

Fostering Reconciliation

An Exploration of the TRC's Calls to Action

2019/2020 Province Wide
Forums



The Kinship & Foster Family
Network of Manitoba

FOSTERING CONNECTIONS

What role can Kinship and
Foster Parents play to aid
Reconciliation

Fostering Reconciliation

The Kinship and Foster Family Network of Manitoba believes in supporting and empowering kinship and foster families in our province. Each year, our organization invites Manitoba's kinship and foster parents to participate in a series of community forums in different parts of the province. These forums offer kinship and foster parents an opportunity to share their wisdom and experiences and express their opinions on matters related to their role as caregivers for children in care. It is our hope that the ideas presented in these forums will enhance the experience for both the caregivers and the children they care for.

Over a span of 14 months, from September 2019 to November 2020, we engaged kinship and foster parents across the province to share their thoughts on reconciliation and what they felt their role in the reconciliation process could be. Our first two forums, in Swan River and Winnipeg, were held in person. With the arrival of Covid-19, our third and final forum was delayed. Normally, this would have been held in a community in the southern portion of the province in late spring but was postponed until November 2020 and was delivered as virtual meetings via our

Licensed Zoom Rooms. It was a new experience for most, but was successful and had the advantage of being able to reach people in all areas of Manitoba who may not have otherwise been able to attend.

"What does reconciliation mean to you?"

The basis for this series of forums was the report released by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). The TRC was created to investigate, uncover and document the truth regarding the residential school system and the impact it had and continues to have on the Indigenous people of Canada. In June 2015, the TRC released its summary report along with 94 Calls to Action which were drawn up with the goal to advance the process of reconciliation.

Historical Perspective

For each of the forums, a brief history was given on colonization, residential schools, the government's role in trying to assimilate the Indigenous people into European culture, and the many challenges the Indigenous people have experienced stemming from these acts. While the TRC was only able to look at the Residential School System and the Indigenous population, many Metis and Dene families were also affected. The '60's Scoop' also played a role in tearing apart families and was part of the presentation given at the forums. Impacts are still being felt today as a result of the government's actions in these areas. The Indigenous people lost their lands, their languages, rights and traditions. Most lost their names as they were given 'Christian' names by the Indian agents who couldn't pronounce their Indigenous names.

Families were torn apart when children were sent to residential schools where they were often mistreated and abused, unable to see their families. All this equates to trauma, loss of identity, and the inability to learn skills and stories from previous generations as would have happened naturally prior to colonization.

Even though Residential Schools have all been closed , the effects of them are still being felt. Racism is still evident. Poverty, alcoholism and addictions are far too common as a result of hopelessness. In Manitoba, 90% of the children in the care of Child and Family Services are Indigenous. Change needs to happen.

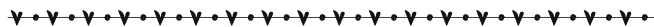
The goal of giving this history was to get kinship and foster parents thinking about the children they care for, why those children are in care, and what role they, as caregivers, could play in the process of reconciliation. Throughout the forum, participants were shown several videos - "The 60's Scoop", "Justice for Aboriginal Peoples - It's Time", and the Ted Talk video "Decolonization is for Everyone". Other suggestions for viewing were "He Can Fancy Dance" (Cindy Paul Scott) and "We Were Children". Recommendations of books to read included "Let the People Speak" by Sheila Jones and "21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act" by Dr. Bob Joseph. These all help to create awareness of the struggles and challenges for the Indigenous people that have brought us to the place we are today. Change is needed. Our goal was to get kinship and foster parents actively thinking about what role they can play in the journey towards reconciliation in Manitoba.

Reconciliation means..."The creation of personal teams to help the families"

The Calls to Action in the TRC's report were divided into two categories: Legacy and Reconciliation

For our forums, we focused on the Legacy section of the report which looked at the harms that were done by residential schools and the proposed actions that should be taken to foster reconciliation. We pulled out the pieces we felt were most relevant for children in care under the following headings:

1. Language and Culture
2. Education
3. Child Welfare
4. Justice



The question was asked "What does reconciliation mean to you?"

Responses from kinship and foster parents to that question included:

- The creation of personal teams to help the families
- Families are broken, we need to respect them
 - Positive communication
- Treatment with children returning home being the goal
 - Have kinship and foster parents as part of the child's team of support

"How can you foster reconciliation in your kinship/foster parent practices?"

