

Empowered or Tokenized? The Experiences of Aboriginal Human Service Workers and
Organizational Responses in a Historically Oppressive Child Welfare System

by

Jane Rousseau
BSW, University of Calgary, 1993
MSW, University of Calgary, 2002

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

Government human service organizations regularly attempt to recruit ethnically and culturally diverse professionals to improve services to diverse communities. The assumption here is that organizational culture and structure support this organizational practice. This study considers the unique challenge for Aboriginal professionals who work in a government child welfare system responsible for the oppression of Aboriginal children, families, and communities.

As a non-Aboriginal organizational insider and researcher, I use a combined Indigenous/ethnographic approach to explore these issues with Aboriginal professionals within the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). This study involves a dual focus that examines the history, identity, values, motivations, and practice approaches of Aboriginal professionals as well as how organizational structural and environment variables support or impede their representation of community needs and interests. Analysis of these two areas results in significant findings for the organization, the social work profession, and various practice and organizational diversity literatures.

Aboriginal participant descriptions of values, beliefs, and practices contribute to literature exploring contemporary Indigenous practice approaches that integrate traditional knowledge

with professional practice. Consistent with some representative bureaucracy studies, participant descriptions of personal history, experience, practice, and motivation to work in MCFD indicate values, beliefs, and motivations strongly shared with their representative group: to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in government care and reconnect them to community.

Aboriginal participant role tensions and dual accountabilities, resulting from their unique community/Ministry insider/outsider position, provide context to studies that explore tensions and contradictions that exist for diverse professionals working in their communities through mainstream organizations.

Findings also contribute to studies in representative bureaucracy and other organizational diversity approaches concerned with the ability of diverse professionals to actively represent community interests. Organizational variables, such as low Aboriginal practice support, racism, cultural incompetence, hierarchical structure and decision making, risk-averse practice norms, poorly implemented rhetorical change initiatives, and institutional physical environments, among others, impede the ability of Aboriginal participants to actively represent community interests. Mitigating factors were found where some Aboriginal participants describe significant organizational support at the worksite level through dedicated culturally competent Aboriginal management and practice teams.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to First Nations, Métis, and Aboriginal human service professionals who courageously embrace a journey to transform outcomes for their children, families, and communities.

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Part 1: The Study in Context

Chapter 1. Introduction

We are fortunate that an Aboriginal person will risk working for this ministry because of the way that this ministry has worked with the Aboriginal community in the past. We are very fortunate. We should honour that and we need to support it. (Ministry of Children and Family Development non-Aboriginal team leader)

After years of exceptionally poor and damaging practices, government child welfare organizations across Canada continue to struggle to find adequate policy, practice, and resources to better serve Aboriginal people. One part of this struggle has involved attempts to include Aboriginal professionals in the government child welfare workforce. This dissertation is concerned with the effectiveness of this effort and how it ultimately impacts the services provided to Aboriginal children, youth, and families. Government human service organizations regularly attempt to recruit individuals from ethnic, cultural, and gender groups with the goal of providing services that better support the needs and provide better outcomes for diverse group service recipients. The rationale is that individuals from particular ethnic or cultural groups reflect and share the same collective understanding of the unique world view (value and belief systems), patterns of perception and communication, language skills, and unique social-cultural experiences and norms of their particular group. The desired organizational goal is to increase effective services and outcomes to these service recipient groups.

Unfortunately, for many government organizations, there are inherent assumptions with this approach that organizational culture, structure, and practices are sufficiently supportive of diverse service providers and recipients. This is not necessarily

the case, as will be discussed in this study. Several areas of organizational studies literature, in the area of representative bureaucracy and other diversity approaches, frame and analyze unique organizational situations to better understand how structures, strategies, and circumstances may support individuals representing a particular ethnic or cultural group to effectively represent group interests. This study surfaces the challenges faced by Aboriginal staff working in the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) to find the necessary organizational support to achieve their objective of improving the quality of services for Aboriginal children, youth, families, and communities.

Consider the challenge for an Aboriginal human service professional, providing children's services while exploring their own unique cultural identity and set of community responsibilities, to work within a government child welfare system pervasively responsible for the oppression of Aboriginal people, including, for some, their own families and communities. How do these professionals balance the often inherently conflicting responsibilities each day they go to work? Perhaps a more important question is how can these professionals implement relevant Aboriginal practice approaches for children, families, and communities while managing what often are or become dual and competing responsibilities between the community and profession/employer? An even more daunting question is how can these responsibilities be balanced in the uniquely challenging environment of a provincial child welfare system where there is constant political flux, shifts in practice approach models, longstanding budget restraints or cuts, and a fear-based, rigid bureaucracy? How still can these value-based professionals seek transformative change, hopeful of bringing a new era to

Aboriginal services from what many view as a dark past of oppressive and genocidal practices?

From the motivations of both the organization and the people they have hired, this study and stream of inquiry seeks understanding—and involves a dual focus:

1. The history, identity, values, motivations, practice approaches, and experiences of Aboriginal professionals who work with a provincial child welfare system in Canada.
2. How organizational structural and environmental variables and approaches support or impede Aboriginal professionals to actively support the interests of their communities.

We begin with the history of child welfare in First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Aboriginal communities in Canada, which provides a basis for understanding why many proponents of child-serving systems across Canada consider it critical to radically alter how services are delivered to Aboriginal children, their families and communities. Provincial and territorial mainstream systems of child welfare are held responsible by many Aboriginal individuals, communities, and leaders for ongoing oppression and colonization of Aboriginal people through the disproportionately large numbers of Aboriginal children in their care. In British Columbia, 56% of children in the care of MCFD (during the time of this study) were Aboriginal (Government of British Columbia, 2010). This number has been increasing rather than decreasing and has continued to do so over the past 15 years. The alarming and disproportionate number of Aboriginal children in care may reflect the complexity of structural issues and the ongoing impacts of colonization that Aboriginal peoples and communities across Canada continue to grapple

with. However, it also reflects the difficulty that large provincial child welfare bureaucracy's encounter when attempting to shift highly rigid systems, structures, and operations to approaches that attempt to better meet the needs of Aboriginal children, families, and communities (Lafrance & Bastien, 2007).

Provincial governments have sometimes necessarily placed more focus and resources on the devolution (or transfer of government resources and funding) of services to Aboriginal communities and organizations. This has occurred through tripartite agreements and regional authorities across Canada, and consequently has drawn focus and resources away from further developing internal systems to become Aboriginal-competent organizations and service providers. Regardless, attempts to devolve services in BC have not changed the fact that the majority of Aboriginal children are still served by MCFD (Government of British Columbia, 2009). That is why this study is vital. Until an undetermined future point when most or all Aboriginal children in BC are served effectively through adequate resources in their own communities, a substantial number, even a majority, will continue to receive services through the Ministry. So a better understanding of the organizational variables and approaches that support Aboriginal workers to provide better outcomes for Aboriginal children, families, and communities is critical within MCFD.

How a Non-Aboriginal Insider Became the Researcher

My interests in this research area arose from over 20 years as a non-Aboriginal child welfare professional in Aboriginal child welfare provincial services in Alberta and BC. I worked with Alberta Children's Services in a number of northern and rural First Nations communities and also with a specialized urban Aboriginal child welfare unit in

Calgary. In all of these settings, First Nations and Aboriginal people were sought for employment because it was assumed, consistent with the rationale alluded to above, that they could better relate and respond to the needs of Aboriginal families and children. From my perspective, the organizational approaches used within these systems to support and motivate Aboriginal employees were based on the same mainstream motivational assumptions and strategies utilized for all employees, including wage and benefit increments, employee evaluations developed to align with larger organizational goals, and career advancement opportunities. In fact, there seemed to be a deficit motivation factor involved for some First Nations social workers coming to work for government because there were tax advantages for them to work with delegated Aboriginal agencies (funded through the federal government) on First Nations reserves. It became clear to me over time that, for those individuals who chose to work for a government system that has played a historically oppressive role in their communities, other motivational factors were likely at play.

It was difficult to witness my Aboriginal social worker colleagues—the ones who stayed—become increasingly disillusioned and dissatisfied. I heard them speak regularly about their inability to change outcomes for Aboriginal families because of system barriers (policies, resources, practice approaches) preventing them from intervening in ways they felt were effective and culturally appropriate. It also seemed to me that non-Aboriginal workers, while aware of and disillusioned with system barriers, were not as significantly impacted by the lack of organizational responsiveness. It became clearer to me over time that Aboriginal social workers, most of whom have directly experienced the impacts of child welfare and other government systems on their families and

communities, are value based (i.e., values and beliefs motivate and form the basis for achieving successful outcomes) in their approach to working with children and families. I believe that change has a more compelling and urgent value and goal when you have directly experienced racism, inequality, oppression, poverty, and personal and social distress. In this regard, my experiences convinced me that it is more important to pay close attention to the values and beliefs inherent in what motivates Aboriginal professionals in child-and family-serving organizations. More importantly, there is a potentially high degree of responsibility and urgency to do so if we know these organizations were historically, and many argue remain, responsible for oppressive practices against Aboriginal children, families, and communities.

In 2008, I began working in the BC MCFD provincial office within the Aboriginal policy branch, where I found myself again in the position of developing relationships and knowledge of Aboriginal professionals struggling within the organization in ways very similar to my colleagues in Alberta. I am profoundly impacted by my professional position within these systems, which placed me in the unique position of witnessing the experiences and frustrations of Aboriginal colleagues. This position also provided me with the opportunity as an inside researcher to develop trusting relationships which eventually resulted in this ethnographic study. I came to engage 26 Aboriginal professionals, some ongoing, through in-depth discussions about their identity, values/beliefs, motivations, practices, and experiences of the Ministry. I firmly believe these discussions and this research were possible because of my relationships with Aboriginal colleagues and the trust that participants chose to have in me based on my working reputation with others, including my committed, demonstrated

understanding of their unique challenges working within the system. Reflecting back over my career of 20 years, my understanding of these challenges is now widely informed by my work in virtually every Aboriginal child welfare environment, positioned as a frontline practitioner, a team leader, a manager and director in the areas of direct practice, operations, policy, and strategic leadership.

Value-Based Orientation and Change Motivation of Aboriginal Professionals

My experiences are confirmed by the results of this study that Aboriginal workers would not be drawn to inherently difficult professional positions in the child welfare system without a value-based orientation toward change and benefit for other Aboriginal people and communities. However, no matter how high their commitment levels are, they are not sustainable without organizational support and changes targeted toward achieving better outcomes. Where strong support within government child welfare systems does not exist for Aboriginal employees, who, despite this lack of support, often spend years trying to achieve change, they often eventually leave. Consistent with ideas within organizational expectancy theory, the outcome of providing relevant service to Aboriginal people becomes unachievable without the Aboriginal employee continuing to contribute an unreasonable amount of effort and level of performance (Nadler & Lawler, 2006). For a limited period, Aboriginal professionals may perceive or feel they can provide more culturally competent, relevant service and better outcomes than non-Aboriginal professionals. However, this approach eventually causes high levels of internal conflict, stress, and discouragement—resulting in high turnover, low retention rates, and the loss of critical and scarce resources for child welfare organizations and,

ultimately, for Aboriginal children, families, and communities. The support for their efforts is simply not there.

Organizational Responsibility to Support Aboriginal Employees and Service

Recipients

I have witnessed through the years this high turnover of Aboriginal workers who attempt to balance dichotomous roles where competing responsibilities cause considerable, ongoing tension and stress. After grappling with these observations, I wanted to better understand the responsibility and capacity of human service organizations to respond to the people they employ and serve. That is, in terms of acknowledging and transforming how power, privilege, and values impact the structure and culture of organizations in ways that can either positively or negatively impact groups of people who were historically marginalized, oppressed, and disempowered.

Learning how an organizational structure and environment based in the longstanding Western tradition of government bureaucracy impacts the practice and change objectives of Aboriginal professionals attempting to mitigate and address longstanding policy and service issues within their communities is a key aspect of the study. Better understanding of which aspects of the organizational environment support or detract from the goals of Aboriginal professionals provides opportunities for organizations like MCFD to develop a diversity approach that will effectively support Aboriginal employees. These questions have become the focus of this extensive research effort.

Purpose of the Study

The substantive or empirical goal of this study is to understand the identity, values and beliefs, motivations, practices, and experiences of Aboriginal MCFD professionals. This lead me to examine which organizational variables and approaches increase and sustain, or alternately detract from, effective Aboriginal approaches within the Ministry—potentially leading to improved outcomes for Aboriginal children, families, and communities. My methodological goal in undertaking the research for this dissertation is to elicit, understand, validate, and convey the voices and experiences of Aboriginal employees of MCFD and to ensure that this study is meaningful and relevant to them. My aim is not to merely document their experiences, but to ultimately provide benefit or value to the study participants and the organization. Thus the study employs a combined Indigenous and ethnographic approach.

The overarching research question in this study can best be expressed as follows:

- *What are the identities, motivations, and approaches of Aboriginal professionals and how does the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) support or impede them to actively represent the interests of Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities through the provision of effective and culturally relevant services?*

Flowing from this question are two others that focus on specific issues that arise from researcher experience, the current organizational context, and the literature:

- *What are the identities and histories of Aboriginal professionals who choose to work with MCFD? What are the experiences, values, and beliefs that motivate them to work with the Ministry? How do they describe their practice approaches and experiences working with Aboriginal children, families, and communities in MCFD? Do they reflect and represent the interests of Aboriginal people?*
- *How does MCFD support or impede Aboriginal professional employees to actively represent community interests to develop and deliver effective and culturally relevant services for Aboriginal children, families, and communities? What*

organizational variables and approaches provide support or create barriers for Aboriginal employees in the organization?

Relevant Literature

Several areas of literature are relevant and inform this research study with its dual focus on the unique identity, values, motivations, and experiences of Aboriginal professionals and also the organizational variables and approaches that most impact the perceived effectiveness of Aboriginal professionals to deliver relevant and effective services to people within the Aboriginal community. I have analyzed appropriate and relevant literatures to better understand how study concepts contribute to better understanding both in the areas of Aboriginal practice and within the organizational literature and diversity approaches. I also developed an analysis of how all of the discrete concepts in the literature may interrelate—how Aboriginal employees from a historically oppressed group are attempting to effectively achieve change consistent with the aspirations of their communities through a government organization—and to examine through social-equity-based organizational diversity literatures what responsibility the organization has toward these same aspirations, and how its unique structure and culture can be shifted to support this change.

The history of child-serving government system intervention, involving the harmful colonial and oppressive practices intended to assimilate Aboriginal peoples in Canada, is examined in Chapter 2. The devastating intergenerational social impacts on Aboriginal children, families, and communities frames a current environment where most Aboriginal people, communities, and organizations seek transformative change through self-governing approaches. In Canada, forms of alternate jurisdiction for the provision of child welfare services in First Nations and Aboriginal communities can only be achieved

through modern-day treaties. In BC only three such treaties exist and none of the First Nations have chosen to assert alternate jurisdiction—mostly due to funding constraints. Therefore, mainstream government child welfare systems, and a number of First Nations and Aboriginal agencies provide service through the delegation of government legislation and funding, comprise the possible workplace options for Aboriginal professions to realize their vision of transforming the way services are provided within their communities.

Analysis of Aboriginal practice models and approaches indicate there is limited academic literature with respect to how Aboriginal participants describe their practice experiences and approaches. This study contributes to this literature and also, perhaps more importantly, to organizational understanding of how Aboriginal human service professional identity, values and beliefs, and motivations inform their approaches to providing services for Aboriginal people and communities.

One area of the organizational literature that is explored in this study involves a highly developed area of study referred to as representative bureaucracy. Concepts within representative bureaucracy are concerned with how well individuals from diverse cultural and ethnic communities can work within government systems to better represent the interests of their group members. The movement for the past half century for employment equity in the workplace is also explored to provide further context and relevance to the study. Other areas of organizational literatures explored (also over the past 50 years) involve studies reviewing how cultural, ethnic, gender, and other forms of diversity, as represented by employees in the workplace, impact organizations' effectiveness as well as how they impact the experiences of diverse employees within the organizational

setting. Some of these studies resulted in the development of a number of organizational variables and indicators shown to impact the experiences, satisfaction, effectiveness, and retention of diverse employees within organizations.

Another area of the literature that helps to inform and frame the study is concerned with specific approaches to creating more effective organizational diversity within organizations. The managing diversity approach, paralleling the era of new public management approaches, is likely the most widely used organizational diversity approach in the past 25 years. However, it is critiqued in the literature for being a superficial approach that, while emphasizing organizational benefits of including diverse employees, does not challenge the structural elements within organizations that support and maintain broader societal attitudes and mainstream approaches. Social equity organizational diversity approaches, as described in the literature, examine how diversity and organizational performance relate to socially equitable outcomes for diverse employees and service recipients. Some of these approaches are more specifically focused on providing increased and specialized services for socially and economically disempowered groups of people.

Areas of this literature reflect a critical analysis of dominant and normative organizational diversity approaches, like the equal employment and managing diversity approaches. Assertions are made that these approaches do not do enough to disrupt power imbalances and dominant normative societal structures within organizations. Social equity organizational diversity approaches recommend more radical change efforts and approaches. Some call for diverse employee organizing and empowerment in pursuing objectives, while others appeal to the moral and ethical obligation for public service

organizations like MCFD to more directly and deliberately redress inequity for historically and contemporarily oppressed groups of people.

Organizational Context

The organizational context for MCFD in British Columbia is also important to explore and understand how external constraints have influenced internal Aboriginal organizational approaches. The highly politicized external environment the Ministry operates within involves responding to pressure and influence from a number of often competing interests, one of which includes First Nations and Aboriginal groups (both as individual communities and the political organizations that represent collective interests).

A competing agenda for the Ministry over the past 20 or 30 years has involved intense media pressure, public inquiries, and recommendations from oversight bodies to respond to a number of system failures by emphasizing a risk-based and child-centred safety approach. This approach clearly conflicts with the approach the Aboriginal community, as well as other client advocacy groups, have advocated for, which involves providing necessary social supports to build individual and collective capacity of Aboriginal families and communities to avoid child removal from the family and community. Early pressure and limited success in the 1990s from the Aboriginal community to move toward a family and community support model was upended by these other system pressures and resulted in Ministry legislation, policy, and practice that emphasized risk reduction and subsequent tendency toward child removal that saw the numbers of Aboriginal children in care rise significantly in the latter part of the 1990s.

In the early part of the 2000s, a resurgence of pressure from First Nations and Aboriginal political groups and organizations in BC resulted in an agreement that resulted

in eight years of planning to establish regional Aboriginal authorities to govern Aboriginal children's services in the province. Within the Ministry, the disentanglement of Aboriginal services began in earnest—earmarking the human and contracted resources that would be assigned to the regional Aboriginal authorities. In 2008, on the eve of the introduction of the legislation to support regionalization, First Nations groups opposed it, voicing their concerns that the approach did not provide for adequate autonomy and only furthered government-led approaches within legislation and policy.

Following this development the Ministry, which at the time reflected a loosely defined concept of alternative jurisdiction for First Nations and Aboriginal provision of child welfare services, developed limited “Nation to Nation” funding for a number of communities. In the years following this research, the Ministry shifted strategic emphasis to focus on internal organizational (and the existing delegated Aboriginal agency approach) cultural competence and service provision and away from seeking alternative jurisdiction approaches for the devolution of Aboriginal services.

It was during this tumultuous time period that this study examined the experiences of Aboriginal professionals working within the Ministry. These contextual elements critically and clearly impacted participants' shared perspectives and experiences.

Research Approach and Methodology

Using a combined Indigenous and ethnographic approach, this study sets out to answer critically important questions concerning how Aboriginal professionals may experience increased support and the ability to practice in a way that is consistent with their values, beliefs, and motivations while working within a government child and

family services organization (MCFD). A total of 26 Aboriginal professional staff from different worksites (three of five MCFD regions and the provincial office) participated in interviews that were conducted primarily face to face. I prefer describing this approach more in terms of having a conversation and discussion than a formal interview. This will be described in more detail in the methodology section of the study.

Participants had an opportunity to review some of the research materials and questions prior to the interview, and we spent the first few minutes of each interview orienting to the research framework. I openly shared my perspective with participants to help them understand what aspects of their experiences I was interested in exploring and what my biases and assumptions were. In the ethnographic tradition, I was already embedded within the environment and able to engage participants through shared understandings of the context, challenges, and unique environment in which we work.

