

**Aboriginal Front Line Workers' Response to  
Aboriginal Justice Inquiry-Child Welfare Implementation:  
An Exploration into Front Line Workers' Experiences**

**By**

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**A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Social Work  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba**

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## ABSTRACT

The field of Aboriginal child and family services in Canada has evolved in a rapid fashion for the past 50 years. Front line practitioners in this high stress field respond to a quickly evolving ideology, and must develop best practice techniques in the face of enormous social problems of Aboriginal people in Canada.

Manitoba is on the cusp of developing the first model of child welfare of its kind in Canada. The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry- Child Welfare Initiative is Manitoba's new child welfare legislation that recognizes the rights of Aboriginal peoples to provide child protection services to their members.

Using Qualitative Analysis, and structured interviews, this researcher explores and describes the experiences and perceptions of eight Aboriginal front line workers who are employed in three southern Manitoba Aboriginal child welfare agencies in phase four of this historic implementation.

Results have indicated a strong commitment to Aboriginal focused interventions that are based on historical and cultural realities of Aboriginal peoples. Researcher has highlighted themes evident in the results, and has developed a series of recommendations and conclusions.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

On November 24, 2003, Manitoba legislators proclaimed the Child and Family Services Authorities Act based on recommendations from the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of 1991. This Act ushered in a new system that recognizes the rights and responsibilities of Aboriginal peoples in managing their Child Welfare systems. ([www.aji-cwi .mb.ca](http://www.aji-cwi.mb.ca) ,2001)

The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry was commissioned in 1988 amidst public outcry resulting from the tragic deaths of two Aboriginal people in Manitoba. The report delivered recommendations on different areas of justice in Manitoba including child welfare in its analysis. According to AJI-Child Welfare web page;

The report included an analysis and observations regarding the historical treatment of Aboriginal people by the social services system and in particular the child welfare system of the province. The inquiry stated that the Aboriginal peoples of Manitoba were not well served by the existing system and made several recommendations regarding the child welfare system. (AJI-CWI et al., 2001).

Based on the recommendations of the AJI, the Child Welfare Initiative has developed the following strategic design principles:

1. There will be a common process to develop the implementation plan to restructure the system.
2. The distinct rights and authorities of First Nations and Métis peoples and the general population will be province wide:

3. Each CFS authority requires a skilled and appropriate workforce and each has the right to define skilled and appropriate' and the criteria through which the workforce is hired.
4. Services, administrative and financial resources in the child and family service system will be distributed in a way that achieves equitable funding and parity of services throughout the province;
5. There shall be a method for determining which Authority or agency can provide the most culturally appropriate services for a child and or a family.
6. Intake services will be coordinated; there will be timely first response; and the intake system will ensure that no child is at risk because of gaps between the mandates or operations of agencies.
7. Each Authority will provide the full range of services and functions as outlined in The Child and Family Services Act and The Adoption Act;
8. Child and Family Services records and processes need to be computerized; and there will be common registries for the whole system.

The system of services delivered by mandated child and family services agencies shall protect and honor children by building and empowering community, family and personal capacity through the delivery of holistic restorative, integrated, preventative, supportive and protective services.

(AJI-CWI et al., 2001)

The vision statement developed by the implementation committee outlines the following vision statement,

A child and family services system that recognizes and supports the rights of children to develop within safe and healthy families and communities and recognizes that First Nations and Métis peoples have unique authority, rights and responsibilities to honor and care for their children.

(AJI-CWI et al., 2001)

In 1999, the Manitoba New Democrat government announced that it was committed to bringing the recommendations of the AJI in the area of Child Welfare to fruition by the year 2003. Tim Sale, who was then the Minister of Family Services and Housing stated,

The task before you is to build a new child and family serves system for all Manitobans; a system that will respect the principle that First Nations and Métis people have a right to govern and deliver Child and Family Services for their families and communities throughout the entire province.( AJI-CWI et al., 2001)

Eric Robinson, who was the minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs urged Aboriginal people to work collaboratively in creating a new system, He stated,

While First Nations and Métis people must not forget their history, it is time to set aside the animosity and distrust of the old system in the interests of pursuing a common path. A common path will lead us into a new future where child and family services system inspires hope, not despair and



where Aboriginal people are truly empowered to care for their own children. (AJI-CWI et al., 2001)

The Aboriginal agencies signed memorandum of understandings committing to the restructuring of the Child Welfare system in Manitoba. At this particular period, many of the Aboriginal agencies operated under tripartite agreements that allowed them to operate within their respective communities with mandates obtained under Manitoba Child Welfare legislation.

The condensed time in which agencies had to prepare for implementation of this system resulted in a series of town hall meetings in which consultations were held with community, as well as the formation of implementation committees consisting mainly of senior and mid level management within existing Child and Family Agencies. (AJI-CWI et al., 2001)

This study explored the experiences of Aboriginal front line workers in three southern Aboriginal child welfare agencies in the midst of these Aboriginal child welfare Initiative changes. Aboriginal front line workers were defined as being mandated workers who were not in management positions, and who carried out the child protection/family service cases of said Aboriginal Agencies. Their roles were to practice protection social work within the guidelines, theoretical models, and legislation provided.

Although the opportunity to provide feedback has been presented in town hall meetings of 2001 and in the feedback forms presented in the AJI Child Welfare web pages, the effects of expanding information and developments evident in front line experience are important to document. The experiences of

the front line worker would be beneficial to document, as it would capture how individual workers have providing service delivery within a system that has been described as 'not meeting the needs of Aboriginal people in Manitoba' (AJI-CWI et al., 2001) as well as their understanding, recommendations, and hopes for the newer Child Welfare Legislation.

Aboriginal practitioners have often cited a separation of Aboriginal child welfare issues from that of the general Canadian population. It is within this environment that the field of Aboriginal child welfare is evolving.(Armitage 1993) Recurring themes within academic and government reports include arguments that the socio-economic, cultural, political, and historical issues evident in Aboriginal families are collectively unique to Aboriginal experience and require a system which reflects the Aboriginal place in Canada's society.(McKenzie, Hudson 1985) In a 1996 submission prepared for the Provincial Government's review of the Child and Family Services Act, Deborah Young stated,

Several core values have guided and influenced the Manitoba First Nation Child and Family Services Agencies. Inherent in these values is the belief that First Nations individual's children, families and communities have a distinct status and identity by virtue of their indigenous origins, history, cultures and languages. This includes their Aboriginal rights and freedoms as identified by the treaties and the constitution act of 1867 and 1982.

(Young 1996 Pg. iii )

In addition to the above, Aboriginal agencies have tripartite funding agreements that are based on the understanding that Aboriginal communities are federal

responsibilities but operate within provincial Child Welfare standards. (Young et al., 1996)

This funding arrangement has been a source of contention as many Aboriginal agencies plan to implement a community based model of service delivery in the midst of residual policies of federal government funding arrangements. (McKenzie & Hudson 1985, Hudson & Taylor Henley, 1995)

This study explored the experiences of front line workers who were on the cusp of developing and implementing a new system of child welfare, as well as who have had the experiences of practicing child welfare within the provincial child welfare system.

Aboriginal Front line workers have been performing their duties within an environment of great change, and challenge. Their understanding of how to implement policies on a day to day basis, their understanding of the reasons for dysfunction in the families that they serve, as well as their concrete recommendations based on the realities of day to day interactions are integral to further development in this field.

Manitoba's Child Welfare system is undergoing great change as a result of the implementation of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry's recommendations in Manitoba's Child Welfare system. While the new Manitoba Child Welfare system is lauded as a positive and historical event for Canada's Aboriginal peoples, it has moved from design to implementation in a very short period of time. Front line workers have had little formal input into the developmental process of the AJI-CWI. Front line workers within these agencies perform their duties in a midst

of incredible changes, and information processing. In addition to this, planning has to be done with respect to jurisdictional boundaries, caseload management, and staff training. The sheer magnitude of the project combined with the timelines made consultation with front line workers a luxury time expense that few agencies could afford. If consultation did occur, it occurred within the midst of the town hall meetings as well as within undocumented means within agency walls.

This myriad of changes would most certainly elicit some type of response from Aboriginal front line workers. Although various communities have been consulted with respect to these changes, the experience of actual mandated workers in an Aboriginal agency has not been formally separated and documented.

Front line mandated workers are those closest to the Child Welfare situations evident in Aboriginal communities. These workers often perform their duties in creative ways within a provincial framework that has often been criticized for not meeting the specific needs of Aboriginal peoples. (AJI.CWI 2001) Flexibility and innovation have always been a much needed characteristic among Aboriginal workers who have often worked within legislation muddled by tripartite agreements, limited community resources, geographical constraints, as well as a complex financial funding system which necessitates funding propositions be made to two levels of government on behalf of Aboriginal agencies.(Young et al., 1996) Feedback from front line workers provides information about creative approaches that have been utilized in case

management, as well as first hand accounts of anticipated difficulties from a concrete perspective.

Keeping in mind that front line workers within Aboriginal agencies have been making case decisions that:

1. Satisfy provincial standards
2. Utilize limited available resources
3. Are culturally appropriate and innovative without compromising child safety
4. Are within communities with extreme socio-economic disadvantages (Young; et al., 1996)

It would be wise to tap into the expectations, recommendations, and feedback of Aboriginal front line personnel.

The timing of this particular study would allow the researcher to gather information from workers about their practices within the older Child Welfare system as well as information as to what they envision from the newer model. Information from the front line will provide an important record of current worker's expectations, concrete experiences, and recommendations in this historical endeavor, and provide readers understanding into the front line perspective.

This study focused on the experiences of Aboriginal Front Line Child Welfare workers in the midst of Aboriginal Justice Inquiry implementation, in the following four areas:

1. Experiences and perceptions of the worker of the previous child and family services Act
2. Understanding of the rationale and process of AJI CFS implementation

3. Specific recommendations or feedback surrounding implementation thus far
4. Impacts in the life of children and families the worker sees as coming from these changes.

This information gained from front line worker responses is useful in providing a historical backdrop in future studies in AJI-Child Welfare implementation. It also provides feedback to management, and implementation committees who have had limited opportunity and timelines to gather such data. The knowledge gained from this research allows readers to form an understanding of the experiences and thematic patterns in thoughts of front line workers working within this particular time period. The experiences of these particular front line workers would be of special significance due to their experience in the former Child Welfare system, as well as in documenting information as to their thoughts surrounding the new AJI-Child Welfare Initiatives.

This study was limited in that it is not a representative sample of all Aboriginal communities in Manitoba and their response to the AJI-CWI. The differences in tribal customs, geographical locations, and community resources make for different experiences from different front line workers. It is expected that the front line worker in northern Manitoba would have had different experiences and perceptions from that of a worker who is employed closer to an urban area.

This study was implemented in a period of time that straddles the provincial system, and in which implementation is in phase four of five phases of implementation. Phase four of the implementation process is a latter stage in which the final transfer of Aboriginal cases to receiving Authorities occur. As a

result, the study may have documented some of the ambivalence that always occurs within the midst of major changes within a system. It is understood by this writer that this has been a snapshot of front line worker response within this particular time period and would not reflect all the changing perspectives of Child Welfare workers in coming years.

The researcher has been employed in the Child Welfare system in Manitoba for a number of years. Her experience ranges from working within a mandated Aboriginal agency to being employed within an urban non-native agency in Winnipeg. This experience enabled this researcher to appreciate and empathize with the various experiences listed by the various front line workers. As a former administrator in Aboriginal mandated agency in the 1980's and more recently, as a front line worker in an Aboriginal and non-native agency, the researcher brought a capacity for understanding the various viewpoints presented during the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Literature relevant to this study can be categorized into two focal areas. The first focal area is a review of the historical themes in the field of Aboriginal child protection. This includes the philosophical belief system of early Aboriginal peoples in Canada and some commonalities in customs. This also includes Canada's early interventions in Aboriginal child protection and the ideological basis for doing so. Early interventions also include literature surrounding the initial Aboriginal child welfare agencies and issues thereof. This is important to outline due to the importance of this history in developing modern interventions.

The second focal area to this study touches on current occurrences, literature, and leanings in developing programs and ideology surrounding Aboriginal child welfare in Canada. This includes challenges and goals evident in the growing field of Aboriginal child welfare in Canada.

#### **Historical Background**

It is important for the purposes of this study to provide a brief overview of the history of Aboriginal child welfare in Canada. This history provides insight into the important role that culture and community play in current child welfare practices. This also provides the reader insight into the additional difficulties a front line worker may have in carrying out daily protection duties for the communities and families who have had direct experience in this history.

In order to gain a personal understanding of this, this researcher had spoken to Eva Courchene who is a First Nation community elder. She had



indicated that family and community were the main source of 'child protection' in her particular community. According to this Elder who described herself as having never attended residential school, and is eighty plus years old, it was the families who decided the placement of the children. Grandparents were the first choice in placing children and childless couples who may or may not be blood relatives were often approached to parent children as their own child. (Conversations with elder, 2004). She noted that as the residential schools became increasingly prevalent, the practice of having children stay with family remained, but the children remained 'strange' to their custom adoptive families and the ties were easily broken. This elder had estimated that at least 4 children or 'young people' had come into her home to stay for periods up to 4 years. This had been done without the signing of any papers, but as a verbal agreement between herself and the parents or grandparents of the children. The one exception to the verbal agreement was the one child who had come into her home, with the knowledge of the band operated child and family services.

This elder had indicated that 'things are different today', in raising children, and that children are 'different' today in their actions, and knowledge. She attributed this difference in parenting styles, and government interventions, and programs, such as Child and Family Services.

In, Stolen From Our Embrace,(1998) Crey and Fournier state,

All Aboriginal cultures teach that children are special gifts lent by the spirit world; if they are not loved and cherished, they may flee back to the realm from which they came. In traditional times, there was no greater dishonor

than an extended family who could not look after it's own young ones. In the rare circumstances where that was the case, the surrounding society always stepped in to share communal responsibility for raising the children. (Pg. 81)

These practices were in keeping with a philosophical basis that Aboriginal agencies struggle to maintain to this date. The practices of interfamily dependence, and 'stepping in' when children were in need of support were deeply entrenched in the philosophical belief system of this era. In Restoring Peace and Harmony (2003), Blackstock states,

The safety and well being of First Nation's children was at its optimal point prior to colonization. The cultural teachings varied from community to community but all incorporated the importance of maintaining holistic balance within an interdependent community context. These philosophies guided First Nations, beliefs, values, and care for children. Thus childcare was provided within an extended family or clan system and the principle of customary care, where a child would be 'adopted' into a family when alternate care was required, was firmly imbedded in the culture. (Pg. 333)

Indian and Northern affairs also recognizes the history of community care in Aboriginal communities.

The First Nations Child and Family Services National Program Manual of 2004, states,

Aboriginal child welfare systems in the period dating from pre-contact to the 1950's largely consisted of informal family networking systems within bands. (Pg.34)

The importance of networking and extended families in early Aboriginal culture underscored a greater philosophy of interdependence and a holistic world view.

