Foster Care Service Delivery Within the Native Community: The Importance of an Aboriginal Framework and the Capacity for Community Change

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Executive Summary

This paper was written for the purpose of providing a comprehensive assessment of the delivery of foster care services at Calgary Rockyview Native Services District Office (NSDO). It is the product of two previous papers focusing on 1) The relevance of cultural competence to the person-in-environment (PIE) method of assessment within the holistic-generalist model of social work and 2) The delivery of foster care services at NSDO and their capacity to be a change agent within the Aboriginal community. This document is important for key-line staff as well as agency directors in understanding the importance of utilizing an aboriginal framework infused by a PIE perspective in the delivery of Native foster care services. It also aims to commend the delivery of foster care services in effecting change in the Aboriginal community through the use of culturally competent methods carried out within a holistic model of social work.

Part One discusses the importance of practitioners of Native child welfare to recognize diversity and be culturally competent in providing foster care services to Native children and their families. The holistic model of social work is presented, with a focus on the Aboriginal framework. The PIE perspective is discussed within the Domain of Practice and its utility with respect to important issues facing the Aboriginal community is emphasized. It is concluded that the use of the PIE perspective within the holistic model of social work is extremely useful, as long as it is viewed through an Aboriginal framework.

Part Two looks at the micro activities carried out by NSDO foster care and their ability to effect change within the macro goal of the Aboriginal community. It is suggested that not only is a PIE perspective essential in service delivery, but that Jeffries (1996) four square model of community development could be used to organize micro and macro activities to illustrate community change. In addition, a holistic model of foster care is given to show the interconnectedness of the four relationships in foster care. NSDO foster care practices reflect a strong commitment to Native empowerment, and also reflect a holistic model of social work practice that would lend itself nicely to a PIE perspective. Service delivery is to be commended, with suggestions that NSDO continue to work within the holistic model in carrying out micro activities and utilize a PIE perspective in partnership with the Native community towards the macro goal empowerment and community change.

Elements of the Holistic Model of Social Work

The Holistic Model of social work addresses: 1) domain of practice, 2) paradigm of the profession, 3) domain of practitioner, and 4) methods of practice (class notes, 1999). The Canadian Association of Social Workers (1998) defines the primary focus of social work, within its person-in environment domain is on: "the holistic network of relationships between individuals, their natural support networks, the formal structures in their communities, and the societal norms and expectations that shape these relationships". The main focus of the holistic framework is relationships, in that all elements in the environment are deeply interconnected, and changes in any part of these systems will affect all other connected parts, and in effect change the entire system (Ramsay, 1998).

Within this model are a wide variety of practice methods which are aimed at improving PIE relationships, including human tights, socially-just environments and social well-being in all human societies (CASW, 1998). In terms of the diversity of the Aboriginal community it is important to view the elements of the holistic model, including the PIE assessment in terms of an Aboriginal framework. Such a framework proposes guidelines for culturally appropriate practice that are essential to understanding Aboriginal relationships with the environment in terms of the holistic model. Morrissette, McKenzie, and Morrissette (1993) propose the following four key elements for an Aboriginal framework for social work practice:

> 1) recognition of a distinct Aboriginal worldview
> 2) recognition of the impact of colonialism
> 3) recognition of cultural knowledge and traditions as an active component of sustaining Aboriginal identity and collective consciousness
> 4) empowerment as sustained through Aboriginal participation and control of essential components of the model.

Domain of Practice

The domain of social work practice has a relationship-centred focus, and encompasses areas of social functioning, social justice, spiritual health, and emotional health (class notes, 1999). It is within this domain that the person-in-environment method resides. The PIE classification system is a tool for assessing community (client) problems in terms of four factors:

> Factor 1: social functioning problems, type, severity, duration, coping ability
> Factor H: environmental problems, severity, duration
> Factor HI: mental health problems
> Factor IV: physical health problems (Karls and Wandrei, 1994).

