicine people, asked everyone they worked with the same question: *What is your way?* By doing so, they were demonstrating that you do not go into an area and tell others what to do, rather each person, each family; each community must be recognized and respected.

This is consistent with a decentralized approach to governance in which the organization administers services, but the implementation and delivery of the programs and services is managed by the local bands and Friendship Centres.

The Okanagan child and family services agency will operate as a department of the ONA. Governance would remain the purview of the Chiefs Executive Council. But the decentralized governance structure is designed to preserve local authority and build in accountability while advancing the Nation's goals of self-determination in the area of child and family wellness.

In keeping with community feedback and Syilx cultural practices, the ONA will administer services, but each band will manage the implementation and delivery of the programs locally.

The organization is guided by a Nation-wide Advisory Council. The Advisory Council collaborates with Community Tables on service design, delivery, and outcome evaluation. There are three Community Tables – one in each region. Both bands and friendship centres will participate through Community Tables and their involvement in the Nation Advisory Council. An independent review body, such as an Ombudsman, adjudicates grievances and ensures due process.

An overview of these bodies is provided here. For a more detailed discussion, please see ***Appendix F: Governance Overview.***

Nation Advisory Council:

- Guides the organization, establishes outcomes, standards and evaluation processes for child and family services;
- Works with Community Tables to design services and evaluate outcomes;
- Includes one representative appointed by each band and friendship centre, as well as two Nation Elders.

Community Tables:

- Established by the bands and friendship centre located within each of the three regions.
- Works with Advisory Council to design community services, establish outcomes, negotiate contracts, oversee service delivery, review and evaluate.
- Includes at least one Elder and one Youth.

CONCLUSION

Many people commented on the importance of ensuring that services can be modified at the community level. Members advocated for a Syilx cultural approach that allows for direction from the bottom up, much in the same way that our chiefs of old used to go to the people to get their instructions on what they should do. Based upon this input, the structure of the new organization is designed to respect local expertise and ensure community is involved in the development, evaluation and modification of evolving services.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE = LOCAL AUTHORITY. –FOCUS GROUP FEEDBACK



THE VISION

RECLAIM AND STRENGTHEN SYILX FAMILY SYSTEMS. –ONA COMMUNITY DIRECTIVE

Full jurisdiction over our children is the vision that has inspired and guided the development of the Syilx Child and Family Plan. The approaches and programs outlined in this document are tools for us to use in moving towards our vision.

Feedback from the Syilx community provided the foundation for our new child and family services. In forums and focus groups, the Syilx people shared the same messages.

- Reclaim and strengthen our family systems.
- Use the model of Family Decision-Making that has been central to the wellbeing of our communities since long before contact.

Delegation

The transition towards full responsibility for statutory child protection services is one of the tools that can move us towards our vision. The intergenerational traumas of colonization continue to impact our family systems and result in harms to our children. The way that MCFD does child protection reduces the capacity of our families and communities. Instead of taking a punitive approach, we are creating services that impose high standards of protection for our children. This is a de-colonization process. It will take time to get it right. We want services that help heal and strengthen family systems. Only by increasing the capacity of our families will we change these cycles.

Beyond Delegation

Delegation is an important step, but it is not the whole picture. We want to ensure that we take advantage of all the resources available. Maintaining dialogue with community is a key piece of doing things in an Indigenous way. We want child and family services that are holistic and community-driven. This is how we strengthen family structures and ensure our communities can care for our children.

Indigenous Approaches

The ONA has already been doing the work of designing and implementing indigenized approaches to service delivery. The healing potential of a truly Okanagan child and family wellness agency is foreshadowed by the success of programs such as the Family Decision Making program, R'Native Voice, and Səx^wkənxit əlx. The Kwu Xast program for children ages 8 to 12 is another example of a best practice that was developed by one of our bands and is now being shared with our Nation.