This was the main focus of the Forum. Participant responses have been categorized under the following subcategories of the four Calls to Action that we chose from the report.

Language and Culture #14 (i)

"Aboriginal languages are a fundamental element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them"

Language and culture has been lost due to colonization and residential schools. Part of the process of reconciliation should be to help preserve these aspects. What is the role of kinship and foster parents in this area?

Participant responses:

1. I think it should be a desire of the foster parent to actively work towards being sure that their aboriginal kids in care have access to local aboriginal gatherings and activities that occur within the community. If it's not a desire of the foster parent then I also believe there should be pressure or even requirements from the licensing agency for foster parents to be a part of these activities.

Language and Culture cont'd:

2. There needs to be an increase in training for all foster parents, case managers, social workers, supervisors, directors and CEO's. This training NEEDS to be MADE IN MANITOBA and not borrowed from another context. It needs to be standardized and available to everyone, it needs to be created with and facilitated by First Nations humans.
3. Foster parents who wish to research and gather historical genealogical information for their kids in care should be allowed to do so. Perhaps agencies would grant permission for foster parents to do this on the condition that information gathered be submitted to workers so it can remain in the child's file.
4. When an agency licenses a foster parent there should be an information session or package given to foster parents about cultural norms, ways or customs to alleviate some of the culture shock that can occur when 'white' people come together with Aboriginal parents, relatives and community members.
5. Waive cost for any person to find their original aboriginal name at any time. Offer cultural and language teachings from school early years.
6. The Aboriginal language is sacred and the meaning of words take on a whole different meaning when said in the language. I feel every agency and community should be able to have a language program that is funded within their community. Utilize community elders, parents and agencies. Elders needed.
7. Language: labelling in schools i.e. washrooms, doors, windows. Cards in Cree.
8. Family training is a pre-requisite which will help in the process of reconciliation. Changing the way people think can be a positive thing in time going forward.

Language and Culture cont'd:

9. Learn to make bannock. Introduce them [children] to the culture such as art.
10. Help them to learn their language and culture. Also try to take them to family.
11. Focusing on family visits.
12. Coming up with ideas so families can be together.
13. Finding a way to positively deal with missed family visits.
14. More inclusion with the CFS system.
15. Foster parents to supervise visits.
16. Having a Plan B if visits fall apart.
17. Improve communication and visits with foster parents and bio family.

*"To know where we are going, we need
to know where we have been"*

Education #10 (ii)

"Improving education attainment levels and success rates"

Participant Responses:

1. Stop calling kids over PA system when social workers, support workers, drivers, etc come to see or pick up the children
2. Schools need to accept services such as services offered by Jordan's Principles
3. Social workers should visit the children in the evening
4. Supported home schooling. Collaborating with school system
5. Education field needs to work toward teaching everyone - that no matter the culture or household, there are no differences
6. Need to start to teach life skills - cooking, childcare, gardening. This also could work well in culture and language. The Key - needs all levels of peoples to input.
7. More and more of the foster children are labelled in our schools right from the start of school. Then they are put in modified classes and are not doing the same actual work of the grade they are in. Most of our kids that graduate Grade 12 have no experience in life skills whatsoever and then they are lost in the world and then on the streets. I myself think that one should also be training our kids life skills and how to live in the real world.
8. School systems to include foster parents in the professional team for each child. Team should include child, foster parent, bio parent (if possible), teachers, doctors, mental health and social workers.
9. Start a support or fun kind of group for kinship and foster parents with the school your child attends.

Education cont'd:

10. Attempt to incorporate Indigenous language in elementary.
11. Involved in curriculum - where we can have a class starting in Grade 1 on Residential School history - with foster parents and parents included.
12. Provide EA's whenever the need benefits the child and keep them there.
13. Establish supported home school for kids that don't adjust to public system and all the chaos.
14. I believe that school employees should all have current and updated training on FASD by Aboriginal people. Medication is not the answer to a child that already has a damaged brain.
15. Education providers should be trained on FASD, ADHD, as well as the trauma kids go through and the trauma foster parents go through.
16. Schools hire a specialized teacher to work with affected children. Elders in schools.
17. For education, we need more advocates and teachers, administrators and curriculum developers to be able to accommodate children in care - to facilitate meaningful education that is less about a positivist, Eurocentric point of view. It is clear the system is failing First Nations people and not the other way around. More First Nations context is needed.
18. Make sure they attend school regularly. Getting them involved in after school activities.