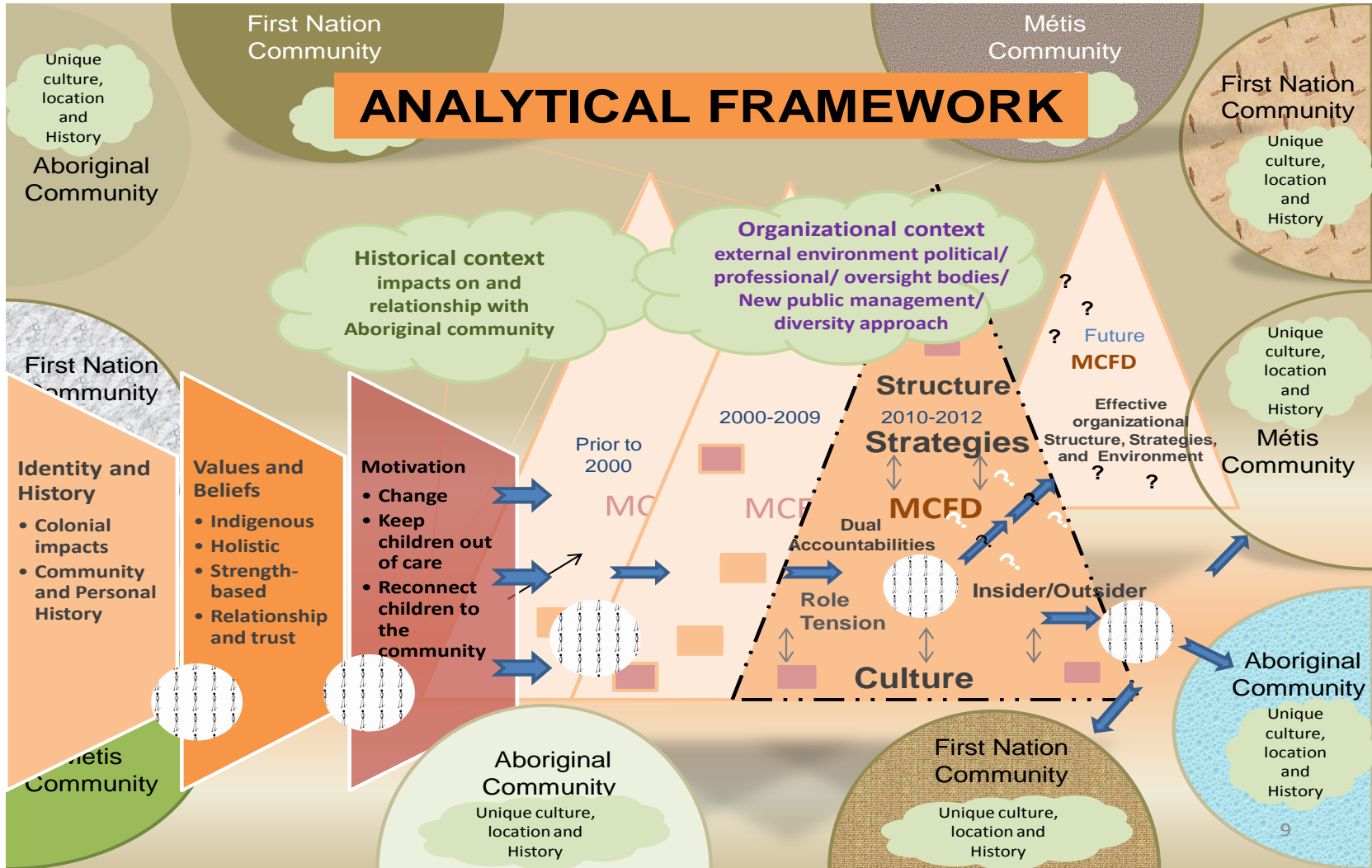
I believe the approach was extremely effective for creating a safe opportunity for participants to share experiences and observations they may not otherwise have felt comfortable with sharing. My position as an organizational insider who seemed to understand some of the unique challenges while openly striving to frame the study and my understanding through an Indigenous world view may have helped facilitate this. The rich and powerful data that emerge through this dissertation significantly attest to the success I met with gaining trust with participants who shared extremely powerful histories, experiences, perspectives, and observations. A challenge and goal is to effectively reflect their voices and pursue discussions and analysis within the dissertation that can provide benefit to them as they pursue transformational change and substantive improvement in the social conditions of Aboriginal children, families, and communities.

Relevant areas of literature (historical, practice, organizational), including a description of the unique internal and external environment and history of the Ministry over the past 25 years, are explored to provide a grounding for the subsequent analysis and discussion of the relevance of the research results. This is consistent with the ethnographic approach and provides a highly detailed and contextual analysis of this unique practice and organizational situation.

Important Research Findings and Contributions to the Literature

There are two areas of inquiry in this dissertation: (1) the identity, motivations, practices, and experiences of Aboriginal participants in MCFD; and (2) the impact of organizational variables on Aboriginal employee perceived effectiveness within the structure, environment, and strategies of MCFD. Analysis of these two areas results in significant findings and contributions, both for MCFD as an organization and also for different areas of Aboriginal child welfare/practice approaches and the various organizational diversity literatures that are explored within the study. A visual map of the research framework (Figure 1.1) outlines the various study components and identifies the important variables and contextual factors that are explored.

Figure 1.1 Research framework.



The study finds that the unique circumstances that lead Aboriginal participants to become involved with providing government children's services are best understood in relation to the development and devastating impact of residential schools and child welfare systems on First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Descriptions provided by Aboriginal participants of their values, beliefs, and practices in working with Aboriginal children, families, and communities contribute to an area of literature that describes unique contemporary Indigenous practice approaches that represent the integration of traditional knowledge with contemporary ways and realities of helping. Relationship and strength-based approaches that focus on developing trust, utilizing traditional and cultural interventions, acknowledging the impacts of colonization, intensive community and extended family collaboration are described as the practices of the Aboriginal participants in this study.

The role tensions and unique insider/outsider dynamic that Aboriginal participants describe in the study support and develop further context to a number of studies that explore the inherent tensions, contradictions, and difficulty of navigating the insider/outsider role of diverse group members working within a dominant mainstream organization to provide services within their own communities. The Ministry is unfortunately, as I will refer to later on here, poorly positioned to support Aboriginal employee practice approaches or mitigate the tensions Aboriginal employees experience in their dual roles and accountabilities to the community and the Ministry.

Motivation and organizational experiences involving the pursuit of change and equitable outcomes for Aboriginal people as described by Aboriginal participants in this study support two areas of the representative bureaucracy literature. Quite basically,

Aboriginal participants are overwhelmingly motivated by a strong sense of responsibility to change the way the government child welfare system works with Aboriginal families and communities. They passionately seek outcomes that will witness fewer Aboriginal children entering government care and that strengthen the connections of children who are already in care. This finding supports representative bureaucracy literature which finds that diverse employees share the same values and beliefs with their representative group and will attempt to further collective group objectives within the organization.

The other area that relates to concepts within representative bureaucracy is how significantly Aboriginal participants can be successful actively representing the interests of their communities. This relates to their ability to develop and implement their unique practice approaches within the Ministry. The findings in the study with respect to this objective are extensive and involve the analysis of Aboriginal and other organizational participant descriptions of the many organizational structural and environmental variables that may or may not support the active representation of Aboriginal employees.

Overall, Ministry structure, environment, and strategies are described as poorly implemented and unsupportive of Aboriginal participant objectives. The organizational environment is characterized by low cultural competence, covert and sometimes overt discrimination and racism, mainstream risk-averse practice norms that are inconsistent with Aboriginal practice or a change agenda, sterile and institutional physical environments, a frontline Ministry staff fatigued with relentless and poorly implemented practice change initiatives directed from regional and provincial leadership, and a perception that the Aboriginal change agenda within the Ministry is largely rhetorical and politically based.

The organizational structure is described as a rigid hierarchy characterized by low communication, disconnected and silo-based business units, and contradictory or rhetorical leadership approaches that display a lack of any real operational support for Aboriginal practice strategies, where frequent and poorly resourced change initiatives are imposed on under-resourced, disconnected frontline practitioners. Participants say that expectations and structure around their work expectations leave them with little time to practice in a culturally relevant way due to high caseloads and systemic requirements that place emphasis on administrative tasks rather than on process tasks like engaging with the community and families.

The tendency to politicize the existence of Aboriginal people within and outside the Ministry is also raised by Aboriginal participants within the study. Participants speak of multiple situations where they feel tokenized within the Ministry—held up by Ministry leadership as “proof” that the Ministry is culturally aware and inclusive. The Ministry is often described as treading lightly in politically sensitive Aboriginal community situations where the optics of MCFD are perceived as poor. Placation by providing resources in sensitive Aboriginal community situations with little consideration for actual practice benefit to Aboriginal children and families is cited as an example by a number of participants. Alternately, situations where resources are unavailable for the provision of services within Aboriginal communities are highlighted by participants. The result of this exploration of the current Ministry organizational culture and structure indicates an unsupportive environment for Aboriginal professionals and service recipients where goals of any of the more progressive organizational diversity approaches can be achieved.

However, strong organizational mitigating factors are also examined through the study by exploring the unique situations and worksites of Aboriginal participants who indicate that their motivations and objectives within the Ministry are supported. A few participants in the study describe relative congruence and success in reconciling their insider/outsider positions and provide valuable information about the organizational variables that enable them to do so. These variables include significant organizational support at the worksite level through dedicated Aboriginal management and practice teams, and committed, culturally competent team leaders. The professionals on these teams are not necessarily other Aboriginal people but may be non-Aboriginal culturally competent allies who share Aboriginal employee values and approaches. Strong team leaders in these worksites have honed their Aboriginal community approaches through extensive Aboriginal community experience and are immensely supportive to Aboriginal participants.

Other variables that impact support for Aboriginal participants in their worksites include more inclusive management approaches, open acknowledgement of historical impacts on Aboriginal peoples and the need for change in the Ministry, acknowledgement of the difficult role that Aboriginal employees are placed in due to this history, inclusion of social support mechanisms for Aboriginal employees, and significantly modified practice and physical environments which emphasize community collaboration and engagement. It is important to underline that the variables involved in these successful situations represent isolated experiences within the Ministry; the typical scenario for Aboriginal participants involves extremely low organizational support. However, mitigating situations and variables are important areas for learning and for the

Ministry to pay attention to if there is real interest in adopting and providing an organizational diversity approach supportive of Aboriginal employees. The results may include greater inclusion of Aboriginal employees through increased recruitment, engagement, and retention with the mutual goal of providing equitable and relevant services and outcomes for Aboriginal children, youth, families, and communities.

Organization and Flow of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized in four sections. The first provides background and methodology for the study; the second and third present analysis of the findings of the interviews with MCFD Aboriginal and other participants; and the last analyzes the findings in relation to existing literature, the organizational context, and the implications for other organizations, the social work profession, and the public service.

It is necessary to provide a fulsome picture of the setting in which Aboriginal participants attempt to achieve their objectives. For this reason, the first section of the study includes an analysis of relevant literatures and a detailed examination of the organizational history, and the political, social, and professional forces which have shaped the Ministry over the past 20 years or so. An in-depth understanding of the organizational setting that Aboriginal professionals work within is necessary to hear their voices and begin to understand their experiences within it. The ethnographic and Indigenous world view and other elements of the methodology are also described in the first section of the study. The results and findings of the study are detailed and intensive—at times involving long participant quotes to ensure that meanings are intact—and represent a large part of the study in the middle two sections that follow the dual focus of the study.

The second section of the dissertation presents findings of the identity, values, motivations, practices, and experiences of Aboriginal professionals working in MCFD, and the third section examines how the Ministry organizational environment, structure, and specific Aboriginal approaches support or impede Aboriginal professionals to actively support the interests of their communities. The voices of Aboriginal participants in these two sections are clear, honest, powerful, and compelling.

The final section of the dissertation involves re-engaging the literature, events, and elements in the organizational setting to analyze and discuss the relevance of the complex study findings for Aboriginal professionals, MCFD, different areas of the literature, other public service organizations, and the social work profession.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Literature examined for the purpose of this study is organized into three sections. The first two sections are relevant to the identity, values/beliefs, motivation, and practice of Aboriginal participants in the study. The third section relates to how public service organizations support or create barriers to Aboriginal employee effectiveness.

The first section explores the history of child welfare in relation to Aboriginal people and communities in Canada, including the impacts of residential school policies and the advent of mainstream child welfare provision for Aboriginal peoples. The emergence of First Nations and Aboriginal-led child welfare programming evolved through Aboriginal community reaction and responses to the oppressive practices perpetuated through these government policies and systems. Current Aboriginal child welfare practice approaches are also explored in this first section of the literature

The second section of literature explores the unique experiences, values, and beliefs of Aboriginal human service workers involved in providing services to their communities. What is often referred to as the insider/outsider literature examines the role tension that Aboriginal practitioners experience with dual accountabilities between competing cultural/community and professional/organizational responsibilities.

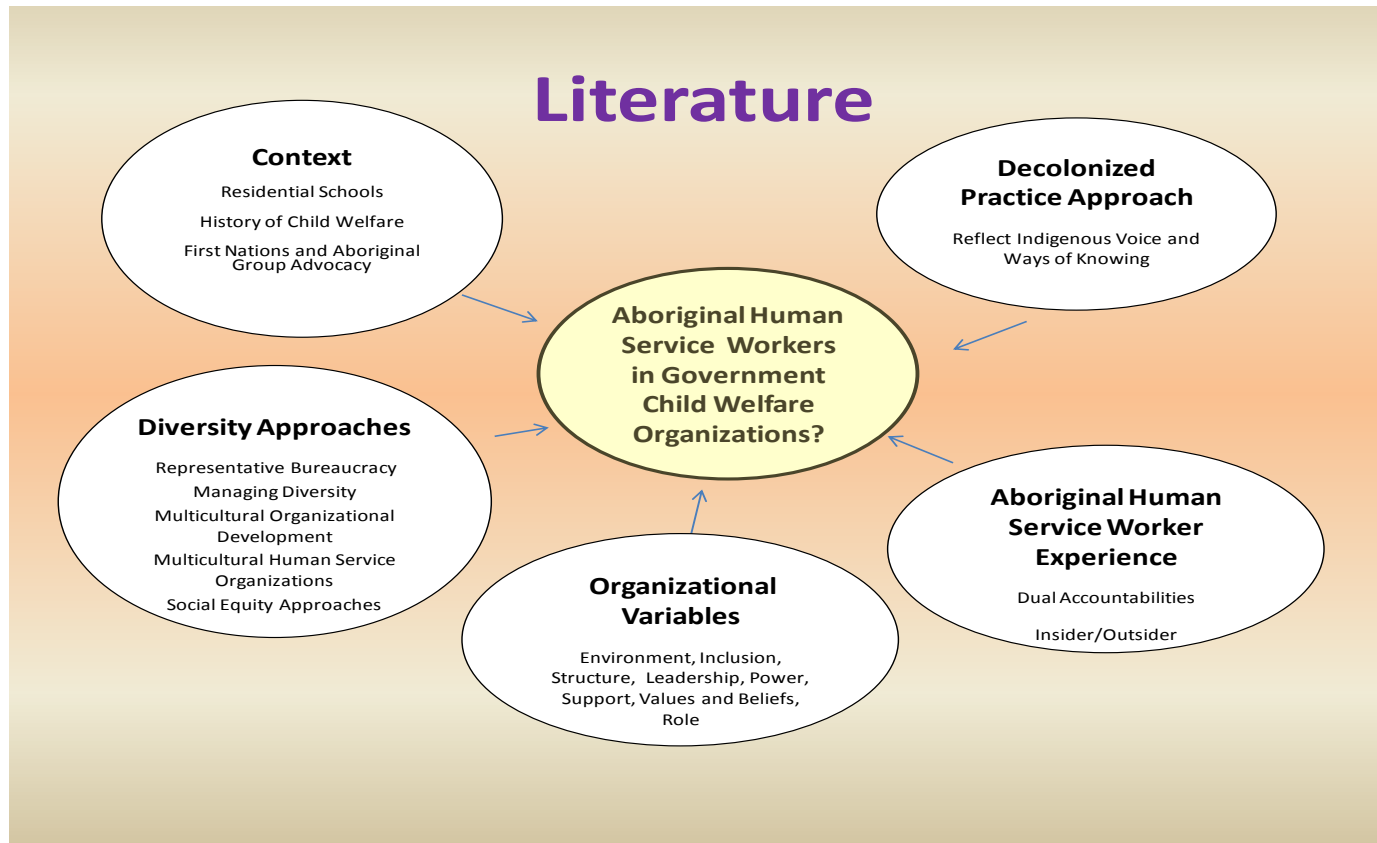
The third section, organizational diversity literature, is relevant to how Ministry organizational structure, environment, and strategies support Aboriginal employee values, motivations, practices, and objectives within the Ministry. The theory of representative bureaucracy provides the rationale for including diverse employees in government organizations to better represent diverse group interests. Social reforms that support employment equity in the Canadian public sector are also explored in the

literature as they provide further evidence of the growing move to include individuals of diverse and presumably marginalized ethnic, cultural, and gender groups in the public service workforce.

Another focus in this section is the examination of specific organizational studies that isolate and explore variables that support or create barriers to the inclusion of diverse employees. A number of organizational diversity approaches are also explored, including the managing diversity approach, popularized during the past 20 to 30 years within new public management approaches in the public service sector. More critical and expansive social equity organizational diversity approaches are also explored as potential models for public organizations that focus on more equitable outcomes for diverse employees, service recipients, and historically impacted and disempowered service recipient groups. The analysis in the third section includes a table that summarizes and organizes the relevant organizational diversity literatures for this study.

The visual map in Figure 2.1 reflects the different literatures that will be explored:

Figure 2.1 Literature explored.



Aboriginal Child Welfare in Canada

Residential schools.

Early provincial child welfare systems in Canada were not involved with most Aboriginal children, families, and communities because they were considered the primary responsibility of the federal government. During the 1870s the federal government, under the authority of the 1876 Indian Act, began funding the construction and operation of Indian residential schools. These schools were operated by the Anglican, Catholic, and Methodist churches, with federal policy support, for over 100 years in Canada until they were phased out in the 1980s. The objective within residential school policy was to alter the identity of Aboriginal children by separating them from their families and communities, suppressing their language and cultural identity, and resocializing them to the values and norms of mainstream society (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

The impacts of residential schools on First Nations and Aboriginal peoples are often described as genocidal because they intentionally and deliberately eradicated languages, religions, history, families, and knowledge of community and cultural traditions (Callahan & Walmsley, 2007; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Other impacts of the residential school system, which involved widespread physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of First Nations children, are linked to intergenerational impacts due to poor preparation of many First Nations adults to parent their children.

Impact of provincial child welfare services.

In 1947 the Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons examined the separate nature of social services for status Indians (Armitage, 1993). The Canadian Welfare Council and the Canadian Association of Social Workers appeared before the committee and argued that Aboriginal children and families should be offered the same range of child welfare services that other Canadians received under provincial legislation and services. The joint committee recommended changes that led to amendment of the Indian Act in 1951, enabling provincial health, welfare, and education services to be provided on reserve under terms negotiated between the federal and provincial governments. Separate negotiations by various provinces, coupled with differing policy approaches, resulted in a huge disparity in the amount and quality of child welfare programs available for First Nations peoples across Canada (Johnston, 1983).

The eventual and uneven transfer of responsibility for First Nations and Aboriginal child welfare to the provinces resulted in an onslaught of maltreatment reports from Indian agents, local police, priests, and rural school teachers (Armitage, 1993). The overwhelming response from provincial child welfare agencies, where agreements were in place, was the removal of large numbers of Aboriginal children from their families and placement with non-Aboriginal families (Armitage, 1993; Johnston, 1983). Federal funding arrangements requiring the federal government to reimburse foster care or protection costs, while not funding prevention efforts, are outlined as a primary reason for “the Sixties Scoop”—the term used to describe the widespread removal of Aboriginal children from their communities in that era (Johnston, 1983).

Statistics indicate that by the mid-1970s one in seven status Indian children was not in parental care at any one time and that as many as one in four children spent at least some part of their childhood in the care of child welfare authorities (Armitage, 1993). The high removal rate was widely linked to provincial child welfare systems that reflected dominant values regarding appropriate standards of care giving and what constitutes material neglect and/or emotional abuse in assessing Aboriginal families (Bagley, 1985; Hepworth, 1980; Hull, 1982; Johnston, 1983; Jolly, 1983; Loucks, 1981; Swift, 1995). A pattern of disrupted parenting directly resulting from the residential school system, coupled with socio-cultural problems resulting from oppressive colonial practices, perpetuates a cycle of high removal of children from the community which leads in turn to the loss of opportunity for children and youth to learn traditional parenting roles, language, and cultural identity. The result is the ongoing involvement of disproportionate numbers of Aboriginal children, youth, families, and communities with the child welfare system. The genocidal effects of residential schools continue to be seen within provincial child welfare systems.

Tripartite agreements: Delegated First Nations child welfare model.

Pressure by First Nations and Aboriginal communities for increased control of child welfare services led to the growth of tripartite child welfare agreements in the 1980s where responsibility for program delivery through provincial legislation and federal funding was transferred to agencies representing First Nations communities (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). These agreements applied to children on reserve only. A more recent occurrence is the development of provincial agreements with

Aboriginal agencies for the provision of delegated child welfare services to First Nations, Métis, and Aboriginal people in urban environments.

In 1996 the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples released a comprehensive examination of Aboriginal child welfare developed through extensive literature review and research partnerships with First Nations and Aboriginal peoples across Canada. That report indicated that by 1992 the number of First Nations children in care was six times greater than children representing the general population. The Commission noted that emphasis was placed on increased First Nations delivery of services through provincial legislation. Between 1990 and 1991, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) funded 36 First Nations child and family agencies covering 212 bands, all with provincial legislation attached. The report noted deficits in the majority of the arrangements resulting from funding constraints and limited policy support for developmental work in new First Nations child welfare programs and agencies.

Further issues and concerns relating to First Nations child welfare agreements that arise from the hearings and inquiry of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) include:

- External sources of policy and legislation in First Nations child welfare programs do not work—the programs perpetuate the practices of the provincial systems.
- Follow-up and evaluation of First Nations child welfare programs is inadequate.
- Families and communities require community healing.
- Resources for preventive child welfare programs are inadequate.
- Training of social work personnel is inadequate/inappropriate.

Movement toward First Nations child welfare service delivery on reserve through provincial legislation as a reaction to the failure of mainstream programs was being established through the federally funded First Nations Child and Family Services

(FNCFS) program (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). While root socioeconomic issues associated with the effects of colonization require more attention through community healing programs and other preventive efforts, the funding for FNCFS programs is allocated so that funds are earmarked for children in care rather than for family preservation or community healing programs (Assembly of First Nations, 2007; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

According to Hudson (1997) the process of widespread implementation of FNCFS agreements delegating authority to First Nations child welfare programs is seriously flawed. Despite the importance of the agreements with respect to moving toward decolonization, Hudson observes that the situation for many First Nations people receiving First Nations children and family services has not substantially changed since the agreements were implemented. The reasons for this lack of change are rooted in the “severity of the social and economic damage arising quite directly out of the colonized and marginalized status of Aboriginal people within Canada” (p. 162). For their part, government is interested in applying funding formulas that narrow the mandate of First Nations child welfare programs to last-resort measures in an effort to restrict spending and fiscal responsibility. It is these funding formulas, along with the delegation of provincial legislation, that exemplify what Hudson refers to as a continuing colonial relationship.