This Child and Family Plan was created through an Indigenous approach that emphasized community engagement, reflecting on cultural teachings, and taking guidance from Indigenous values. The Family Decision-Making model outlined in the next section is a key piece of our Indigenous approach to child and family service delivery. We will continue to develop and utilize uniquely Syilx programs that incorporate family systems, Elders, knowledge keepers, and our nsyilxcən language.

Partnerships

The ONA is exploring the opportunity to work with MCFD outside the child protection umbrella. Generally, these services are contracted out to non-Aboriginal service delivery organizations that often lack the cultural competency to work effectively with our children and families. The result is that our communities encounter difficulties in both accessing and utilizing these services. Other service delivery streams (beside child protection services) that are managed by MCFD include:

- Child and youth mental health
- Early childhood development (including assessments, infant development, post-natal support, and parenting)
- Child and youth with special needs
- Youth justice (including intervention and post-support)
- Adoption

In order to change this situation, the ONA has developed a Letter of Understanding with MCFD establishing a collaborative process for the planning and delivery of services that impact our communities. This LOU is the first of its kind in BC and an important step towards the disentanglement of funds and services.

The objective is to ensure these services are delivered in ways that are both relevant and accessible to our communities. This requires either taking over the contract or working with service providers to make the necessary changes. The ONA gains a directive voice in how these services are delivered to our communities and our families gain improved access to increasingly meaningful services.

Responsive to Community

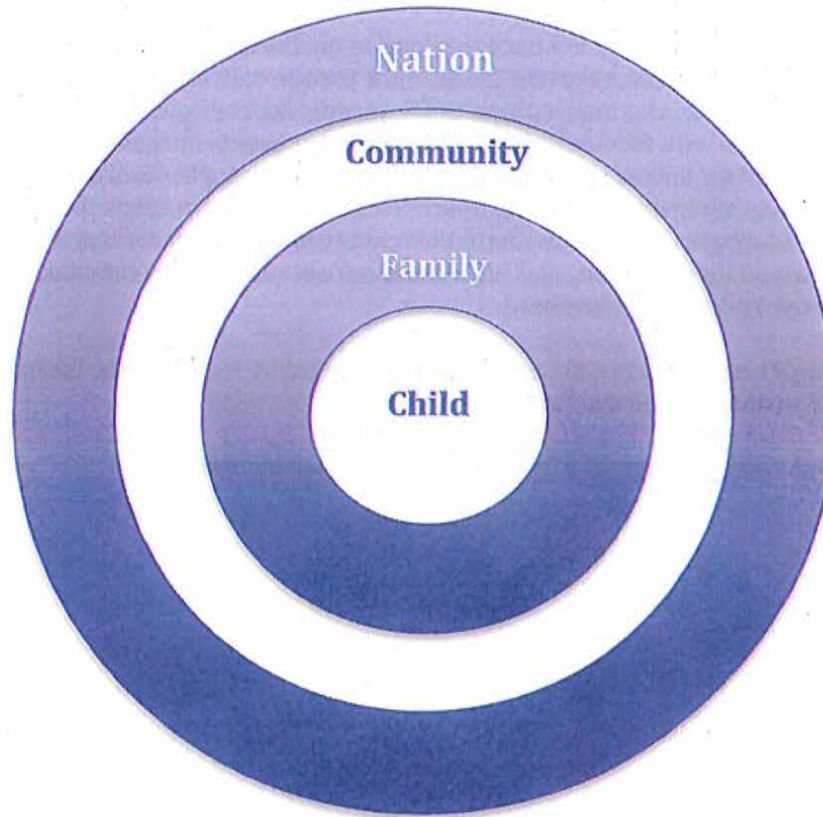
Ongoing community engagement is critical for philosophical consistency and for ensuring continued relevance. Our new organization includes an approach to quality assurance that is informed by Syilx values and supports a cycle of feedback and improvement.

Many other delegated agencies do not have this level of quality assurance. Our policies and procedures build responsiveness into the fabric of the service delivery. Instead of reviews that sit and gather dust, this approach provides for ongoing staff review, feedback from community, discussion with the Advisory Council, and subsequent changes that are themselves reviewed for ongoing relevance. We recognize that people – and organizations – must adapt to changing conditions. Our approach to quality assurance keeps the organization coming back to connect with the community in a way that creates a culture of continual review and improvement. This will ensure our service delivery remains relevant to the needs of our children and families.