Blackstock (2003) stated,

First Nations people believed that the totality of relationships between individual elements governed the well being of the system more than the specific nature of individual elements, and that no element existed in the absence of its relationship with another. (Pg. 333)

In the 1920's to 1950's, residential schools were widely used by the Federal government in its policy to assimilate Aboriginal People. Children were removed from homes and community to attend residential schools for months out of the year. J.R. Miller has documented the use of residential schools in Canada's policy of assimilation on Aboriginal people in Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools. (1997)

Children's time spent in these schools were often marked by the trauma of sexual, physical, and spiritual abuse. Residential schools had done irreparable damage to the social fabric of Aboriginal society in the physical, mental, spiritual components of the child. The forced removal of children over a suspended period of time had created a crisis in which a whole generation had been affected to varying degrees. (Pg. 137)

It is not within the scope of this paper to outline the details of the residential schools system or its subsequent long term effects on the generations of Aboriginal people who had attended these schools. It is, however relevant to note that residential schools had been utilized as an informal method of child protection by Indian agents during the years prior to the provincial decisions to practice child welfare in Federal jurisdictions.

In Family and Child Welfare in First Nation Communities, (1993) Andrew Armitage states,

By the 1970's the child welfare system had become the successor to the residential school system as an alternative care system for Indian Children. It was most active in those regions of Canada where the residential schools were most often used. (Pg.150)

In 1947 Canadian Association of Social Workers and the Canadian Welfare Council made a submission to the special joint committee of the senate and the House of Commons in order to extend services to First Nation Communities. The federal government responded by utilizing Section 88 of the Indian Act to justify the extension of provincial services to what is essentially a federal jurisdiction.

Child welfare practice in Manitoba began in earnest upon the decision by provincial authorities to extend child welfare authority to First Nation communities. The service delivery was sporadic at first but quickly increased. Marlyn Bennett has stated in a 2003 child and family services fact sheet,

Provincial laws of general applicability were first imposed on First Nations in 1951 when a number of revisions were made to the federal Indian Act, which included the addition of Section 88. Section 88 of the Indian Act provides that a provincial law of general application, subject to certain restriction is applicable to First Nations people living within any province, regardless of the federal government's constitutional responsibilities.

(Pg. 4)

Fournier and Crey have delivered a scathing indictment of the 'child welfare' system that followed the provincial decisions to deliver services and the federal decision to abscond responsibilities.

In 'Stolen From Our Embrace(1998), Fournier and Crey state,

Once the provinces were in charge, and the guaranteed payments for each Indian child they apprehended, the number of First Nations children ballooned. Only 1 percent of all children in care were native in 1959, but by the end of the 1960's 30 to 40 percent of all legal wards were Aboriginal children even though they formed less than 4 percent of the national population. (Pg. 83)

The term '60's scoop' was used to describe the practice of removing children during the period after the federal transfer of its authorities to provincial governments. The term was coined by Patrick Johnston who was a researcher with the Canadian Council on Social Development. (Johnston 1983)

The increase of Aboriginal children being apprehended and removed from homes did not go unnoticed by Aboriginal people. The increase of adoptions and

children in care resulted in increased pressure from the Aboriginal population who organized and lobbied for changes in the existing child welfare practices.

Deborah Young stated,

During the late 1960s and early 1970s the number of First Nation children thought to need protection by the child welfare authorities increased significantly. They usually apprehended and placed these children in non-Aboriginal foster or group homes. Thus although the residential school system no longer existed, First Nation people continued to be pushed toward assimilation. In fact, many First Nation people view the child welfare system as a vehicle for cultural genocide, since it has typically given little appreciation to the 'values, lifestyles and laws' of the First Nations people of Canada and because it has imposed on them the standards, cultural values, laws and systems of dominant society. (Pg.3)

In 1980, Aboriginal Leaders, and Federal and Provincial Authorities made tripartite agreements for Aboriginal Agencies to provide child welfare services for First Nation agencies in Manitoba. This resulted in an expansion of child welfare agencies in Manitoba's First Nation communities.

This increase in agencies corresponded with an increase in literature surrounding practice and ideology. Inherent in this literature is the acceptance of colonialism as a viable ideology in the discussion surrounding child welfare issues. The paradigm of colonization often arises in discourse surrounding Aboriginal child welfare policies and ideology. The concept of colonization, its role in the Aboriginal experience in Canada, as well its application to child

welfare history has been a recurring theme in policy development for Aboriginal child welfare.

Howard Adams' Prison of Grass (1972) has been a major contribution to the literature in understanding the role of colonization in Canadian Aboriginal history. Adams states,

Businessmen wanted to get the greatest amount of labor for the least possible pay, and the purpose of racism was to reduce native people to a subhuman level where they could be freely exploited. Racism therefore arose from economic factors inherent in capitalism. (Pg. 122)

Adams also described the relationship that colonialist Canada has had with Aboriginal people and their children.

As soon as native children enter school they are surrounded with white-supremist ideas and stories-every image glorifies white success. Because they are unable to resist it, they become conditioned to accept inferiority as a natural way of life. They soon recognize that all positions of authority-such as teacher, priest, judge, Indian agent - are held by whites. These people make all the rules and decisions that determine the fate of Métis and Indian people. An aggressive and sophisticated white supremacist society intimidates colonized people, it makes them self conscious and withdrawn. As native children grow up, these white supremacist images become more alive, but natives are powerless to do anything about them. Consequently, the children internalize inferior images as a part of their true selves, often with strong feelings of shame. (Pg. 15)

The model of colonization has become a model that Aboriginal Peoples in Canada closely identify with. (Tuhiwai,Smith 2002) More recent writers accept the role of colonization in Aboriginal child welfare, and build upon this model as a causative model, while exploring best practice possibilities. (Blackstock 2002) In, Native Children, Child welfare and the Colonization of Native People, Brad Mckenzie and Pete Hudson have noted the relationship between child welfare and colonization. They had argued that First Nation child welfare history is rooted in colonialist attitudes and ideology. This history warrants an intense intervention system needs to occur parallel to on-going discussions and efforts for Self-governance in the wider Aboriginal Community. (McKenzie Hudson 1985)

Academic authors in the 1980's have noted colonization as a factor in the development of child and family services, as well as a factor in the developing effective services. (McKenzie and Hudson,1985) The practitioner, while recognizing colonization as a backdrop to Aboriginal experiences in Canada, is challenged to formulate best practice that will incorporate an Aboriginal treatment model within this context. Writings surrounding Aboriginal child welfare in the 1980's and 1990's link colonisation to culturally appropriate practice in Aboriginal child welfare. The argument is that the historical, socio-economic, and cultural situation of Aboriginal people warrants a specific application of social work that incorporates these into practice. (Horejsi, Heavy Runner, Pablo 1992)

McKenzie, Seidle, and Bone explored the child and family service standards in First Nations and the themes within practice. The importance of



extended family, holistic practice, as well as self determination was highlighted as standards in practice as a result of this study. (McKenzie, Seidle, Bone, 1985) The logical next step beyond the recognition of the historical occurrences, as well as the role of neo-colonization in Aboriginal Communities was to issue the challenge for political changes in administration, and policy of Aboriginal child welfare.

Hudson and Taylor-Henley (1995), took a realistic appraisal of where First Nation Child Welfare is heading, and what may be needed. They argued that there was a period of stagnation in the progress of Native child and family services. It had become very apparent in the first 20 years since the incorporation of Aboriginal agencies in Manitoba, that the inadequacy of the funding arrangement of the federal government, the endemic social problems within the Aboriginal communities, and the relative inexperience of Aboriginal agencies resulted in a need for further changes (Hudson and Taylor-Henley 1995). They argued that tragic occurrences such as the Lester Desjarlais (1992 Giesbrecht) case, had resulted in a collective demoralization, and loss of impetus for Aboriginal child welfare changes.

Lester Desjarlais was an Aboriginal child who had been in the care of an Aboriginal child welfare agency, and who had committed suicide. The child had been repeatedly abused by community offenders, and virtually ignored by the child welfare agency mandated for his protection. The inquest into his tragic death led by Judge Giesbrecht, revealed issues such as a lack of trained workers, community denial, and an offloading of child welfare responsibilities by

the Federal and Provincial governments to agencies poorly prepared for the responsibilities of protecting children. (Giesbrecht 1992)

Aboriginal child welfare agencies soon learned that they would deal with the same myriad of social problems that their predecessors had. (Horejsi, Heavy Runner-Craig, Pablo (1992) outlined a profile of Aboriginal clientele. Front line workers in Aboriginal agencies generally had to deal with many clients who fit within the following profile :

Generally, the parent is directly or indirectly affected by alcoholism and /or co-dependency is young, lacking in parenting skills, and easily overwhelmed by parental responsibilities; is emotionally overtaxed by a history of loss and incomplete grieving; is overwhelmed and exhausted by the daily grind of poverty; has low self esteem and lacks self confidence is often a product of dysfunctional family to which he or she feels obligated and loyal and is easily influenced by family members feels embarrassed and shamed by the communities knowledge of abuse or neglect, has a tendency to run away rather than confront problems directly, is reluctant to talk about or even mention sexual matters; is fearful and distrustful of child welfare agencies and of social workers who can place children in foster care; believes that once a child goes into foster care, the child will always remain in care; is fearful of the power associated with tribal politics and the tribal court; does not believe he or she will be protected by or treated fairly by tribal and or state courts and by tribal and or state child welfare

agencies or is easily confused and intimidated by complex organizations government programs and agency procedures(Pg.. 193)

In First Nations Child and Family Services; Breaking the Silence (1997), Pete Hudson, in recognition of the role that colonization, and widespread social problems that child welfare practitioners might have faced, postulated that the needs in Aboriginal communities are endemic. Current methods of intervention utilized by the Aboriginal child welfare agencies need to increase in breadth and width to accommodate the intense needs of Aboriginal communities. The growth in knowledge, understanding and agencies in Manitoba, has not been supported by the funding bodies, and are not able to adequately respond to the problems evident in Aboriginal communities. He also noted that the practitioners often themselves suffer from intergenerational effects of the oppression evident in Canada's relationship with Aboriginal Peoples.

In Stolen from Our Embrace,(1998) Fournier and Crey noted that the history of Canada's relationship with Aboriginal children has been a dangerous one. Crey and Fournier stated,

The deliberate policy to separate and forcibly assimilate Aboriginal children into the mainstream has pervaded every era of Aboriginal history in Canada and has profoundly injured First Nations People both historically and today. Each era say a new reason to take Aboriginal children away from home placing them in residential schools, foster care or non-Aboriginal adoptive families. (Pg. 17)

Aboriginal agency's ability to effectively manage child welfare systems for their communities is based on the ability of practitioners to recognize the factors that influence the endemic social problems in Canada's Aboriginal population.

Canada's historical relationship with Aboriginal peoples is very relevant in developing strategies and practices that are used for treatment.

### **Current Developments**

While the model of colonization has been utilized in understanding the politics behind the relationships between Manitoba's First Nation peoples and child welfare, there has been also been development in the definition of Aboriginal paradigms which will enable best practice in child welfare for Aboriginal peoples.

Current developments in the area of Aboriginal child welfare include a list of some relevant developments. This section will also outline key principles in the AJI-CWI, as well as two Department of Indian and Northern Affairs publications surrounding Aboriginal child welfare in Canada.

Recent literature acknowledges the relationship between colonization and the practice of social work. In 2003 Cindy Blackstock outlined the nature of the role that colonialism played in the history of Aboriginal child welfare. The history outlined in earlier writings and government publications is viewed as necessary in development of Aboriginal child welfare in order to accurately assess Aboriginal issues and subsequent treatment. In Restoring Peace and Harmony in First Nation Communities (2003) she wrote,

Children were a focus of colonial actions because the re-education and re-socialization of future generations served the goal of assimilation. Residential schools and later, the child welfare system, became instruments of this process, even if some of those involved described their actions as benevolent. ( Pg. 334)

In his book, Seeking Mino-Pimatasawin, Hart through consultation with elders, and through subjective experience, outlined the paradigm common to Aboriginal peoples. (Hart 2002) Hart argued that although the environmental perspective closely parallels the Aboriginal experience, it is not the one and the same. He stated that the Aboriginal experience is a perspective that is often at odds with the dominant ideologies, and encompasses the entire experience as a whole rather than as an application. (Hart 2002). Hart has incorporated recognition of this worldview into his practice as a therapist.

Morissette (1991) outlined the continuum of cultural beliefs and spiritual beliefs among Aboriginal peoples. While Morrisette had developed the continuum as a scale that linked spiritual beliefs with the level of colonization evident in first nation families, the model can also be utilized as a tool in respectful acknowledgement of the diversity of beliefs evident in First Nation families. Recognition and respect for the diversity of belief systems among Aboriginal peoples would allow for practice that incorporates core traditional beliefs such as respect and love into the social work relationship.

In Healing in First Nations, The Spirit of Family (1993), Ed Connors outlined the importance that Aboriginal cultures place in the concept of families. The modality of treatment encompassed First Nation groups such as the family, community, as well as extended family. He stated,

....treatment within the First Nation Communities often must encompass interventions which recognize the entire community as the group receiving treatment. These large extended family networks require large scale interventions. Individually focussed models of treatment such as behavioral therapy approaches, fall short of addressing the complex relationship issues that must be attended to if significant and lasting changes are to be affected. (Pg. 64)

Blackstock (2003) identified the lack of literature in the field of Aboriginal child welfare, particularly in the area of best practice. Although there is alot of documentation on There is little information on best practices among Aboriginal agencies. This is evident despite the excessive studies, and documentation on Aboriginal people of Canada.

The creation of the First Nations Child and Caring Society would hopefully provide a national database for the exchange of information and research in the field of Aboriginal Child and Family Services. Blackstock (2003) says, "Although in the developmental stages, the society has already hosted three national conferences involving First Nations child and family service providers" (Pg. 342)

A centralized area for the gathering of data relevant to Aboriginal child welfare is a stepping stone to further development of effective programs, training initiatives, and identification of gaps in service delivery.

The challenge for practitioners today is to keep core values such as extended families, community, and ways of life, while responding to, and respecting the diverse beliefs of the Aboriginal families serviced.

Manitoba's development of the AJI-CWI is a significant new development in Canada's Aboriginal child welfare system. The AJI-CWI is significant because it has been born out of the history of First Nation people in Canada, and it is a first step to recognizing the rights of Aboriginal People in receiving services from Aboriginal Agencies despite their on-reserve status. The AJI-CWI recommendations and subsequent implementation in Manitoba have been formulated building on an understanding of the impact of colonization, as well as the recognition of Aboriginal community values.

In A Feather Not a Gavel, (2001) Hon. A.C. Hamilton states,

The Helen Betty Osborne and John Joseph Harper incidents brought the terrible consequences of racism to public attention. While our report may not have produced solutions, I believe that holding the facts and horrendous results up to public scrutiny was of value. While Canadians do not like to admit it, racism exists in Canada. Its insidious nature is directed at those who appear different from us. A first step in reversing racist attitudes and their bedfellow, stereotyping, is to admit they exist in the

form of discrimination. The next and more difficult step is to take positive measures to eliminate them. (Pg.56)

The 2001 outline of the AJI-CWI document titled 'Promise of Hope; Commitment to Change (2001) outlined the restructuring of Manitoba's child welfare system. The document outlined the changes expected in the new system and gave information on the philosophical base of the new system. The document stated,

Under the new system, Aboriginal children and families will receive child and family services from Aboriginal Agencies, no matter where they live in Manitoba. These agencies will now be able to provide services that better reflect the cultural needs of children and families. Helping to solve problems before they start will be the main focus throughout the new system..... (Pg. 15)

The Aboriginal child welfare initiative recognizes that Aboriginal Peoples in Manitoba have a right and responsibility to care for children from First Nation communities. It has further acknowledged that a different world view and history is evident among First Nation peoples. The move toward a holistic and preventative approach is evident in the structuring of the principles of the AJI-CWI.