The PIE system was designed to complement the fourth edition of the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM IV) and give social workers a systematic classification system for identifying problems in social functioning (Karls and

Wandrei, 1995). Specifically, it gives social workers a common language, a common description a basis for gathering data, clearer communication, clarity of the domain of social work (Karls and Wandrei, 1995).

PIE would be useful in assessing Aboriginal clients if the four factors are viewed within the aboriginal frame work mentioned earlier. One of the major concerns in service delivery within the Aboriginal community is proper assessment that reflects the systemic and oppressive problems Aboriginal communities have faced (Little Mustache, 1999). The use of "Western" or traditional methods without concern to different needs and perspectives results in assessment and interventions that are neither empowering nor appropriate to the client (Miley, O'Melia, and DuBois, 1998).

The most critical areas that need to be understood are: 1) the impact of Residential Schools, 2) Aboriginal's feelings of powerlessness over their own lives, 3) focus on dysfunction, and 4) the importance of family, tradition, and partnership in the Aboriginal community (Indian Association of Alberta, 1989).

Therefore, in the first PIE factor, social functioning, the worker must understand the impact of Residential schools on the relationship between mother and child. Residential schools resulted in two entire generations learning child-rearing practices from an institutional perspective in an environment that was frill of hostility, abuse, and a complete void of role models (Indian Association of Alberta, 1989). Problems in family roles in Aboriginal families can be attributed to this Residential School Syndrome, and need to be assessed in terms of this (Nahanee, 1993).

In terms of the environmental problems in the second factor of the PIE system, aboriginals have historically been systematically stripped of their rights. The residential schools, prohibition, as well as land treaties have all had an impact on how aboriginals view their environments. It is likely they would view government agencies with extreme caution and the worker needs to be sensitive to this apprehension. Also, what we consider to be basic economic needs, education, and safety, may not be the same as the Aboriginal client.

Physical and Mental problems in functioning (levels III and IV) may involve problems such as alcohol dependence and depression, and thus are useful in a complete assessment regardless of the client's culture. However, a recognition of services that are run by and for Aboriginal client's is essential to the empowerment of the client, and success of the service plan (Child Welfare Handbook, 1995). Agencies that are Aboriginal will have an inherent understanding of the importance of family, culture and tradition that will facilitate treatment. This, however, does not mean that social workers have to be of Aboriginal background to become culturally competent.

Domain of Practitioner

The ability of social workers to address and critique their own biases, values, and stereotypes falls into the domain of practitioner (class notes, 1999). This includes sensitivity to others, flexibility in practice methods, and a broad-minded viewpoint. At a practice level, the social worker needs to be aware of their own "internalized cultural responses" and not project them on to the practice situation (Miley et al., 1998). Also, there needs to be an awareness of others, and a concrete effort to learn about others traditions and worldviews in order to facilitate alternative ways of thinking, feeling and behaving (Miley et al, 1998) Finally, social workers must understand the clients in terms of relationships with status and privilege (Miley et al., 1998). In the Aboriginal community there has been a history of stereotyping, oppression, and racism. A worker who has never

experienced these kinds of struggles with power and socio-economic status must understand their impact on clients who have.

At an agency level, there are many factors in play that can affect the cultural competency of the social worker. Agency policies, their orientation towards practice, structure, physical environment, and resource networks also must reflect cultural awareness within the domain of practitioner. Agencies that are culturally aware utilize aboriginal resources, are open to evaluation from the aboriginal community, reflect an aboriginal framework orientation. are structured so that they don't "mirror' the problems within the community, and are accessible to all clients (Miley et al., 1998).

With respect to flexibility in intervention methods when working with the aboriginal community, it is important to be open to traditional aboriginal methods. These include: "smudging" and "sweats", both types of spiritual cleansing, as well as other types of spiritual journeys. The culturally competent social worker must not only be aware of these methods, but also suggest and encourage them in order to empower the aboriginal client.