The current climate of change in child welfare is an opportunity to reduce the harm that is still being done to our children and families.

It is time to do things differently. It is time to decolonize our families.

THE FOUNDATION



Syilx Family Systems

The Syilx culture, the nsyilxcən language, and the Enowkin'wix^w process are the foundation upon which this Plan rests. The voice of the community is in sync with our cultural values. The new organization must take a holistic approach based on Syilx laws and customs. Families must be at the centre. Cultural practices must be embedded within the service delivery approach. Support and prevention must be prioritized.

In Nation-wide forums, interviews with Elders and more than a dozen community focus groups, the Syilx people gave a strong message about outcomes: "No more children leaving our communities."

The people identified three main areas of focus for the new organization:

(1) Raise Healthy Children: Teach them the culture. Promote active living. Create relationships with Elders.

(2) Support Healthy Families: Focus on prevention. Support natural caregivers. Make sure our communities know the resources available to them. Provide home support that starts with prenatal moms and continues until children start school.

(3) Do Intervention Differently: Identify protocols for how suspected child abuse and neglect are reported. Work with extended families. Keep kids in community and in the culture. Custom care plans instead of foster care with strangers.

Taking inspiration from our cultural teachings and today's best practices in Indigenous family wellness, this Plan proposes a uniquely Syilx approach to service delivery that will address complex root causes and reinforce our community's ability to create healthy environments where children are safe and thrive. The suggestion has been made that the mandate of the organization should be to stop the cycle of intergenerational trauma with this generation. Our Family Decision-Making Model is delivered within the philosophy of Syilx values and principles respecting the autonomy of families and recognizing their strengths and resiliency. Resources are used to support decolonization practices that strengthen families and improve family functioning.

Family Decision Making

Family Decision Making is the guiding principle of the Syilx Child and Family Service Department. Beginning from the premise of collective responsibility, this model of child and family wellness treats the wider network of kin and community as a source of strength and seeks to actively involve them in child and family wellness. The Family Decision-Making approach has been happening in this region since long before contact.

Our traditional process of *Enowkinwixw* is the foundation of Family Decision Making. This consensus-based practice uses dynamic tension to seek insight into different perspectives, to shape a shared approach, and to develop a collective understanding.

Family Decision Making incorporates a worldview that understands both Indigenous ways and the historical impacts of colonization and subsequent intergenerational trauma. It allows for more responsive and culturally appropriate ways of working. It encourages programs that strengthen support networks and empower families to take part in creating plans that meet their needs. The approach increases the motivation for families to participate in a process that has long seemed oppressive. For many Indigenous families who have experienced intergenerational trauma, this process is a first step to reconnecting with each other and with the community. It is an opportunity for healing to occur and a powerful sense of family to emerge.

Family Decision Making offers many important strengths for our communities including:

- redressing historical injustice by recognizing and returning responsibility for children and family matters back to the Nation.
- recognizing that the community has a role to play both in supporting the family and in ensuring the child is connected to their ancestral land, culture and language.
- promoting partnerships between families, communities and government with respect to planning for children.
- diverting cases from the courts thereby reducing delays in decision-making and planning.

- including family members in the creation of their own case plans, thereby increasing their motivation and supporting them to increase their capacity to make good decisions for their children.

The Aboriginal Child and Youth Mental Health initiative is another example of a Family Decision-Making approach that supports improved family system functioning. This is a new program in the south Okanagan that is already demonstrating positive results. The program not only prevents children and youth from coming into care, it also supports families to address the underlying traumas that are leading to crisis.