There are currently 105 delegated First Nations Child and Family Services programs delivering services to approximately 160,000 children and youth on reserve in Canada (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013). Provincial legislation and service standards remain a primary feature of these programs, despite

advocacy by First Nations to move toward Aboriginal community values and standards (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013; Assembly of First Nations, 2007). Program funding remains largely based on protection services. Since 2008, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) has entered into tripartite agreements with Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Prince Edward Island and Manitoba to implement the new enhanced prevention-focused approach (EPFA) funding model to provide limited funding for prevention services (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013). The recent movement to implement this approach comes after years of research, analysis, and inaction on the part of AANDC and only after the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), in conjunction with the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, made a complaint to the Canadian Human Rights Commission in July 2006 (Assembly of First Nations, 2007). AFN stated in their complaint that the “funding inequality is directly linked to First Nations children being unnecessarily placed in foster care and First Nations can wait no longer to act” (Assembly of First Nations, 2007). Further, AFN claims that under the existing framework, AANDC was providing FNCFS programs 22% less funding per child than it provides to provincial agencies. AFN argued that additional resources for overall community development to address poverty and neglect—which are at the root of child removals—are required by First Nations communities.

Ongoing efforts by First Nations communities to gain control of child welfare, and other economic and social interests, have been met by the Canadian government with municipal-type structures that appear to allow the government to retain a considerable amount of control over how services are delivered. However, this should not detract from

the considerable gains that Aboriginal people have made in the area of child welfare. A result of the First Nations child and family delegation agreements and the growing presence of Aboriginal helpers and organizations in the child welfare field is the impact of powerful advocacy efforts for increased change, both on reserve and in urban and off-reserve mainstream child welfare programs. These individuals and organizations advocate, while the rest of the system seems mostly silent, about the inequities within mainstream system approaches for Aboriginal people. This type of movement increases visibility and momentum of the issues and the potential for meaningful change in the area of Aboriginal child welfare issues.

Existing models and approaches to Aboriginal child welfare delivery.

A reality for the majority of First Nations and Aboriginal people who do not live on First Nations lands or areas covered by delegation agreements is that they are primarily served through mainstream provincial systems. In a small number of jurisdictions in Canada, Aboriginal people are being served outside of mainstream provincial systems in urban areas. Manitoba and Alberta have provincially mandated Métis child welfare authorities. BC attempted to pass legislation in 2008 to create five Aboriginal regional child welfare authorities, but failed to maintain the support of First Nations leadership in the province and did not proceed. The only other alternative approach to delivering child welfare currently available to BC First Nations is entering a treaty (to date only three treaties have been entered into in BC) that enables the Nation to enact their own child welfare legislation (to date none have) and the anomalous Spallumcheen (now Splatshin) Band Bylaw enacted in 1980 which remains the subject of intense and disputed legal interpretation.

Emerging Aboriginal family support models/agencies.

Largely in response to growing numbers of Aboriginal people becoming directly involved in delivering services through First Nations delegated and other community agencies, models for services designed specifically in response to the unique experience and needs of Aboriginal individuals and communities have emerged. Provincial government child welfare agencies have increasingly provided funding to Aboriginal social support agencies to provide support services to Aboriginal families who are involved with child welfare authorities. While initially providing a rationale for the need for different services, literature and advocacy in the area have evolved to include highly detailed and specialized models and approaches for working with Aboriginal children, families, and communities, along with discussion regarding who is most qualified and capable of providing services.

John Red Horse contributed greatly to the early literature concerning social policy change by indicating the need to develop a compatible service delivery model for Aboriginal people and communities. A social conservation model specifically designed for human service delivery for Aboriginal individuals, families, and communities was proposed by Red Horse, Lewis, Feit, and Decker (1978). Two imperatives identified were (1) exploring traditional Aboriginal cultural attributes associated with family cohesiveness and individual mental health, and (2) modelling human service systems that promote this sense of family purpose within the cultural context.

A model for Aboriginal social work practice that has been widely adapted by Aboriginal support agencies is one presented by Morrissette, McKenzie, and Morrissette (1993). The practice framework is based on four key principles: (1) focus on Indigenous

world view; (2) developing consciousness within the Aboriginal client about the effects of colonization; (3) utilizing cultural knowledge and traditions to retain identity and collective consciousness; and (4) empowering Aboriginal clients. These four key concepts are embedded in a cultural continuum that reflects the variation among Aboriginal people in terms of their identification with traditional Aboriginal culture and the degree to which they have become assimilated into dominant culture (Morrissette et al., 1993).

Historical trauma and grief experienced by Aboriginal people are viewed as a starting point for working with individuals and families because these are the root of current social and health problems (Weaver & White, 1997). Essentially, the vital yet basic common values held by Aboriginal people are the cornerstone of the development of services to address social and health issues. Weaver and White (1997) echo the work of Morrissette et al. (1993) by outlining the differences between mainstream family values that focus on the nuclear family versus a collective Aboriginal orientation to the extended family and community.

Similarly, Weaver and White (1997) underline the level of connection that Aboriginal people have to their traditional culture, land, language, and community. They propose a linear continuum—similar to the cultural continuum outlined by Morrissette et al. (1993)—that ranges from “culture of origin to assimilation or acculturation” into dominant society (p. 73). This identification is critical for understanding how to approach culturally appropriate practice with Aboriginal individuals and families.

A community empowerment approach is described as a strategy to develop and deliver a provincially delegated child welfare program of the Lalum’utul’ Smun’eem

Child and Family Services of the Cowichan Tribes on Vancouver Island (Brown, Haddock, & Kovach, 2002). This First Nation provides an example of a community that acknowledged widespread social problems resulting from colonization and deliberately built a child welfare program on a community-wide level rather than simply targeting specific child protection issues. The program was subject to the same constraints involving provincial legislation and limited funding experienced by most First Nations programs. However, it successfully identified early on that involving and empowering the people in the community was essential to building a strong program where all community members are involved as an essential component to support practice.

A critical aspect of how the Cowichan people have created a meaningful child welfare program occurred through the implementation of *self-conscious traditionalism*, described by Alfred (1999, cited in Brown, Haddock, & Kovach, 2002) as a “process of identifying traditional values and consciously using them to inform contemporary activities” (p. 149). Intensive community exploration was involved in developing ways where traditional values could be applied to contemporary social issues encountered by Nation members on a widespread basis.

First Nations and Aboriginal peoples have altered the policy environment in response to considerable challenges raised in reaction to the perceived inability of the mainstream system to provide culturally competent and anti-oppressive child welfare practices for their people. There is movement both on and off reserve toward Aboriginal child welfare service delivery. Strong influence by Aboriginal groups, political action, and advocacy in this area are evidenced by early Aboriginal voices in the literature and by the First Nations movement toward tripartite agreements 30 years ago.

The unique situation Aboriginal people have achieved through social and political advocacy means that many First Nations across Canada are delegated to deliver children's services within their communities. The Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, and other First Nations groups continue to advocate for autonomous child welfare structures where service standards reflect unique Aboriginal community/cultural practices and enhanced funding formulas to acknowledge that widespread community recovery efforts are required in the context of child welfare if the high number of children in care is to be reversed.

The situation for First Nations not receiving services through delegated agencies and for First Nations and other Aboriginal people living off reserve is somewhat different. These individuals and communities continue to rely on provincial child welfare delivery systems for services. In urban areas, the shift to some delegated and support service provision by Aboriginal workers and agencies has been one of two provincial strategies for providing culturally competent services, and further helps alleviate the government's responsibility to provide those services. The other strategy—hiring Aboriginal professionals to work in the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), which is the focus of this research—has met with limited success, as acknowledged in the introduction.

Aboriginal Human Service Practitioner Experience

Literature in the area of what has become known as the insider/outsider dynamic addresses the advantages and challenges for community insiders when working in their own diverse community setting through an external social/human service organization. Other literature also addresses the specific role tensions and dual accountabilities that

First Nations and Aboriginal child welfare workers experience when working in their own and other First Nations and Aboriginal communities. The challenges these individuals face are explored alongside descriptions of their experiences as both insiders and outsiders in the communities and organizations they work with.

Community insider advantages.

The impact of being a service provider who comes from and works within the community is examined in the 1990 study of a central Appalachian community project where both insiders and outsiders were employed (McDonald, 1990). Results indicated that insiders had considerably more intimate knowledge of the community and the norms that prevailed. The outsiders had more difficulty identifying with and adapting to community standards. Conflict avoidance was a very important community norm that insiders were aware of and most often observed. It was found that outsiders, who were accustomed to addressing conflict openly, viewed insiders' reluctance to address conflict as meaning they were passive, emotionally distant, stupid, or uncaring about the objectives of the project they were working on. A potential benefit of employing community insiders is their ability, where it is welcomed, to provide community context to help guide others' actions within the organization.

Using a grounded theory approach, Cruikshank (1990) interviewed 25 community social and educational practitioners regarding their experiences as practitioners in rural or northern community development work. The findings indicate that insiders and outsiders have different roles to play in community development. Outsiders appear able to navigate through some of the ingrained community practices and, being detached from a local situation, are more able to act. Insiders, it is argued, have an advantage through their

much deeper understanding of community issues. Cruikshank recommends utilizing approaches that maximize the use of insiders' and outsiders' unique advantages in community development.

Lockhart (1982) also discusses the merits of a community development methodology that values insider information and resources and outsider understanding of the system where the community must navigate to achieve outcomes based on a process that is not assumed to have fixed problems or solutions constructed outside the community. All of these articles focus on and provide a rationale for seeking the inclusion of community insiders within organizations. However, the dynamic of power and influence between the perspectives of the insiders versus the outsiders is not well explored. Further analysis in this area would help determine how to ensure that the benefit of the community insider's perspective is included in the overall organizational approach.

Aboriginal insiders: The impact of dual perspectives and accountabilities.

Bennett and Zubrzycki (2003) use a qualitative research methodology to examine how Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers reconcile their cultural knowledge and practice with dominant culture social work values. This study focuses largely on how academic preparation and social work theory ill prepare participants for the experience of working within their own or other Aboriginal communities. Some key findings were that participants pursued professions in social work to change what they perceived as the system's inability to effectively serve their communities. However, choosing social work as a profession caused some participants to feel that their communities were wary and suspicious of them because of the profession's

complicity in oppressive practices toward Aboriginal communities. It was acknowledged that social workers had a “bad name” in Aboriginal communities, mostly due to the removal of children.

One of the main challenges for study participants was identified as “maintaining boundaries” (Bennett & Zubrzycki, 2003). Many recalled being taught to maintain personal and professional boundaries and to avoid dual relationships, but they commented on how unrealistic doing so is given the reality of living and working in a small community where personal and professional identities coexist. Closely related to this issue is the challenge to professional values for the social workers who have kinship ties within communities and often must work with their relations when referral to another worker is not possible. Also in relation to boundaries, Aboriginal cultures place value on the “obligation to share resources and care for each other. This means the worker/client relationship becomes influenced and informed by the importance of doing whatever is needed to help the client/family” (p. 66). The researchers reveal the participants had little to offer regarding how to reconcile the difficulty of balancing professional and cultural demands.

In the same study, the importance of working with extended family members within Aboriginal communities was stressed by participants because these relatives were often found to provide information regarding appropriate interventions (Bennett & Zubrzycki, 2003). Where there were age and gender differences between the participants and their clients, the participants found it was important to work with other community members who could bridge the impacts of these differences of power, status, authority and knowledge in the community.

Supervisory relationships for the participants with non-Aboriginal superiors were mostly described as inadequate because the cultural knowledge (and possible conflict with professional knowledge) was generally not attended to (Bennett & Zubrzycki, 2003). Agency relationships were described as difficult because participants felt compromised in encouraging people to use services that were “oppressive and alienating” (p. 68). One study participant identified the reasons organizations employ Aboriginal people as symbolic: “So what they really want is employees who just happen to be Aboriginal rather than Aboriginal employees” (p. 68). Given these findings, the researchers cite a need for critical reflection on dominant cultural assumptions implicit in social work education and practice.

Reid (2005), a First Nations woman and insider researcher, utilizes a gendered First Nations decolonized approach to explore the impacts of child welfare work on the holistic health and coping abilities of First Nations women who work in delegated Aboriginal agencies in British Columbia. Five themes emerge from the study: dual accountabilities between the community and the provincial/federal government; the stress of unrealistic expectations and multiple roles; the emotional costs and benefits of the intensity of relationships; the notion that meaningful work provides strength; and coping strategies to maintain holistic health.

In terms of dual accountabilities experienced by participants in Reid’s study, responsibilities are described as “broad,” “intense,” “large and complex,” “unrealistic,” “contradictory,” and “unmanageable” (p. 30). Participants describe the responsibility to work within the child welfare delegation model as an extension of the colonial relationship; they report that it creates frustration, tremendous pressure, a lack of power

and control, and stress. They describe their relationship with the federal and provincial governments as challenging and directly impacting their holistic health. They struggle with the perception that they are somehow furthering the perpetration of colonialism toward their own people. One woman spoke of the challenge to “walk between two worlds” and to incorporate cultural child care practices into delegated programs (p. 30).

The women in this study spoke about significant pressures of dual accountability alongside other pressures that include “inequitable and insufficient resources” and the “lack of infrastructure and capacity” provided by government to do the work that translates into the need for them to perform multiple roles (p. 30). Long hours, multiple responsibilities, and the difficulty of feeling “you have done a job well enough and met all of the responsibilities and demands” are cited as causing intense strain and pressure (p. 30).

Despite the intensity described in the dual accountabilities of their roles, the First Nations women in this study also spoke of how meaningful work brings and gives strength as they address “historical injustice and intergenerational impacts of colonization” (Reid, 2005, p. 30). They describe this meaning as their motivating force and say that they derive further strength from the benefits their work provides to children and families and through the meaning it gives to their own lives. The ability to be creative and innovative was cited as important. The women’s motivation for doing the work is to see improvements and positive change for First Nations and Aboriginal children, families, and communities. They describe their work not just as a job but a commitment to the future of their community and their grandchildren.

The women in the study also describe a lack of boundaries and unrealistic expectations within the community as causing stress (Reid, 2005). Knowing clients is sometimes identified as a “strength” and sometimes as a “cause of potential conflict” (p. 32). Participants identify an emotional cost as well as a benefit because of the intensity of their relationships in their work. They feel that stress, unrealistic demands, and pressures from themselves and those around them can contribute to chronic health issues. Identified strategies involve increased program autonomy (removing provincial legislation) so that service provision is congruent with community values and expectations, the need to create better work/life boundaries, increasing social support through peers and colleagues, and better self-care.

Aboriginal child welfare insiders and outsiders in MCFD.

In an extensive study of Aboriginal child welfare provision in British Columbia, Walmsley (2005) notes a number of differences in the orientation of Aboriginal practitioners versus non-Aboriginal practitioners delivering delegated child protection services in British Columbia. He notes that Aboriginal practitioners identify different pressures from their non-Aboriginal counterparts, with significant pressure emanating from constraints they feel in pursuing cultural autonomy, which Walmsley describes as “the lack of freedom to protect children in ways consistent with the values, traditions, and practices of their community” (p. 59). He states: “their fear is that the policies, practices, and systems of the dominant society . . . will control child welfare in ways inconsistent with community practices” (p. 59).

In his study, Walmsley explores proximity to the community in practice and finds that practitioners (often Aboriginal) who are either from or have adopted themselves into

a community come to live and work in extremely close proximity to the community, often experiencing a loss of personal privacy and a blurring between their professional and private lives. He talks about how the impact of this blurring of roles contribute to a strong sense of isolation for practitioners who are “in but not of” the community and wonders if it contributes to high staff turnover.

Aboriginal participants in Walmsley’s study identified Aboriginal communities as the principal protector of their children. In contrast, non-Aboriginal participants most often described communities alternately as system victims, adversaries, participants, or partners (2005). The conceptualization of the community as protector is based on looking at traditional approaches where a child’s well-being was viewed as a collective responsibility and the community intervened to create alternative arrangements for children when required. The legacy of the residential and child welfare systems and their impacts on Aboriginal people and communities is also noted by an Aboriginal participant in Walmsley’s study, who emphasizes the need to practice with a distinct understanding of the legacy and the fear and panic it evokes within Aboriginal people when the system intervenes in their lives.

The above focus on Aboriginal professional insider/outsider experiences and the necessary tensions created within their unique roles explored in the above literature provides a basis for further inquiry in this study.

Organizational Diversity Literature

Several streams of organizational diversity literature are relevant to this study and are examined for their relevance to how a public service organization like MCFD, that is providing highly contested services to First Nations and Aboriginal people, attempts to

recruit and retain First Nations and Aboriginal professionals in an effort to provide more effective services. The streams of literature examined in this section include those on representative bureaucracy and employment equity; social reform, employment equity, and the Canadian public service; internal organizational diversity processes, performance, and culture; managing diversity perspective; and multicultural organizational development, and social equity organizational perspectives. These organizational diversity perspectives are then analyzed and summarized with the aid of a table.

Representative bureaucracy and employment equity.

The ideas advanced through theories of representative bureaucracy largely stand behind ongoing attempts by federal and public service organizations in Canada, and in many other democratic Western nations, to serve diverse service recipient group interests. It is assumed that this can be achieved by employing diverse group members within the public service to represent diverse group interests—in the case of this research employing Aboriginal professionals to respond to and address the needs of Aboriginal children, youth, and communities.

The theory of representative bureaucracy introduced by Kingsley (1944) holds that a bureaucracy can only be responsible to the extent that ministers and civil servants reflect and share similar backgrounds and social views to those of the people they represent. The theory has also come to include diversity distinctions that move beyond social class to include race, ethnicity, culture, gender, ability, sexual orientation, and age (Bailey, 2004).

Mosher (1968) was the first to introduce and distinguish between passive and active forms of representation. Passive representation refers to the diversity origin of

individuals and the degree to which they collectively reflect the values and interests of their social group within society. Active or responsible representation refers to the degree to which a public servant is expected or able to advocate for diverse group interests.

Mosher was concerned with how little was known about the linkage between active and passive representation. The implications for research, he contends, are the strength of socialization effects prior to entering the public service versus the socialization (homogenization) processes of employment within the public service.

Proponents of representative bureaucracy support the theory based on the argument that inadequate external controls of public servants through the political executive, legislature and courts translate into a public service that overly exercises significant power and authority (Kernaghan, 1978; Sowa & Selden, 2003). A public service that is demographically representative of the population will be more responsive to the needs and interests of the populace and therefore more responsible. This hypothesis has several assumptions. Possibly most critical is that the values of public servants are established through their socialization experiences prior to entering the public service and not influenced thereafter. Further, values representative of their cultural or ethnic group will be reflected in their behaviour, decisions, and recommendations as public servants. Various groups in society should therefore be reflected in approximate proportion to their numbers in the population so that public servants can accurately represent their interests both in policy development and program delivery.

The critics of representative bureaucracy contend that if a representative bureaucracy were achieved, “the values of the public service will *as a whole* not be similar to those of the general population; rather the values of *individual* public servants

may be similar to the values of those groups in the population they are supposed to represent” (Kernaghan, 1978). Given that individuals make decisions (and not the public service as a whole), each administrative and senior executive unit within the public service would be required to be representative of the total population to ensure that all interests were to be represented in the decision-making process. Another failing of the theory, opponents observe, is that public servants from diverse groups may not share similar values to fellow group members outside the public service. People from socially and economically disadvantaged groups who seek upward mobility may have different social and educational origins or aspirations and therefore share values more similar to those they work with than to their group members. In addition, socialization processes continue after an individual enters a bureaucratic environment.

It appears that modern proponents of representative bureaucracy have advanced the theory, at least in the literature, based on the belief that there remains enough pre-occupational socialization experience, integration, and identification of values with the diverse group for diverse public servants to move forward and represent their interests within the bureaucracy (Krislov, 1974; Krislov & Rosenbloom, 1981). Much more focus then depends on the link between passive and active forms of representation within the bureaucracy. Thompson (1976) identified that this link depends on conditions in the organizational environment, such as hierarchical position of diverse civil servants, the issue being considered, and the use of working groups.

Considerable research in the area of representative bureaucracy has recently focused on examining variables in bureaucratic public service environments that impact active representation (Sowa & Selden, 2003). The primary focus examines the conditions

in traditional bureaucracies more conducive to the expression of active representation. These studies emerging in the 1990s have focused on female bureaucrats from ethnically diverse groups and have reported varying degrees of success in demonstrating active representation dependent on degree of administrative discretion, individual attitudes, organizational socialization, and administrative actions (Dolan, 2000; Meier & Nigro, 1976; Selden, 1997; Sowa & Selden, 2003).

Further research shifted focus from an organizational level to that of administrator characteristics, and some findings indicate that ethnically diverse bureaucrats with liberal political orientations and fewer years of bureaucratic experience are more likely to adopt an active representation role in their employment (Selden, 1997; Selden, Brudney, & Kellough, 1998, as cited in Sowa & Selden, 2003). Further findings from the same studies indicated that individuals were more likely to adopt a role that increased minority access to programs when they perceived the employer expected or supported such action.

Social reform, employment equity, and the Canadian public service.

The advancement of representative bureaucracy theory coincided with social reform movements in Canada, including francophone bilingualism, feminism, Aboriginal rights movement, disabilities rights movement, as well as rising numbers of racially visible immigrants who drew attention and placed pressure on the Canadian government to address underrepresentation of these diverse group members within the public service (Kernaghan, 1978). Equal opportunity (EO) policy was introduced in the 1970s by Canada's Public Service Commission (PSC) with the government aim to achieve more proportionate representation of particular groups of people. Kernaghan maintains that PSC targeting of francophones, women, Aboriginal people, and people with disabilities

during this time was motivated by the political significance and growing influence of these groups and the desire to achieve a limited representation of the population. The main objective stated by PSC at the time was to remove institutional and attitudinal barriers to equality of employment opportunity or access within the public service. PSC also speculated that underrepresentation of diverse group members may reduce sensitivity within the public service to the needs of diverse groups in the population. It appears that PSC's main goal was to legitimate or increase service access for the identified groups. Secondary to this goal was a motivation consistent with the assumption within representative bureaucracy that representation alone will promote responsiveness to group needs.