While Aboriginal community leaders were generally pleased with the move towards recognizing Aboriginal issues in Manitoba Child Welfare System. It was clear that this was to be an interim system while the issues of self-government are resolved. (Armitage 1993)



In addition to the development and implementation of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry's Child Welfare Initiative, a significant study occurred just prior to its development.

In June of 2000 the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, in response to Aboriginal concerns surrounding the federal funding arrangement for Aboriginal child welfare agencies (Standard 20-1), initiated a Joint Policy Review. The Joint Policy Review was published in June of 2000, and had made 17 recommendations to be implemented in Canada's Aboriginal Child and Family Services Program. These recommendations outlined the importance of integrating cultural and community practice in First Nation agencies, and noted the under-funding that First Nation agencies received in the area of prevention dollars. (Joint Policy Review 2000)

The significance of the Joint Policy Review was in its inclusion of First Nation recommendations during its development. Aboriginal leaders had worked collaboratively on the document. First Nation agencies were hopeful that population based funding formulas of the early aboriginal agencies would be revised to reflect the needs of First Nation Communities.

In February of 2004, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs unveiled a National Program Manual for Aboriginal Child and Family Service Delivery in Canada. The report was widely denounced by Aboriginal leaders due to its perceived return to a child centered and residual approach to child welfare. The funding component was perceived to be deficient for the type of

interventions that First Nation communities require. One of the main criticisms leveled against the program was that the document failed to include any of the 17 recommendations of the joint policy review into the program.

The DIAND program manual (DIAND 2004) stated, "There were a number of recommended changes in the National Policy Review of 2000 which have not yet been implemented but may in the future. These changes will be reflected in the document as they occur." (Pg.5) The document also advised that a government wide review occurred after the policy review of 2000, and that this review, as well as a transfer of authorities resulted in the development of the manual. It stated,

Independent from the National Policy Review, a government wide policy renewal process delayed work on the NPR recommendations from 2000 to September 2003. New interim authorities were issued in September of 2003 and are reflected within this document as they affect FNCFS. While the new authorities contain some of the recommendations of the NPR such as increased flexibility in Maintenance funding, other recommendations require more development before being put forth for consideration. (Pg. 8)

Manitoba chiefs criticized the document and described it's creation and implementation a 'hijacking' of the joint policy recommendations of 2000. The contrast in philosophy in the funding bodies for First Nation agencies create difficulty for First Nation service providers who are mandated to deliver services to First Nation Children within this context. First Nation practitioners are required

to provide services that are comparable to mainstream services within provincial legislation, as well as within federal funding formulas.

Aboriginal front line workers perform their duties within provincial legislation, within agencies that are grant funded for children in care who are designated as provincial wards, and who receive population based funding, for children who are designated as federal children.

While there have been some promising developments in the area of research and development in First Nations child welfare, it is imperative that development and research continue in areas such as best practice identification, as well as in documentation of funding inequity.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

Aboriginal child welfare practice in Canada has dubious beginnings that is rooted in the policy of assimilation, and colonialist ideology that is documented repeatedly in the literature. (Blackstock 2002 ,Bennett 2003, RCAP 1995, Armitage, Mckenzie and Taylor -Henley ,1992,Young (1996).

The historical pathways of Canada's Aboriginal people is important to document while developing child welfare interventions. The relationship between historical trauma, and the endemic social ills of Canada's Aboriginal population warrants a specific model of intervention.

Aboriginal agencies have evolved in a rapid fashion since their inception in the 1980's. The goal for practitioners has been to develop a program that recognizes inherent right for self government in the area of child welfare, as well as community driven interventions.

The difficulties that Aboriginal agencies will have in assuming responsibilities for child welfare within their respective jurisdictions include but are not limited to, precarious legal positioning that lead to what has been described by Bennett (2002) as:

A complex three party relationship between First Nation Child and Family agencies, the provinces and DIAND, all of who are responsible for the funding and delivery of child and family services in Canada. (Pg.2)

Further difficulties also lie in the intergenerational effects on Aboriginal peoples from historical trauma. Practitioners from the communities may have unresolved issues that impede their ability to deliver healthy programs to the communities they service. (Hudson 1997)

Heartbreaking and tragic outcomes such as the life and death of Lester Desjarlais, have been directly related to poor staff training, community dysfunction, and government offloading of services to poorly equipped agencies. (Giesbrecht 1992)

The challenge of Aboriginal child welfare is to develop and promote interventions that will effectively recognize the cultural makeup of its recipients within this environment. There have been some commonalties identified in Aboriginal child welfare Practice, such as emphasis on extended families, community, and recognition of the colonialist history of Aboriginal peoples. (McKenzie, Seidle, and Bone, 1995)

The ultimate challenge for child welfare practitioners in Canada is to develop a repertoire of interventions that can be respectfully delivered to the

continuum of Aboriginal families values (Morrisette, 1991) within the context of self-government. Further challenges lie in ensuring that The Child Welfare agencies are adequately funded in order for practitioners to do preventative and holistic social work reflected in their respective agency philosophy statements. This is the context in which Aboriginal front line workers are performing their duties on a daily basis.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

This study occurs in an environment of legislative policy change within the Manitoba child welfare field, and is intended to document the front line worker's response within three Aboriginal southern child welfare agencies to these changes. The exploration and subsequent description of these worker's experiences is the overall goal of this study. To accomplish this goal, the researcher has utilized methods that are exploratory and descriptive in design. The study used qualitative methods to gather the subjective experiences of these front line workers, and used quantitative methods in order to provide context to the information that is their experiences.

A case study method was utilized in order to analyze the data from the interviews, and case oriented analysis was utilized in order to identify patterns in the body of data. The design, data collection methods, research sample, data analysis, and delimitation of this study are outlined in the following pages.

#### **Research Design**

This study was designed as descriptive and exploratory, and utilized qualitative and quantitative means to attain data. This design was chosen in order to explore the subjective experiences of the subjects. The use of combined measures was utilized in order to provide context to worker experiences.

Marlow (2001) has stated that "Descriptive research records and reports phenomena. Descriptive research can provide important fundamental information

for establishing and developing social programs but it is not primarily concerned with causes” (Pg. 32)

The overall goal of this study was to explore and document the information from the respondents and to provide context by contextualizing the information from quantitative data obtained from agency statistics, and community statistics. Marlow stated, “The primary mission in the analysis of qualitative data is to look for patterns in the data, noting similarities and differences.” (Pg. 34) Marlow (2001) has stated that “Combining measures can enrich your study and help ensure that you are tapping a maximum number of dimensions of the phenomena under study. Using a number of data collection methods is sometimes called triangulation”. (Pg. 221) Triangulation was used in this study in order to provide context to the worker experiences. This was also used in order to ‘provide a means of validating findings from qualitative research’ (Pg. 357) This research includes results from interviews, as well as information obtained from agency statistics as well as population statistics.

This study utilized a case study method in order to gather information about the subjective experiences of individual front line workers within a particular context.

The information from the data collected is presented in two sections. One section will explore the quantitative data obtained from the First Nation statistics as per the statistical data gained from Statistics Canada, and from Indian and Northern Affairs. This information includes population data of the communities that the agencies service. This information also includes the amount of children

in care, or open cases within each agency within the period from November 24, 2003 to August 2004. Annual report information which documents the amount of foster homes that are available to each of the agencies is also documented.

This data was utilized to provide context for the experiences of the front line workers, and will allow a deeper understanding into the context of experiences.

The interview was chosen as the instrument by which to gather the information from the workers. A semi-structured interview had been chosen in order to increase response rate from the participants, and in order to record the details of the subject's experiences. Christine Marlow (2001) has stated that,

Interviewing is one of the main methods for collecting qualitative data and is a key data collection method in many interpretive studies, where the focus is on collecting information that discloses the richness of the subject's experiences. (Pg. 268)

The amount of participants and the amount of data expected made interviewing the subjects a viable method of gathering the information.

The research questions targeted the following areas:

1. Experiences and perceptions of the worker of the previous child and family services Act
2. Understanding of the rationale and process of AJI CFS implementation
3. Specific recommendations or feedback surrounding implementation thus far
4. Impacts in the life of children and families the worker sees as coming from these changes.



The format of the interview questions is located in Appendix C.

### **Research Sample**

Three Aboriginal agencies, which are mandated under the recently formed Southern Authority, were approached by this researcher to participate in this study. Letters were sent to agency directors outlining the invitation, and explaining the content of the study. (Appendix A). These three agencies were approached due to their similarities in size and due to their accessibility by this researcher.

The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Principles of using human subject in research projects was adhered to. Consent forms for the Research subjects are in Appendix B. Three participating agencies are Intertribal Child and Family Services, Sagkeeng Child and Family Services, and Anishinaabe Child and Family Services.

Subjects for the interview were front line personnel who were employed by one of the three Aboriginal agencies, and who conduct most, if not all, of their duties in the urban sub-offices. For the purposes of this study, front line social workers were social workers who represent the agency and respond to child protection matters as per Section 3-17 of the Manitoba Child and Family Services Act. (CFS Act 2003)

Workers from urban outreach offices were approached to be participants, as the AJI-CWI changes are focused on urban workers. Their experience with implementation was unique due to the difference in geography, timelines for implementation as well as differences in access to resources. Limiting

respondents allowed this researcher to focus on the urban Aboriginal worker's experiences.

The subjects were telephoned by this researcher, and asked if they are available for an interview for this study. A time for a personal interview was arranged at the time of this telephone call, and upon meeting, the subjects signed consent for release of information form (Appendix B)

### **Participating Agencies**

#### ***Intertribal Child and Family Services***

Intertribal Child and Family Services provides child welfare services to three Aboriginal communities. These three communities differ in tribal affiliation, hence the name Intertribal. The communities served are:

1. Dakota Tipi First Nation (Dakota)
2. Kinonjeoshetegon First Nation (Ojibwa)
3. Fisher River Cree Nation (Cree)

The Mission Statement for Intertribal Child and Family Services is:

“To develop support systems that protect children, empower families and strengthen our communities”. (ICFS Annual Report 2003)

Intertribal Child and Family Service's main office is located in Fisher River First Nation with outreach offices in each community including the city of Winnipeg. There were 20 employees in this agency at the time of this study. Of these employees there were three front line workers in Fisher River, there were four outreach workers, and there were three on-reserve mandated workers from

Kinonjeoshetegon and Dakota Tipi. The total amount of front line workers located in the Winnipeg office increased from two to four in the 2003-2004 years.

### ***Sagkeeng Child and Family Services***

Sagkeeng Child and Family Services provides services to the community of Sagkeeng First Nation. Its main office is located in Sagkeeng First Nation. There is a Winnipeg sub-office. Sagkeeng is an Ojibwa community. This reserve is located 100 kilometers northeast of Winnipeg. Sagkeeng has attained full jurisdictional authority in January of 2004, and is under the jurisdiction of the Southern Authority.

The mission statement of Sagkeeng Child and Family Services is:

To ensure children are safe and protected and given opportunities to reach their full potential. To provide Child and Family Services that promote family wellness.

To encourage community participation and responsibility by providing an integrative teamwork approach through collaborative delivery of service.

Two front line workers agreed to participate in the interviews from this agency.

### ***Anishinaabe Child and Family Services***

The third community agency, Anishinaabe Child and Family Services provides services to the following First Nation Communities:

1. Lake Manitoba,
2. Little Saskatchewan,
3. Lake St. Martin,
4. Dauphin River,

5. Pinaymootang First Nation

The head office of ACFS is located in Fairford (Pinaymootang), and the agency has sub-office locations in each community as well as in the city of Winnipeg. These communities are Ojibwa, and are located west of lake Winnipeg.

The ACFS mission statement is:

The agency delivers mandated child and family services and programs in a manner which will maintain and strengthen the individual, the family unit, and their First Nations community within the context of Aboriginal values and customs. (ACFS Annual Report 2003)

There were currently four outreach workers in the Winnipeg sub-office at the time of this study and three agreed to participate in this study.

### **Data Collection**

The research question was formulated during the course of this worker's duties in child and family services. The AJI-CWI implementation had been occurring since 2000, and there was much activity in child and family agencies surrounding the implementation. Using a grounded theory approach, this question arose out of this researcher's involvement in the child welfare field in Manitoba.

The interview was drafted using structured questions targeting the four areas of interest for the researcher. These four areas are:

1. Experiences and perceptions of the worker of the previous child and family services Act.

2. Understanding of the rationale and process of AJI –CWI.
3. Specific recommendations or feedback surrounding implementation thus far.
4. Impacts in the life of children and families the worker sees as coming from these changes.

Three agency directors were approached with a letter (Appendix A) introducing the study and requesting permission for their agency's participation. The letter had specified that individual files would not be reviewed, and as such, clientele of the agency would not be identifiable by this researcher. Upon director's approval, a description of the study which was comprised of the interview and consent form was sent to the directors. This information was followed by a telephone call explaining the purpose of the study, as well as to answer any questions the director might have had.

The criteria for becoming a respondent in this worker included the following:

- Mandated front line worker
- Employed, or performing duties within the city of Winnipeg.
- Employment in one of the three targeted Aboriginal child welfare agencies

All of the interviews occurred within a two month time frame and lasted from thirty minutes to two hours in duration.

The researcher advised the respondents that the interview could be terminated upon their request if they are feeling agitated, or uncomfortable and unable to complete the interview. If appropriate, referrals will be made to the employee's support system or one agreed upon by employee. This was not required as formal debriefing was not required during the interviews.

In order to provide a context for the data, the researcher had arranged to obtain data on statistics of the agency. These were available through the agency statistics, as well as through director's reports, and annual meeting reports.

The researcher accessed population statistics from Indian and Northern Affairs surrounding the First Nation communities serviced by the three agencies. The agency management was contacted and statistics were requested detailing the amount of children in care, number of expected cases from transfers, as well as the amount of foster homes being utilized by each agency.

When the interviews were complete, the data from the interviews were transcribed by the researcher and printed out. To avoid any possibility of identification of subjects, they were coded into numbers. For example, the first interview conducted was numbered as one. There were eight interviews completed in total. The data from the interviews have been sorted into the four areas of interest.

The study used qualitative methods in the form of semi-structured, in depth interviews and explored the experiences of front line personnel. The researcher endeavoured to utilise the 7 stages in the complete interview process as set out by Steiner Kvale (Babbie 1998)

1. Thematizing
2. Designing
3. Interviewing
4. Transcribing
5. Analyzing

6. Verifying

7. Reporting(Pg.294)

This particular interview (appendix C), had four sections and was semi-structured in design. It began with questions pertaining to the demographics of the subjects, and proceeded to open ended questions in four areas of interest.