OPERATIONS

Service Delivery

Building on the groundwork laid by our Syilx culture and the guidance provided by both the community and the latest best practices in decolonization, an operational model has emerged that will enable us to once again exercise jurisdiction over our children and families. Service delivery based on a Family Decision Making model is innovative, develops capacity, and has a positive impact on children, families and communities. It is also convergent with Okanagan values and practices. The structure of the organization respects local autonomy, builds in accountability, and advances the Nation's goals of self-determination in the area of child and family wellness.

As we move forward, the service delivery continuum will be developed within the Enowkwn'wixw process and will prioritize the following.

- Prevention and early intervention support services.
- Family preservation and reunification.
- Placement options that meet needs for cultural and family attachment.
- Custom care placements that protect rights to land, language and culture.

Given what we know about the circumstances contributing to family breakdown, child serving systems must be an integral part of community planning and comprehensive planning needs to address key issues such as housing, education, health and economic development. Pragmatic short-term solutions such as safe houses, emergency housing, mental health services for children and families, support services, and equitable resources for extended family members must be considered a priority.

Within a five-year timeframe, Syilx Child and Family Services will move to offering the following service delivery streams.

- Child and Youth with Special Needs
- Early Childhood Development
- Youth Justice
- Child and Youth Mental Health
- Adoptions

Governance

As the Indigenous people of this territory, the Okanagan Nation has the clearly mandated goal of reinstating self-government and implementing meaningful law-making authority in

keeping with Syilx occupation of this land for time immemorial. As a Nation, we assert jurisdiction over Aboriginal child and family services in our territory. The following governance recommendations were reviewed and accepted by the Chiefs Executive Council of the ONA.

Exercise Jurisdiction: The ONA will work with the federal and provincial governments to advance its goals of autonomy and self-governance in the area of child and family services. In doing so, the Nation asserts that this participation does not diminish or otherwise derogate from the inherent right of self-government or any other right protected by the Constitution Act.

Create A Decentralized Governance Structure: In keeping with community feedback and Syilx cultural practices, the organization will have a decentralized governance structure designed to preserve local authority. The organization will govern and administer services, but the implementation and delivery of the specific programs and services will be managed by the individual bands and friendship centres. The organization will operate as a department of the ONA. When the Nation's overall governance structure emerges, child and family services will evolve within that framework.

For a fuller discussion, see *Appendix: Governance Overview*.

Local Authority

As discussed in the previous chapter, local authority is facilitated by the Nation Advisory Council and the Community Tables. There are three community tables, one in each region.

The working relationship between the Nation's Advisory Council and the Community Tables is an essential component of this structure. The relationship operates according to the principles of a continuous improvement model of evaluation, essentially acting as a built-in feedback loop. An Ombudsmen is in place to adjudicate grievances.

Nation Advisory Council:

- Guides the organization, establishes outcomes, standards and evaluation processes for child and family services;
- Works with Community Tables to design services and evaluate outcomes;
- Includes one representative appointed by each band and friendship centre, as well as two Nation Elders;
- Reports quarterly to the CEC, reports annually at AGMs.

Community Tables:

- Established by the bands and friendship centre located within each of the three regions.
- Works with Advisory Council to design community services, establish outcomes, negotiate contracts, oversee service delivery, review and evaluate.
- Includes at least one Elder and one Youth.

Quality Assurance

A high standard of quality assurance is being implemented for Syilx Child and Family Services. The approach to quality assurance builds on policies and procedures developed by the Wellness Department, and meet or exceeds standards for Aboriginal child and family

services organizations. These policies communicate clear expectations, ensure consistency, and provide guidance to staff and clients. They support a continuous cycle of feedback and performance improvement. This approach of continual review and community engagement is in line with Syilx values. It is also essential to creating better outcomes for our children and families.

The Quality Assurance Handbook has four sections.

Business Practices includes leadership, strategic planning, legal requirements, financial planning and management, risk management, human resources, technology, rights of the person served including client complaint processes, release of information, accessibility plan.

Health and Safety includes training, criminal record checks, internal and external inspections, emergency procedures, critical incidences, infection control, transportation, and crisis intervention.