Paradigm of Profession

The paradigm of the profession refers to the agreed upon domain, methods, values, and ethics in social work practice (Ramsay, 1998). The CASW code of ethics guides the professional activities of social workers, and the principles must be followed, regardless of the community the social worker is serving. In addition, the social worker has a special set of skills, and has been trained, but this does not necessarily mean he or she is an "expert". When infusing an empowering perspective, it can be said that the worker has "expertise" about aboriginal issues and concerns, but he or she is not the "expert" about their lives (Miley et al, 1998).

In an empowering approach, assumptions about human systems are key, and they include:

1) all people deserve acceptance and respect
2) clients know their situation best
3) all human behaviour makes sense in context
4) all human system behaviour is motivated
5) challenges emerge from transactions between person and environment, and are not inherent in the person
6) strengths are diverse and include worth, cultural pride, and resources within the community (Miley et al, 1998')

These empowering assumptions can be used to empower the Aboriginal community and reinforce the idea that they are the expert of their own life and know what is best to help heal challenges within their community.

Methods of Practice

The scope of social work practice methods include child welfare, family services, medical social work, psychiatric social work and school social work (CASW, 1998). This scope of practice represent social work at the micro, micro and macro level in working with individuals, families, organizations/forrna1 groups, and communities/societies, respectively (Miley et al, 1998).

Practice methods can reflect an empowerment orientation, such as the person-in-environment assessment, which is essential to diverse communities. These practice methods seek to accomplish the core functions of social work: 1) to help people obtain basic human services, counselling and psychotherapy with individuals/families/groups, working to enhance community services, and promoting socially just policy (CASW, 1998).

The practice methods used in the holistic framework then, are empowering, reflect PIE, and have different levels. They also have a number of phases. For example the traditional problem solving process has six stages: 1) engage, 2) assess, 3) plan, 4) implement, 5 evaluate, and 6) terminate which are cyclical in nature (Miley et al., 1998). This method can be utilized with the PIE assessment as the main tool for identifying problems in social functioning. These would be relevant within the Aboriginal community as long as the aboriginal framework is kept in focus.

The practice methods used traditionally with the Aboriginal community reflect solutions that show social work was not concerned with the uniqueness of the community as it was assumed that the best solution to their problems was full integration into general society (Armitage, 1996). It is now known that a holistic model which embraces diversity and methods that empower clients is what is best for all, regardless of race. An example of and institution that embodies this perspective is the Aboriginal Child Welfare Services, which will be the focus of Part II of this paper.

Conclusions

The relevance of issues of diversity, specifically the aboriginal worldview, is extremely important in the use of a holistic model for social work practice. Use of the PIE system of assessment, within the four dimensions of the holistic model would be useful in service delivery to the Aboriginal community as long as the Aboriginal framework that identifies the systemic and historical origins of their problems the main lens through which assessment is viewed. Issues such as residential schools, the need to self-determine, cultural traditions, and the importance of organizations specific to Aboriginals and staffed with aboriginals will have an impact on all four dimensions of the holistic model as well as the PIE system. However, I feel that the issue of diversity is important when using the holistic framework and PIE assessment, particularly within child welfare services to Aboriginals, the focus of this paper.

PART TWO

NSDO Foster Care: A Holistic Model

As mentioned earlier. within the Holistic Model of Social Work, the paradigm of profession for foster care is mandated by the Alberta Child Welfare Act. When a Native child is in need of foster care, the following order of placements outlined in Section 8 of the Child Welfare Manual (1995) must be applied:

1) placement with the child's extended family
2) placement in the local community, settlement, or on the Indian home reserve
3) placement with caregivers of the same aboriginal cultural, spiritual, and linguistic background.
4) placement with other aboriginal care givers

5) placement in resources other than the aboriginal child's cultural background, but with care givers who are willing to and capable of ensuring that the child will establish and maintain contact with persons of the child's aboriginal culture and spiritual beliefs.

Thus, although the protection and well being of the child is always paramount, it is NSDO policy to keep Native children with Native families and encourage family preservation whenever possible in consultation with the Native community. NSDO recognizes the importance of the retention of cultural identity and traditions in Native children who are placed in care. Thus, the macro perspective of foster care is to encourage the empowerment of the Native community by the placement of Native children in foster homes.

