

AA6.2 Indigenous Community Safety and Mental Health Responses in Toronto

In response to the letter dated July 6, 2020, written by Jeffrey Schiffer and Frances Sanderson and the July 7th presentation at the Aboriginal Affairs Committee entitled Trauma-Informed Land-Based Response to COVID-19 by Shiobhan McCarthy and Mark Atanasoff, Director of Holistic Services and Director, Quality Assurance and Decolonization.

The presenters state the land based pilot program which occurred in West and East locations in Toronto provided positive outcomes for families. The grim reality is there is a sentiment among many families in the Native Community; of choosing not to engage with programming and services Native Child and Family and Services of Toronto (NCFST) offers due to having had or current involvement with NCFST's child protection sector. The Native, Inuit and Metis community is impacted every day from the agency's institutional racist, oppressive and genocidal acts; forcible separation of Indigenous children from their families, communities and nations, non-Indigenous foster, group and institutional custody placements, denial of language, culture, spirituality and violations of human, constitutional and sovereignty rights. Native Child and Family Services of Toronto is complicit in the overrepresentation of Native children in the Foster Removal System. Currently, there are more Native children in foster, group and institutions than in the height of attendance in Residential Schools. The Millennium Scoop genocide must end with true community led approaches to child welfare and an inquiry into the injustices, abuses and deaths connected to the child welfare industry.

Regarding NCFST's "Request for Support and Expansion," Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, Indigenous Affairs Office and City of Toronto would be infringing the Inherent Rights of Native Peoples with respect to incorporating NCFST into the Indigenous Placemaking Strategy.

Indigenous child welfare agencies were supposedly the answer to address the youth overrepresentation of Native children and in foster, group and residential custody placements. These agencies follow Ministry of Children and Youth policies and procedures which are continuing to significantly harm Native families and communities. By design, the agencies enforce colonial standards that fail to keep families together, heal from intergenerational traumas and as a result, cause further impacts of discrimination, racism and genocide to Native children and families.

A holistic vision is one of families, community members and traditional helpers unifying together to discuss, plan and implement a culturally appropriate child welfare delivery with the focus on- community response to crisis, abuses, intergenerational trauma, keeping families together and family reunification.

Given the grievous state of NCFST and the ongoing impacts listed, the Native Community's response this month was to camp outside of the organization for eleven days, with a contained sacred fire to address a Community Member's denial of a culturally appropriate response of an open child protection file. Calls to defund Native Child and Family Services of Toronto's child welfare teams and resignation of the Executive Team and Board of Directors were heard throughout the time the camp was in existence. Instead of approaching the situation with respect and adherence of proper Titleholders Self-Determination Rights to Care, Raise and Protect their children and rights to ceremony, the NCFST Executive Team contacted the Toronto Police Services to be involved which ultimately led to a Native mother being physically assaulted, charges laid and improper and violating behavior towards the closing of a sacred fire.

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto partnership with Toronto Police Services (TPS) causes violence, oppression and surveillance to the Native Community, through the agreements in place; upon an investigation TPS contacts NCFST, which results in a child protection file opening, NCFST contacts TPS to follow up and to work together to criminalize, separate Native families, commit genocidal acts and systemic racism.

Unjustly, NCFST is seeking allocated funds from the defunding of TPS to be directed to "Indigenous-led responses to community safety and mental health in Toronto." NCFST is not in a position to be an agency to be a lead agency to address community and mental health, when the agency perpetuates significant harms to the Indigenous Community.

Furthermore, community led discussions are to occur at the grassroots level to envision transformative solutions with culturally appropriate responses to crisis concerning wellbeing and child welfare concerns in the Native, Inuit and Metis communities in Toronto.