Information Measurement and Management includes data collection system (including person-served information, business practices, program evaluations and health and safety); the development of data collection tools, measures of efficiency including reporting mechanisms, and processes to effect ongoing performance improvement.

Program Service includes the development of policies and procedures specific to Child and Family Services including child and family-centered care, screening and access to services, orientation, assessment, plan of care, transition, records of the child/youth served, and quality records review.

Transition Plan

The Okanagan Nation is proposing a phased-in approach as we move towards full responsibility for statutory services that builds upon the success of programs currently being delivered. While more planning is required before ONA can assume full delegation status (C6), the start-up phase of operations includes a transition plan that increases ability to deliver direct services concurrent with ongoing planning activities.

Initially, Syilx Child and Family Services will deliver C3 services. Over a three-to-five year timeframe, operations will transition to delivering C4 to C6 services. In the final phases of the plan, service delivery will expand to include both on and off reserve.

Working in partnership with MCFD, ONA's existing programs will evolve under the umbrella of Family Decision-Making and expand to provide a full spectrum of voluntary support services. This phased-in approach will enable Family Decision Making to begin sooner in the process. Currently, referrals are received once a child has already been in care for some time, usually after a continuing custody order is already in place. During the start-up phase, and in coordination with MCFD, the Okanagan Nation can begin to deliver Family Decision-Making beginning with the intake stage and continuing through referrals and carrying through to providing support services for families to implement their plans.

The ONA is proposing the development of three teams (North, Central, South). Each team will include one or two Family Decision Making Social Workers (delegated), a Family Reunification worker, a Developmental Clinician, a Wraparound coordinator and a Program Administrative Assistant. A full-time Practice Manager will supervise the teams. ONA will

second two MCFD lead managers: the Practice Manager, and an Implementation Operations Manager to assist with the transition from C4 to C6 services. The ONA proposes that MCFD transfer all non-delegated services and any corresponding contracts.

A key focus of the first phase is building capacity at the local level through the establishment of Community Tables in each of the three regions. Community Tables will provide support and feedback to the emerging teams. Each table will have a slightly different composition to reflect their communities and members will need to undergo a training course to orient them to the Family Decision-Making model and provide them with the necessary understanding of child and family services.

For a detailed overview of the transition process, *see Appendix G: Overview of Five-Year Transition Plan*. The Appendix provides a table detailing each of the five phases as we move towards fully delegated service delivery both on and off reserve.

Decision-making power must accompany our new responsibilities and this includes the ability to re-tool funding in a manner that is consistent with this plan. In other words, funds cannot come with stipulations attached. It is the fiduciary responsibility of the federal government to fund delivery of child and family services to the Syilx people. Federal governments have delegated this responsibility to the province along with a transfer of funds for the delivery of this service. Provincial government then uses these funds to deliver child and family services that, in theory, are accessible to all people living in BC. Current government-funded programs are not responsive or accountable to the Aboriginal people that they serve. Despite MCFD's inclusion of responsiveness and accountability in their guiding principles, we still struggle with inappropriate services. MCFD must disentangle these funds, making them available for the development of programs by Syilx Child and Family Services.

CONCLUSION

The people of the Okanagan Nation have the opportunity to engage and become leaders in a collaborative, strength-based, culturally-appropriate serving system that will focus on ensuring children from prenatal to young adulthood have the support and resources they need to thrive and succeed. Throughout all of our work with *captikwł* and culture, it has been strongly evident that our traditions are relevant today in ways we never imagined. They are indeed a strong, viable and living foundation that will take us and our children forwards into the future.

We can do this. It won't happen right away but it *will* happen. There are strategic steps to take. Creating our own Syilx child and family services is an important one. This is an exercise in restoration based on our Syilx laws and culture. This is how we begin to decolonize our family systems. This is how we continually evolve. This is how we support our communities to practice *Sqilxw*: Our people's way. We will carry on the work, tell the *captikwł*, teach the teachings, and always be preparing for the *stelsqilxw* – the people-to-be.



Photo: September 2008 Wellness Committee, MCFD and AANDC agreed to enter into planning for delegation.