Efforts within the Canadian public service at this early juncture—of what became referred to as Employment Equity Programs (EEP)—focused mainly on recruitment (Kernaghan, 1978). Efforts beyond recruiting diverse people were limited primarily to employee training initiatives. Training was utilized in attempts to increase competency levels of diverse employees for advancement to more senior and executive level positions within the bureaucracy. Aboriginal people in particular were encouraged to acquire the knowledge, skills and experience needed to work in—and conform to—the public service. Valuing of Aboriginal knowledge and the potential contribution it could make was not acknowledged within the public service. Kernaghan (1978) identifies three remedial strategies of the public service under EEP that included active recruitment, administrative structures redesigned to reduce obstacles to entry and advancement, and education and training to prepare diverse group members for advancement.

Kernaghan (1978) describes representative bureaucracy as appealing to government at the time for its symbolic impact and ability to promote stability in the political system. Employment equity remains official policy, reflected in Canadian legislation and pursued by the Canadian government in both the private and public sectors (Canada Public Service Agency, 2005). The Employment Equity Act, originally passed in 1986 and revised to include the public service in 1996, requires the PSC to comply with anti-discrimination employment legislation. The last available annual report of the Canada Public Service Agency (CPSA) for 2004–2005 indicates that the CPSA continued to recruit for a targeted federal workforce that was representative of particular diverse groups (Canada Public Service Agency, 2005). Clear emphasis remained on recruitment and training initiatives within the public service. With regard to Aboriginal people, the CPSA reported exceeding representation in the general category, achieving 3% in the executive category (Aboriginal people comprise 4% of the general population), and 2.5% in the scientific and professional category.

While acknowledging that gains had been made with recruiting employees, CPSA identified five priorities: targeting specific accountability for managers at all levels; bringing about corporate culture change (in regard to recruitment and retention of diverse employees); increasing external recruitment; providing core development and mentoring programs for designated groups; and improving communication to more clearly articulate objectives and expectations (Canada Public Service Agency, 2005). A key area identified for progress is to develop better understanding of how growing diversity affects the business objectives of government and how to integrate those needs into business and human resource planning. In reference to culture change activities, the report focuses on

organizational culture change training programs targeted to the executive level and references other training programs offered through the public service that range from diversity training, to employment equity information workshops, to mentorship and training programs for designated group employees.

The federal government's CPSA reports seems to indicate that diversity efforts within Employment Equity Programs remain primarily externally driven by compliance with policy and legislation designed to increase the representation of specific diverse groups within the public service (Canada Public Service Agency, 2005). Changes are made to criteria and processes for diverse individuals to gain entry to the public service, but once they become employees, aside from diversity training workshops that appear to be offered on a voluntary basis to all employees, all other efforts are focused on assisting diverse employees to adapt to the culture of the public service through training programs designed to help them learn the skills necessary for advancement within the organization.

Described by Thomas and Ely (1996) as the discrimination and fairness diversity perspective, EEP can be visualized more as an input to organizational environments than as an organizational process. Employment equity programs determine their success by the number of designated group members that hold positions within the organization.

Organizations that do not move further to adopt internal organizational diversity process or change tend to encourage diverse group members to adopt the organization's culture.

Organizations pursuing this type of diversity perspective alone are not interested in exploring employee differences in terms of how they may improve or change organizational processes and outcomes (Selden & Selden, 2001). It seems the extent to which public service bureaucracies are willing or able to change the organization's

culture will affect the expression of substantive or active effects of representation. Where no organizational change occurs, the only substantive effects of representation will be on the individual level of diverse individuals, mitigated by the effects of socialization within a rigid environment that discourages the expression of values that differ from those of the organization. Therefore it seems the bureaucratic form of the organization and its openness to change is important in relation to active representation. To explore alternative and complementary diversity perspectives, organizational literature regarding the effects of diversity on internal organizational processes is examined.

Internal organizational diversity processes, performance, and culture.

Three general theories regarding organizational ethnic diversity and creativity are consistently used to link ethnic diversity to some measure of group/organizational effectiveness: social identification and categorization theory, similarity/attraction theory, and information and decision-making theory (Pitts & Jarry, 2007).

Studies in the 1980s (Tajfel, 1982; Turner, 1987) identified process-oriented difficulties that prevented diverse groups from producing ideas or solutions of equal value with those produced by homogenous groups that did not experience similar process issues. As a group becomes more diverse, the complexity in communication, coordination, and cohesion increases and it becomes more difficult for members to work together effectively. Social identity theory (sometimes referred to as in-group/out-group dynamics) describes the need for individuals, when developing social identity, to compare themselves by gender, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, and organization to maintain high levels of self-esteem by deeming their group or category to be the “good” or “in” group. This behaviour accounts for what is otherwise known as

stereotyping others from out-groups. In diverse work groups, the theory would suggest that a pattern of heightened problems regarding trust, communication and cooperation will result. Work processes will be more cumbersome, thus causing the final product to be of lower quality—which implies a negative relationship between organizational diversity and performance.

A somewhat related stream of research, similarity/attraction theory, asserts that similarity in demographic attributes increases interpersonal attraction (Byrne, Clor & Worchel, 1966). Further research has shown that in situations where individuals can choose to interact with a variety of diverse people, they are most likely to select people similar to themselves (Burt & Reagans, 1997; Lincoln & Miller, 1979). This research also predicts that increased diversity in organizations negatively affects performance.

However, a different stream of research, referred to as information and decision-making theory, has demonstrated, specific to areas of information generation and decision making, that faulty process issues resulting from high levels of diversity can be overcome by benefits gained from increased creativity, ideas and knowledge (Gruenfeld, Mannix, Williams, & Neale, 1996; Tziner & Eden, 1985; Wittenbaum & Strasser, 1996). In situations where negative impacts on work processes exist (because of diversity in the work group), the increased information available to the group is enough to offset the process problems (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992; Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999; Zenger & Lawrence, 1989).

A number of other studies have produced positive relationships between ethnic diversity and organizational performance in work groups (Mullen & Cooper, 1994; O'Reilley, Williams, & Barsade, 1997; Watson, Kumar, & Michaelson, 1993). Watson,

Kumar, and Michaelson (1993) used management students in an academic setting to create diverse work groups that could be compared to homogenous ones. The diverse work groups were able to generate a wider range of perspectives and alternatives than the homogenous ones. McLeod and Lobel (1992) also created comparison groups among students to participate in brainstorming exercises. The diverse groups produced higher quality ideas, but not a larger number of ideas than the homogenous groups. Mullen and Cooper (1994) found that in-groups/out-groups change over the duration of a project based on task-specific requirements of the project.

Studies that have produced negative relationships between ethnic diversity and organizational performance have primarily focused on the use of individual performance evaluations as outcome indicators (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990; Lefkowitz, 1994; Sackett, Dubois, & Noe, 1991). Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley (1990) found a relationship between organizational diversity, lower organizational commitment, career satisfaction and perception of promotion likelihood. In a study by Tsui, Egan, and O'Reilly (1992), diverse members of organizational work teams or out-group members were less committed to the organization, absent more often and more likely to be looking for alternative employment.

Based on social identity theory and information and decision-making theory, Pitts and Jarry (2007) hypothesize that the more extensively diverse workers are required to collaborate to achieve an organizational outcome, the more likely it is that the creative benefits of the association will be outstripped and produce a negative diversity effect. Using three different measures of performance (overall student pass rate, student achievement test score percentages, and the school district's dropout rate) as dependent

variables, they tested the relationship between ethnic diversity and organizational performance in a large-n study that examines the effectiveness of diverse managers (low degrees of collaboration) and teachers (high degrees of collaboration). The results indicated that in relation to all three measures, the negative association between student performance and teacher diversity was statistically significant. The same result was consistently not the case with diverse managers. Pitts and Jarry (2007) conclude that, while their research does not definitively demonstrate an association between diversity and weak performance, they do believe it supports the literature, indicating that as complexity in collaboration and coordination in diverse work groups increase, performance may decrease.

The above literature regarding the impact of diversity on organizational performance suggests both positive and negative relationships between organizational diversity and performance. Degree of collaboration and coordination in position appears to impact performance in the very limited studies that appear in the literature. The more supportive side of this literature is drawn heavily upon as a rationale, and it forms much of the argument in the business case for the managing diversity perspective. This approach, along with other managerial approaches, has entered the public management field and become widely known as new public management approaches (Wilson & Iles, 1999).

Organizational variables and diverse employee experiences/effectiveness.

Organizational performance is also examined in the literature from the perspective of the affective experiences of diverse individuals in the workplace; studies have included examination of feelings of isolation and lack of identification in interpersonal

relationships within the organization (Chrobot-Mason, 2004; Ibarra, 1995; Jones & Schaubroeck, 2004; Mor Barak & Levin, 2001). Diverse workers were found to experience exclusion from networks of information and opportunity (Cox, 1994; R. Smith, 2002). Exclusion has been found to affect diverse employee motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, long-term commitment, and retention (Ensher, Grant-Vallone, & Donaldson, 2001; Foley, Hang-Yue, & Wong, 2005; Friedman & Holtom, 2002; Mor Barak, Findler, & Wind, 2003). In research done by Lawler (194), employee perceptions of acceptance by the organization are connected to the degree of satisfaction they report with their job and their level of commitment to the organization. Job satisfaction and organizational commitment have also been associated with absenteeism and organizational turnover rates (Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001).

Findler, Wind, and Mor Barak (2007) draw on social identity theory or in-group/out-group dynamics to describe how an organization relates to the diversity characteristics of employees through its organizational structure and culture. Focusing on research findings that stress the notion of inclusion, they maintain that being in the minority has significant impacts on diverse worker experiences of isolation in work groups and exclusion from support networks. Social support networks create instrumental resources key to employee performance and advancement. In the organizational context, they find, “the degree to which the desire to belong is accommodated by the organization can affect organizational outcomes as well, including employee well-being, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment” (p. 68). Findler et al. (2007) use a confirmatory analyses approach with a survey questionnaire and standardized scales to measure diversity, inclusion-exclusion, social support, stress, general well-being, job

satisfaction and organizational commitment as they are influenced by employee perceptions of fairness, inclusion and degree of social support. Their findings support a theory-based model that diverse employee performance is related to organizational structure and culture. Diverse employee perceptions of fairness, inclusion and degree of social support that corresponds with degree of stress, well-being, organizational commitment and job satisfaction are impacted by the degree to which the organizational structure and culture supports them.

The role of organizational structure and culture in enhancing diverse employee performance, although limited, is presented in the above studies. The literature supports the rationale that organizations may want to focus on and work toward developing inclusive, fair and supportive internal value systems and processes if they are interested in supporting diverse workers to be satisfied, high performers who are able to attain their goals within the organization.

This stream of research and literature emphasizes how organizational structure and culture can affect diverse employee performance. The managing diversity perspective, explored in the next section, has relied on some of this literature in exploring organizational development strategies. However, multicultural organizational development and social equity approaches focus more on organizational structural and culture change to disrupt power imbalances replicated within organizations that mirror societal oppression and inequality. These perspectives are discussed below.

Managing diversity perspective.

An examination of the main features of the managing diversity perspective, and how it has gained prominence in both the theoretical and organizational diversity field,

reveals links to the rise of managerialism in the public service in the past two to three decades (Wilson & Iles, 1999). Managerialism, also described as the new public management, concerns the adaptation of private-sector business, management, and organizational concepts and techniques into the public sector (Hood, 1991). Traditional Western bureaucracies, like those that exist in the US, UK, New Zealand, Australia and Canada, have all experienced shifts in public service policies and practice since the late 1970s that reflect a shift from an administrative to a managerial culture (Hood, 1991; Kernaghan, Marson, & Borins, 2000; Thomson, 1992; Wilson & Iles, 1999).

Managerialism for public organizations translates to more focus on increased resource accountability through delegated budgets and service-level agreements, monitoring and measuring, quality assurance, decentralization, innovation and shaping the culture of the organization into one that promotes high performance (Kernaghan et al., 2000; Wilson & Iles, 1999).

The managing diversity perspective emerged in the writing of R. Thomas (1990) as supplementary to equal opportunity approaches like affirmative action and equal employment legislation in the United States. Relying heavily on literature and research that supports a positive relationship between organizational diversity and increased organizational performance, the managing diversity perspective relies on making a business case that promotes organizational diversity which will, in turn, increase productivity through increased creativity, innovation, recruitment, retention, promotion and focused marketing (R. Thomas, 1990; Wilson & Iles, 1999). Managing diversity is an organizational development approach that is strategic in terms of taking a situation where diversity in the workplace (which is often viewed as problematic or a potential for

conflict), is reframed as an asset that can positively impact organizational outcomes (R. Thomas, 1990).

Decreased conflict, stress, enhanced productivity, improved morale, job satisfaction and employee retention are all expected benefits of a managing diversity approach (Agocs & Burr, 1996). These organizational objectives are believed to be achievable primarily through employee awareness programs promoted by organizational leadership regarding diversity awareness, developing empathy and understanding of difference, and individual attitudinal change, often through experiential exercises that involve examining racial and/or sex role stereotyping. All individuals are viewed as diverse and encouraged to value diversity in others; therefore, all views are valued within the organization. The benefits of the managing diversity perspective are that, in contrast to the employment equity perspective, differences go beyond colour, gender, ethnicity, ability, and age to include class, sexuality, and work style.

In terms of values, it is the mainstream approach that is challenged, and acceptance of the differences of diverse individuals is an integral part of the belief system of the managing diversity perspective (Wilson & Iles, 1999). However, Agocs and Burr (1996) caution that discrepancies often occur between the theoretical literature and actual organizational interventions within organizational change programs. With the managing diversity perspective, the aspect that seems to be stressed in practice is diversity awareness programs for staff; what is missed is actual change to the organization's philosophy, culture, structure, policies, and procedures. External consultants are often brought in to deliver diversity training to volunteer participants, and sometimes larger organizations have internal trainers deliver packaged training programs (Agocs & Burr,

1996). This approach to training is focused on middle managers, supervisors and frontline staff. Some benefits may include improved communication / human relations skills resulting in bottom-line benefits. However, these benefits are largely inadequate for shifting organizational routines and power structures. Without a deeper organizational approach to promoting diversity, the single-pronged training approach is inadequate to create any real or systemic change.

An additional critique of the managing diversity approach is that it can lead to an uneasy denial of real or significant differences which may be beneficial to dominant groups within organizations (Wilson & Iles, 1999). Any structural changes within the organization, if they are to occur, do not acknowledge real power differences that exist due to social or group inequality. For example, in terms of organizational culture, sanctioned change would likely relate to improved communication regarding an inclusive understanding of diversity within the organization, but may not involve questioning existing power structures within the organization that likely continue to reflect mainstream groups. Within the managing diversity perspective, the ethos of managerialism, framed by the goals of organizational outcomes, dictates the prevailing values of an organization's culture. Diversity is a strategy and something of an add-on within the organization's overall goals. In terms of collective groups of individuals that may be attempting to build capacity within public organizations to better serve their own communities, the managing diversity perspective would merely view these groups as a commodity within the organization, not as having a more primary responsibility and inherent value to their community (Jones, Pringle, & Shepherd, 2000).

Multicultural organizational development, social equity, and anti-oppressive organizational perspectives.

Organizational development strategies, wherein the managing diversity perspective lies, are rooted in assumptions of change that are simultaneously concerned with the full use of human resources while increasing organizational efficiency or profitability. As such, the pursuit of individual goals, diverse individual goals, and organizational goals is seen to be met with minimal conflict—the human relations perspective that reflects a rational-empirical, consensus model of organizations (Bolman & Deal, 1984). While competing views exist in the field, some theorists and practitioners advance a view and practice more in line with a conflict model of organizations in the area of diversity. Prior to the arrival of what is known as multicultural organizational development (MCOB), other literature rarely dealt with collective social, class, racial, or gender issues (Chesler, 1994).

In contrast to the managing diversity perspective, MCOB appears to advocate for a social justice agenda, within a conflict perspective, that sees societal racial and social oppression replicated and supported in organizations (Chesler, 1994). MCOB approaches are anti-oppressive, not merely accepting or affirming difference but seeking reductions in patterns of oppression in organizations (Chesler, 1994; Hardiman & Jackson, 1994). The focal point of MCOB therefore challenges the culture and structure of mainstream power groups within institutions and organizations. Proponents of MCOB argue that power is seldom shared or given away in the absence of challenge or pressure (Chesler, 1994). If power is to shift, it is necessarily taken, and so, critical within MCOB “is the development of new sources of power among formerly oppressed and disempowered

organizational members” (p. 245). The difference between the managing diversity approach and MCOB is the former’s emphasis on communication and trust and the latter’s on power and pressure. The degree to which power relations and the status quo are shifted is quite different in the two approaches.

Chesler (1994) argues that organizational development strategies like managing diversity, (that are based on trust and communication), are only effective in situations of relatively equal power. In situations where inequity exists, they often result in rhetoric, tokenism, co-optation and empty agreements for change that never take place. Conversely, conflict tactics have the ability to bring repressed issues to the surface rather than allowing them to remain as ongoing impediments to process, and they provide a framework around which to focus real and meaningful organizational attention. Integral, however, is a plan backed by sufficient power and support. Sustained pressure may be necessary for sustained change. MCOB also assumes that strong self-interest in maintaining power and privilege within the mainstream hierarchy exists such that change will not occur without struggle and conflict. Power sharing is often redefined by managers as participatory management or employee involvement. With the organization conceived of as a political system, MCOB acknowledges a constant negotiation among competing interest groups within the organization. There is evidence that major stakeholders in US organizations resist the approach, seeking to defend racial and gender privilege, especially when challenged (Chesler, 1994).

Chesler (1994) and Hardiman and Jackson (1994) outline MCOB tactics to include the following: education of the mainstream managerial elite in an effort to reduce bias and increase awareness; development and mobilization of leadership within

oppressed groups of employees and formation of interest groups; change in human resource and personnel policies and programs to better meet diverse employee needs; transformation of organizational values through mission statements, symbols, myths, and norms; alteration of reward systems to reinforce managers for behaviour in relation to issues of oppression; creation of cross-group or status coalitions; negotiated decision making and interest-based bargaining as ways to utilize conflict productively; generation of power with which to influence, threaten, or coerce necessary change processes, including the use of pressure and threats, whistle blowing, protests, and external agents; and, multicultural forms of conflict resolution and dispute settlement (Chesler, 1994).

Multicultural human service organizations (MCHSOs), as characterized by Nagda and Gutierrez (2000), build on the intraorganizational development work of MCOOD but add a socially just and fair service outcome dimension for identified diverse groups and communities served by human service organizations. While MCOOD attempts to create a socially equitable climate for employees within the organization, MCHSO focuses on empowerment practices committed to eliminating social oppression for clients and society at large. Workplace conditions are modelled on a multicultural ideology and goals, while the potential for conflict among employees as a result of identity-based differences is recognized and accepted. Conflict is used to enhance intergroup understanding and process. The organization's internal and external diversity practices are tightly coupled. MCHSOs are learning organizations that continually reflect on processes, structures, policies, practices, membership and interconnectedness to help create and support nurturing and sustaining communities within the organization, in diverse client communities and in the larger society. Workers are encouraged to be in

constant action and reflection about their internal and external practice, with particular focus on social and cultural differences. The word *praxis* is relied on to describe the interplay or circular relationship between experience and reflection through which new insight is achieved.

Rice (2005) examines social equity in public administration in the context of the postmodern era as necessarily connected to how well government organizations can implement diversity perspectives that address social fairness in service delivery outcomes and public policy implementation. Drawing a connection between the organization's culture and its ability to promote a multicultural and socially equitable internal climate that promotes and sustains diversity among its workforce, a further linkage and connection is made to social equity in the external environment through service delivery outcomes. Public service pursuit of social equity in outcomes means that traditional bureaucratic notions of value-neutral orientation must be abandoned, and there is a moral obligation to provide a higher quantity and quality of services to those who need them most (Frederickson, 1990; Rice, 2005). Program evaluation criteria are focused on how well programs enhance fairness, justice and equity in outcomes. Svava and Brunet (2004) suggest that social equity in public organizations should take four criteria into account: procedural fairness, access, quality, and equitable outcomes.

Social equity models in public organizations that have proactive organizational diversity strategies have values embedded in the organizational culture around social equity that can be more effectively promoted at the service delivery level (Rice, 2005). Social equity approaches focus on equitable organizational outcomes for diverse groups of people, but they also emphasize and draw together different aspects of organizational

diversity required to achieve positive outcomes. Recruitment and retention of diverse workers is based on appealing to and affirming internalized values within diverse people to contribute to equitable outcomes within their own and other diverse groups.

Addressing internal organizational diversity processes is aimed at deep organizational structure and culture change within public organizations, rather than simply at internal processes designed to extract the creativity or potential of diverse workers to achieve productivity, which may or may not be tied to positive outcomes for diverse groups of people.

Public organizations have not been strongly involved in promoting social equity with service delivery outcomes in these types of models because they often involve citizen engagement and participation models (Rice, 2005). Other barriers to public organizations implementing social equity models are significant. Management style within bureaucracies tends to be “top down” with a high degree of control and low communication. Decision-making processes are generally centralized and procedurally oriented with high degrees of conformity. These collective characteristics render the public organization ill equipped to respond to change initiated by the external environment.

Analysis of diversity perspectives in relation to research and practice.

Clearly, current literature and research provide different levels, stages and approaches of analysis when considering the relationship between diversity individual employees, organizations and diverse community interests. Critical links appear with how internal organizational processes are considered as focal points for intervention and support and the assumptions that are made about what is normative and desirable in terms

of the culture of organizations. Representative bureaucracy, in passive or active forms, and managing diversity perspectives frame diversity from a rational-empirical consensus model orientation that potentially fails to acknowledge inherent societal power imbalances replicated and reproduced within organizational and institutional structures. As such, the internal organizational processes that each perspective targets tend to be on an individual or small group level, intended to create change in individuals within the organization, rather than on a structural or cultural level.

Representative bureaucracy focuses on research that identifies the characteristics of diverse individuals which enable them to more effectively achieve active forms of representation on behalf of diverse groups in the context and constraints of a bureaucratic environment that implicitly values and reflects mainstream culture. The degree of administrative discretion they are able to achieve through individual attitude, degree of preorganizational socialization, administrative characteristics, political orientation and years of experience are examples of the types of research actively examined in this area. These types of variables indicate which diverse individuals are best positioned to advocate for diverse groups within traditional public service organizations.