Data collection occurred via two avenues. The first avenue was to obtain data by using researcher constructed interviews. These interviews occurred over a two month period and involved eight agency workers.

The second manner of data collection involved an agency statistics review, as well as a review of population statistics in DIAND statistics.

### **Data Analysis**

Two levels of data were gathered for this study. The data from existing statistics, and population numbers from the services First Nation communities lend credence and validity to the statements within the interviews.

The quantitative information was organized into five headings.

- Number of 1st Nation people on and off reserve
- Population of areas served by agency
- Number of children in care in Winnipeg Outreach Offices
- Number of cases expected in the AJI-CWI implementation
- Number of foster homes licensed by each agency for Winnipeg Offices

The numbers were descriptive, and underscored the statements made by individual workers. Marlow (2001) stated "The primary mission in the analysis of qualitative data is to look for patterns in the data, noting similarities and

differences.”(Pg. 208) With this in mind, this researcher utilized a case oriented analysis (Babbie 2001) in order to “Look for patterns appearing across several observations that typically represent different cases under study”. (Pg. 360)

Case oriented analysis is defined by Babbie (2001) as “an analysis that aims to understand a particular case or several cases by looking at the details of each” (Pg. 360)

Each of the interviewees was analyzed as an individual case, and emerging patterns were identified and noted by the researcher. The interviews were transcribed and this researcher identified emerging themes, and patterns across the cases. The emerging themes were placed under the researcher constructed categories. Researcher constructed categories are defined by Marlow (2001) in the following manner, “Researcher constructed categories are categories that researchers apply to the data. These categories may be relatively meaningless to the people under study but the categories do provide a good overall picture of the phenomena being investigated.” (Pg. 214)

Each of the emerging notations were coded and piled in a stack with the identifying concept. For example, lack of resources was a common theme in every one of the interviews. When it emerged in the review of an interview, this researcher clipped the phrase and placed it into a compartment with other phrases of this nature said by the other respondents. This phrase fit into the compartment of ‘specific feedback’. In the event that the respondent identified lack of resources as an impediment to future practice with families, this phrase was placed into the next heading that would be “impact to families and children.”



Cross Classification is described in Research Methods for Generalist Social Work (2001) as,

Creating potential categories by crossing one dimension or typology with another, then working back and forth between the data and one's logical constructions, filling in the resulting matrix. This logical system will create a new typology, all parts of which may or may not actually be represented by the data.(Pg.217)

This format utilized Cross-Classification in order to create a visual reference to the range of respondent's answers to the interview questions. The data from the interviews had been arranged in a table in which reflected the range of opinions on one particular researcher constructed heading. This process was to allow for the researchers' viewing of the range of opinions, within the researcher constructed categories.

### **Limitations of This Study**

This study sought to explore and describe the experiences of eight front line Aboriginal workers within the Southern Authority of Manitoba's child welfare system in the midst of Phase 4 of the five phases of the AJI-CWI. One of this study's limitations is that it captured the experiences of a very limited population in a province wide occurrence. The exclusion of other Aboriginal agencies, as well as the General Authority Agencies, provided a very limited glimpse into one segment's experiences and perceptions. The wide range of peoples involved in the implementation process has had a wide range of responses. The

experiences of all First Nation practitioners were different in terms of values, culture, and location.

The researcher was sensitive to climate of change in the agencies', and as such, has sought to obtain the permission of management of each agency before approaching the individual workers for those particular agencies.

While the management of each of the agencies' were cooperative and inviting to the prospect of the research, the fact that management had approved of, and supported the study, might have had implications on the data obtained through the interviews. The limited discussion surrounding unions, pay scales, and related material may be in part due to this cooperation between researcher and management.

This researcher has been employed in the child welfare field for the past five years, and has been previously employed in child welfare in the 1980's. This experience in front line, and management has provided experiences that may enrich the study and provide an understanding into the issues evident in some of the themes.

This writer is cognizant that this same experience may affect the interview results by researcher bias. This was addressed by efforts to accurately transcribe interviews, and by utilizing cross classification techniques in analyzing the data. The design of this study was formulated in order to describe and explore the experiences and perceptions of front line Aboriginal workers, within a specific context.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Interview Results

In this section, the data that had been gathered from the interviews with the frontline workers was organized into four researcher-constructed headings. Utilizing cross case analysis, this writer organized data into four main topic headings.

The four headings and four subheadings, under which the data was sorted, were:

- Perceptions and experience in former CFS system,
- Feedback for AJI-CWI implementation in four areas

Prevention

Human resources

Resources

Case management

- Perceptions surrounding AJI-CWI system and finally
- Perceived implications of AJI-CWI's implementation to families serviced.

#### **Perceptions Pre-AJI-CWI Manitoba Child and Family Services Act**

The general consensus among the participants was that the pre-implementation child and family services system in Manitoba did not appear to meet the specific needs of Aboriginal people in Manitoba.

There was some discussion as to the historic and cultural needs that Aboriginal people have that is in direct contrast to that of the general population.

This perceived need for a differing type of services was attributed to cultural reasons, historical reasons that included colonization, as well as to the use of residential school in disrupting the family life of Aboriginal people two generations ago.

There was also some discussion surrounding the need for child protection services in Aboriginal communities, the strengths and necessity of the former system, and the differentiation between workers and the general child welfare system.

Respondent One stated,

"I think the old system is representative of the whole idea to colonize First Nation's people"

This particular respondent elaborated by stating that he/she felt that as an individual CFS worker, he/she had concerns that he/she was perpetuating colonization, as CFS in general was an extension of the residential school system. Other strong feelings surrounding the Child Welfare System and Aboriginal peoples in Manitoba were more succinct.

Respondent Two stated,

"I think that Aboriginal people in the Child Welfare System are very oppressed."

Although this respondent had strong feelings surrounding this particular issue, other respondents advised that they felt that they were doing important and necessary duties as a child welfare worker, but that the former child welfare system did not service Aboriginal Peoples in Manitoba as well as it might have.

Respondent three, who had been involved in Child Welfare for a long period of time, stated,

I don't feel they [the former Child Welfare System] serviced Aboriginal people well, mainly because they are non Aboriginal they don't understand what it is like to be Aboriginal. And the struggles that Aboriginal people encounter on a daily basis, not only within their families but also with society in general.

Of the eight respondents seven had indicated that they felt that the child welfare system prior to AJI-CWI changes did not meet the specific needs of Aboriginal people in Manitoba. The reasons for this were varying in degrees of how strongly they felt this was so. The responses often pointed to a system that reflects the needs of 'dominant society' and as such, does not meet the needs of Aboriginal peoples through omission.

Respondent one stated that,

"The act [Manitoba CFS ACT] is mainstream and it doesn't fit for Aboriginal people. It should have been designed for Aboriginal people because 70 percent of children in care are of Aboriginal descent. It 's a system that is foreign to a lot of people...they (workers) can't work under that system."

The identification as the system as a whole being unable to meet the needs of practitioners and families was a strong theme. Respondents responded to the question quickly and without hesitation.

Respondent Two stated,

Well of course it's a system that we've never been familiar with. It is a system that has been imposed by the government that hasn't worked. I cannot think of the strengths.

Some respondents felt that they felt restricted in the narrow focus of the Child and Family Services Act. The respondents felt that Aboriginal people's historical considerations warranted a different type of child caring model. Respondent One also stated,

“ We have a lot of mainstream social workers telling us how to fix ourselves and meanwhile we always retreat back to our culture with respect to our traditions.”

The respondents were skeptical of the previous Child and Family Services Act's capacity to treat the specific needs of Aboriginal peoples due to the issues that are unique to Canada's Aboriginal peoples. The history of residential schools disruption of Aboriginal families was one consideration that was discussed as an argument for specific treatment modalities for Aboriginal people. Respondent three has stated,

Because of the colonization and the residential schools, there are a lot of parents who have not been parented in positive ways. That's why a lot of kids come into care. They [the parents] have not learned parenting. They've only been doing what they've been taught. We need specific resources because of intergenerational effects. There has been a downfall because of it.

Two of the respondents had indicated that the Child Welfare Act had provided the basics tools for child protection. They were also able to focus on their specific role as a child protection worker. These same two workers had indicated that they had spent at least five years in the field of front line protection. Respondent four stated,

The fundamentals are there [in the CFS Act] for us to provide services whether you are First Nation or Non-First Nation. We're all in it together, which is to protect children and help families.

The respondents noted that the individual workers who the respondents worked with within the system were basically carrying out the mandate of the act, and that interpretation of the act had been subjective and practitioners had performed their duties in accordance with their own world view. Aboriginal front line workers indicated that the type of interventions had been delivered from a mainstream perspective. Therefore, the service that the Aboriginal families received were subjective and in accordance with individual worker's belief systems.

Many of the respondents have indicated an affiliation with other non-aboriginal service providers who have been operating within federal and provincial statutes and policies. At least five of the respondents had been mindful of mentioning that the individuals that they worked with from other agencies are struggling with many of the same issues that First Nation practitioners face in the field of child welfare.

The general theme among the five respondents who were mindful of differentiating between individuals in the system from the actual systemic problems were that the basics of child welfare are the same across the board, and that despite the differing issues, the overall goals of protecting the child and helping the families remain constant.

Respondent Six stated,

I like to call them [workers within non-Aboriginal agencies] our brothers and sisters of CFS. There's some appreciation there coz we're all doing the same thing.

When speaking to the purpose and effectiveness of the Act, Respondent four replied,

"The act is reflective of what the needs are. It is to protect children."

While the respondents were mindful to note their respect for work done by the child and family service workers, they also indicated that their respect for other workers was noted because the other workers have to attempt to alleviate the difficulties of multi-need Aboriginal families with the same tools that Aboriginal workers are attempting to utilize.

At least two respondents stated that the interpretation of the Former Manitoba Child Welfare Act was based on the ideology of the individual workers within the system. These workers had mentioned that the interpretation of the act is often subjective.

Well I think there is strength where there was a proactive agency, but a lot of it [Practices] depended on the worker and their value system.



This worker further stated that workers who had a 'mainstream' point of view that focused on child protection alone, did a disservice to Aboriginal families who are often focused on community, extended family, and culture. Respondent Seven stated,

Some were proactive in trying to reunite [families] but there was still lots of mainstream view points that did not do justice [to the families].....I believe they [workers] did not do enough in terms of trying to get children back home to functioning families...

Respondent Eight added to this statement,

Non-native workers sometimes have it harder coz they don't have the understanding, of uh, the way people have been brought up. We have aunts, uncles...family members who have been through [a lot]. It's closer to home for us... so we can understand.

Another of the five workers who noted their recognition of work done by the non-native workers stated that the inherent racism in society is evident to Aboriginal workers but appears to be difficult to identify if someone is a member of the system. Respondent Seven stated,

It's the system. We can see it [the racism], how it came to be, but when you believe in it [the system].....How do you help people who don't belong?

On a concrete level, many of the respondents had outlined a perception that Aboriginal agencies and their workers have had to 'jump hoops' in order to

obtain the same or equal services from collateral agencies, as well as from funding bodies in the former child and family system. Respondent Four stated,

What's wrong with the [former CFS Act] is that there was so much red tape. If you want something you've got to go [different people who work at the provincial directorate] ..... I don't really see how we get services when there is so much red tape. You have to pass through so many hoops before you can get good service for your client, and that's the frustrating part.

Respondent Three had indicated that the focus on child protection was problematic in practices where a holistic case management approach is preferred.

I think there was some merit to the [former] CFS act, certainly, but it had a lot of loopholes, and had a stronger focus on child protection rather than reuniting families to their cultural community.

Many of the respondents had indicated a separation of individual worker's practice and the actual system of child welfare. Some of the workers had indicated that they themselves had felt obliged to find their own interpretation of the former Child and Family Services Act, and to use this interpretation in their practice. Respondent Four stated,

My goal with the agency is ah... I know my role is to protect children and that's what I've used the Act [CFS ACT] to do. You can use it for prevention, intervention, and protection. It did what it had to do, which was to provide me with the tools to manage my caseload.

This particular worker had been well versed in the former CFS Act, and had been a practitioner for a long period of time in child welfare.

This worker also stated,

I try to look at the act and try to stay within the parameters of that act and use it to my advantage. I try to use it to help families within the guidelines. That way I use it to my advantage, and for my cases. I usually try to find ways, to try help families with that Act...

Again, this particular respondent had successfully maneuvered through the former CFS Act, and indicated that he/she had managed to obtain services for clients through flexible use of the Child and Family Act.

Other respondents recounted similar feelings of frustration in the lack of options evident in the former act. The focus of the former act on protection was seen as strength as well as a weakness of the former act. Strong due to the structure and focus of child protection, and weak because of the lack of available options for families.

The respondents had indicated that they are cognizant of the necessity of the Child Welfare Act in protecting children despite their overall consensus that it did not service the people of Manitoba in the manner that reflects the needs and issues of Aboriginal peoples.

Respondents have been uniform in their assessment of the shortcomings of the former Manitoba Child Welfare System in that they felt that the former CFS act had been 'mainstream' in ideology and that this did not 'fit' the needs of the families serviced. While they acknowledged that it had strengths in that it gave

the structure, and the protocols, for pure child protection mode, they all agreed that the older act did not service Aboriginal people in Manitoba in a fully positive manner.

Of the respondents, one went further and advised that he/she felt that the act was an extension of colonist methods with intent to subjugate families.

Respondant One stated,

Working with Aboriginal women and hearing their stories when they've been adopted out, it's devastating. Meanwhile they [the children] come back destroyed. This was to protect children! I think that's what led up to this day. One of the things I keep hearing is that we're not changing anything, we're inheriting a system that uh, that does not build on our values, that's not built on our world view. What's really gonna change?

In summary of Part One, the respondents listed the strengths of the Manitoba Child Welfare Act in being its focus on child protection, and the structure that it gives to individual practice. Many of the respondents noted that the act had assisted when conducting their duties as child welfare workers by focusing on the directive of child protection. Despite these acknowledgments the respondents had been unanimous in stating that the former CFS act had been a 'poor fit' for Aboriginal people in Manitoba, as it did little to recognize or address the needs in Aboriginal families. Many indicated that the needs of Aboriginal families required innovative and intensive treatment. This latter statement had been almost uniform in all of the respondent's statements regarding the Child and Family Services Act.

## **Feedback to the Process**

The AJI-CWI implementation has been ongoing since October of 2000. Child welfare practitioners, as well as levels of government, have demonstrated their commitment to this process by conducting a phenomenal amount of planning and change within this limited time frame.

At the date of this paper, the process is in stage four of the implementation process. There were five stages to the process, and stage four involves the completion of case transfers to the new authorities.

The respondents were given an opportunity to provide feedback to the process as well as recommendations for its successful implementation. As front line workers, the respondents are the driving forces that carry out the policies, ideologies, and duties set forth in this process. Respondents were asked to provide feedback and recommendations in four areas relevant to the AJI-CWI. These were in the areas of case management, prevention, resource issues, and human resources.

This is the result of these discussions.