The goal of fostering is to "become aware of the needs and the rights of foster children and their families, and to learn how to respond to their physical, emotional, educational, and spiritual needs" (Preservice Training Module 1, 1990). This awareness includes a cultural component and recognition of the distinct Aboriginal worldview and empowerment through active participation and control within foster care. The tasks carried out by foster care workers and foster parents represents this micro perspective in that each foster family is key in effecting change within the macro goal of greater change within the Aboriginal community.

Within the holistic model of social work, the foster care unit's first task in the Domain of Practice is to assess potential foster parents from a person in environment perspective. It is important to know the foster parents family background (how were they raised?), their personal background (criminal record?), their relationship with the community (supports?), their family relationships (boundaries?), and their cultural awareness (Native?).

Once foster parents are approved., the next task is to match a child to their home. This matching is based on the qualities of the home (their classification and preferences) and the needs of the child. Although it is important to place children in Native homes, not all homes are Native. In this event there is an explicit understanding that the parents will encourage and participate in cultural activities in order to foster the child's Native identity and strengthen ties with the Native community. However, as stated in NSDO's guiding principles, it is recognized that each child is an individual and there will be variances in the affinity the child has with his or her Native heritage.

Foster parents, foster care workers, and practicum students need to address their own biases, values, and cultural competency within the Domain of Practitioner (Class lectures, 1999). These workers can be considered part of the Change Agent System that implement services to Native children in need (Class lectures, 1999). It is important for change agents to self-evaluate their beliefs and decisions. Do we really believe in Native empowerment, that they can be responsible for matters concerning Native children? Are we culturally competent enough to fully understand the Native child, family, and community? Are we aware of any biases towards Native people, or stereotypes that may affect service delivery? Are we committed to the preservation of Native families and the empowerment of the Native community?

At NSDO, the answers to these questions is yes, and specific practices and interventions can be discussed within Methods of Practice (class lectures. 1999). It is in the Methods of Practice that the micro C '1 activities of foster care reside. Cultural awareness training is mandatory for all foster parents and staff at NSDO in order to address:

1) The differing perceptions of the interaction between an Aboriginal individual and a Child and Family Services Worker as it relates to the child welfare act already established.
2) The different expectations that are the products of the relationships established from the latter interaction between members and the public at large.
3) The differing perceptions in just treatment from the Aboriginal perspective and the Child and Family Services perspective and the conflicts that arise from such confrontations (Crowshoe, 1999).

This training is key in identifying cultural gaps in service, differences in beliefs, and assessing the level of cultural competence in each individual worker. One of the major concerns within NSDO is the level of cultural competence each worker has (Little Mustache, 1999). Some workers may have extensive knowledge of Native culture whereas some of the newer employees have very little. How much time passes before cultural competence is addressed? This needs to be an ongoing assessment in order to maintain a desired level of competence to deliver foster care to Native children.

As mentioned earlier, foster parents are considered part of the foster care team as change agents. In turn, the foster parents are the client's of the foster care workers. The foster care workers are responsible for providing the support foster parents need to deliver services (action system) to Native children (client system) (class lectures, 1999). The relationship between the foster care worker and the foster parents at NSDO is a positive one because the worker sees the parent as a valued member of the service team and validates the concerns of the foster parent during monthly visits.

There are many Native resources that are available through NSDO to maintain a cultural component, provide treatment services, and support for foster parents. NSDO maintains a current listing of Native resources in Calgary such as The Aboriginal Resource Centre (ARC), Four Directions Foster Parent Association (4-D), Ke Mama Nnanik Native Family Day Program, Native Addiction Services, and the Calgary Native Friendship Society. These agencies operating on the micro level are successful in working towards the macro goal of empowering the Native community in the delivery of child welfare services.