The managing diversity perspective similarly focuses on organizational productivity and performance gains through creativity and decision making to justify internal diversity programs within organizations that are primarily focused on diversity awareness/training programs. While mainstream values are challenged and the acceptance and valuing of diversity is encouraged, the managing diversity perspective does not effectively challenge social inequity and power differences. Its primary focus appears to be improving employee interpersonal communication and relations in a non-

conflict approach to create a climate where the benefits of mutual respect and creativity, through cooperation and collaboration, can be enjoyed by the employees and the organization. A culture that commits the resources of both the workers and the organization to productive outcomes for the organization appears to be the primary goal. The capacity exists to link performance and culture, but since the managing diversity perspective fails to acknowledge power imbalance and social equity issues in organizational outcomes, this linkage does not occur.

The dynamic nature of the relationships among internal organizational processes is complex. However, their interplay becomes important when the diversity approach taken is concerned with how an organization's structure and culture are impacting areas of diverse employee performance like social support, communication, access to information, experiences of conflict, ability to surface and address conflict, level of trust with colleagues and management, role power, advancement, stress, motivation, access to information, expression of diverse and creative ideas, and so on. When considering the importance of these relationships, it becomes clear that there is immense potential for research and inquiry in the area of diversity in organizations. However, the diversity perspectives that are clearly concerned with identifying organizational structure and culture as the focal points for intervention are far less explored in the public service and organizations in general at this point.

MCOD, MCHSO, and social equity perspectives reflect an anti-oppressive lens that seeks to address reductions in patterns of oppression in organizations. All identify organizational structure and culture change as essential to a redistribution of power, fairness, and equity within organizations. MCHSO and social equity approaches have the

added element of connecting internal diversity performance to achieving enhanced and equitable service outcomes for diverse groups of service recipients. A focus on these approaches appears to have great potential for further learning with regard to how diverse employees' internalized values and mission impact their experiences within provincial child welfare organizations. Table 2.1 provides a summary of the relevant literature on organizational diversity approaches.

Summary of literature on organizational diversity.

The broad range of literature that informs this study is primarily exploratory and descriptive in nature, leaving further room for inquiry. There appears to be a beginning study focus on the variables in organizations that contribute to a fit or lack of fit for Aboriginal employees and, ultimately, better outcomes for Aboriginal children, youth, families, and communities. However, there appears to be a minimum of in-depth inquiry into culture (or values and beliefs), internal organizational variables and external influences on the organization that support and motivate Aboriginal employees and the organization to provide better service outcomes for Aboriginal children, youth, families, and communities. The various diversity approaches reflect theoretical and philosophical differences that impact the targeted levels of change and activities undertaken within organizations, with the result of different organizational and service outcomes. Table 2.1 below provides an overview and comparison of these differences among the various diversity approaches.

While the literature reviewed in this section provides some useful concepts and approaches, it does not directly focus on the proposed area of study: to explore the tensions and challenges for Aboriginal social workers who work in the challenging

context of a provincial child welfare organization and how the organization may or may not support them in their roles. The next chapter provides an overview of the external organizational context within which Aboriginal employees seek support from MCFD to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities.

Table 2.1 Summary of literature on organizational diversity.

Streams of Literature	Level of Change	Recommended Actions	Implications for Organizational Change
Representative bureaucracy/ employment equity	Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on recruitment strategies • Institute affirmative action • Enact equal opportunity legislation/policy • Train diverse employees to advance within mainstream organization • Individual-level advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual-level advocacy for diverse groups or group members • Individual-level characteristics of diverse employees / service streams stressed within a mainstream organizational culture
Organizational diversity variables impacting creativity, performance and culture	Individual and organizational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on internal organizational variables that impact innovation, creativity, performance, and diversity • Focus on problem solving, decision-making processes, leadership style, organizational structure, power, roles, inclusion, stress, social support, communication, conflict, motivation, equity/equality, reconciliation processes, values, norms, meanings, beliefs, myths • Focus on developing inclusive, fair, and supportive internal value systems and processes 	<p>Organization change that depends on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approaches to diversity—whether focus is on an individual, organizational, or systemic level • Organizational variables that impact diverse worker satisfaction/effectiveness • The depth of the change process • Level of organizational support • Diversity in organizations has been shown to have both positive and negative relationships with organizational performance. • Diverse workers are able to achieve high levels of performance when goals of the organization are consistent with their own.
Managing diversity perspective	Individual and organizational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on managerial culture, which includes focus on delegated budgets, decentralization, human relations approach, quality assurance, and innovation • Business case: Shape the organizational culture to promote high performance • Promote research that supports a positive relationship between diversity and increased organizational performance • Focus on communication and trust within the organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved communication / human relations skills • Decreased conflict, stress, enhanced productivity, improved morale, job satisfaction, and employee retention are expected benefits • Desired organizational outcomes—increased output • Structural changes do not acknowledge real power differences that exist due to inequality

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value and accept diversity in all employees • Create diversity awareness programs • Engage external consultants • Organizational outcomes dictate prevailing values within the culture of the organization 	
Multicultural organizational development	Organizational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge power imbalances in organizations • Assumes strong self-interest in organizations in maintaining power and privilege • Challenge existing culture and structure of mainstream power groups within institutions and organizations • Develop new sources of power among disempowered organizational members • Use conflict tactics to surface issues that impede process • Educate executive to reduce bias and increase awareness • Develop and mobilize leadership among oppressed employee groups—interest groups • Alter reward systems to reinforce managers to shift behaviour in relation to oppression • Negotiate decision making and interest-based bargaining as ways of utilizing conflict productively • Influence, threaten, or coerce necessary change processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek reduction in patterns of oppression in organizations • Transform organization values through mission statements, symbols, myths, and norms.

<p>Multicultural human service organizations and social equity approaches</p>	<p>Organizational and systemic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive of all actions of MCOB • Deep organizational structure and culture change modelled on multicultural ideology and goals • Embed values at the service level in the organization that reflect social equity • Recognize and surface conflict to enhance intergroup understanding and process • Couple internal and external diversity practices • Organizational learning approach—reflect on processes, structures, policies, practices, membership and interconnectedness • Engage in constant action and reflection about internal and external practice focusing on social and cultural differences • Connect social equity to service outcomes • Recruit and retain diverse workers by appealing to and affirming internalized values that reflect equitable outcomes for their own and other diverse groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socially just and fair service outcomes for employees, diverse individuals, groups, and communities served by the organization. • Eliminate social oppression for clients and society at large. • Obligation to provide higher quantity and quality of services to those who need them most. • Social equity in the organization reflects procedural fairness, access to services, quality and equitable outcomes (Svara & Brunet, 2004).
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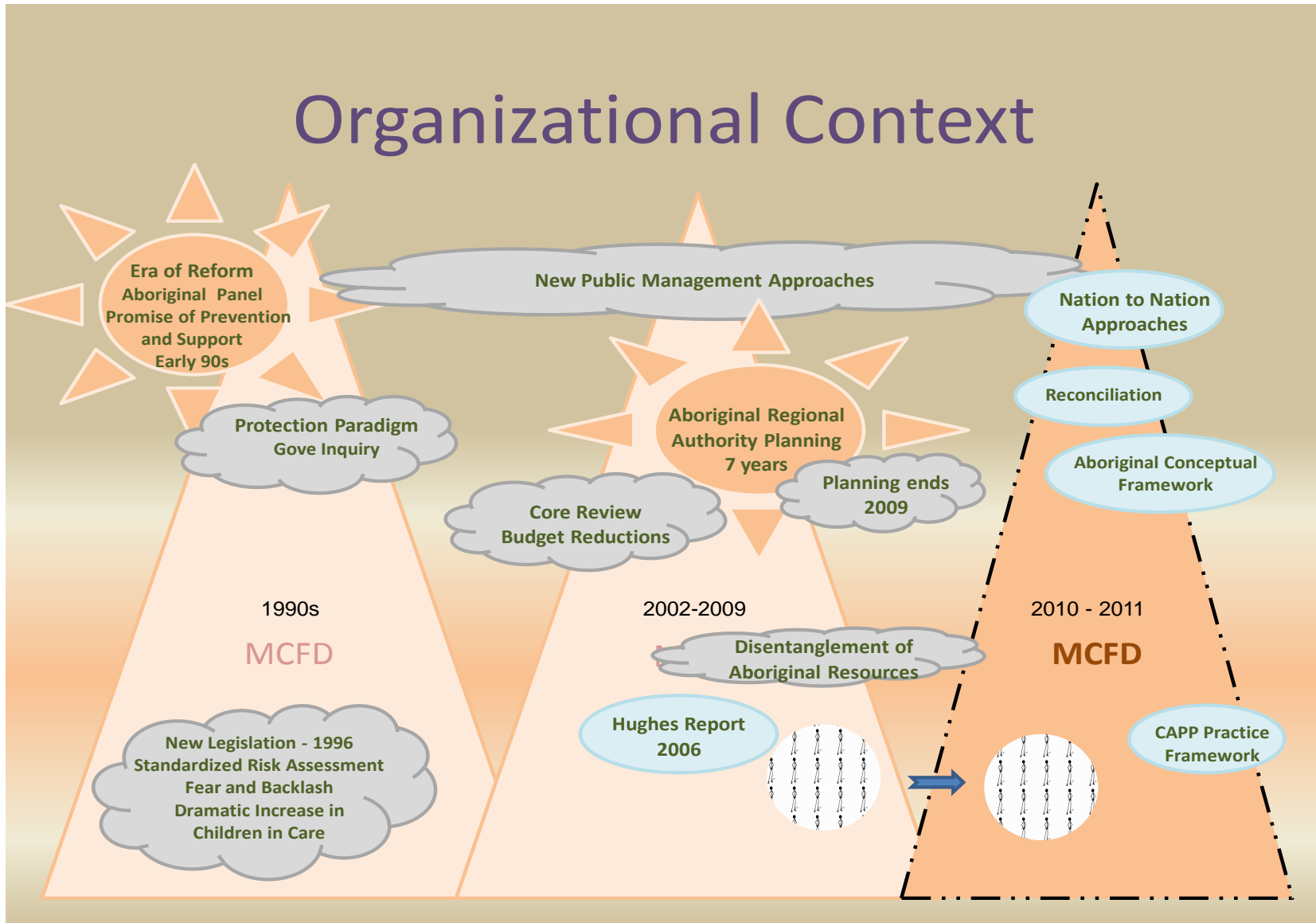
Chapter 3. MCFD Organizational Context: Aboriginal Services 1990s to Present

This profile of the Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD) examines the context in which the Ministry provides children's services, and specifically how it has attempted to address the diverse and contested needs of Aboriginal children and families in British Columbia given the history and the internal and external environment it operates within. The profile contains a description of the Ministry strategic Aboriginal plans—from 1999, 2010 when the research interviews were conducted, and the most current plan—analyzed in relation to the various external professional, political, and economic influences on the Ministry, and its capacity to deliver effective Aboriginal services since 1990.

There has been considerable Aboriginal community pressure and demand for improvements in service for the past 40 years influencing the delivery of Aboriginal children's services in BC. These services were provided by the Ministry of Social Services during the late 1980s and early 1990s and through the newly formed Ministry of Children and Families (later renamed Ministry of Children and Family Development) in the late 1990s. MCFD brought together a number of services for children (child safety and guardianship, adoption, youth justice, mental health, early childhood and childcare services) that had previously been delivered by several different ministries.

The visual map in Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the organizational context, examining the external pressures that have shaped and influenced organizational responses since the 1990s.

Figure 3.1 Overview of MCFD organizational context.



The 1990s Era of Reform

Community panels: The promise of prevention and support in new legislation.

In 1991, under the direction of the New Democratic Party of BC, two external community panels, one Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal, were convened with the intent of informing a long-overdue review of child welfare legislation (Hern & Cossom, 2007). After intensive community consultation, the Aboriginal community panel released the report *Liberating Our Children, Liberating Our Nations* in 1992 (Aboriginal Committee of the Community Panel). The report's recommendations for system and legislative change are summarized as follows:

1. Transition to inherent Aboriginal child welfare jurisdiction.
2. Expansion of interim Aboriginal Child and Family Services with responsibility for provincial legislation.
3. The development of Aboriginal justice and/or decision making alternatives to provincial family courts.
4. Guaranteed ongoing government financial support to Aboriginal communities to provide comparable services.
5. Legislated availability of preventative family services to avoid child removal.
6. Development of culturally appropriate standards.
7. Recognition of the primacy of Aboriginal birth parents and/or extended family/community as caregivers.
8. Provision of information to, and inclusion of, the First Nation or Aboriginal community with respect to removal or guardianship decisions for children.
9. Differentiation between children in immediate danger and children in situations where families may benefit from support services rather than child removal.
10. Mediation available to families within seven days where child removal occurs.
11. Consideration of all extended family members of an Aboriginal child in care as approved foster facilities unless there are reasons why it is not appropriate. (Hern & Cossom, 2007)

The panels' protracted process, combined with a number of intervening events, meant its intended influence on the new *Child, Family, and Community Services Act* passed in 1996 was less evident than was originally anticipated. Hern and Cossom (2007) argue that, during the two-year period of 1991 to 1992, the "pendulum swung once again between protecting children and supporting families, with the oscillation moving hard to the support-prevention side" (p. 137).

The long-divided debate that polarizes efforts to protect children versus the provision of prevention and support services was playing out for decades prior, and the Aboriginal community eagerly anticipated that family support and prevention would prevail and would result in implementation of the recommendations of the Aboriginal community panel, either through legislation or through system change. The delegation model, which enables Aboriginal child and family service agencies to deliver services under provincial legislation, was implemented in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It was then—and continues to be—considered by the Aboriginal community as less than ideal and only an interim measure to First Nation and Aboriginal autonomy over children's services (Kovach, Thomas, Montgomery, Green, & Brown, 2007).

The Gove inquiry and the shift to a child protection paradigm.

The anticipated shift to family support and prevention never occurred, and the system swung back to the child protection paradigm in the remaining years of the 1990s decade. A key event that contributed to this shift was the outcome of the 1994 appointment of Judge Thomas Gove to conduct a public inquiry into the death of a child in care, Matthew Vaudreuil, to inform system reform for child protection in BC (Armitage & Murray, 2007; Callahan & Swift, 2007; Walmsley, 2005). This inquiry was initiated just as the new provincial legislation was being introduced in the legislature. The draft of the legislation represented a major shift by expanding the provision of child welfare services beyond child protection to include provisions for family support and family involvement in child welfare (Callahan & Swift, 2007). It also included some but certainly not all, of the recommendations of the Aboriginal community panel. Regardless, the legislation as drafted did not pass.

Standardized risk assessment.

Emerging after intense and ongoing public and media exposure and focus on the Ministry's practices, Gove released an interim report in March 1995 that led to changes in the new legislation to ensure child safety, not family support, as the prevailing and foremost concern (Callahan & Swift, 2007). Gove's final report included specific recommendations to introduce a system-wide risk assessment tool when investigating child protection reports, as well as specialized training for social workers to conduct risk assessments. Gove acknowledged the danger of using standardized assessments as a replacement for social worker skill and judgment, but in despite this risk, the Ministry reacted quickly by adopting as a top priority the adoption and implementation of standardized risk assessment (Callahan & Swift, 2007; Walmsley, 2005). Because risk assessment tools are based on predicting the likelihood of future harm to a child and are strongly based on caregivers' past behaviours, there is a strong argument that they are biased against cultural groups like Aboriginal people, already overly involved and impacted by the child welfare system (Callahan & Swift, 2007). The past history of system involvement, combined with the prevalence of poverty, substance abuse, and other social functioning challenges resulting from colonization, means that Aboriginal children emerge from these assessments consistently indicating they are at a higher likelihood of future harm than other children.

Ministry fear and backlash result in a dramatic increase in children in care.

Strong internal Ministry messaging, which Walmsley (2005) argues was based to a large extent on the degree to which the Gove report held individual social workers and administrators responsible for the casework decisions that led to Matthew Vaudreuil's death, resulted in many social workers adopting a risk-averse "cover your ass" practice that erred on the side of child safety (p. 53). In his study of MCFD child protection workers, Walmsley concluded from their

responses that a zero-tolerance mentality around children's deaths resulted in a huge increase in the number of children who were removed and brought into care, with one of the study participants coining the expression "when in doubt, take them out" (p. 53). The implementation of oversight authorities such as the Office of the Child, Youth, and Family Advocate in 1994, Ministry quality assurance approaches as recommended in the Gove report, and intense media scrutiny also contributed to the pressure Ministry workers experienced to err on the side of removing children. This tragic surge in the number of children in care, which went from 6,200 in 1993–94 to 9,523 in 1999–2000, reflects the result that by the end of the 1990s era of reform, child safety had become the prevailing approach within the Ministry. For Aboriginal children, these numbers were more devastating. By the mid-1990s, Aboriginal children represented approximately 31% of children in care; this number reached 37% in 2000, 50% in 2006, and in 2010, 56% of all children in care in BC were Aboriginal (Callahan & Swift, 2007; Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2009).

New public management influences.

Callahan and Swift (2007) contend that the 1990s era of child welfare in BC was closely linked to the rise of new public management or managerial approaches in the public sector. They assert that intended advances in professional practices as advanced through the Gove inquiry were not accomplished. While risk assessment eroded professional practice, it paradoxically strengthened managerial approaches to child welfare in BC. During the rise of these neoliberal ideals in the 1990s, which was characterized in Canada by reduced federal social spending transfers to the provinces, the provincial government was forced to find ways to narrow its mandate and reduce expenditures for the provision of social services. One strategy was the implementation of the risk assessment tool which ostensibly made it possible to predict which

parents were most likely to harm children in the future. This narrowed or restricted the number of service recipients which were then provided services intended to prevent future maltreatment of children. The consequences for Aboriginal people are a cultural bias inherent in standardized risk assessment tools, which means they are targeted and over represented in the limited service recipient group to an even higher extent than they were over the past 50 years. The standardized risk assessment model was used in BC until 2012, when it was replaced by a new set of structured decision-making (SDM) tools that use a modified actuarially based safety assessment. Whether this new approach to decision making will continue to cause Aboriginal children to be overrepresented in the system is unknown.

The New Millennium

Promise of Aboriginal regional authorities: Liberal government and core review.

After it became clear that the 1990s reforms had resulted in an alarming rise in the number of children in care, concern grew that resources were being directed away from family support to pay the rising costs associated with children in care (Foster, 2007). In 2001, a new BC Liberal government came into office, and it appeared clear to them that the seemingly endless restructuring that occurred as a result of the development of the new Ministry also drained limited resources—and had to stop. In a manner consistent with managerial or new public management approaches, the Ministry undertook a core review of its programs and services. The review recommended renewed focus on early intervention, special needs, and family support services as well as improving care and services for the large number of children in care. Some of the family support and family engagement features of the draft 1996 legislation that were not included were introduced into the amended CFCSA legislation. A key feature of the core review

was the systemic restructuring of Ministry governance to five regional authorities that mirrored the provincial health authorities.

System improvements or budget reductions?

All of the recommendations of the core review were to occur as the BC Liberals aimed to dramatically reduce budget expenditures across government (Foster, 2007). A projected three-year budget for the Ministry in 2002 indicated budget reductions of 23% overall and 30% for child and family programming. Budgets in other ministries that provide supportive and preventive social programming to children and families were similarly reduced. Ministry leadership proposed a number of cost-cutting managerial approaches to the children in care population: reducing the number of children in care by encouraging the placement of children with extended family; increasing the number of adoptions; reducing costly group and residential treatment placements for children; and reducing other costs associated with children in care. The proposed changes within the core review, alongside the proposed budget reductions, were met with broad skepticism within the Ministry and across the social service community and education sector. Within one year, the number of children in care came down from a high of 10,775 to 9,603 by 2003. However, the proportion of Aboriginal children in care continued to increase.

Momentum to create Aboriginal regional authorities.

The Aboriginal community, in response to the core review recommendation to create community-based regional authorities, rallied for Aboriginal control of a separate stream of Aboriginal child welfare regional authorities (Foster, 2007). What has become known as the Tsawwassen Accord, an agreement made between Aboriginal and First Nations political groups and Ministry executive staff in 2002, launched a parallel stream of planning for five Aboriginal

child welfare regional authorities intended to place governance of service provision within a collective independent Aboriginal (First Nations, urban Aboriginal, and Métis) community regional framework (Kovach et al., 2007).

The Tsawwassen Accord was supported by four diverse First Nations, Aboriginal, and Métis political groups in BC, making it a historic occurrence where diverse interests were set aside in favour of establishing a separate stream of Aboriginal child welfare services under the control of the Aboriginal community (Kovach et al., 2007). Regional Aboriginal planning committees were supported by the Ministry to engage with local communities to guide the process of developing the five Aboriginal authorities across the province. However, in March 2004, the minister for MCFD announced the postponement of the establishment of regional authorities. The non-Aboriginal stream was disbanded while the Aboriginal planning committees were to continue with significantly reduced funding—cut by two-thirds. The reduced funding, combined with a move away from engaging local Aboriginal community direction for planning, raises questions, contend Kovach and colleagues (2007), about the sincerity of the Ministry and government to establish the authorities. The planning did continue, however, with the development of a governance structure that reflected a Crown corporation relationship whereby the Aboriginal regional authorities would deliver services under the continued mandate of provincial legislation and policy. In 2008, the day the legislation was to be introduced into the legislature, a number of First Nations leaders opposed both the legislation and regional authority model, stating that their communities had not been appropriately engaged in the planning and development processes. The limited governance structure that was developed for the Aboriginal regional authorities did not satisfy the aspirations of many First Nations leaders (many of whom

were already involved in the BC treaty process), who preferred to pursue other, individualized avenues to gain First Nations jurisdiction and control of services for their communities.

Disentangling Ministry resources for transfer to the Aboriginal regional authorities.