### **Case Management**

The respondents reported wide discrepancies in terms of how many cases they currently carry. Many of the respondents expressed concerns that high case to worker ratios may result from the transfers, and result in poor service delivery. The prevailing comment was that a system of case management needs to be developed that recognizes the high needs of some clients. Not surprisingly, all of

the respondents had indicated a desired cap on cases assigned to individual workers. Respondent Four stated,

I guess we should limit our cases to a certain number. If you have too many cases we are shortchanging our clients, our families. There should be a certain number.

Workers noted that there had to be some concession in case assignment to case types. High needs children and high-risk families need to be assigned in smaller numbers to experienced workers. Some of the respondents had voluntarily listed the amount of cases that they carried, and the numbers ranged from 23 to 46 cases. One worker indicated that a caseload of 50 was not out of the ordinary when they were practicing Aboriginal child welfare in the 1980's. Respondent Seven stated,

"It was nothing to have a worker have up to 50 and more cases. In those days the sky was the limit."

One worker who had experience with a number of agencies, stated,

I think the caseload management, from my experience has been really disproportional. Some caseloads are much higher than others and also the fact that there are high need cases needs to be considered....

Another worker noted that the cases assigned to a worker can be higher in number, but this would present a disservice to families. Worker's can 'manage' but they would not be able to case plan as well as they would like to. Respondent One stated,

Paperwork... I could manage, with about 40 [cases], but whether I would be able to do what I would like to do [in terms of working with the family] is another matter.

Many of the respondents indicated that they have worked overtime regularly in order to 'keep up' with their caseloads or to keep it manageable. Respondent Eight stated,

You have to put in some evening time just to make sure that letter went out, that case note got sent, or that child was checked on. If a worker didn't do this, then they'd be in over their head in no time. Everyone does it [overtime], in my opinion, they have to with the type of cases there are.

Overtime work on evenings and weekends was a reportedly regular occurrence among the respondents that they accepted as a given of the field in which they are employed.

One respondent (Six) stated,

A lot of our families [clients] do not have their crisis on a 9-5 basis, and I think we all know this when we work in this area [CFS].

The respondents reported that they have been on-call (equivalent to emergency after-hours) for 24 hours for a week at a time. Some reported a longer period than this as a result of covering other worker's on-call shifts. This was a reportedly new development in their duties as a result of implementation. Previous to this, workers would go 'on-call' for weekends and holidays but not for such an extended period of time. Although the respondents had mentioned this

recent addition to their duties, few elaborated on their feelings surrounding this extended service delivery.

With the recent restructuring, at least five of the respondents had noted an increase in expectations from their respective agencies surrounding the duties of the worker. These duties included the increase in On-call availability, file reviews of transferred files coming in, and increase in meetings with collateral agencies and foster parents during the initial stages of the new transfers.

Of the agencies who did not receive case transfers, the increase in workload was reported in areas such as preparation for case transfers, training initiatives, and an increase in on-call duties. This increase in duties was noted by the respondents to be 'expected' and did not appear to be an issue that the respondents had serious issues with.

Respondent Three stated

It's gonna be stressful for the first while. Like anything else there's gonna be growing pains; things are going to need to be re-looked and retried...How this is unfolding is gonna have an impact on who well we're able to deliver services...hopefully for the better.

The respondents were aware that the small size of some of their respective workplaces makes for the specialization of duties untenable. This did not prevent them from identifying the specialization of case management as something that is desired in the new system. Respondent five had indicated a concern that there is no specialization in the Aboriginal Agencies, and that this translates into more duties for individual workers. Generic Social Work in an



Aboriginal Agency has come to mean mastering a number of skills in very different areas. This respondent stated,

[Other agencies] have intake foster care, foster care workers, foster care coordinator, place of safety workers....In that respect [specialization] you do have that ability to provide those services. When I look at First Nation agencies we have a skeleton team of workers. We have the kids, front line worker, supervisor, and that's it.

The specialization of caseloads is a desired outcome of the AJI-CWI. The respondents have listed some of the areas of specialization that they personally would like to see. Respondent Seven also identified a need for specialized workers.

I think we would definitely need to have more workers who are, you know, close to experts in working with FAS children, crack addicted moms, and just workers who are able to connect with the troubled teens.

The primary concerns surrounding case management for the respondents was having a reasonable amount of cases that will allow them to provide quality and in depth services to the families, as well as having an array of workers that will meet the specific needs of the families serviced. Respondents had perceived that there is a recent increase in duties, and expectations from their respective agencies in terms of duties in addition to managing their case load.

### **Prevention Services**

The prevailing theme in feedback surrounding prevention was the concern that there are currently not enough workers to effectively develop, and implement

agency appropriate programs and services. Prevention was seen as a cost-effective way to reach families before family crisis necessitated children being removed from the home. Prevention services were also viewed as an integral component of First Nation Agencies philosophy of providing holistic services for clients. There was also a concern among respondents that the overall Child and Family Services System was moving away from the holistic model favored by many Aboriginal agencies and moving toward a protection only mode.

Respondent Four stated,

The community sees us as the be all and end all in terms of somewhere to go for help. A lot of the time this may be true, especially in the smaller communities where there is no services.

Respondent Eight had indicated that there is a palpable change in philosophy of Government that trickles down to front line practice. The move to a child protection focus in Aboriginal agencies would be detrimental to the agency as many agencies have spent years building reputations among their members, and would affect the individual front line worker. This respondent stated,

We seem to be moving toward sole child protection, and I uh, I really don't feel comfortable doing only this. I would like to, as a worker, say to our families, No, we are not just going to come in and remove your children....here are some options...

There was some concern in at least two of the workers that remote First Nation communities are unable to provide effective programming for their communities.

Respondent Five stated,

When you look at all the communities in particular First Nation communities, there's very little there. That's what really concerns me. You have community members who want to live in Winnipeg who have all these issues. There are families on reserve who have these issues who want to continue to stay on reserve, how do you help them when there's nothing there for them.

The workers who had been employed in the system for a number of years remembered a cap being placed on Services to Family dollars. This was of particular concern as they stated that this cap and eventual removal of prevention dollars affected their practices in negative ways. Respondent Seven stated,

First it was a 'cap', and then the dollars were gone. How are we supposed to provide family services in some of the communities where we are the only show in town? Now, I am worried that again, we are being asked to perform [CFS duties] with even less than then.

With prevention dollars, some workers have stated that they were able to effectively intervene in some family situations and avoid children coming into long term care. With the advent of the new child welfare system, the workers have indicated that they would like to plan for a more holistic model of intervention, which would encompass more of the community, families, and environment of the individual.

Respondent Two stated,

“Using a prevention approach is cost effective in the long run... we would use a holistic way to interact with the families...”

Respondents have raised questions surrounding whether they would be able to provide services for Aboriginal people in the fashion that they would like to without services to family dollars. Many have indicated that this is what they would like to see in the new system, but were unsure as to how exactly the new system would unfold in the coming years. Respondent Three stated,

I guess we'll have to wait and see. It's been a long time coming, and I think we will do good work simply by recognizing the problems people go through, but, uh, I think we also need the tools to carry this out.

A few of the respondents indicated that there is link between prevention programs and the type of practices that they would like to see in Aboriginal child and family services. Respondent Six stated,

Prevention programs would be part of the whole community services model that most of the agencies [Aboriginal] are hoping to establish aren't they? They are an important piece of the pie. [The model].

In support of this statement, one of the service objectives of the new system was “To take a holistic approach toward child protection.” (PromiseofHope2000)

The respondents regarded prevention services as an integral component in the holistic approach of practice in child welfare that many of their respective agencies subscribe to. In this context, the notion of prevention services is regarded as central to practicing within the new child welfare system.

## Resource Availability

The majority of the respondents had much to say about resources and their availability, as well as the need to develop them within the communities of the agency. There was a general consensus that the scarcity of resources was a major problem that will affect individual practice. Workers expressed a desire to be able to send Aboriginal clients to culturally appropriate services that will address their specific needs.

Some of the respondents had opportunity to work in agencies where there had been a perceived increase in resource availability, and these workers indicated that these resources needed to be transferred with the children. This area had been regarded as crucial to best practice, and to providing culturally appropriate services to people of Aboriginal descent.

Respondent Five stated,

Oh we definitely need more resources... just within our agencies alone we don't have the bodies to be able to do the type of work in prevention. We're always short staffed. We don't have the dollars for different programming. That's always an issue

Another respondent (Six) stated,

"Well I think we are going to definitely need the funding before we have the resources in the community at the community level."

One respondent from an agency which has already received some case transfers has indicated that being able to access resources is crucial to best practice.

We're maybe not getting everything in terms of accessing resources and services. Not being able to access these, we do the best that we can for them [the clients], with what we have that is.

There was a perception among the respondents that other authorities had more access to resources, and that the resources available were designed to meet mainstream needs. Respondent Four stated,

The [other agencies] they seem to have had a lot more resources in contrast to the Aboriginal agencies. Aboriginal agencies have to contract for specific services. There seems to be a lot of hoops to jump through to access resources.

In addition to the perceived need for resources, there was a sense of urgency as to how to distribute the resources that were available. Respondent Four had expressed concern about the increasing permeation of drugs, specifically crack cocaine, into Aboriginal communities. This worker expressed a need for distribution of available resources in the advent and quick spread of these issues.

There's got to be a quicker way to pool our resources. These issues are not going to go away, they will be increasing...

Worker's expressed some frustration at the perceived expectations on individual workers in carryout their duties with the resources they have on hand.

Respondent Five stated,

"If you look at First Nation agencies, they have skeletal team of resources."

This respondent also stated,

.....The onus on us as native agencies is that we are expected to do everything and anything but we don't have the resources to do that. We have to multi task. You know, one person as opposed to other agencies, you know, they have others.

The specificity of needed resources was also an issue. The lack of Aboriginal specific resources has been listed as an important issue. Aboriginal specific programming was again tied to the intergenerational effects of residential school or to the post-colonial status of Aboriginal peoples in Manitoba. Respondent Three stated,

"We need specific resources because of inter-generational effects. There has been a downfall in our people because of it."

Another respondent stated,

Too often we're trying to box in and label our clients in order to access those resources. It's very difficult to access resources for Aboriginal clients because we've experienced years of colonization and we're different in respect to our world view about what is best for us or how we are going to receive help.

Workers expressed a need for developing agency resources with Aboriginal clients in mind.

I'm hoping that we have more access to resources that we can control, and more money to provide and develop the programming. We would

need our own group homes, our own foster homes; we can attach our own terms.

Some respondents expressed concern that the types of cases that are being transferred warrant a higher level of practice that has not yet been developed by their particular Aboriginal agency.

Respondent Six put it in this way,

“I think we are in the process of really challenging the systems and the services that exist already.”

The lack of resources in terms of developing programs, and having specialty workers is especially harsh to these workers given that the larger agencies are perceived to have the resources on hand.

Respondents had expressed some level of pride in the services that they offered with the limited resources they have access to. Respondents however, have expressed some frustration at the gaps evident when comparisons are made with other agencies.

What we need to do, it's almost overwhelming to provide that type of services but when you look at [Other Agencies] and the amount of resources that they have available to them it's uh, amazing how we operate and how they operate. There's just so much more that they offer that we don't have, but we still do the same work and we still manage at the same level that they do. I'm not saying this is good or bad...I'm just saying *that's the reality*.



Worker's had the general perception that resources were specialized in the larger agencies, and that front line workers made referrals in order to access these resources. This was seen as a luxury in smaller agencies in which the worker had to perform a multitude of duties in her or his capacity as a front line worker.

One worker stated,

I seen how things were done in [the agency I had previously been employed in] and you didn't have to do certain things as a front line worker. They [the resources] were there, and all you had to do was to make referrals. The resources were *right there...*

When asked as to what constituted resources, the respondents listed residential care facilities that ranged from staffed facilities, to foster homes, and intervention and preventative services from inside and outside the agency. This included programming, as well as specialized workers such as re-unification workers, and peri-natal workers.

Respondent Two described the situation in their practice in this way.

We're not broken down as much and we don't have those [services] available in our organization to provide certain segments of services coming out of our agencies. We basically have to encompass everything. We have to be responsible for almost everything that is related to this case whether it be medical, therapeutic, or educational.

While there was a perception among many of the respondents that the bigger agencies had more mainstream specific resources available to them, this

was viewed as a reality of the operating system that they have learned to work around. Respondent Five described the situation in this way,

“Aside from speaking about the supply of resources that [other agencies] has, we’ve had a good working relationship with [other agencies].”

The responses to the issues of resource availability, ranged from a ‘wait and see’ perspective to questions surrounding whether the resources are on their way. Many of the respondents expressed worry that the cases would arrive with little or no resources attached to them. This worker stated,

“We are basically living on the edge, we have no resources.”

Another stated,

“The more resources we have, the better off we will be in terms of helping families and developing programs.”

Another worker from an agency that has been accepting some case transfers stated,

“My understanding of the process was that the resources and money would be coming with the children and it hasn’t been working out that way.”

Workers’ expressed a need for community based resources, and an opportunity to develop those for the families they service. If the actual resources did not arrive with the child, they indicated that they would like to see the finances available to their agency in order to develop programs and resources.

Respondent One stated,

We don't have enough community based resources. Not enough funding for programming. For families that are trying to make changes and have their child back home. I'm hoping that we will see resources put in by government that they've [the families] normally been given by [their former agencies]. Currently there just isn't enough.

One respondent expressed their stance on access to resources. They had initially stated that there seems to be an increasing perception that Aboriginal child welfare agencies are 'taking over' and want an inordinate amount of the resources. This respondent (Seven) stated,

We don't want anymore than what any client of [other agencies] rightfully receives. We want a level playing field in which we are given the opportunity, with the same financial tools, the same resources available, to be able to work with our families and children.

Themes evident in the feedback section surrounding resources were that given the amount of social problems that Aboriginal clients experience, there needs to be resources available to the First Nation Child and Family Workers that are equipped to address these issues. There was also a concern that it takes some time and expertise to develop and implement these resources, and that that as of yet, they are not arriving with the cases.

### **Human Resource Issues**

The respondents feedback in the area of human resource issues ranged from discussions surrounding the type of cases that are arriving, to the present workplace changes that they are experiencing.

Respondents generally agreed that more training was in order, as staff needed to be aware of the complex issues in child welfare practice. Training was viewed as positive, and one respondent indicated that the influx of workers would provide a forum for bridge building between the agencies. There was very little stated about the secondment process except for one respondents' optimistic view that this would open up avenues of understanding between the agencies.

Some of the workers pointed out the discrepancies that they perceive between the amount of duties they are expected to perform, particularly in contrast to the larger agencies, for seemingly less on the provincial salary scale.

The need for trained Aboriginal workers, or at the very least, workers who understand the situation of Aboriginal peoples was identified. Respondent Four stated,

We need trained people who understand the living conditions of the people we service.

Of the eight respondents, half had attained a university degree and the other half were either in a child welfare certificate program or a bachelor of social work co-hort program. They indicated that they were committed to training in order to meet the challenges of their practices. One worker stated that training and a 'good staff' were integral to agency wellness.

Respondent Six stated,

"We always have a need for new workers and training. We need trained resources. It is good to have a good staff and a good staff/client ratio."