Figure 1: A Four-Square Model of NSDO Foster Care

Jeffries (1996) four-square model of community practice would serve as a useful tool to NSDO's foster care unit by organizing micro activities that work towards the larger macro goal of Native control over foster care of Native children (see Figure 1). This model helps practitioners gain their basic orientation to needed change, and then look closely at what activities fit within the model (Jeffries, 1996). Quadrant A looks at community development, Quadrant B looks at social planning, Quadrant C looks at social action, and Quadrant D looks at social reform (Jeffries, 1996). Quadrants A and B reflect stability whereas Quadrants C and D fall within the region of change. Quadrants A and C reflect community decisions whereas Quadrants B and D are influenced by elite decisions (Jeffries, 1996).

Quadrant A represents community development decisions that are focused on stability and empowerment (Jeffries, 1996). Cultural awareness training that staff and foster parents must take facilitates knowledge of Native culture with a goal of increasing cultural competency in the social change agents within foster care. This training is to strengthen Native children's ties with their community and help foster parents encourage the retention of their cultural identity.

Next in Quadrant A are support services for foster parents and Native families. These services provide essential resources that are essential to the development of the Native community within Calgary. Four Directions Foster Parent Association (4-D) offers a cross cultural adoption program that provides assistance to parents experiencing challenges with cross cultural adoption, and well as cross cultural fostering. 4-D also works to educate and promote cultural sensitive services to Native children and their families. The Aboriginal Resource Centre also provides support services

for Native children and their families and holds foster parent support meetings on a monthly basis.
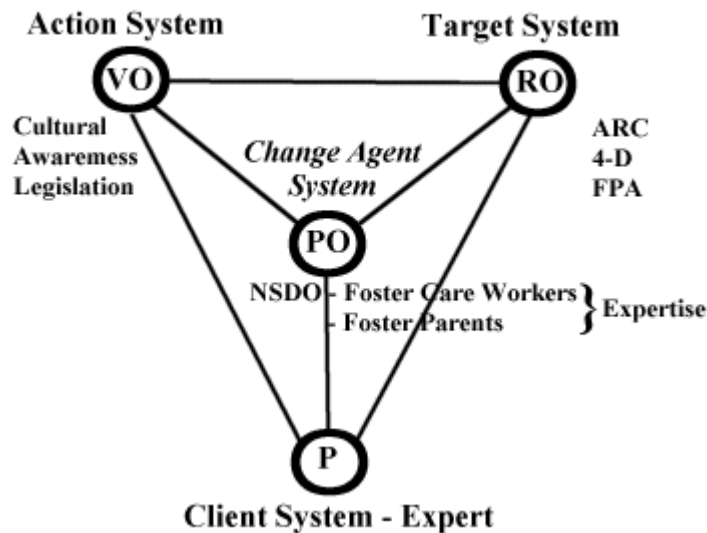
Quadrant B represents social planning decisions that maintain stability and are influenced by elite members of the community (Jeffries, 1996). The Calgary Foster Parents Association holds monthly support meetings to discuss current fostering issues and plan for future events. PARC a monthly meeting of all the child welfare district offices is also involved in social planning. Issues concerning the future of child welfare, such as permanency planning and Native involvement are discussed here. Decisions made here are in the interests of partnership with the Native community, but are largely made by elite community members.

Quadrant C represents social action, where change is the focus with decisions made by the community (Jeffries, 1996). This section encompasses groups that advocate for the rights of Native Children within foster care. This may involve consultation with the Native community regarding the placement and services given to Native children as well as criteria for foster parents promote change and empowerment. It is action such as this that leads to social reform that resides in Quadrant D.

In Quadrant D, social reform takes place, with decisions made by the elite members of the community (Jeffries, 1998).. However, these decisions are greatly influenced by Native communities and reflect the goals of Native governance of child welfare matters concerning Native children. Section eight of the Child Welfare Manual (1995), as well as Section seventy three of the Alberta Child Welfare Act (1997) are decisions that reflect the changing shift of power towards greater Native empowerment.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Figure 2

The delivery of foster care services at NSDO reflects a commitment to ensuring that Native children in need are placed with caregivers that provide a cultural sensitive home. There is an effort to employ Native staff, open Native foster homes, and strive to keep children in their Native communities. The guiding principles (see Appendix A) reflect a distinct Persom4m Environment perspective within an Aboriginal framework.