"Information regarding the child needs to be shared with the family"

Child Welfare #3 and #4 (iii)

#3 "We call upon all levels of government to fully implement Jordan's Principles"

#4 (iii) "Establish, as an important priority, a requirement that placements of Aboriginal children into temporary and permanent care be culturally appropriate"

**It was mentioned that, in Manitoba, block funding has been put into place for Child and Family Services Agencies. Bill C-92 is a federal bill which allows Indigenous people jurisdiction over child and family services for their children.

Participant responses:

1. Need more inclusion of kinship and foster parents (co-parenting).
2. Information regarding the child needs to be shared with the family.
3. Kinship/foster parents need to be a part of the team surrounding the child.
4. Kinship/foster parents need to have more say in the process.
5. Better communication with bio parents.
6. Kinship/foster parents need appreciation for the work they do.
7. Need to get rid of the stigma. Kinship/foster parents are being told by bio family that they are making money off the kids.
8. Kinship/foster parents should meet to communicate before visits
9. Kinship/foster parents need to know the plan for the child

Child Welfare cont'd:

10. Need to facilitate safe family visits.

11. Get rid of term 'foster parent'.

12. Need sensitivity training.

13. Communication between kinship/foster parents and bio parents. Ask questions about the child (hobbies, favorite foods, talents, etc) Engage with the parent to help keep them feeling positive and informed of their children's lives.

14. Build a family plan for 'before and after'. Continued help with programs such as Family Enhancement. Chief and Council have responsibility to build a safe house for children in care. Children should not have to leave their homes - parents should leave if necessary. Children have the right to remain in the home.

15. Advocate for resources for young men parents. More supports for youth to transition on own.

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**"ALL CANADIANS, AS TREATY
PEOPLES, SHARE RESPONSIBILITY
FOR ESTABLISHING AND
MAINTAINING MUTUALLY
RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS"**

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Child Welfare cont'd:

16. Some agencies won't allow us to connect with the natural family. Help agencies learn that you can be a valuable part of reconciliation with the family. Start the conversation. Be concrete. It's never too late to ask the question "How do we do this?"
17. Foster parents don't feel they have a voice. They don't think they can make a difference.
18. Where are the supports for the bio parents?
19. Kinship and foster parent role should change to foster families (not just the children).
20. Kinship and foster parents do not know when to connect child with family.



"It's never too late to ask the question "How do we do this?"

Justice #34 (i and iii) and #38

"We call upon the governments of Canada, the provinces, and territories to undertake reforms to criminal justice system to better address the needs of offenders with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), including:

- i. Providing increased community resources and powers for courts to ensure that FASD is properly diagnosed, and that appropriate community supports are in place for those with FASD.**
- iii. Providing community, correctional, and parole resources to maximize the ability of people with FASD to live in the community."**

"We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial and Aboriginal governments to commit to elimination the overrepresentation of Aboriginal youth in custody over the next decade."

Participant Responses:

1. Start with preventative measures by acknowledging the issues.
2. Can start early with education with school system or parenting programs.
3. More or additional life skills training for young parents.
4. Info on FASD.
5. Just more prevention programs and education.
6. Field walks can be used for cultural and language teaching, child's anger management and training on handling children with anger.
7. Finding the child's interests, dreams, building paths, triage programs, calendars of programs available. Health forums on disabilities.

Justice cont'd:

8. Dissolve FASD labels to Brain Differences that we all have. If a child gets jailed...make special provisions for a child to be able to return to the last foster home there were in before they got in trouble. They need a sense they have a place to go where they are loved and cared for.

9. Proper advocating is our responsibility along with lawyer, teacher, chiefs, RCMP and CFS. No fast tracking, but genuine 100% advocacy. Our responsibility to ensure those family/community ties are not broken.

10. For all communities - special courts for youth in care with FASD. When child and foster family have a breakdown, police should be the last resort. On-call workers trained to work with children in stressful situations

11. Justice preventative/intervention program should start while the child is 8-up. Programs that can start building on the child's strengths. Cultural camps. Mentoring with younger children. Skill building.

12. Advocate for healing circle for youths. Educational programming so that they can integrate into society as a responsible human being.