Respondents who were enrolled in a co-hort program indicated that they found the task of balancing work with post secondary enrollment challenging, but also considered it as a 'great opportunity'.

One respondent stated,

This agency arranged to have a group attend these classes. They [the classes] are challenging, and it's a good opportunity to upgrade our skills and graduate with something. It is difficult to be studying after being at work all day.

Wage discrepancy was also an emerging issue evident in Human Resources feedback. Respondents indicated that they were doing the same type of work, with the same type of degrees (for those who had degrees) for less payment and with less on-hand resources. The workers who raised this issue tended to have degrees in addition to experience in being employed in a government setting.

One worker stated,

An individual with the same degree in our agency would do the same work as one in a non-Aboriginal agency, and the work we do is not divvied up. We don't have any special human resource positions to fill in any of those gaps.

Another worker stated,

"We don't seem to be following the provincial salary scale at Aboriginal agencies."

There was a conspicuous absence of any comments on union issues, or labor issues with the seconded provincial employees. Of the eight respondents, not one had raised these as human resource issues that are emerging with the AJI-CWI. Human resource concerns ranged from pay scales, to training issues.

Many of the participants indicated that their position encompassed a large portion of their lives. They reportedly went on-call for 24 hour periods up to a week in duration, in addition to regular overtime, and attending training sessions to upgrade their skills. This was in addition to the large influx of changes, and information that comes with adapting to a new provincial child welfare system.

One worker stated succinctly,

“ What we need to do...it's almost overwhelming...”

Respondents indicated a high commitment to the process and advised that they would perform the duties in anticipation of working within the new system. Most of the respondents had indicated that they had roots within one of the communities serviced by their respective agencies.

The majority of the respondents in this sample had some form of formal training in Social Services. Out of the eight respondents, four indicated that they had university degrees. Three of the respondents were currently enrolled in a Child Welfare Training initiative, and were entering their final year.

On a final note regarding Human Resource Issues, at least five of the respondents had described their experiences in Native Child Welfare to be 'rewarding', 'historical', and important work. The respondents had indicated a

high commitment level to the process and perceived the future outcomes to be positive. Respondent One summed this up by stating,

“It’s [AJI-CWI] a historical process that we are involved in...”

### **Understanding of the AJI-CWI**

The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry was a major occurrence in the Aboriginal community in Manitoba and many of the respondents indicated that they followed the proceedings of the inquiry quite closely. The respondents who had been employed in the CFS field at the time of the AJI inquiry indicated that they and their respective agencies had followed the inquiry with respect to its recommendation of Child Welfare Practices quite closely, and four of the respondents had participated in the inquiry in some manner. Respondent One described the rationale for AJI-CWI in these terms:

Things haven’t worked in the past and I think that it [the AJI initiative] represented a lot of different things to a lot of different people, but for me that whole process is simply recognizing that we as First Nation people have the right to provide care for our children

Respondent Three indicated that the changes are a positive move for Aboriginal families,

In my own words, I believe that the AJI was to respond to the inadequacy of the former Child Welfare Act and to the subjectivity of it, and how decisions were made. I don’t think it was always in the best interest of Aboriginal families.

Some of the respondents had voiced the opinion that the AJI had been a major occurrence for Manitoba's Aboriginal people, and that the implementation of its recommendations a long overdue occurrence.

The inquiry was described as a time when emotions were running high in the Aboriginal community, and the changes were a positive outcome of tragic occurrences. The feelings of sensitivity were still evident in some of the respondents when recounting their memories of the inquiry. Respondent Eight stated,

It [the inquiry] had a lot of criticisms due to its format. The stories were raw and ugly and I think that people didn't like to be reminded of that. That there's racism, that there's inequality, and that there is a lot of painful living among our people.

Information gained about the AJI-CWI initiative was gained from a variety of sources. Many of the respondents indicated that their respective agencies had given the workers information, as it became available. The information generally came from staff meetings, and from periodic information sessions. Information over and above this came from the worker's own research, via the internet, reading pamphlets or through educational systems. Respondents indicated that they had trouble in integrating the volume of information that was available, and in verifying its validity. One of the respondents who was enrolled in a training program stated,



The information is there, but having the time to read up, to look into it and get a really good understanding is hard to do with a full caseload, family, and classes. In the course of things, it's just not a priority.

Of the eight workers, seven had indicated that they sought out information over and above what was provided to them. Respondent Four offered this explanation as to why.

I like to know what is going on. There are so many changes and they affect how we work. I just more or less educated myself. I like to keep abreast of what is going on.

Respondents who are enrolled in a Child Welfare Certificate or Bachelor of Social Work co-hort program noted that information was regularly presented to them, and that the topic had been discussed in classes. They used this general information as background information to the more agency specific information they would receive at work. They indicated that they had felt very satisfied with the information and training that they were receiving in these programs.

One respondent felt that on campus university classes had dealt with the AJI-CWI information from a different perspective,

The questions that came out of class discussions about it [AJI-CWI] were like; Are there gonna be jobs for non-Aboriginal people, or uh, we want to get into child and family services, is there still that possibility because of the AJI?

The concern over jobs seemed to be taking precedence over the concern of the disproportionate number of Aboriginal Children in Manitoba's child welfare system. This respondent stated,

I hear about jobs, positions, and what is going to happen to workers within the system. What I *don't hear is, concerns about the children*, and how this would affect them.

Another respondent who had been employed in different offices in the CFS system, noted that concern about job security had been a dominant theme within the system. This respondent had emphasized with the individuals in that particular agency. Respondent Four stated,

I worked in a couple of agencies; I have an idea of how they feel about being seconded. The fear they have about losing their jobs. I can see where they are coming from and I have an idea as to how they feel...I guess I would not feel any different in regards to job security.

While there was a level of empathy evident in respondents for colleagues who had employment concerns, this did not affect Respondent's perception surrounding the implementation's necessity, and timeliness.

AJI-CWI understanding of the respondents was gleaned from a variety of sources. Many of the respondents listed the inquiry as a major occurrence and had little difficulty in remembering the dates and rationale for the inquiry. The CWI information was obtained from classes, agencies, and written information from the website, or from pamphlets.

Of the eight participants, three had indicated that they did not feel comfortable speaking to the strengths and weaknesses of the new Act as they did not have time to review and compare it to the former act.

One simply stated,

“First of all, I want to say that I haven’t seen the new act yet. I don’t know what type of adjustments will happen in our clientele, our practice.”

The three also indicated that this interview had incited their curiosity and that they would commit to reviewing the 2003 Manitoba Child Welfare Act.

The eight respondents had little difficulty in outlining the rationale for the AJI-CWI. For some of the respondents the inquiry was an emotional occurrence in which they had some close involvement. At least three of the respondents had indicated that they did not review the Authorities Act and as such were not comfortable commenting on it’s strengths and weaknesses.

### **Expected Changes**

A large proportion of the respondents reportedly did not see any major changes as of yet in their particular practices. The comments in this area of the interview, ranged from general and hypothetical to very specific. The differences were reflective of each agency’s different position in terms of accepting transfers. Some agencies had accepted some transfers whereas others had not. The question in this area had been asked if there were perceived changes to individual practices. The question then was broken into whether there are perceived positive and negative changes in their practice.

Respondent Five noted that there was some convenience in the mandate being widened to include off reserve jurisdiction. This allowed for more timely intervention in terms of court, apprehensions, and case planning.

I think as far as out of convenience. In the case of apprehension. We can do this outright instead of information the other agencies. It saves us some time, as to when we actually get to work with the families. [Other agencies] used to have to physically send a worker to assist us. There was some process before we actually get the case. We can now do this outright and deal with the family that much sooner.

Another perceived positive change was related again to the widening mandate that is evident since proclamation. Respondent Six stated,

It's just that when a crisis happens, you know, it happens fast and we can now respond to it now, without explaining, and justifying our reasons for apprehension to an agency that simply does not have the background information that we have...

In terms of concrete changes, another worker had indicated that case transfers that did occur necessitated some intensive reviews with respect to case plans, resources attached to the cases, and child evaluations.

"When we had case transfers, the frustrating part was the lack of written information that came along."

To the implementation process's credit, this identified problem of lack of information in the child's file had been identified by workers and brought to management's attention. This issue was then brought to the transfer table where

the solution of providing a checklist was proposed. This checklist would allow the transfer process to proceed smoothly as it would allow a clear expectation of what is required before a case is transferred.

In agencies where case transfers had been accepted, respondents had noted that treaty numbers had to be applied for in many of the arriving cases. Receiving aboriginal agency workers questioned why this particular task had been not completed in a number of transferred cases.

I don't know why the treaty numbers were not applied for...you know...maybe just not familiar with the whole treaty process or its importance. What we've ended up doing is going through every child's file and checking if they are eligible for status, and where...

This particular situation was also viewed in a positive light in that these children who are eligible for treaty status will apply and receive their status, as there are workers who understand the process, and who understand the importance of attaining treaty status.

It's probably a good thing that they came [the cases] when they did so we can apply for them [treaty cards] before the child turns eighteen. The other worker might have tried to get them their status but became frustrated at the red tape.[laughs]. We're used to it ,[red tape] and expect it...

The application for treaty status can be symbolic of the Aboriginal agency's value on heritage and subscription to Aboriginal roots.

Case transfers had occurred in at least two of the agencies participating, and respondents were able to identify some negative patterns that are occurring as a result of actual case transfers. One respondent noted that,

There was not any type of social assessment done on this child and this child's needs were not addressed. This child has been in care for 14 years and the child is severely disabled and there are files where other children are leveled at level five, yet these needs of this child were not assessed as high. The needs are much greater, you know, and yet none of that was acknowledged. There seems to be some inconsistencies.

There was a noted difference in the type of files that had been transferred.

The workers noted that the children or families in the transferred cases had little attachment or ties to the originating community. Some of the workers noted that the families had negative experiences of the originating communities and that there is lingering mistrust and animosity.

"They [Aboriginal families] leave because of negative feelings about the place [community], or because of things that happened, and how they were treated. So now, here we are, trying to rebuild that relationship."

Respondent Three noted that;

"These kids don't have any idea about what reserve life is like or what we're about."

This phenomena of Aboriginal people feeling displaced and hostile to their reservations is not uncommon. Fournier and Crey (1998) stated,

Most of Winnipeg's 65000 Aboriginal people have emigrated from Manitoba's 62 reserves and 120 Métis Communities. They may be fleeing poverty or seeking a job, education or more social contact. Whole families leave the reserve to escape the cronyism and elitism of many elected chiefs and band councils... (Pg. 213)

This represents a hurdle of mistrust and hostility that must be negotiated by individual workers. This influx of families estranged from communities necessitates program development in areas of inclusion. There may also be a positive change in practice due to the possibility of family reconnection to the originating communities.

Respondents were asked to provide specific feedback to four areas relevant to social work practice in child and family services. Many of the workers have indicated that the duties are remaining the same, and that although there will be some growing pains, the adjustments will occur in their practices as the cases arrive. This minimization of the changes had been described by a couple of workers as making the process of change 'manageable'. Respondent Five stated,

I don't think we are going to re-invent the wheel in any shape or form. We are going to still provide the fundamentals of child welfare, to serve communities and to protect children. I think where the change is that we'll be accountable to the Southern Authority.

Each of the respondents expressed hope that the changes that occur would be positive.

Respondent Two who had expressed excitement about the change in legislation stated,

“I don’t want to foresee negative right now. I guess time will tell.”

This same worker stated that,

“I hope to see positive changes. It’s been a long time coming and hope that we can use, um, our mandate to work with our families in a way that is not so oppressive.”

The workers were consistent in expressing hope that changes that do occur will be positive and will benefit families. However, many made qualifying remarks that there will be some adjustments and ‘growing pains’ before the system is running in a way that is envisioned. Respondent Six stated,

“I think there will eventually be a positive change. I think there will be fallout, and growing pains. It may not look so positive at first but I am hoping to see a different type of service.”

Some respondents were specific in the way they envision the final product.

Respondent Four stated,

I’m hoping that down the road the southern authority has more authority over the other areas which they don’t have right now. Like special rate, special circumstances and so forth. I guess it would be better. I guess cause our values and beliefs are different.

Although there was an overall emphasis on positive outcomes occurring due to the changes, the worker provided conditions to successful implementation of the AJI-CWI.



I'm hoping myself, as a worker that it will give us the tools to help in prevention and intervention. But that being said we need the money and the resources to have our own resources. *Our own programs where we can send our people to. [Italics added]*

One worker stated,

“As long as it [the authorities] doesn't become another Indian Affairs where there's a lot of bureaucracy involved and adding on a lot of people. The more people who work on top, the less [the agencies' have] for resources.”

Overall, the respondents noted that they felt the changes were positive, and were committed to the process. The concept of hope was expressed by many of the respondents. Hope for a system which was easier to navigate for workers, for a holistic approach, and for positive outcomes for the families they serve.

While the respondents expressed hope, they also expressed realistic, and concrete concerns about what may hinder the new system's capacity to deliver services. One respondent had added late in his/her interview, a concern that is crucial to the building of strong and accountable agencies. The issue is political interference in Aboriginal communities, and the agency's need for a unified response to this issue. One respondent stated,

I think there is going to be a process that affects the whole system. We know that Chief and councils have to go through a lot of changes too, in how they see Child and Family Services in their community. This is going

to impact on how we're gonna be able to deliver the services without interference from them because there definitely has been interference in not all, but some communities.

This concerns that the collateral agencies on reserve and off reserve are not adjusting or growing to accommodate the changes is one that had been expressed as a theme.

The respondents have indicated that their collective experience with collateral agencies, that is, schools, police services, non-mandated agencies, and hospitals, have been changing with the advent of the new system. They attributed some of the negative interactions with collateral agencies to miscommunication and misunderstandings. They have attributed this to lack of knowledge about the new system, and lack of knowledge about the conditions of Aboriginal peoples. Respondent One stated,

I think for this whole process in general the information has not filtered through as clearly as I would have liked to have it presented to me. Like you talk to a lot of people in the community, social workers, it's all at the management level, and it hasn't reached you know, the grassroots level. The worker, the people who can be referred to as the ones who provide front line services.

Respondent Three commented on collateral agencies by stating,

They are mainstream. Some are supportive. But for the larger part we don't have the support. They are very mainstream viewed. They are not

understanding of the AJI; I don't think for the most part they see it as a positive change. They're used to dealing with [Non-native agencies].

Another worker added,

Well I think it will eventually be a positive change. I think there will, however, be a lot of fall out regarding resources.

This anticipated fall out included some concerns that misunderstandings may affect the fluidity of referrals, and there will be some initial confusion surrounding roles of agencies. At least one of the respondents had indicated that there had been a marked increase in some hostility in non-native collateral agencies. This had been attributed to a perception that there is a overall hostile reaction by non-native service providers to the legislated changes.

Respondents made suggestions which included a more intensive education process for collateral agencies, and in particular police. Respondents often had simple suggestions with respect to educating collateral agencies and for dealing with the anticipated 'bumps' on the road to implementation. One suggestion was to have a Southern Authority representative conducting workshops on the implementation at the collateral agency locations, or hosting 'open houses' at Outreach offices in order to build positive working relationships.