During the six-year period in which the Aboriginal regional planning authorities were moving toward the transfer of services, the five Ministry regions (still under centralized authority) were analyzing and disentangling the direct and contracted services they were responsible for delivering to Aboriginal people. Several regions (the Interior, Vancouver Island, and Fraser Valley) engaged in workload analysis of frontline teams to create newly formed Aboriginal service teams that were to be directly transferred to the Aboriginal regional authorities once they became operational. Analysis of existing service provider contracts was undertaken to determine what percentage of the resources would transfer to the Aboriginal regional authorities. MCFD was in a process of devolving services to the Aboriginal regional authorities and, rather than making efforts to improve internal Aboriginal service approaches, was anticipating the divestment of the delivery of all Aboriginal services. In essence, the MCFD Aboriginal service improvement plan for the seven-year period culminating in 2008 was the transfer of services to the Aboriginal community governance structures. When this transfer failed, the Ministry, in a conciliatory effort perhaps to curtail the ensuing political fallout, negotiated a number of “Nation to Nation” agreements with individual First Nations and Métis political bodies and communities in BC. These community development contracts had as their goal Aboriginal community exploration of alternative jurisdiction for the provision of child welfare services. At the time of the study, this was the direction within the Ministry in pursuing Aboriginal service improvements through alternative jurisdiction.

MCFD Aboriginal Strategic Planning

MCFD strategic planning over the past 20 years reflects the direction and external pressures the Ministry was experiencing from the First Nations, Aboriginal, and Métis communities in BC. Highly arguable is the degree of success the Ministry has ever had implementing strategic plans for Aboriginal services. Table 3.1 below outlines the goals, priorities, outcomes, guiding principles, key actions, context, and key influences that preceded analysis of strategic planning efforts within the Ministry against the backdrop of external and internal influences through these years.

The *Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Services—1999* reflects a Ministry focus at the time of increasing internal capacity to design and deliver improved services guided by Aboriginal people, increasing Aboriginal community capacity to deliver services, improving Ministry and Aboriginal community relationships, and improving the coordination of provincial and federal jurisdiction and obligation for Aboriginal services (Government of British Columbia, 1999). Key actions included strategies to expand availability and accessibility of services; cultural awareness training for Ministry staff; recruitment and retention of Aboriginal staff through development of cultural awareness approaches with contracted and delegated agencies to hire, train, and support Aboriginal staff; reconciliation efforts; collaborative policy agenda with four Aboriginal policy tables (Aboriginal political organizations); and community capacity building and partnership to build for future CFCSA delegation options.

Table 3.1 Analysis and comparison: MCFD strategic Aboriginal service plans 1999–2013.

Ministry Aboriginal Strategic Plans	Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Services (1999)	Strong, Safe, & Supported Pillar 4: The Aboriginal Approach (2007–2012)	Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff (2010)	Aboriginal Service Improvement Plan (MCFD Operational and Strategic Plan) (2012/13–2014/15)
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase Aboriginal community capacity to develop and deliver services • Increase Ministry capacity to deliver appropriate Aboriginal services • Coordinate provincial jurisdiction and federal obligations for Aboriginal services • Cross-government advocacy to support viable Aboriginal capacity for health and wellness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support Aboriginal people to exercise jurisdiction in delivering child and family services • Provide Aboriginal children, youth, and families with access to a full range of equivalent, effective services that reflect and support Aboriginal cultures and traditions • Ensure that jurisdictional issues do not interfere with services to any child in need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that Aboriginal children and youth live in strong, healthy families and sustainable communities where they are connected to their culture and traditions • Respect and support the dignity, survival, and well-being of Aboriginal people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve measurable service improvements and improved outcomes for Aboriginal children, youth, and families accessing MCFD services • Strengthen and support practice of DAAs and community partners parallel to strengthening MCFD practice with the goal of creating a joint service system for vulnerable Aboriginal children, youth, and families • Focus on community development, prevention, and early intervention
Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve working relationships with Aboriginal communities • Improve Aboriginal community capacity to deliver services • Improve service to Aboriginal clients • Coordinate efforts across government to support Aboriginal services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that Aboriginal children, youth, and families receive services through an Aboriginal service system that strongly connects children and youth to their culture and tradition • Support Aboriginal communities to develop and deliver models of service intervention • Support the development of Aboriginal regional authorities to administer child and family services • Support Aboriginal leaders' efforts to engage the federal government around the development of healthy First Nations communities • Aboriginal service delivery will result in improved outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships • Recognition and reconciliation • Socioeconomic gaps • Financial barriers and budget restraints • Systemic barriers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve service excellence in partnership with Aboriginal communities for Aboriginal children, youth, families across all six service lines by increasing value of services • DAAs achieve operational excellence through use of available resources • Pursue continuous learning and growth to improve services based on an engaged, skilled, well-informed, and well-led workforce
Outcomes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal people are delivering services to their children, youth, and families • Decrease in Aboriginal children and youth coming into care • Increase in the number of Aboriginal children in care who have positive developmental outcomes • Decrease in # of Aboriginal youth 		<p>Work with community partners to clarify outcomes and measure of success for Aboriginal children, youth, and families</p>

Ministry Aboriginal Strategic Plans	Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Services (1999)	Strong, Safe, & Supported Pillar 4: The Aboriginal Approach (2007–2012)	Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff (2010)	Aboriginal Service Improvement Plan (MCFD Operational and Strategic Plan) (2012/13–2014/15)
		who attempt or commit suicide		
Guiding Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledgement of the impacts of provincial child welfare system and other systemic impacts (e.g., poverty) on Aboriginal communities The need to hear the voices and experiences of Aboriginal people in service design and delivery The need to create effective and culturally appropriate services in partnership and through holistic and collaborative approaches Acknowledgement of disproportionate representation of Aboriginal children in child welfare system Direct input from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> First Nations Summit Union of BC Indian Chiefs Métis Provincial Council of BC Aboriginal Peoples Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cross-government New Relationship founded on principles of respect, recognition, reconciliation Effective CFS policy and practice reflect traditional practice All work with Aboriginal children and youth needs to facilitate and enhance attachment to culture and community Self-determination and inherent jurisdiction of First Nations people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aboriginal people are disproportionately represented in the social service system High percentage of Aboriginal children in care Health and well-being of Aboriginal people lower Inequality exists in access to Ministry resources and access to comparable services Past practices (residential schools, Sixties Scoop, and discrimination) have highly negative impact on well-being of Aboriginal communities—strong reconciliation needed from Ministry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening the service systems Incremental service change driven by change/development in the broader political and legal environment Change in service delivery systems, community development initiatives, guided by First Nations, urban Aboriginal, and Métis people Ensure services are developed and delivered in a manner that resonates with the vision and aspirations of First Nations, urban Aboriginal and Métis people Build effective partnerships with First Nations, urban Aboriginal, Métis, treaty nations, and community leaders
Key Actions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies to expand availability and accessibility of services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enact delegation enabling agreements Develop protocol agreements, defining working roles and relationships, with local Aboriginal communities Redirect services to increase accessibility and number of Aboriginal direct service contractors Work with federal government, through policy and corporate branches, to reduce bureaucratic approaches Aboriginal training strategy to support enhanced participation in implementing CFCSA and Adoption Act: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create working group for Aboriginal curricula Engage postsecondary institutions to 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Support communities to develop a common vision for governance of the child welfare system through consultation Implement chosen governance model (regional authority approach) through funding, capacity development, and changes to legislation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate the transfer of services to Aboriginal people Contribute to “Closing the Gap” in Transformative Change Accord: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete financial analysis of Aboriginal services transformation Complete gap analysis on full range of services for Aboriginal children and youth Support First Nations, the federal 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt a reconciliation approach guided by Touchstones of Hope Allocate resources to offset funding inequities Align human resources and staff roles within the Ministry Gather key partners (government, ministries, service providers) to identify and address systemic barriers Support Aboriginal self-determination through service delivery initiatives developed, evaluated, and driven by Aboriginal 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop organizational cultural competency to consistently provide effective services Partner with Aboriginal communities to develop and deliver capability across six service lines through well-designed and managed culturally appropriate, safe services for Aboriginal children, youth, and families at provincial, regional, and local community levels Use practical evidence to inform culturally appropriate policies, service standards, and practice guidelines to drive service design and delivery excellence for Aboriginal children, youth, and families Partner with DAA to develop lean and flowing value streams across all

Ministry Aboriginal Strategic Plans	Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Services (1999)	Strong, Safe, & Supported Pillar 4: The Aboriginal Approach (2007–2012)	Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff (2010)	Aboriginal Service Improvement Plan (MCFD Operational and Strategic Plan) (2012/13–2014/15)
	<p>support Aboriginal people seeking professional training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increase Ministry staff Aboriginal cultural awareness <p>3. Cultural awareness strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Recruit and retain Aboriginal staff ○ Establish cultural awareness approaches with contracted service providers and agencies to hire, train, and support Aboriginal staff 	<p>government and DAAs to develop and implement a new prevention approach for federal funding</p> <p>5. Implement Jordan’s Principle (a child-first principle named in memory of Jordan River Anderson, a child from Norway House Cree Nation, which calls on the government of first contact to pay for services and seek reimbursement later so the child does not get tragically caught in the middle of government red tape)</p> <p>6. Improve contract processes and infrastructure for Aboriginal service providers</p>	<p>community</p> <p>Ministry staff to apply the following five principles to all work with Aboriginal children, youth, families, and communities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Self-determination: Aboriginal people in best position to lead the development of CFS 2. Culture and language reflected in Aboriginal CFS approaches 	<p>service lines to support effective services</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Partner with Aboriginal service providers to deliver excellent human resource information, and cost management 6. Drive collaborative partnership toward strong culturally appropriate service delivery, practice research, and learning excellence 7. Continuously improve understanding of Aboriginal client and community needs
<p>Key Actions continued.</p>	<p>4. Reconciliation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Approach Aboriginal communities regarding participation of MCFD in reconciliation ceremonies when/if desired by community ○ Increase Ministry staff understanding of history and cultural values of Aboriginal communities in their regions <p>5. Collaborative Policy Agenda:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure four Aboriginal political groups (listed above) are involved in policy development to set priorities for Aboriginal children and families and work with them to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ identity and remove barriers to full implementation of new legislation ○ modify the Ministry’s performance evaluation framework outcome criteria to ensure relevance to Aboriginal communities ○ develop strategic plans unique to each table 	<p>7. Support Aboriginal people to identify and reclaim indigenous child protection and development practices from the past</p> <p>8. Support Aboriginal people in the work of designing a CFS system founded on their culture and traditions</p> <p>9. Support communities and service providers to increasingly address the needs of vulnerable children and youth with emphasis on culture and traditions in a community-based approach</p> <p>10. Support service providers in plans for capacity development, including equitable access to training, and support in the recruitment and retention of staff</p> <p>11. Support in the development of complaint resolution process, policy, standards, and quality</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Holistic approach reflected in Aboriginal CFS approaches 4. Structural interventions reflected in CFS approaches 6. Nondiscrimination: Aboriginal people are entitled to equal access to CFS responsive to their needs and based on Indigenous knowledge and culture 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Partner with Aboriginal agencies to attract, develop, and retain a fully engaged and skilled workforce. Provide a supportive environment for Aboriginal MCFD staff and pursue strong emphasis in cultural competency for non-Aboriginal staff, foster parents, and service providers 9. Partner with Aboriginal agencies to develop and maintain operational performance management and quality assurance systems that drive service excellence

Ministry Aboriginal Strategic Plans	Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Services (1999)	Strong, Safe, & Supported Pillar 4: The Aboriginal Approach (2007–2012)	Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff (2010)	Aboriginal Service Improvement Plan (MCFD Operational and Strategic Plan) (2012/13–2014/15)
	<p>6. Community capacity building:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop resources to support isolated communities and support emerging entities such as the Métis and urban Aboriginal communities ○ Support evolving and emerging entities with a partnership approach to build for future delegation of CFS responsibilities 	<p>assurance which reflects the new service system</p> <p>12. Support the development and implementation of a comprehensive, innovative five-year Early Years plan for Aboriginal children</p>		
<p>Context and Key Influences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) • <i>Liberating Our Children, Liberating Our Nations</i> (1992) • Gove inquiry (1995) • New legislation CFCSA (1996) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tsawwassen Accord (2002) • BC Children and Youth Review—Hughes report (2006) • Independent oversight office—representative for children and youth (2006) • Transformative Change Accord (2006) • New deputy minister 2006 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth, and Families • Regional authority legislation fails to move forward June 2009 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiscal environment of ongoing restraint and reduction in expenditures (2009–present) • Cross-government LEAN process 2011 • New deputy minister 2011 • Expanded role and improved Ministry relationship with representative for children and youth

The strategic plan, which preceded the shift toward the regional Aboriginal authority approach in 2002, does not indicate an approach consistent with the direction the Ministry agreed to with respect to the separate regional authority structure. A more measured and conservative approach to building capacity with anticipation of an eventual, but long-term devolution of services seems to be implicit in the 1999 document. It appears the Tsawwassen Accord may have been less a result of Ministry planning than a reaction to the outcry from First Nations and Aboriginal communities when MCFD announced a move to a generalized regional authority approach. Certainly at a time when the government was looking for ways to reduce budget expenditures, the decision would have a major impact on resources. The long term potential to devolve services however could stabilize funding requirements and reduce political instability.

The eventual 2004 pull-back from regional authority planning for mainstream Ministry services indicates the Ministry had likely overextended itself fiscally and was unable to continue with the move to regionalization. However, events that were occurring simultaneously in BC involved a shift in BC Liberal government stance with respect to First Nations and natural resource development certainty in the province, where much of the raw resources are in or on the ground in areas where individual First Nations have filed land claims. In 2005, shortly after the MCFD decision to halt the regional authorities but to allow the Aboriginal authorities to continue, the BC government signed the tripartite Transformative Change Accord (TCA) with the federal government and the province's three First Nations political organizations. The TCA represents a commitment by the partners to close social and economic gaps between First Nations people and other British Columbians, reconcile Aboriginal rights and title with the Crown, and establish a new relationship based on respect and recognition. The political climate with First Nations and Aboriginal people in the province, with a positive shift in the provincial

economic situation in 2005, meant that political support existed for the Aboriginal regional planning authorities. It did not mean, however, that the MCFD approach to developing a limited governance structure for the authorities would in the end be acceptable to First Nations leaders and communities in BC.

The Hughes report and Aboriginal Children’s Services: 2006.

Intense scrutiny of MCFD resulting from the death of a child who was in Ministry care under a kith and kin agreement, followed by a letter to the premier from three child welfare advocates, prompted another system-wide review in 2005, this one conducted by Ted Hughes (Hughes, 2006). The 2006 report *An Independent View of BC’s Child Protection System*, widely known as the Hughes report, contained recommendations for improvements in the delivery of child welfare. Hughes’s global assessment was that reductions in Ministry funding, combined with ongoing organizational change and inconsistent leadership, “had pushed the Ministry to what could only be described as a breaking point, and it needed to regain equilibrium and stability” (Foster, 2007, p. 204). Hughes’s position at the time of the review was as an adjudicator for the federal government for compensation payments to Indian residential school survivors, which gave him some knowledge of Aboriginal issues.

A major recommendation of the Hughes report was for an independent representative to oversee the provincial child welfare system (Hughes, 2006). This recommendation was implemented in 2006 with the appointment of a First Nations Justice from Saskatchewan, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, as the representative for children and youth. The representative’s role is to provide advocacy and ongoing recommendations for system improvements.

Hughes also stressed that concern for the increasing number of Aboriginal children in care necessitated renewed consultation with Aboriginal communities so that Ministry policy and

practice could better reflect their needs. Hughes called for better support for delegated Aboriginal agencies (DAAs) and urged that MCFD “find ways to recruit and retain more Aboriginal people for service in the Ministry, at all levels, but particularly among social workers who deal directly with children and families” (p. 149). Hughes was clear that systemic issues of poverty and the community-wide socioeconomic limitations experienced in Aboriginal communities due to ongoing impacts of colonization (specifically the intergenerational impacts of residential school and child welfare policies) require cooperation between both levels of government and with First Nations and Aboriginal leaders.

Hughes also supported the ongoing move within the Ministry to create a regional authority structure where Aboriginal authorities took on responsibility for services to Aboriginal children (Hughes, 2006). He stated that the structure’s success would depend on the following factors: provincial and Ministry political leadership demonstrating a consistent clear commitment to decentralization; a dedicated Ministry team with stable resources and time for consultation; and partnership with communities. He also recommended that service transfer occur only when regions (including Aboriginal regional authorities) could demonstrate competency in service delivery.

Support for expanded kith and kin and youth agreements, intended to prevent children from entering care, also needed to be properly resourced (Hughes, 2006). Appropriate support for staffing, training and program evaluation for all service transformation projects was also seen as critical to Ministry approaches to reducing the number of children in care. Unlike many previous reports that resulted in individuals being blamed, Hughes took a systemic approach where provincial leadership was held accountable for not creating and providing the necessary environment where system improvements—or even stability—could occur. Within six months of

the release of the Hughes report the Liberal government in BC responded by appointing Lesley du Toit, a children's services executive from South Africa, as deputy minister for MCFD (Foster, 2007). Pursuant to two of Hughes's recommendations that there be some consistency and stability in Ministry leadership and appropriate resources, the government signed a four-year contract with du Toit and increased the budget—close to the 2001 level that existed when the Liberals formed government.

MCFD Aboriginal strategic planning: 2007–2012.

Lesley du Toit was serving as deputy minister for MCFD at the time of this study in 2010 and she remained in the position until March 2011, when new Liberal premier Christy Clark replaced her with Dr. Stephen Brown. During her five-year tenure as deputy minister, du Toit supported and promoted the regional Aboriginal authority approach. However, when regionalization efforts failed, she shifted focus to encouraging individual First Nations communities and organizations to pursue alternative jurisdictional approaches through individual contracts. What seems clear is that, during du Toit's time with MCFD, focus was initially on an imminent transfer of services, and when this transfer failed, the Ministry shifted to another approach, as unclear as it was, as a means to devolve services.

Strong, Safe, and Supported (SSS): 2007–2012.

Strategic planning as outlined in Strong, Safe, and Supported (SSS) reflected an outward focus on the transfer of delivery of services to Aboriginal peoples with less focus on internal Ministry service improvement strategies (Government of British Columbia, 2010b). The Ministry's goal with respect to Aboriginal services within SSS, where Aboriginal services formed one of five pillars of service, was to transfer jurisdiction to Aboriginal communities. The priorities of pillar 4 in SSS, The Aboriginal Approach, very much reflected this goal. Pillar 4

describes support for Aboriginal communities to develop and deliver models of intervention, support for regional Aboriginal authority development, Aboriginal service systems that strongly connect children to their culture, and the expectation that Aboriginal service delivery will result in improved outcomes.

The Strong, Safe, and Supported strategic plan remained in place until 2011, when new deputy minister Dr. Stephen Brown replaced it with a new strategic plan. It remained unclear in the period after the Aboriginal regional authority approach failed what the mechanics of the specific approach for an Aboriginal service system—what the federal and provincial legal and funding platform for this proposed alternate jurisdiction—would be.

Touchstones of Hope—Reconciliation to improve Aboriginal services.

A specific approach to strengthening Aboriginal child and family services, developed within Aboriginal academic, practice, and professional communities, has recently been introduced to the area of mainstream child welfare systems. It is a strategy for reconciling mainstream and Aboriginal perspectives and developing new possibilities within the mainstream child welfare system for “indigenizing” the way in which services are conceptualized, designed, implemented, and delivered. Touchstones of Hope (Blackstock, Cross, Brown, George, & Formsma, 2006), began to be piloted by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada and MCFD in six northern BC communities in 2007.

Touchstones of Hope was developed from the collective contributions of 200 Aboriginal leaders during a three day event called “Reconciliation: Looking Back, Reaching Forward—Aboriginal Peoples and Child Welfare” held in Niagara Falls, Ontario, in October 2005. Touchstones of Hope provides a reconciliatory framework within which relationships and partnerships among Aboriginal communities and mainstream child welfare organizations can be

developed to move forward an agenda for appropriate planning and development of Aboriginal child and family services (Blackstock et al., 2006).

Touchstones of Hope was not specifically developed to provide a descriptive approach to transforming bureaucratic structures and variables within the mainstream organization to more adequately support Aboriginal approaches to providing child welfare services. The approach is, however, intended to impact the values and beliefs of professionals and practitioners within mainstream child welfare organizations, and so it may provide a beginning point in an organizational change effort to impact the culture of these organizations (Blackstock et al., 2006). Organizational change efforts need to be internalized beyond Touchstones of Hope if specific organizational structures and variables are to be further indigenized to be consistent with the values and beliefs of both the Aboriginal people who work within the organization and those it is intended to serve.

From 2009 forward, MCFD annualized a one-million-dollar budget allocation for reconciliation activities that were to take place in all MCFD regions. At the time of writing, the Ministry has indicated that the budget has been reduced to one-fifth this amount.

Aboriginal Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff.

In 2010, the year following the failure of the regional Aboriginal authority legislation, the Ministry developed the *Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff*, an internal Ministry document intended to guide the Ministry's Aboriginal community and service delivery practices (Government of British Columbia, 2010a). The framework reflects a shift in orientation from the previous strategic planning in *Strong, Safe, and Supported*. While it reflects the Ministry's ongoing focus on reconciliation efforts with Aboriginal communities, the framework represents a shift in approach, since the failure to transfer Aboriginal services, by

acknowledging that Aboriginal services were to remain with the Ministry for at least the foreseeable future while complex issues around jurisdiction were being explored. The framework focuses on culturally competent Ministry practices based on acknowledging the legacy of racism and structural inequities in Aboriginal communities. It directs Ministry employees to embrace non-discriminatory and holistic approaches that acknowledge the self-determination of Aboriginal people. It also calls for the realignment of human resources and staff roles within the Ministry to better respond to Aboriginal service needs.

Child and family support, assessment, planning, and practice (CAPP).