The principles are holistic in nature with relationships between the Band, the family. the community, individuality, and the culture as being key to practice (see Figure 2). Foster care workers empower foster parents as change agents to uphold these principles, and community resources (validator others) educate about oppression and empowerment. Legislation created that is Native specific shows that the Native community is being heard and changes are being made. These micro activities can be organized within a four-square model of community practice to help orient and guide macro goals.

It is this writers belief that NSDO foster care unit is striving towards the same goals as the Native community regarding foster care of Native children, and reflects a strong focus of empowerment, relationships with the family and community, and a commitment to cultural competency. Service delivery should continue in the same manner it currently does, with no recommended changes in how foster care services are carried out for Native children and their families.

Calgary Native Services District Office Mission Statement and Guiding Principles

Native Services District Office (NSDO) was established in 1987 and is one of three Alberta Family and Social Services (AFSS) in Calgary. The office provides a collaborative effort between AFSS and Native *communities* to deliver child welfare services to Native children and families that are in need. NSDO is comprised of four units that respond to child welfare needs regarding: Investigations, 2) Family Support, 3) Permanent Guardianship, and 4) Foster Care and Adolescence. NSDO has attempted to facilitate community ownership of services and case planning by the Calgary Aboriginal community through implementation of Calgary Aboriginal Community Services Advisory Committee (CACSAC) and ongoing support of Native Planning, Assessment and Review Committee, both of which are chaired by community members. Native Services represents an attempt to fashion a model that will co-ordinate services delivery between a centralized, urban delivery point and mral Native communities. The Guiding Principles are:

I) Band Focused

The Alberta Child Welfare Act (1998) guides the NSDO in its provision of services to Native children and parents in need. Section 73 (see appendix B) of the Act is significant given that the clientele are exclusively of Native descent. This section recognizes the reserve as a valued asset and resource, although the child may live off the reserve.

2) Familial, Social. Cultural and Spiritual Needs

NSDO places high value on the Native family's and child's unique familial cultural, social and spiritual heritage. Operations should be compatible with Native traditions and beliefs, particularly where those traditions and beliefs apply to child care. The office will thus meet the needs of the clients, rather than a situation where clients are expected to meet the needs of the program.

3) Individuality

NSDO recognized that there will exist variances in terms of degree of affinity each child for family has with Native culture and will treat each case accordingly. The staff should thus be aware of and address the particular cultural need of each child and/or family.

4) Community Resource Base

NSDO values those community resources that understand and support Native culture. Whenever possible, these should be the resources of choice. It is vital that staff encourage and support the development and utilization of external Native programs or Agencies.

5) Native Specific

I) In keeping with a philosophy that is supportive of Native traditions and beliefs and consequently Native empowerment, it is recognized that the child's and family's best interest are served by the delivery of services by staff who themselves are Native. This approach facilitates Native involvement in child care and is compatible with the premise

that Native Child Welfare should remain within the Native community.

II) The nature of services, being Native specific, should be Native determined, planned and developed for Native people, by Native people. Native clients should retain the feeling that they have some control over their lives. This approach is compatible with the development and retention of Native empowerment. This is a collective empowerment as opposed to a mere individual gain.

III) Given that the Native Child Welfare Office serves distinct Native subgroups, the Metis, Blackfoot, Sarcee, Stoney, Cree and many other tribes, the unique features of each group are addressed through the Aboriginal Advisory Committee. In addition to increased co-ordination, this effect will feasibly lead to new Native Child welfare options and strategies.

These principles will facilitate the strengthening and development of the Native community as opposed to a counter productive situation where Native children are estranged from their people, their culture and their identity. It is a positive approach in that it utilizes the strengths inherent in the Native community.

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