One worker stated that they had waited for six hours for police assistance on a possible apprehension. This worker was unsure as to whether this was the norm or whether the police had the understanding that Aboriginal agencies were still non-mandated in Winnipeg.

Observations were made by respondents that many collateral agencies contact with Aboriginal people has often been as service providers, and not colleagues. This was presented as a problem, in that a new relationship had to be negotiated, and negative stereotypes had to be addressed.

Two workers anticipated a lot of comparisons being done between what is now known as the general authority and the native authorities. This was seen as inevitable, but undesired and unfair. They were quick to point out that Aboriginal Agencies have been in existence for a shorter period of time, and are still developing. While workers have anticipated some difficulties in implementation with collateral agencies, they also have generally indicated that this was probably a short-term concern, and would be alleviated over time. Respondent Six commented,

'There is going to be a lot of initial scrutiny for native agencies.'

The hope and the trepidation of the majority of the respondents can be summed up in this Respondent Two's statement.

'I think we're capable. We work with what we now have, we're lacking but we'll get the experience and eventually it will go smoother.'

### **SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS**

The interviewees' responses touched on a variety of issues that they perceive to be important to the worker's practices. These issues ranged from the importance of developing resources and prevention programs that would be conducive to

Aboriginal best practice, to concrete recommendations that would allow the process a smoother implementation.

The eight respondents have been involved in the AJI-CWI process to different extents. These eight respondents have all indicated that they have attended meetings, planning sessions with respect to preparation and planning, and many of the respondents have indicated working late or overtime on AJI-CWI related issues. Of the eight respondents, none have indicated perceiving its overall implementation as a negative occurrence. All the eight respondents have indicated varying degrees of optimism surrounding the AJI-CWI implementation, and have also expressed concerns in areas of implementation that they felt warranted it.

The issue of resources was considered to be an important and major topic. Many of the respondents were aware that the type of interventions they would like to develop relied heavily on whether there are resources to carry out these interventions. There was concern that resources were not arriving with the transferred files. The concerns arose after initial files were transferred, and it had been noted that the attached services had been cut prior to transfer. Workers could only surmise that the cutting of these services signaled a reluctance to transfer the attached services.

Prevention programs were also listed as an important if not integral component of best practices in Aboriginal child welfare. The respondents expressed the importance of having this piece in place in order to conduct their

duties in an effective manner. Prevention programs were viewed by respondents as a way to carry out mandates that valued least disruption and family cohesion.

Concerns related to the implementation were that the funding for this new system would not be adequate to meet the philosophy of the AJI-CWI principles.

Another concern was in recognition of the conditions in the home communities, and the concerns that these organizations would not adapt to the new system. One specific statement to this was one respondents' statement that chief and councils must adapt to these changes by not interfering with child welfare issues.

Respondents maintained a realistic expectation of the newer system, while recognizing that the former system did not adequately meet the needs of Aboriginal peoples in Manitoba in the past.

There were expectations of difficulties and 'growing pains', but overall, the respondents advised this researcher of their commitment to the process. This commitment is evident in the amount of overtime, preparation time, and training, that each of the workers have committed to for their respective agencies.

There was little discussion in some areas of human resource issues such as unionization. This can be attributed to two reasons. One possible reason is the avoidance of contentious areas of discussion due to their agency management's support of this study. Another possible reason for this can be the simple huge influx of information that the workers' must process.

The human resource issues were primarily in the areas of training, and the identification of discrepancies between aboriginal workers and non-native workers in wages, duties, and travel expectations.

The overall primary concerns appeared to be in areas such as resource, and prevention, and this may be due to the timing of the study.

Overall, the respondents had appeared receptive to the study, and to contribute their expertise to what they appeared to consider an important and historic development in Aboriginal child welfare in Manitoba.

One worker summed this up as follows,

"It's [AJI-CWI] just everywhere if you are a worker, and it has been a long time coming, I'm hoping I can say to my grandkids [laughs] that I took part, and was involved during this time..."

## **RESULTS FROM QUANTITATIVE DATA**

Quantitative Data was obtained by this researcher from Agency Statistics, and population statistics in order to provide context to the data obtained through the structured interviews.

The information obtained from each agency was basically an overview of the amount of cases each agency carries in their respective outreach offices, the number of foster homes that are licensed by each agency in the City of Winnipeg, and the number of cases that each agency is expecting from the AJI-CWI transfers. In addition to the above, population statistics for each First Nation community serviced was obtained from DIAND's (2004) listing of First Nation Profiles. A distinction between on-reserve member and off reserve members was

also made. The data from these sources is listed under each agency heading in the following section.

### **Anishinaabe Child and Family Services**

Anishinaabe Child and Family Services reported having 101 files open at the Winnipeg Outreach Office. This amount of cases was divided among the four case workers at the office. The total expected case transfers to arrive is one hundred and fifty. This number will change as this number is reflective of the number of cases open to other agencies at this particular time. It is primarily comprised of permanent wards and children already in care. As new cases arise, a second batch of cases is expected to arrive which is estimated at 50 to 75 cases.

Anishinaabe Child and Family Services licensed 40 foster homes in Winnipeg at the time of this study. The number of homes licensed had increased dramatically within the previous year. The band membership of each reserve as of the DIAND Community Profiles (<http://sdiprod2.inac.gc.ca/fnpofiles/general> information) is as follows:

Little Saskatchewan	980
Off reserve	348
Lake St. Martin	2021
Off reserve	689
Lake Manitoba	1621
Off Reserve	769
Dauphin River	261



Off Reserve	119
Pinaymootang	2506
Off Reserve	1211

The total population of the First Nations serviced by ACFS is 10525.

The total off-reserve population serviced by ACFS as of 2001 is in the amount of 3136 ([http://sdiprod2.inac.gc.ca/fnporfiles/general information DIAND 2001](http://sdiprod2.inac.gc.ca/fnporfiles/general%20information%20DIAND%202001))

### **Sagkeeng Child and Family Services**

Sagkeeng Child and Family Services had 70 agency files as of November 2004. The agency was expecting 170 cases to be transferred in the AJI-CWI process at the time of this study. This amount included Family Service files. Winnipeg outreach office had one child and family service worker who manages 22 cases as of November 2004, while the main on-reserve office had three Child and Family Services Workers. The agency had a total amount of 13 foster homes in Winnipeg as of November 2004.

The total registered population as of INAC statistics ([http://sdiprod2.inac.gc.ca/fnporfiles/general information](http://sdiprod2.inac.gc.ca/fnporfiles/general%20information)) for November 2004 was 6384. The total off reserve population was 3338.

The total amount of First Nation members from the ages 0-14 was 700 persons.

### **Intertribal Child and Family Services**

Intertribal Child and Family Services has a main office in Fisher River Cree Nation, and subscribes to a decentralized model of service delivery. The Child and Family Services Agency consists of three First Nations. The names

and population for these First Nations (<http://sdiprod2.inac.gc.ca/fnporfiles/general> information ) are:

Kinonjeoshtegon First Nation (Jackhead)	642
Off Reserve	322
Fisher River	2999
Off reserve	1327
Dakota Tipi	60 (approximate)

The total potential population to be served after implementation is 5290 and this does not include the Dakota Tipi population.

As of November 25, 2004, the agency had been expecting 54 cases to be transferred to the Winnipeg Outreach Office in the AJI-CWI process in the first "batch" of transferred cases. This number reflects both children in care files, and active family service files. The Winnipeg Sub-Office had 36 children in care files and 30 family service files for the Fisher River communities as of November 2003. The Kinonjeoshtegon Winnipeg worker had 30 open cases in Winnipeg. The total amount of cases in the Winnipeg office is 96 as of November 2004.

The Winnipeg sub office has increased its child and family worker number from two to four workers as of November 2004. This reflected the addition of a worker for Kinonjeoshtegon and a seconded employee.

The agency has increased its licensed foster home resource base from 12 homes in March 2004 to 19 homes in December 2004 in preparation for the influx of new cases.

#### **SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE DATA**

The data gathered for the three agencies consisted of the amount of anticipated case transfers, population statistics for on-reserve and off reserve residents, and the amount of foster homes for each community.

Each of the Agencies had expected an influx of new cases that double the amount of their current off reserve case numbers. These case numbers are approximate, as the amount of new referrals, and re-opened cases are not reflected in the current numbers. The actual number of transferred cases may be higher than those number currently listed.

Each of the three agencies has an open Winnipeg Sub Office which will absorb the transferred cases. The Winnipeg sub-office workers have, on average, 25 cases per worker as of November 2004.

The population of First Nation Communities is comprised of a large percentage of youth, (1-30 years of age). (INAC 2000). The growth rate for First Nation communities in Canada is estimated to increase by 34% in the next 20 years. These factors, as well as the addition of off-reserve cases to Aboriginal Agencies case lists suggests a initial doubling of case lists, upon implementation, and a significantly higher increase of population to be serviced in coming years. The growth rate for populations to be serviced by Aboriginal Agencies will exceed those of the general Canadian population in coming years.

The implications of this growth pattern for front line Aboriginal workers are a projected increase in workload per worker. Workers will be providing services to a higher needs urban based population with little or no community ties, little

family support systems, and operating with an on-reserve population based funding system for service delivery.

The listing of foster homes is reflective of the amount of resources currently available to each of the three Aboriginal agencies as of November 2004. Each of the agencies reported a growth in the amount of foster homes added to their resources. This was largely reflective of each of the agencies preparation for the anticipated transfer of cases. Although there has been reported growth in the amount of licensed homes, the anticipated need for culturally appropriate homes in a limited population area such as Winnipeg, presents the agencies with a future dilemma in the shortage of culturally appropriate resources such as foster placements.

The quantitative data gathered from each of the agencies has been in areas such as foster care resources, amount of cases currently open to each outreach office, and population statistics and trends in Aboriginal communities served by these agencies.

The data suggests that the population of the First Nations communities serviced by these agencies largely consists of youth, and consists of a large number of off-reserve members. Aboriginal communities are growing at a higher rate than that of the general Canadian population, and coupled with the high rate of social problems in the Aboriginal population, this may present Aboriginal agencies with eventual higher case loads per capita and due to the limited resource base in the Winnipeg area, a limitation of resource availability.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY OF RESULTS

It has become apparent to this researcher during the process of this study that the experiences and perceptions of Aboriginal front line workers in an Aboriginal agency are shaped by a variety of issues that transcend their daily duties as child and family service workers.

The historical context of Aboriginal child welfare was important to this study, as it provides a sense of context for the difficulties that Aboriginal people may have in representing a system that has a historically dubious relationship with Canada's Aboriginal People.

Respondents have provided information that suggests that as front line Aboriginal workers, they are strained by multiple issues in the larger field of child welfare. Aboriginal practitioners carry-out the mandates of provincial statutes, with financial resources from two funding bodies. The philosophy of the long awaited Child and Family Services Authorities Act, as well as inter-agency philosophical statements may be difficult to achieve with the current population growth patterns, and federal move to a child protection centered philosophy of funding.

Themes within the interviews point to a common agreement among respondents that the child welfare system previous to the AJI-CWI did not meet the needs of Aboriginal People in Manitoba. The evidence provided for this assertion, by at least one worker, was the difficulty adhering to the former act's policies and procedures. In order to carry out the type of social work he/she

wanted, and in order to 'help families', this worker found it necessary to seek out creative interpretations of the Child Welfare Act. In addition to this, the dubious historical relationship between Aboriginal Peoples and child welfare's role in the Canadian Governments' policies on assimilation was a factor in respondent's desire to see a differing system of child welfare.

Many of the respondents had completed varying levels of university education, and were familiar with the history of Aboriginal Peoples, and in particular the history of residential schools in Canada. They generally viewed the creation and usage of residential schools as evidence of Canada's attempt to assimilate First Nation Peoples, and as attempts at colonization.

Employment in this field presented some of the respondents with some discomfort due to the perception of Canada's usage of child Welfare , education and targeting of Aboriginal children to further this policy of assimilation.

Respondents had expressed the view that there is a definite need for Child Welfare programs in First Nation Communities, but felt that the development and designing of such programs should be made by First Nations Peoples with First Nations common understanding. These findings are similar to those found by Seidle, Mckenzie, and Bone, in Child and Family Service Standards in First Nations: An Action Research Project.(1995)

The difference in an Aboriginal world view, in relation to the previous child welfare system was a common theme evident in the interviews. On an individual level, this reconciliation between the history of child welfare, and carrying out the day to day duties may lead to stressors not evident other child welfare agencies.

Respondents stressed the importance of resource availability, and prevention programs. Many of the workers were able to articulate what kind of practice they envisioned in the new system and realized that the acquisition of resources and prevention programs were integral to the philosophy of the new system.

The concerns that the resources were not forthcoming with the transferred cases appeared to be valid, as respondents reported that their agency had received transfers without the allocated funding arriving. Respondents also concluded from their own case reviews that resources that were to be attached to the arriving cases had been cut prior to transfer. Coupled with the perception that resources were slow in arriving, was the fear that resources and prevention dollars may not arrive at all. This was not a totally unreasonable conclusion, given the lack of formal avenues in which to relay information to the front lines, and many of the respondent's direct experience with a budget cap in 1992 of Services to Families dollars. The development of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs National Program Manual in 2003 further added to the perception that the history of under funding, and neglect of prevention programs would continue at the federal level.

Hudson and Taylor Henley(1995) argued that the successful negotiation of federal support was integral to the successful implementation of the principles of First Nation Child Welfare Practice. The philosophy and goals evident in each of the participating agencies point toward a holistic and integrative approach to practice. Principles of the AJI-CWI, as well as the vision statement also point

toward a provincial model of prevention and integration. It remains to be seen whether the financial means will be supplied in order for the front line workers to carry out the mandates of their respective agencies. It also remains to be seen how the mandates will be carried out should the funding allocations be insufficient to meet the demands of the respective mandates.

Respondents indicated that they had attended training programs, meetings, and specialized classes in order to attain a certificate or a B.S.W. They had described their participation in these programs as satisfactory and as meeting their needs for information processing. The Child and Family Diploma/BSW program was evident as a theme in many of the interviews. This program is exceptional in that it appeared to meet the needs of these particular students by providing relevant information, job specific training, and was flexible to meet the scheduling needs of this particular group. The co-hort program gave these practitioners opportunity to train in a university setting where they would not have otherwise had the opportunity to do so.

The inquest surrounding the death of Lester Desjarlais (Giesbrecht 1992), had indicated a strong need for training in Aboriginal Communities in the area of child welfare. This was an important component to attaining control over child welfare programs. These flexible and innovative Child Welfare Co-hort programs allows for successful completion of training by creative scheduling and by designing the program to meet the specific needs of the child welfare field.

Respondent had indicated that there were a number of commitments on their time that were not evident in pre-implementation. This taxation on individual



time and energy was evident in the respondent's statements surrounding their extra duties. These duties ranged from an expectation of employees being on-call for 24 hours a day, for seven days at a time, to extra committees, boards, and preparation time, related to the incoming files. These duties were done in addition to their attendance to their co-hort programs, as well as training programs in the course of their regular duties. Respondents had noted that their agencies were without specialized positions, and as such, they were required to conduct a variety of duties in their position that can be carried out by specialty workers. Examples of these duties include but are not limited to, filing their own court papers, driving longer periods due to the wide expanse of areas serviced, and in some instances, arranging child placements.