Another highly anticipated framework was released in 2010 outlining MCFD's practice orientation across all of its six service lines (Government of British Columbia, 2010c). How CAPP applies to Aboriginal services within the Ministry is never fully articulated, other than a statement in the CAPP discussion paper that it "supports the principles set out in the Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff" (p. 7). The discussion paper outlines the philosophy the Ministry is undertaking toward establishing a "developmental, strengths-based approach to child and family development" (p. 4). Collaborative practices, including family development response (differential child welfare response), family group conferencing, community development by First Nations, and early intervention work of DAAs, are referenced as laying the foundation to move toward the full "implementation of practice change" (p. 5). The "practice change phase of transformation" will provide better outcomes for children, youth, and families by providing staff with a developmental approach that "focuses on building relationships, identifying needs and providing the opportunity, environment and resources for people to meet their needs" (p. 6).

In October 2010, shortly after the release of the Aboriginal conceptual framework and the CAPP framework, the interviews for this study commenced. Most Ministry staff had received orientation to both frameworks, although more emphasis was placed on the CAPP orientation than on the Aboriginal conceptual framework. Within six months of commencement of this research, direction within the Ministry shifted as Lesley du Toit was replaced by Dr. Stephen Brown as deputy minister. Implementation of both frameworks was curtailed in the months that followed, and strategic Ministry planning shifted once again.

MCFD Operational and Strategic Plan and Aboriginal Service Improvement Plan (2012/13–2014/15) and Lean government.

The MCFD Operational and Strategic Plan and a companion document, Aboriginal Service Improvement Plan, were released in May 2012 (Government of British Columbia, 2012). The plan indicates a renewed focus on internal service improvements and improved outcome strategies for Aboriginal children, youth and families. Another overall goal is strengthening and supporting the existing services being delivered by the DAAs. Focus has shifted away from previous strategic planning on alternative jurisdiction for First Nations communities and rests on improved community development, prevention and intervention services in First Nations and Aboriginal communities. The above goals are viewed as achievable with a partnership approach with Aboriginal communities.

A rebranding of the Ministry's organizational approach is one of pursuing a continuous organizational learning process to focus on improved services using Lean processes employed across the BC government since 2012. The Lean approach is described in a memo by Deputy Minister to the Premier John Dyble to the BC Public Service as a "process improvement approach" designed by the automobile industry to be used in economic times where "it's more

important than ever that each of us keeps finding new efficiencies in our jobs and in the ways that we work” (Dyble, 2012). Dyble also states that “results experienced by ministries and agencies in B.C. that have used Lean and other continuous improvement approaches include improved quality and savings of both cost and time.”

Post-2008 economic realities, following the global financial crisis, have significantly reduced government revenues, placing constraints on spending and triggering newfound interest in this new public management approach. Clearly the province is experiencing significant fiscal restraint issues and the BC government has adopted yet another managerial approach across government and within the Ministry responsible for providing services to vulnerable and at-risk children, youth and families in BC.

Summary

This chapter has provided a profile of the Ministry of Children and Family Development that goes back nearly 25 years to describe impacts of the 1990s era of reform. It defines events and trends since, and provides a contextual backdrop for how MCFD attempted to address the diverse and contested needs of Aboriginal children and families given the organizational history and impacts of the internal and external environments. Pressure for system improvements for Aboriginal people has been met with various responses by the Ministry, and key events and documents help to develop understanding of the contextual environment in which Aboriginal employees, who are also advocates for system change, have been impacted.

The 1990s reform era involved the promise of prevention and support services within new legislation. However, events intervened that diluted the government’s response to the recommendations of the 1992 Aboriginal community panel process and the report *Liberating Our Children, Liberating Our Nations*. The subsequent Gove inquiry, which examined the death

of a young non-Aboriginal child whose family was involved with the Ministry, drew intense media interest and criticism. The inquiry's outcome, intended or unintended, involved a shift back toward the child protection paradigm through the 1990s. The much-anticipated Child, Family, and Community Services Act (CFCSA) that was passed in 1996 reflected this shift, and soon after the Ministry adopted standardized risk assessment tools. The backlash of the Gove inquiry apparently created a culture of fear within the Ministry where managers and frontline staff alike opted for low-risk practice involving high rates of child removal; these practices, in turn, resulted in a dramatic and near-catastrophic increase in the number of children in care—particularly Aboriginal children.

New public management or managerial approaches influenced the Ministry in the 1990s and contributed to increased focus on standardized risk assessment approaches, weakening the focus on professional practice improvements. Reduced overall funding meant that the province looked for ways to reduce expenditures for the provision of services. This process resulted in a narrowing of the Ministry mandate to reactive services (bringing children into care) rather than expanding to include supportive services (supporting children to remain in their family home).

Another managerial strategy to reduce expenditures coincided with what has since become known as the core government review, focused on Ministry expenditure reductions in 2002 and led to systemic restructuring of the Ministry into five regional authorities that mirrored the provincial health authority regions. The Aboriginal community rallied and advocated for Aboriginal control of parallel Aboriginal regional authorities. On the day the legislation was to be introduced to the legislature in 2008, it was opposed by a number of First Nations leaders and organizations whose contention was that the process had lacked integrity. The limited

governance structure developed for the Aboriginal regional authorities did not satisfy the aspirations of many First Nations leaders to gain jurisdiction and control of services.

The period between 2002 and 2008 saw the Ministry internally reorganizing and preparing to divest services to the Aboriginal regional authorities. This involved analyzing and disentangling direct and contract services intended for Aboriginal people. When the move toward Aboriginal regional authorities failed in 2008, the Ministry quickly shifted toward a strategy of entering into community development contracts with a number of First Nations and Aboriginal communities to support the exploration of alternative jurisdiction for provision of child welfare services. At the time of the study, this was the direction being taken within the Ministry for pursuing Aboriginal service improvements through alternative jurisdiction.

The Hughes report, released in 2006 following yet another Ministry inquiry, expressed concern for the increasing number of Aboriginal children in care and suggested that MCFD renew consultation with Aboriginal communities to ensure policy and practice could better reflect the needs of Aboriginal people. It also stressed the need for increased recruitment and retention of Aboriginal people in all levels of the Ministry and particularly at the front line. The report also called for increased support and stable resources for the existing delegation system and the proposed Aboriginal regional authority structure.

Over the past 20 years three MCFD Aboriginal strategic plans parallel and reflect the history, external and internal influences and overall direction of Aboriginal service focus within the Ministry. Strategic planning in 1999 reflected Ministry focus in the 1990s of increasing internal capacity to design and deliver improved services. The planning did not reflect the shift toward Aboriginal regional authorities that would occur three years later. Strategic planning for Aboriginal services in 2007 reflected an outward focus on the transfer of services to Aboriginal

people with less focus on internal Ministry service improvement strategies. After the failed attempt at regionalization, strategic planning shifted for several years, focusing on a poorly defined strategy to support alternative jurisdiction for Aboriginal and First Nations communities. In the three years since the study was conducted, there has been a marked but questionable shift back to focus on internal Ministry service improvement based on efficient, financially sustainable processes such as Lean.

Chapter 4. Methodology

The conceptual framework emerging from this study's central themes is described in this chapter building from ideas and questions about Aboriginal employee identities, motivations, and approaches and how the organizational structure and environment either impedes or supports them to provide better services and achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal children, youth, families, and communities. Implicit in this framework is the central philosophy and viewpoint that characterizes Aboriginal employees within MCFD as primarily motivated toward value-based practice improvement and systemic change and therefore highly motivated and oriented to value-based approaches that reflect the goals of the larger Aboriginal community.

Next, the epistemological approach for this study, reflecting an Indigenous world view, is presented. This includes an outline of the ethnographic methodological approach, including the research design based specifically on providing a highly collaborative approach with Aboriginal participants. Important components for this research design include the unique position and relevance of my position as a non-Aboriginal organizational insider researcher that enabled me to access study participants and develop the high level of trust necessary to elicit the in-depth responses they provided, and the ability to develop and utilize an internal organizational Aboriginal research committee. The research population and sample, the data collection methods, data analysis, ethical approvals, and the strengths and limitations of the research approach are also addressed.

Conceptual Framework

The literature review and organizational history provided context and helped bring focus to relevant variables for the study. However, the organizational diversity literature has a generic diversity orientation and organizational context. Also, specific literature that addresses the

experiences of Aboriginal employees in a provincial child welfare organization, or the organizational variables and diversity approaches that may best support them to be effective in their roles and contribute to better outcomes for Aboriginal people, is limited. An ethnographic approach that emphasizes the development of knowledge from an Aboriginal perspective allowed me to pursue a phenomenological or inductive approach to developing and defining the study concepts, questions, and variables pursued through the study. However, as an insider researcher, I came with some beginning ideas from my analysis of the literature and from many years immersed in government Aboriginal child welfare systems.

These observations, coupled with some of the literature on role tensions inherent in dual accountabilities of community insiders, compelled me to learn more about the identities, values, beliefs, motivations, and practices of Aboriginal human service professionals who choose to work within historically oppressive government child welfare organizations. I wondered to what extent Aboriginal professionals see themselves as insiders and/or outsiders in the Ministry and within their communities, and whether the inherent tension in dual accountabilities impacts how effective they can be in an organization like MCFD. Further, how is this unique and important situation impacted by the organizational environment of MCFD, the unique internal and external contextual factors (including historical, professional, political, societal, and economic variables) that influence the evolving organizational culture and structure of the organization?

I was already aware, through my organizational insider orientation, that MCFD was developing a number of strategic initiatives and approaches intended to “transform” how the organization responds to and provides services to Aboriginal children, youth, families, and communities, and I wondered how effective these initiatives were. That is, my own perspective within the organization caused me to question issues surrounding communication and

implementation, and I had witnessed what appeared to be a disconnection between the strategic and practical orientations of the Ministry. Another purpose for this study then emerged and compelled an in-depth analysis of the different aspects of this specific evolving approach in terms of how Aboriginal employees see its fit and potential effectiveness for themselves so they can provide better services and outcomes for Aboriginal people.

The literature on organizational diversity is helpful for determining which variables and approaches may be important to focus on when examining the MCFD Aboriginal approach during the past ten years. Yet, how do Aboriginal employees view these organizational variables and approaches? How might Aboriginal employees identify variables that have yet been addressed in the literature? And how do they see these variables and approaches contributing to or detracting from their role effectiveness in achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities?

The purpose of a conceptual framework is to provide—from the literature, the history of the organization, and my own experiences—some beginning definitions of the variables and to start to develop and analyze how these variables may fit together. The literature provides some guidance for how to approach the varying levels of analysis in the study.

The insider/outsider perspective potentially enables a beginning understanding of the unique and sometimes incongruent position Aboriginal workers may occupy in terms of what they bring to and how they experience their positions within government child welfare organizations. They are ultimately insiders whose cultural experiences and affiliations give them a vantage point from which they are keenly aware of the negative potential the system has for their communities. They possess knowledge and experiences and gain information from their community on a regular basis that potentially highlights this potential and reality in the child

welfare system. The variation for Aboriginal professionals in the insider/outsider perspective is the proximity they have to their own communities through the work they do. For example, there are obvious differences when a Coast Salish First Nations person works with their own community on Vancouver Island than when a Samson Cree First Nations person from Alberta works within the same Coast Salish community. This variation may be expressed as the degree of the insider role. The most polarized or extreme insider position is the First Nations person working in their home community as both a community member (with the myriad relationships and expectations that entails) and an MCFD employee. An Aboriginal person who is not from the community they are working with, but who feels a responsibility to the Aboriginal community, also identifies to varying degrees as a community insider.

The next level for consideration is defining the organizational variables that Aboriginal MCFD employees identify as supporting or curtailing their role effectiveness for best serving Aboriginal children, families, and communities. The literature identifies a broad range of possibilities best summarized as follows: organizational (power) structure; organizational culture (values, norms, beliefs, meanings); leadership style and structure; creativity and innovation; problem-solving and decision-making approaches; communication and conflict approaches; social support/inclusion; motivation; stress; levels of trust; role power; equity versus equality orientation; and reconciliation orientation. These variables provide a basis for beginning to formulate questions for data-gathering. It is entirely possible that these variables will be expressed in ways that depart from the literature and that others will be identified by the participants.

The literature addressing specific organizational diversity approaches, such as representative bureaucracy and equal opportunity, managing diversity approach, MCFD,

MCHSO and other social equity approaches, contain unique perspectives on organizational diversity. These approaches place different emphasis on a range of concepts from the ability to passively and actively represent group interests, equality, equity, fairness, access to services, service outcomes, performance, identification of racism and power imbalances, systemic and societal barriers, and the degree to which organizations are responsible to address them.

These approaches provide some context for comparison of the current approach being pursued by MCFD. Further inquiry and results within the context of the study help to begin framing an analysis and discussion regarding the “MCFD Aboriginal approach.” Again, the study participants will provide richer and more meaningful information and understanding for how these approaches are significant or useful within an Aboriginal context, including identifying other possible approaches or dimensions for consideration.

In summary, the study considers processes on a number of different levels: the unique context for and experience of Aboriginal employees in a government child welfare organizational setting; the external and internal organizational context and variables that contribute to their employment experience and how they see the overall organizational approach in terms of it being consistent with achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal children, youth, families, and communities. However, as the researcher, I remain aware that while combining ideas and concepts from the literature with prior experience is an important consideration for moving forward, what is critical to this study is remaining open to the unfiltered voices and meanings of the Aboriginal participants who will provide further definition and meaning to be uncovered through the research process.

Research Questions

The inductive approach for posing research questions potentially allows important aspects of the research area to emerge as data, with developing themes. The overarching research question is:

- *What are the identities, motivations, and approaches of Aboriginal professionals and how does MCFD support or impede Aboriginal employees to actively represent the interests of Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities through the provision of effective and culturally relevant services?*

Flowing from this question are two others that focus on specific issues that arise from researcher experience, the current organizational context, and the literature:

- *What are the identities and histories of Aboriginal professionals who choose to work with MCFD? What are the experiences, values, and beliefs that motivate them to work with the Ministry? How do they describe their practice approaches and experiences working with Aboriginal children, families, and communities in MCFD? Do they reflect and represent the interests of Aboriginal people?*
- *How does MCFD support or impede Aboriginal professional employees to actively represent community interests to develop and deliver effective and culturally relevant services for Aboriginal children, families, and communities? What organizational variables and approaches provide support or create barriers for Aboriginal employees in the organization?*

These questions represent the entry point for an inductive ethnographic inquiry.

Researcher Stance: Some Assumptions

Why I chose to undertake this research is important. As First Nations educator Eber Hampton (1995) expresses, “there is motive in research” (p. 7). As I noted earlier, I became interested in this research area through a long-term career as a non-Aboriginal professional working alongside many Aboriginal colleagues in both government child welfare systems and delegated child and family services agencies. Over the years, many of my Aboriginal colleagues shared frustration with their inability to effect changes they want to see for Aboriginal children, families, and communities. I have experienced the disillusion we potentially all feel with

bureaucratic constraints that often prevent us from doing the work we know must be done. I see now clearly that it affects us differently. These Aboriginal colleagues have been frontline workers, team leaders, and managers, and many have been friends. And they have a story to tell.

So, given my experience, I bring to the research a perspective that includes some specific beliefs and biases with regard to First Nations and Aboriginal peoples and social program development. These beliefs include the following:

- Bureaucracies in Canada are constructed through mainstream values, and racism is a pervasive covert feature that prevents meaningful organizational change efforts. Organizational change requires a more radical approach that has, as yet, not been attempted in Canadian government organizations.
- Most First Nations and Aboriginal employees within government bureaucracies are employed to provide the *perception* that progressive action is being taken to better serve Aboriginal peoples.
- The ongoing impacts and effects of a neocolonial system have devastated many First Nations and Aboriginal communities. These communities must lead their own community recovery interventions that reflect, to the greatest possible extent, their traditional community cultural values and practices.
- Aboriginal peoples need to lead the development of the recovery of their communities in partnership with federal/provincial partners that provide adequate resources and respectful support.

This research was not proposed in a positivist tradition that seeks to remove or control for bias in the design. Rather, as many theorists – sometimes critical of the concept of objectivity in Western science – suggest, it is important for the researcher to deliberately state their assumptions and openly present them to any potential participant or consumer of the research (Hampton, 1995; Kuhn, 1970; Nadasdy, 1999; L. Smith, 2012; J. Thomas, 1993).

As a non-Aboriginal person working with Aboriginal people, and now as a researcher, I bring with me the legacy of a Western scientific approach that, at best, benignly documents experiences of Aboriginal oppression in colonial and postcolonial times and, at worst, rationalizes and justifies oppressive practices that have led to the near annihilation of Indigenous

cultures (L. Smith, 2012). The critical need, and my commitment for conducting this research, is for ethical guidelines that include emancipatory goals in conducting research with First Nations and Aboriginal peoples.

Methodology and Research Design

Epistemology.

My intention is to elicit, understand, validate, and convey the voices and experiences of the Aboriginal employees of MCFD and to ensure that this study is meaningful, relevant, and beneficial to them. The rationale for conducting non-positive qualitative research with Aboriginal peoples is found in a growing academic movement toward the use of decolonized approaches within Aboriginal research settings (L. Smith, 2012). This movement emerged from or developed parallel to other theories like critical theory, Marxist theory, feminist theory, and postmodern theory. What these perspectives have in common is a premise that views a critical power imbalance in group relations that culminates in oppressive structures. The position taken by many schools of thought reflects Kuhn's (1970) assertion that all sciences possess core assumptions on which they are based. Therefore, objectivity, the premise of positivism and Western science, cannot reasonably exist.

The argument that science is based on assumptions presumes a relationship between power, research, and knowledge (L. Smith, 2012). Linda Smith argues that non-Aboriginal researchers using positivist methodologies impose their values and assumptions—which reflect socialization and education in an imperialist and colonial tradition—on research results in Aboriginal settings. If a methodological stance brings with it accompanying values and assumptions, it must be moved from a covert position (such as in a positivist approach) to an overt one (reflexivity) so the research audience has the opportunity to fully evaluate the results.

I deliberately chose a non-positivist approach through ethnography that attempts to decolonize knowledge and research from dominant and Eurocentric influences that have pervaded Aboriginal peoples and cultures as a result of imperial and colonial ideological forces over the last several centuries. Aboriginal approaches to knowledge, practice development, and research re-centre Aboriginal beliefs, values, and approaches in relation to the concepts that are of critical interest (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002; L. Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2001). Holistic world views that have informed the values, beliefs, and practices of Aboriginal peoples are critical to inform and reconcile the effects and impacts of colonization on Aboriginal peoples, including the current state of child welfare services in BC and Canada. Therefore, any approach to research in this area should be guided by this overarching orientation.

Bennett and Blackstock (2002) assert that Aboriginal knowledge and approaches assured that children were best cared for prior to colonization. Specific values, beliefs, and cultural practices varied in relation to different Aboriginal peoples and communities. However, consistent concepts within a holistic Aboriginal world view saw children as “important and respected members of an independent community and ecosystem” (p. 1). Holism, the foundation within all Aboriginal community approaches, is often viewed as essentially antithetical to the individual rights approach found within Canadian child welfare legislation and practice. The challenge for moving the Aboriginal child welfare agenda forward is building on “the cultural strengths of communal rights, interdependence and knowledge which are often diametrically opposed to the legal requirements to operate within the realm of euro-western provincial values, laws regulations and standards” (p. 1).

This study is framed by my understanding that Aboriginal children, youth, families, and communities will achieve better outcomes for their children and within their communities when

the concepts guiding child welfare policy and practice are firmly rooted in Aboriginal knowledge. I also understand that Aboriginal knowledge is variable and therefore each community expresses values, beliefs, and practices in a unique way. Brown, Haddock, and Kovach (2002) also highlight what they describe as “self-conscious traditionalism” whereby community processes are necessary that combine traditional Aboriginal knowledge with the contemporary realities of Aboriginal communities in Canada.

Following from these ideas, the epistemological approach implemented involves the challenge of communicating the meanings of individual Aboriginal people within MCFD, who reflect their unique experiences of community. This must occur while also remaining critically aware of Aboriginal perspectives and a knowledge base that focuses on holism, personal or subjective experiences and representations, spiritual and physical manifestations of experience and being, social and interdependent relationships, and intergenerational learning (valuing of cultural mentors/Elders). These concepts are based on a dependency on locality and ecosystem (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 1999; Hart, 2007; Henderson, 2000). One must also keep in mind that each concept becomes more complex when the diversity of Aboriginal knowledge systems is considered (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002). Effectively hearing, reflecting and reporting the voices of the Aboriginal participants means attempting to necessarily adjust and remove from this approach the potential constraints of a Western scientific paradigm.

Methodological approach.

Ethnography is a particularly well-suited qualitative approach because it potentially allows the researcher to assume a holistic outlook in an attempt to gain a complete and comprehensive picture of a group, or, in this case, a group or groups within an organization (Fetterman, 2010). The emic perspective, or the insider’s perception of reality, is not an attempt

to capture an objective reality but to understand why group members believe, feel, or do what they do. An emic perspective “compels the recognition and acceptance of multiple realities” (p. 21). Given the research questions proposed in this study, it seems that emic or insider perspectives are critical to informing mainstream organizational perspectives that exist and dominate current approaches within the system.

Ethnography allowed me as a researcher, already positioned as an insider, and having been immersed throughout my career in Aboriginal child welfare settings and for the past five years in MCFD, to gain an in-depth understanding of the unique experiences and culture of the group and subgroups within it (Fetterman, 2010). Contextualizing the data and placing the perspectives of the insiders and other data gathered through interviews, observation and document/information gathering within the organization into a larger perspective is a critical piece of analysis that takes place within ethnography. A choice can be made to focus on behaviours, ideas, beliefs, and/or knowledge. Additionally, the unique ability that a nonpositivist qualitative study has to allow themes to emerge from data prior to the researcher imposing their definitions and constraints on the research focus, through previous literature and inquiry, is perceived as essential for attempting to hear unfiltered Aboriginal viewpoints.

Research design.

To explore the proposed research questions, a mixed approach to gathering data within the ethnographic methodology was adopted, and this approach allowed for triangulation of data. An important consideration is the degree of researcher grounding and contextualization within the environment and subject matter that occurred prior to and after conducting the data collection and during other aspects of the research. I worked in another provincial child welfare organization for 15 years as a frontline practitioner, team leader and contract manager in a

number of different Aboriginal child welfare settings. For the past five years I have worked within MCFD as a manager in Aboriginal policy and as the deputy director for delegated Aboriginal agencies. These experiences have provided me, as the researcher, a highly contextualized insider experience and the ability to witness the organizational environment that brings a unique perspective and understanding to the study.