"SUPPORTING ABORIGINAL PEOPLES' CULTURAL REVITALIZATION AND INTEGRATING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS, ORAL HISTORIES, LAWS, PROTOCOLS, AND CONNECTIONS TO THE LAND INTO THE RECONCILIATION PROCESS ARE ESSENTIAL"

Justice cont'd

13. Hold sessions across the city teaching foster children how to understand the system and to learn their rights in what they deserve

14. Continue in the FASD diversion program. Advocate for more accommodation in sentencing - educate our children re: FASD, brain differences, encourage strength-based approach instead of a deficit-based one (i.e. what are our child's strengths?)

15. Justice, Advocate. Use community cultural justice systems. To be more aware of FASD and how it affects their thinking. Community housing resources. Teaching youth advocacy.

Other questions and concerns brought forward by participants:

- Lack of communication for both kinship/foster families and natural families
- Sufficient supports for bio families
- Lack of understanding
- Budget cuts which ultimately affect the children
- Sufficient accessible services and resources

Pledges made by kinship and foster parents regarding their role in the reconciliation process:

1. a) I can support reconciliation by continuing my role in fostering and to empower other foster parents
- b) To continue my education by reading
- c) To be open to walk beside, proactively, a woman known to the child welfare system within my community
- d) To find out more of my grandmother's history. To have conversations with my kiddos and those I come in contact with about what I learned today. Sharing the history, not shame, and empowering action.
- e) I believe education helps others and may help change perspectives. To know my past will help me in my future and gain insight and all these conversations would be ongoing.
- f) Steps I plan to take: To order new books and read them, ask my cousin for information and search my mother's information, possibly use ancestry.com to look for answers. When? by March 2021
- g) To share the Ted Talk video on Facebook

I will know if my actions make a difference when:

- *I hear less people in my life making racial or hateful comments or expressing myths like facts*
- *I can have conversations and ask better questions to encourage thinking and others to be exposed to truth and possibly have empathy.*

"Before we can find a solution, we need to strive to understand the problem."

Pledges Cont'd:

2. I pledge to keep educating myself. I found this training life changing, thank you so much.
3. a) Understand their history by watching Indigenous film makers and read literature. I supported my foster children attending cultural events like Pow Wow's and smudging. Both of my foster children attend Cree Nations Heritage Language. Learn more about Indigenous arts: making teepee, dream catcher, Inukshuk, listening to music, we had sweet grass and oil in our home.
 - b) Continue supporting my foster children to get involved in knowing their history and heritage.

I will know my action steps make a difference when:

- I do my part supporting my foster children educating themselves knowing about their history and heritage.

4. Some of my thoughts on how we can support reconciliation:
 - a) To know where we are going, we need to know where we have been.
 - b) Before we can find a solution, we need to strive to understand the problem.
 - c) Reconciliation is a journey. Help others see the past through the eyes of those who were mistreated.
 - d) Don't judge people for what they don't know, but help them learn to better understand the perspective of our Indigenous neighbors.
 - e) Be willing to listen to their stories.
 - f) Acknowledge that healing will take time and is complicated but we need to be willing to do the hard work of listening and supporting.
 - g) Ask the community of our Indigenous children in care how we can better understand their history, their culture and how to best support their community in integrating their children back into their circle.
 - h) Ask if there is some way we can continue to a part of the child's circle.

Overall, the majority of kinship and foster parents who attended this series of forums seemed to agree that there are things they can do to foster reconciliation in our province. The information presented helped to give understanding to why there is such a high percentage of Indigenous children in care as well as increased awareness that change needs to happen. Based on the input of the forum attendees, kinship and foster parents want to do what they can to help bring about positive change, even if in small steps. We thank all the kinship and foster parents who participated in the forums. Your insight is valuable and important.

"FIRST NATIONS, INUIT, AND MÉTIS PEOPLES, AS THE ORIGINAL PEOPLES OF THIS COUNTRY AND AS SELF-DETERMINING PEOPLES, HAVE TREATY, CONSTITUTIONAL, AND HUMAN RIGHTS THAT MUST BE RECOGNIZED AND RESPECTED"

Organizational Beliefs

At **The Kinship & Foster Family Network of Manitoba** we believe in the:

Empowerment of Kinship and Foster Parents to be respected members of the professional team, and we strive to provide training and supports that will assist you in achieving this goal.

Kinship and Foster Care works best when following the Principles of Addition:

- Always add rather than subtract people from a child's life.
- Adding people always expands the circle of support.
- The birth family always remains at the center of the circle.
- A kinship or foster family is not the center of the circle but a valuable complementary addition to the birth family.



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