While the respondents had indicated feelings of embarking on a historical endeavor and expressed positive excitement about the AJI-CWI process as a whole, the taxation on time and energy will inevitably have negative repercussions if not responded to in a unified and timely manner by management.

Population Statistics reflect a higher population growth rate for Aboriginal Peoples in Manitoba. The faster growing population is also more prone to social dysfunction and subsequent involvement with Child and Family Services, as well as to other institutions. In addition to this, the population of the First Nation Community in Manitoba is predominantly youth, about 40% of the population being in the age category of 30 years of age and under. First Nation respondents have reported that they perceive the off-reserve population to be alienated from

home communities, as well as having higher degrees of social dysfunction than their on-reserve counterparts.

The growth patterns for Aboriginal Peoples is higher than that of the general population. It is important for Aboriginal Agencies to proactively address issues that may affect the future operation of Agencies. Arguments can be made that the families serviced in the coming years by urban Aboriginal Agencies will be:

1. Estranged from their communities of origin, and subsequently isolated, and on the peripherals of society.
2. Under thirty and without the support systems of community, and elders, and cultural affiliation and connection.
3. Without adequate resources such as in-home supports
4. Struggling with multifaceted issues, such as alcoholism, multigenerational abuse issues, and involvement with justice system.
5. Receive services from CFS workers who receive less pay than their interagency colleagues, and who perform much of the traveling, and case details personally.

The challenge of child welfare practitioners is multi-layered. They must conduct their duties, while negotiating funding that is necessary for effective service delivery, while developing models, and practices that are designed for Aboriginal Peoples.

The challenges in meeting the needs of the Aboriginal population is not confined to case work. The training and recruitment of healthy and trained resources such as Aboriginal foster homes, and Aboriginal social workers presents with unique challenges.

While some of the respondents had indicated that an understanding of the conditions evident in aboriginal communities was crucial to effective practice, it is important to recognize that many of the Aboriginal service providers have experienced much of the social problems experienced by their clientele. This is further compounded by the networking and inter-dependency that is inherent in many of the Aboriginal Communities. There is a need to realistically appraise to what extent this issue affects practice and take action to address it.

Front line practitioners are cognizant of the challenges in delivering services within a new model of service delivery. Their commitment to the process is evident in the interviews. The challenge of managers and political bodies is to ensure that workers have the training levels, supports, and personal support to carry out their difficult duties.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

This study has outlined the themes from the front line of child welfare service provision in the midst of implementation of the AJI-CWI. It has been the intention of this study to explore perceptions of front line workers, and to document the findings utilizing qualitative analysis. The researcher has highlighted issues in front line responses that affect the caliber of work, and that have implications for future practice.

Recommendations have been made that would allow for a smoother transition time for front line workers, and that would proactively address issues associated with implementation.

- 1) The documentation of First Nation population trends, as well as presenting issues in transferred and existing cases. The accurate documentation of trends in Aboriginal Service delivery is integral to future planning, and development.
- 2) An appraisal of current job descriptions, actual duties performed, and staff compensation at this time would be beneficial to ensure equity in compensation, and to ensure that staff's individual needs are met in a fair and equitable manner.
- 3) Hudson (1997) had recognized that the practitioners in First Nation Communities are affected from many of the very social problems evident in their case loads due to the issues of colonialism. While it is recognized

that employee benefit plans include provision for an employee assistance program, a formal support system that recognizes the specific issues that a First Nation Service Provider may encounter would be beneficial to holistically supporting an employee First Nation Practitioners who themselves are products intergenerational issues such as abuse, loss of parenting from residential abuse effect, and loss. An agency or authority's proactive formal development of these support systems would ensure an emotionally healthy staff and resource base.

- 4) A formalized avenue of communication between Authorities, and Implementation committees, would be beneficial during this last stage of implementation. While most of the respondents indicated that staff meetings provided outlets for venting, and avenues for gathering information, A structured environment in which worker's can obtain accurate information surrounding implementation matters, and possibly present feedback on process can be conducive to alleviating some of the concerns that the workers' have.
- 5) Agencies within this study have generally indicated Band leadership who demonstrate a 'hands off' approach in child welfare issues. A prudent approach would be for agencies to produce protocol and policies which would address these issues before they arise in the new system. The issue of political interference is one that would be best addressed in a proactive way. Protocols can be developed in order to alleviate the stress of the worker when faced with this issue. Inclusions in Policy Manuals as to a

step-by step process for staff, would be beneficial to staff. This issue is especially important given the influx of off-reserve clients who reportedly have had negative or non-existent ties with their respective First Nation Communities.

- 6) Respondents had indicated a high level of satisfaction with the training programs they are currently enrolled in. Continued opportunities for training will promote greater participation in Child Welfare from First Nation members.
- 7) Aboriginal Agencies must continue to recognize that the existing arrangement in which Section 88 of the Indian Act is utilized for justification of Provincial mandates is an interim arrangement. Preparation, and capacity building toward this long term goal is prudent.
- 8) Aboriginal population is increasingly diverse in matters of spirituality and belief systems. A recognition that there is diversity and creating base cultural touchstones, such as language, history, and values would ensure that the teaching of respect is first and foremost in the social work relationship. The proactive identification of these basics in culture would identify a baseline in Aboriginal social work practice in a manner which respects the diversity of today's Aboriginal family, and would also avoid contentious issues that would distract from the overall goal of healing the family and community.

This study purposed to explore and document the experiences and perceptions of Aboriginal child welfare workers within the context of implementation of the AJI-CWI. This study can be beneficial to management and Implementation committee's in meeting some of the challenges pro-actively. This study has been limited in that it has not documented valuable input from counterparts from the Métis, Northern, and General Authority.

Future studies would be beneficial in the area of post-implementation, and follow up studies to measure what type of holistic services have been developed with an increasingly residual budget, as well as exploratory studies of front line respondents after implementation. Comparison studies with other authority staff would also be beneficial to document in order to provide comparisons to the perceptions of the AJI-CWI process.

Overall patterns in interviews revealed a highly motivated group of practitioners who have demonstrated their commitment to the process despite the multitude of issues that may present as stressors in their practice.

There is irony in that Aboriginal front line workers are anticipating working in a provincial legislative system that reflects the world view of Aboriginal Peoples , while lobbying for federal funding. The principles of the AJI-CWI which were based on recognition of Aboriginal history and values will be fully implemented by the Authorities who receive funding and legislation under the provincial legislation.

Aboriginal Populations grow beyond that of the general Canadian Population. The rates of poverty, low education margins, and social problems remain high in Aboriginal communities and populations. The factors of population, social problems, and historical considerations warrant a model of Child and Family Services that is separate from that of the Canadian public.

It is important that this model recognize the diversity within today's Aboriginal population. This can be achieved by developing 'touchstones' or standards in cultural practice that are evident in Aboriginal communities. Examples of this may be language, history, and teachings common in diverse tribes and communities.

The identification of these 'touchstones' would allow for respectful interventions that recognize the diversity of Canada's Aboriginal population, and would ensure that resources are developed for the entire Aboriginal Population.

It is important to recognize the specific needs of the Aboriginal service providers in Aboriginal child welfare. Many of the service providers have been touched by the same social problems evident in their clientele. This is also true for service providers such as foster care providers. Appropriate care programs must be designed with these caregivers in mind.

Front line respondents had been unequivocal in their opinion that the problems evident in the families they service warrant a treatment approach that reflects their world view. The opportunity to develop this system remains the challenge for Aboriginal child welfare agencies.



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## **APPENDICES**

### **A. Letters to Aboriginal Agency Directors**

**Anishinaabe Child and Family Services**

**Intertribal Child and Family Services**

**Sagkeeng Child and Family Services**

### **B. Consent form**

### **C. Questionnaire**

## Appendix A

February 17, 2004

Lloyd Bunn  
Director,  
Sagkeeng Child and Family Services  
Fort Alexander, MB

Dear Sir,

My name is Cybil Williams, and I am a graduate student in social work at the University of Manitoba.

I am currently conducting a thesis study in the area of Aboriginal Justice Inquiry Implementation and Aboriginal agency worker's experiences surrounding this.

As per our telephone call dated Jan 10, 2004, I have indicated that to you that I am requesting permission to have Sagkeeng Child and Family Services be one of three agencies involved in this study.

As a participant your agency would agree to allow myself to administer questionnaires to members of your front line staff. These participants will be randomly selected from your list of qualifying candidates, and will be approached via telephone by this researcher. These questionnaires would measure their experiences in providing services in the midst of AJI implementation. Information gathered would be confidential and would not be attributed to any individual worker in the written document, nor released to anyone other than myself. This will be accomplished through the writing of the written document. Identifying information will not be attributed to a place of work nor an individual.

In addition to the above, I would gather statistical and background information, such as case load sizes, numbers of intakes, size of agency and populations served, in order to provide context of worker experiences.

Further to our conversation, I am not requesting any information that would undermine worker/client confidentiality, and as such, would not peruse identifiable or individual files.

In conclusion, I am hoping that your agency would agree to become part of this study. It is my hope that this study would document front line worker's valuable recommendations, as well as provides feedback to aid in the overall implementation of this historical event.

Thank you for your consideration into this matter.

Respectfully,

Cybil Williams, B.A., B.S.W

February 28, 2004

Dave Rundle, Director  
Anishinaabe Child and Family Services  
Pinaymootang First Nation,  
MB.

Dear Sir,

My name is Cybil Williams, and I am a graduate student in social work at the University of Manitoba.

I am currently conducting a thesis study in the area of Aboriginal Justice Inquiry Implementation and Aboriginal agency worker's experiences surrounding this.

As per our telephone call dated Jan 10, 2004, I have indicated that to you that I am requesting permission to have Anishinaabe Child and Family Services be one of three agencies involved in this study.

As a participant your agency would agree to allow myself to administer questionnaires to members of your front line staff. These participants will be randomly selected from your list of qualifying candidates, and will be approached via telephone by this researcher. These questionnaires would measure their experiences in providing services in the midst of AJI implementation. Information gathered would be confidential and would not be attributed to any individual worker in the written document, nor released to anyone other than myself. This will be accomplished through the writing of the written document. Identifying information will not be attributed to a place of work nor an individual.

In addition to the above, I would gather statistical and background information, such as case load sizes, numbers of intakes, size of agency and populations served, in order to provide context of worker experiences.

Further to our conversation, I am not requesting any information that would undermine worker/client confidentiality, and as such, would not peruse identifiable or individual files.

In conclusion, I am hoping that your agency would agree to become part of this study. It is my hope that this study would document front line worker's valuable recommendations, as well as provides feedback to aid in the overall implementation of this historical event.

Thank you for your consideration into this matter.

Respectfully,

Cybil Williams, B.A., B.S.W



February 17, 2004

Shirley Cochrane, Director  
Intertribal Child and Family Services  
P.O Box 358, Koostatak, MB

Dear Shirley,

My name is Cybil Williams, and I am a graduate student in social work at the University of Manitoba.

I am currently conducting a thesis study in the area of Aboriginal Justice Inquiry Implementation and Aboriginal agency worker's experiences surrounding the changes associated with implementation.

As per our prior conversations, I have indicated that to you that I am interested in having Intertribal Child and Family Services be one of two agencies involved in this study.

As a participant your agency would agree to allow myself to administer questionnaires to members of your front line staff. These participants will be randomly selected from your list of qualifying candidates, and will be approached via telephone by this researcher. These questionnaires would measure their experiences in providing services in the midst of AJI implementation. Information gathered would be confidential and would not be attributed to any individual worker in the written document, nor released to anyone other than myself. This will be accomplished through the writing of the written document. Identifying information will not be attributed to a place of work nor an individual.

In addition to the above, I would gather statistical and background information, such as case load sizes, numbers of intakes, size of agency and populations served, in order to provide context of worker experiences.

In addition to the above, I am not requesting any information that would undermine worker/client confidentiality, and as such, would not peruse identifiable or individual files.

In conclusion, I am hoping that your agency would agree to become part of this study. It is my hope that this study would document front line worker's valuable recommendations and experiences surrounding the implementation of this historical event.

Thank you for your consideration into this matter.

Respectfully,

Cybil Williams, B.A., B.S.W

## **APPENDIX B**

**Title of Study: Aboriginal Front Line Worker Experience in AJI Child Welfare Initiative Implementation.**

**Researcher: Cybil Williams B.A., B.S.W**

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. The purpose of this research would be to provide a record of your experiences and recommendations as Aboriginal child welfare front line workers within the context of AJI- Child Welfare implementation.

The researcher is utilizing a qualitative approach and would interview you, as an Aboriginal front line worker, and would organize and record the information gathered. These sessions, as well as your identity workers will be confidential. A tape recording device will be utilized in the gathering of the information in order to gain an accurate recording of the information. Recorded information will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. This researcher will look for broad patterns within worker experience, and individual experiences will not be identifiable as being attributed to any worker or specific agency in the written document. The researcher and research advisor would be the only ones privy to the information within the recordings as well as the written material identifying the source of the data. If you agree to be part of this study, you may change your mind at any time during the process.

Participation within this study is voluntary and remuneration to subjects is not available to subjects, however a small honorarium in the form of a \$15.00 Wal-Mart gift card will given to participants at the conclusion of their interview.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the research, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participations should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Cybil Williams

Professor Don Fuchs

Faculty of SocialWork

204-474-7879

This research has been approved by the Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba.

If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above named persons or the Human Ethics' Secretariat at 474 7122, or email [margaret\\_bowman@umanitoba.ca](mailto:margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca). A copy of this consent from has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participants' Signature

Date

Researcher Signature

Date

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Questionnaire

#### Part one: Demographics

1. What is your position with this agency?
2. What level of education and or training do you have for your Position?
3. Where do you perform most of your duties?
4. Are you Aboriginal? If you are status, what band do you originate from?

#### Part Two: Pre-Implementation

1. How long have you worked under the former CFS act as a frontline worker?
2. How well do you feel that former CFS Act has serviced Aboriginal People in Manitoba?
3. What do you see as the strengths of the former CFS Act?
4. What do you see as the shortcomings of the former CFS Act?

#### Part Three: AJI -CWI understanding

1. In your own words, what is your understanding of what the rationale is for the AJI-CWI implementation?
2. What type of adjustments do you see in your practice as a result of changes to AJI -CWI implementation?
3. What positive changes do you see in your practice as a result of the AJI CWI implementation?

4. What negative changes do you anticipate as a result of the AJI CFS implementation?
5. In what manner did you gather or gain your information on the AJI-CWI implementation process.

Part Four: Feedback surrounding implementation

1. In what way do you envision the AJI CFS implementation as impacting on your social work practice?
2. What specific recommendations would you, as a worker have to add to these areas:
  - a) Caseload management
  - b) Prevention
  - c) Resource availability
  - d) Human resource
3. What has been your experience with collateral Agencies in relation to AJI CFS implementation? I.e., police, other agencies, schools, etc.
  4. What impacts on the lives of Aboriginal children and families does the worker see as happening from the changes in AJI-CWI?
5. How involved have you been as a worker to the AJI-CWI implementation process?