



## Aboriginal Child Welfare

For Aboriginal people, the “circle of life” describes the relationship and connection between Aboriginal community members, families, the land and all living creatures. When an individual, such as a child, is removed from the circle, it is said that the connection is broken and must be restored through the return of that individual to the family and community, once more.

### How Many Aboriginal Children Are In Care?

- Statistics from the [National Household Survey](#) indicate that of the approximately 30,000 children in care in 2011, 14,225 were Aboriginal (Statistics Canada, 2011).
- The Aboriginal population represents only 2% of Ontario’s population, but 22% of crown wards are Aboriginal (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2013).
- There are “more First Nation children in [child-welfare] care today than at any [other] point in history, including residential school” (Blackstock, 2003).
- There is no definitive source for the number of Aboriginal children in the care of Ontario Children’s Aid Societies (CAS). However, based on the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies’ (OACAS) survey results and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services’ (MCYS) quarterly reports, there are an estimated 2,800 Aboriginal children in the care of Ontario CAS’s (Commission to Promote Sustainable Child-Welfare, 2011).

### Why are so many Aboriginal children in Care?

- Structural factors play a significant role in “predisposing Aboriginal children to disproportionate placement in the care of the child-welfare system” (Blackstock, 2009).
- Compared to other children, data indicates that Aboriginal children are less likely to come to the attention of child-welfare authorities due to physical and sexual abuse (NWAC, 2010).
- The primary reasons associated with child-welfare involvement with Aboriginal families are due to “neglect-driven factors which can be largely accounted for when controlling for poverty, poor housing and caregiver substance misuse” (Galley, 2010).

Aboriginal children and their families continue to be negatively impacted by government policies and legislation (i.e. residential school, the 60’s scoop, the placement of Aboriginal children into non-Aboriginal homes).

### How Does Child Welfare Impact Aboriginal Children?

- Only 44% of youth in and from care graduate from high school compared to 82 per cent of Ontario youth (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2013).

- Youth in and from care are over-represented in the youth justice system and more likely to experience homelessness (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2013).
- Studies that have documented youth who left care report that a high percentage are living on the streets or staying temporarily with friends or “couch surfing” ([Collins; Collins](#); [Kufedlt; Serge; Serge](#) et al.)
- A lack of connection to culture has been identified as a clear risk-factor in respect to violence and/or suicide. Research findings indicate that youth who lack “a meaningful connection” ( to themselves and the person that they will become in the future) are at an increased risk of committing suicide (Hallett, 2005).
- Children raised in foster care “tend to do more poorly in school and are more likely to experience depression and substance abuse” (Post Media News, 2013).
- Parents who lack the financial resources to have their child placed into a customary care Agreement, face an increased risk of losing the option of having their child returned to their custody due to the timeframes and processes of the crown wardship system (Ontario Native Women’s Association, Environmental Scan & Consultation Report).

### Recommendations:

- The Child and Family Services Act provisions should be modified to ensure that Inuit and Métis children are eligible to receive culturally-relevant services (reports indicate that CAS workers generally equate ‘native’ or Aboriginal identity with First Nations only) (Métis Nation of Ontario, 2012).
- A greater emphasis should be placed upon kinship placement and customary care to ensure that Aboriginal children and youth are able to maintain a connection to their culture.
- Additional financial resources and services should be in place to foster and support a family’s ability to take care of their children; removal of the child from the family should be a last resort.
- Families must be able to access ‘prevention’ services from an agency (other than child-welfare services).

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