The ethnographic approaches that I intended to use when I originally designed the study included participant observation, focus groups, and in-depth individual interviews with strategically selected Aboriginal employees. I was unable to proceed with participant observation, and only one focus group occurred, due to a lack of perceived safety by participants in the workplace, which I will explain below. The approach also included examination of organizational documents and discussions with leaders within the organization that could potentially provide in-depth information on MCFD Aboriginal approaches. Recruitment letters used in an attempt to target specific worksites for the purpose of creating a case study approach to the ethnographic study proved fairly unsuccessful. Research sponsors assisting with participant recruitment advised me that some Aboriginal employees expressed concern about being identified within MCFD and therefore were reluctant to participate in the study. Others expressed distrust of research efforts with Aboriginal people in general. Several potential participants also contacted me to indicate they were interested in participating but did not want to be identified by colleagues or management. They agreed to participate in a confidential interview, but were not comfortable with observation in the workplace or participating in a focus group.

With the exception of one group of participants from an existing Aboriginal support network who agreed to participate in the studies only focus group, all other participants chose to

participate in an in-depth interview only. A small number of focus group participants were also interviewed individually. These experiences in the initial recruitment stages may indicate the degree to which Aboriginal employees in MCFD may be reluctant to identify themselves for the purpose of the study and point to early issues regarding safety, belonging and perception of support within the organization.

After a small number of individuals participated in interviews, a snowball effect appeared to occur where the researcher was contacted by individuals who had heard from either research sponsors or participants about the research approach, subject matter, and open-ended interview style and indicated that they were interested in participating in an interview. Following initial data analysis, four specific worksites emerged that stood out as either very supportive or unsupportive worksites for Aboriginal professionals. The resulting data and information provide a powerful comparison of organizational settings that variously do or do not support Aboriginal professionals.

Discussions or interviews with MCFD leaders in Aboriginal services at the provincial office and in two of the regions occurred over a longer period of time than did the interviews with Aboriginal participants. Repeated researcher attempts to engage MCFD leaders succeeded in a total of only five interviews over a period of two years. Table 4.1 summarizes data collection instruments.

A potentially supportive argument exists that this study originated a long time ago and that, in the ethnographic tradition, I was situated as a participant observer for many years in a variety of settings working with Aboriginal professionals within provincial government child welfare bureaucracies. My many placements in the field over these years have already provided a substantial grounding of experience in the particular culture and group of people with whom I

conducted this study. While this experience remains outside the study's formal parameters, it does provide me with potentially significant history, preparation and a developing understanding of a particular culture for Aboriginal professionals. It also means that I could rely on existing relationships and a degree of trust with key people within the target sample that was critical to completing the study.

Research collaboration.

In 2004, I initiated a collaborative pilot study that looked at the experiences of Aboriginal child welfare workers with cultural/community and professional responsibilities. The pilot study provided valuable conceptual insight into the research area that helped inform the interview questions and the approach to the focus group and interviews. The intense interest and feedback about the importance of the unique experiences of Aboriginal professionals by all of the participants in the pilot study provided ongoing motivation for me to complete this larger study.

Aboriginal human service workers, as the literature and my professional observations bear out, often assume leadership roles outside their careers in their extended families and communities. They are active and busy people both within and outside the work setting. A researcher must be sensitive to the draw on resources of Aboriginal people and communities—particularly when they work in a challenging field like children's services within a large organization like MCFD. So, while it was my intention for the purpose of this study to build collaborative strategies, I needed to remain mindful of this reality. All transcripts of individual interviews were provided to participants for initial screening where they could make any direct deletions, changes, or additions. The results sections, in which participant statements are reflected, were also provided to participants with their contributions highlighted so that they could see how they were identified for the purpose of the study and the context in which their

information was used. All suggestions and feedback provided were integrated into the results section. Some participants provided significant feedback while others did not.

It was my approach to invite further involvement of participants in the research process and to acknowledge they may have challenging careers and important family/cultural/community commitments, and may not be able to participate more directly in research efforts even where they had interest or value for the goals of the research. I realize that doing research is an organic process, and where there was interest by any of the Aboriginal participants (and where collaboration became a possibility within the research), I actively pursued how individuals wanted to participate and made space available within the research design for their involvement. What resulted from these efforts is that many participants provided ongoing feedback about the research topic, the questions and the approach I was using in the interviews; this feedback informed each subsequent interview and, I believe, strengthened the approach. Several participants became active in data analysis by discussing by phone and through email what they felt the implications of data were and how the data supported particular concepts. This contribution was invaluable and provided further grounding and understanding on my part of the concepts and themes that were expressed.

Aboriginal research committee.

I am grateful to three Aboriginal individuals, all MCFD employees when the research project began, who also provided ongoing invaluable guidance, support and feedback throughout the research project. All helped contribute to my orientation and ability to engage an epistemology reflective of an Indigenous world view and to strive for a culturally relevant and respectful standpoint throughout all aspects of the study. The benefits for me as the researcher are apparent because having the support of these individuals assisted me with necessary cultural

knowledge, reflexivity with respect to content, and self-awareness as I moved through all aspects of the research and writing this dissertation. One individual in particular, with whom I had long conversations with respect to the research, helped to keep me centred on the positive aspects of research outcomes when at times some of the data and information felt quite overwhelming and negative. Without being able to engage each of these three people, who all had a very different approach and made different contributions, I would have lost valuable perspective and possibly even my momentum for completing the project.

Gaining entry.

The corporate sponsor for MCFD, the assistant deputy minister for Aboriginal services, approved the research proposal and assisted by contacting each regional executive director of service informing them of the research and requesting their assistance by identifying both a regional sponsor for the research and also MCFD leaders of Aboriginal services for interviews. At the time the research was conducted, MCFD was organized in five regions throughout the province with a supporting provincial office. The research was conducted with Aboriginal employees within the provincial office and three regions. Sponsors within each region and the provincial office, (i.e., those involved in delivering Aboriginal services), supported the research project and assisted with participant recruitment.

The researcher, through existing employment with MCFD, had positive and productive relationships with the sponsors and many Aboriginal professionals in several locations. These relationships helped immensely to facilitate some of the sampling issues that arose. Given their involvement with providing Aboriginal services, the sponsors could provide in-depth historical and current external and internal organizational data, records and reports (with appropriate organizational approvals). They also possessed and provided comprehensive contextual

knowledge of issues and variables that addressed the research questions and assisted with the difficult task of recruiting Aboriginal participants.

The initial approach to accessing potential Aboriginal participants was by way of an email invitation that contained two attachments—a summary of the proposed research and the individual consent to participate in the research study (see Appendix D and Appendix E). This was sent out to all employees in a particular geographic area where research sponsors indicated they were aware of the existence of Aboriginal employees on particular teams. MCFD does not track Aboriginal employees therefore emails went out widely and included all employees in a target geographic area, encouraging those who self-identify as Aboriginal to participate.

When this approach elicited few responses, some regional sponsors began to contact individuals directly about the research project, encouraging those who were interested to follow up on the email invitation and to contact the researcher for more information about the research focus and purpose. Participant confidentiality was maintained throughout, and the researcher ensured that the identity or participation of any employee was never discussed with any person within or outside the organization.

Research population and interview sample.

The target population of Aboriginal employees within MCFD for the focus groups, observation and interviews was to be selected based on judgmental sampling techniques that seek to locate the most appropriate members of the subculture or unit of focus under study (Fetterman, 2010). As the goal of this research is exploratory and in the ethnographic tradition, cases or situations in the province were pursued in the hope that they would best showcase the highly variant situations and conditions that Aboriginal workers find themselves working in.

The assumption made at the time was there may be concentrated numbers of Aboriginal employees in particular teams in the province and that they would be sufficiently interested in participating. The reality was that while there were potentially some teams that included as many as five or six Aboriginal professionals, many did not respond to the (email) invitation to participate. The reluctance to participate, as described earlier, meant that the selective sampling approach was modified to include a snowball technique in an attempt to attract enough Aboriginal participants to complete the study. The sample was also broadened, from existing MCFD staff to individuals who had recently left the organization in the previous two years. It seemed that individuals who had left the organization might be more comfortable talking openly about their experiences and so became potential and eventual participants in the study. The modified sampling strategy shifted to research sponsors communicating informally within their networks over a two-month period of time where they actively contacted individuals to inform them about the research and the opportunity to participate.

The strategy to target effective or ineffective Aboriginal organizational situations occurring within particular locations within MCFD geographically or organizationally (that could provide considerable insight into the research questions did emerge), but only after initial data analysis indicated that several worksites that fit the criteria did in fact exist. The variance in experiences between different roles of participants (frontline social workers, mental health workers, managers, program specialists, etc.) also emerged at the data analysis stage.

Twenty-one in-depth individual interviews with Aboriginal participants and one focus group with nine Aboriginal participants occurred. A total of 26 Aboriginal professional staff (four participated in both individual interviews and the focus group) participated from 18 different worksites from three of five MCFD regions in the province and the provincial office. A

majority of the interviews occurred in October and November of 2010 and were conducted in person in the various regions and at the provincial office. Due to the emergence of new participants, two interviews occurred by telephone in January 2011. One participant could not participate in person or by telephone and provided a written response to the questions. The interviews and focus groups ranged from one to three hours in length, with most averaging about two hours.

Demographic Representation of Participants

Of the 26 Aboriginal employees who participated in in-depth interviews, 19 (73%) are female and 7 (27%) male. Fourteen (54%) identify themselves as First Nations, 7 (27%) of mixed First Nations and European ancestry, 2 (7.6%) of mixed First Nations and Métis ancestry, 2 (7.6%) of mixed Métis and European ancestry, and 1 (3.8%) of mixed First Nations, Métis, and European ancestry. Twenty-one (81%) of the participants were current employees of MCFD at the time of the interviews, while 5 (19%) had recently left employment at MCFD (within two years). Of the participants still at MCFD, 4 (19%) worked with individuals and families in their own community or territory. Of the participants who had recently left employment, 4 (80%) had worked in their own community or territory.

Eight (31%) of the participants worked as child protection social workers, 7 (27%) worked as guardianship or resource social workers, 4 (15%) as managers, 3 (11.6%) as mental health support workers, 3 (11.6%) as practice analysts, and 1 (3.8%) as a youth probation worker.

Nine (34.6%) of the participants had worked at MCFD for two years or less, 9 (34.6%) between two and three years, 3 (11.6%) between five and six years, 2 (7.6%) between eight and nine years, and 3 (11.6%) for more than ten years.

The number of participants who were working with MCFD at the time of the interview but have left two years later (after the date they participated) is 7, or one-third (33.3%) of Aboriginal professionals.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection occurred over roughly a two-year period with the majority of participant interviews occurring between September and November 2010. Table 4.1 (which follows the descriptions of each method) summarizes all five data collection instruments.

Individual interviews/conversational method.

Participants were invited for an individual interview with the researcher. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher shared with each participant the rationale for doing the research, and often engaged in conversation with the participant around the research topic, researcher stance, methodology, research design, epistemology, summary of some of the literature and the opportunity for participant collaboration.

Interviews were conversational, and while open-ended questions sometimes guided participant responses, initial discussion provided a natural opening and opportunity for participants to talk openly and at length about their experience as an Aboriginal employee within MCFD. This approach fit the ethnographic tradition and the approach that Fetterman (2010) describes as a “grand tour” where participants can relate their experiences in as unfiltered a way as possible.

Kovach (2010) describes using a conversational method with Indigenous research that reflects the approach used in the interviews, and designed to encourage participants to share their meanings in an unfiltered way. This sharing occurred in many interviews; participants were encouraged to describe what they felt were important or key experiences or stories through

uninterrupted narrative. Kovach refers to this method as a “culturally organic means to gather knowledge within research” (p. 42). The interplay between this method and an Indigenous epistemology or paradigm is connected to the researcher’s ability to elicit rich descriptions of experiential aspects to “learning and knowing” (p. 40). How individuals are engaged—and Kovach makes a direct analogy to the importance of protocols for Indigenous communities—impacts how and what they share and what we come to know of their experience and knowledge. The conversational method also “aligns with an Indigenous worldview that honours orality as a means of transmitting knowledge and upholds the relational which is necessary to maintain a collectivist tradition” (p. 42).

The researcher used verbal probes and questions to follow key themes that emerged and/or re-emerged from previous interviews with other participants and in the focus group (see Appendix A for a sample of questions that was used to prepare for the individual interviews). The researcher also posed questions that arose from reviewing organizational materials and talking with research sponsors to solicit the reaction of the individual participant in the interview. What is important is that an inductive and iterative approach to conducting the interviews was used, encouraging conversation and participants to tell their stories while also posing key questions that allowed important aspects of the research area to emerge as data were accumulated and themes began to emerge (Fetterman, 2010). A recording device was used to accurately record the individual interviews. The audiotapes from the interviews were transcribed, and participants were provided the written transcripts with the opportunity to review, add, change, and/or delete content as they felt was required to reflect their intended meaning.

Focus group.

One focus group with nine participants was conducted in November 2010. The issue of identification was not an issue in this pre-existing support network where members had indicated they had a level of safety and trust in the group. The group facilitator contacted all group members in advance and provided documentation and written consents (on behalf of the researcher), both for their information and so that they could contact the researcher directly. Consent to participate was provided in writing. The researcher provided a brief presentation on researcher stance, rationale and research topic, and the opportunity for participant collaboration.

The meeting provided an excellent informal opportunity to engage a group of participants around the concepts of the study as well as their subsequent interest and willingness to participate in an individual interview. In fact, of the nine participants, four chose afterward to participate in an in-depth interview. The dynamic of addressing some of the research themes through a group setting meant that participants could respond to each others' ideas, perceptions, feelings, concepts and themes. Nuanced situations that the group experienced together were raised, and the researcher had the opportunity to hear different perceptions and observations among group members. A recording device was used to accurately record the focus group, and the recording was subsequently transcribed. A sample of questions used for the focus group is provided as Appendix B.

Interviews with MCFD organizational leaders in Aboriginal services.

Interviews were arranged with MCFD leaders in Aboriginal services. These interviews assisted the researcher with developing an understanding of the varying approaches to Aboriginal services and also to clarify, contextualize and follow up on concepts within the information gained through interviews with Aboriginal participants and through document review. The

interviews also provided an opportunity to elicit more information regarding how MCFD Aboriginal approaches and the organizational context support Aboriginal employees and Aboriginal services. A sample of interview questions used with MCFD leaders is included as Appendix C.

MCFD document analysis.

Research sponsors and other organizational members assisted the researcher to locate relevant sources of information and documentation regarding organizational variables that impact Aboriginal approaches, practices, policies, protocols and/or programs. The information obtained consisted of both external and internal documents, including current and historical Aboriginal strategic plans, descriptions of policies and programs, organizational structure, and human resource policies and practices. Approval and access to any internal data was negotiated through the MCFD research agreement.

Table 4.1 Summary of data collection instruments.

Data Collection Instrument	Participants (#)	Summary of Instrument
Aboriginal employee in-depth interviews	26	Intensive individual interviews involving participants in research through open-ended questioning. Follow-ups and probes from this and other data sources.
Focus group	9	Existing group engaged in research discussion Ideas and perceptions expressed provided richer information regarding study concepts for follow-up in individual interviews.
Interviews with MCFD leaders for Aboriginal services	5	Assisted researcher to clarify and contextualize historical and current information and concepts extracted through document review. The researcher also used open ended questions to engage in discussion around research focus.
MCFD documents—all publicly available	n/a	Organizational data regarding organizational variables that impact Aboriginal approaches, practices, policies, protocols, and/or programs.

Note: Several participants were involved in more than one data collection instrument.

Data analysis.

During the data analysis phase of an ethnography, both the similar and unique qualities of the data collected may emerge to be understood. Systematic decisions regarding the meaningful expression of data were made throughout the study (Unrau & Coleman, 1997). Based on a qualitative analysis method described by Unrau and Coleman (1997), I read through all transcripts and observation notes to obtain a sense of the overall data. This process occurred in an iterative way as data was being collected in the field and extended into a much deeper reading once all data had been collected and the final analysis began.

A qualitative approach to synthesizing the data into smaller units of meaning (and then identifying similarities and differences between them prior to transforming them into patterns and themes) represented an initial attempt to transform the data (Unrau & Coleman, 1997). The development of thematic categories arose through a constant comparative method by what is termed “grounding” in the data (Ristock & Pennell, 1996). Themes were presented and analyzed for both similarity and diversity of thought and experience. A conscious, considerable effort to go beyond dominant and researcher assumptions in an effort to create alternative explanations and challenge dominant discourses was made (Ristock and Pennell, 1996). The results section reflects deep, rich descriptions of particular themes that emerged through the above process. I strive to ensure the voices of the Aboriginal study participants are presented clearly—reflecting their meaning both individually and collectively where their voices come together. The ongoing involvement of Aboriginal participants in the review and feedback of the results section was invaluable as a sounding board to gain reaction and affirmation of the data and results from participants seeing the collective voices of other participants for the first time.

A log book was kept to document process information and researcher thoughts, feedback from the committee, participants and any other questions or issues that arose. The log book helped guide me during data analysis as I tracked how some of the dynamic force and insights that helped to inform my decisions around grouping data into meaning units and themes. Throughout the data analysis, my mental and physical logs helped me to remain aware of my own biases, and to be more reflexive and accountable to the voices of Aboriginal participants.

Strengths and Limitations of Methodology

The major strength of this study is its commitment to a decolonized research approach with the Aboriginal people who are the focus. Vigilance, as in taking direction from the cultural and academic advisory committees, was important to ensure that I, as a non-Aboriginal researcher, could maintain this commitment throughout the research process. The use of an ethnographic approach means that in-depth and intensive data collection and triangulation increased the reliability of the data, results, researcher understanding and subsequent analysis. The identification of varied case sites maximized exploration of how different situations and contexts (e.g., differing management styles, differing positions within the organization, differing mixes of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff, different geographic regions and relationships with First Nations communities) and other variables affect the research issues and questions. Further, the substantial number of highly diverse First Nations communities and peoples involved with MCFD made British Columbia a particularly important and interesting place to explore the issues in this study.

A limitation of the study was the focus on smaller numbers of research participants within one organizational context potentially means it could lack breadth. This applied approach to research can therefore only be generalized to the specific population in the study. To mitigate

these issues, arguably the most complex jurisdiction for designing and delivering services for Aboriginal communities was chosen, in addition to relying on a researcher in situ and multi-instrument and case design approach. The research is intended to be exploratory and descriptive in nature and, as such, is in no way conclusive. However, it may form a foundation for further study in the area.

Ethical Review Approval Considerations

The approach to ensuring an ethical review approval process involves the inclusion of several organizations. The University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board was responsible for providing ethical review and approvals in regard to the research. As part of that process, the Faculty of Human and Social Development also reviewed the proposal with regard to the implications for Aboriginal peoples involved in the research design. MCFD relied on the ethical review approval of the university, but also engaged an internal process to approve the research proposal.

University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board process.

A research proposal was submitted as required by the University of Victoria for ethical review through the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB), which follows policies and procedures that comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on the Ethical Conduct for Researching Involving Humans (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2005).

The application was approved as submitted and the researcher received notice of ethical approval indicating the application had been approved and that research could commence in August 2010. Approval was extended over a three-year period ending August 2013.

Faculty of Human and Social Development (FHSD) and Aboriginal research.

As a student within the Faculty of Human and Social Development (FHSD), I adopted formal protocols and principles for conducting research in an Aboriginal context (Faculty of Human and Social Development, University of Victoria, 2003). An FHSD committee reviews requirements in relation to this protocol, liaises and provides feedback in the context of the above HREB ethical approval process. This protocol emphasizes collaborative approaches for conducting research with Aboriginal peoples and communities. Three concepts that are stressed are the protection of, the partnership with, and the participation and empowerment of Aboriginal peoples and communities. An Aboriginal research advisory committee mentored me throughout the project on aspects of the cultural-traditional perspective, and helped ensure that I maintained an ethical and appropriate orientation to conducting research in an Aboriginal context.

Informed consent was obtained from participants throughout the project. The researcher contacted potential participants by email and provided written and verbal information with regard to the research project. Interested individuals were provided a letter of invitation to participate (Appendix D) that included a description of the research project and an offer to see the full proposal. Participants were asked in the invitation letter to consider becoming involved as collaborators or co-researchers in the research project and were invited to contact the researcher for further discussion of the project, their interest in collaborating, or any questions that they may have had regarding confidentiality, management of information, or other concerns or issues regarding the research. A letter of informed consent was also included (see Appendix E). All participants were informed of their right to confidentiality and assured that every effort would be made to ensure that any type of identifying information would not be shared in any way.

A highly collaborative process of sharing transcripts and results and inviting further input also occurred. Participants were also provided the ability to withdraw from the study at any time.

During the individual interviews, the researcher once again discussed with participants the risks of being in the study and their level of comfort in disclosures. After these discussions, the participants were asked if they were still comfortable to continue participating in the study. They were also advised again that they could choose at any time to withdraw from the study or request that the data from their interview not be used. The researcher determined at the beginning of the study (and with participants at key points along the way) how involved they wanted to be in the research process. Research skills and knowledge were openly shared with participants to the extent that they wished to participate or gain further knowledge.

Audio recordings were transcribed and backed up on a computer data key. A master list of data was used to keep the researcher organized during data collection, and all participant names were changed for purposes of confidentiality. A filing and storage system was utilized to keep audio recordings, notes, and all other information secure and organized. Computer data have been password protected.

MCFD research approval process.

The MCFD research, evaluation, and accreditation team engaged the researcher in a process of review with respect to conducting this research. The team provided approval to proceed in August 2013.

The next two parts of this dissertation represent the two areas of results and findings of the study, which focus on: (1) the identity, values/beliefs, motivations, and experiences of Aboriginal professionals in MCFD; and (2) the organizational response to supporting Aboriginal professionals within MCFD.

Part 2: Aboriginal Employee Experiences Within the Ministry

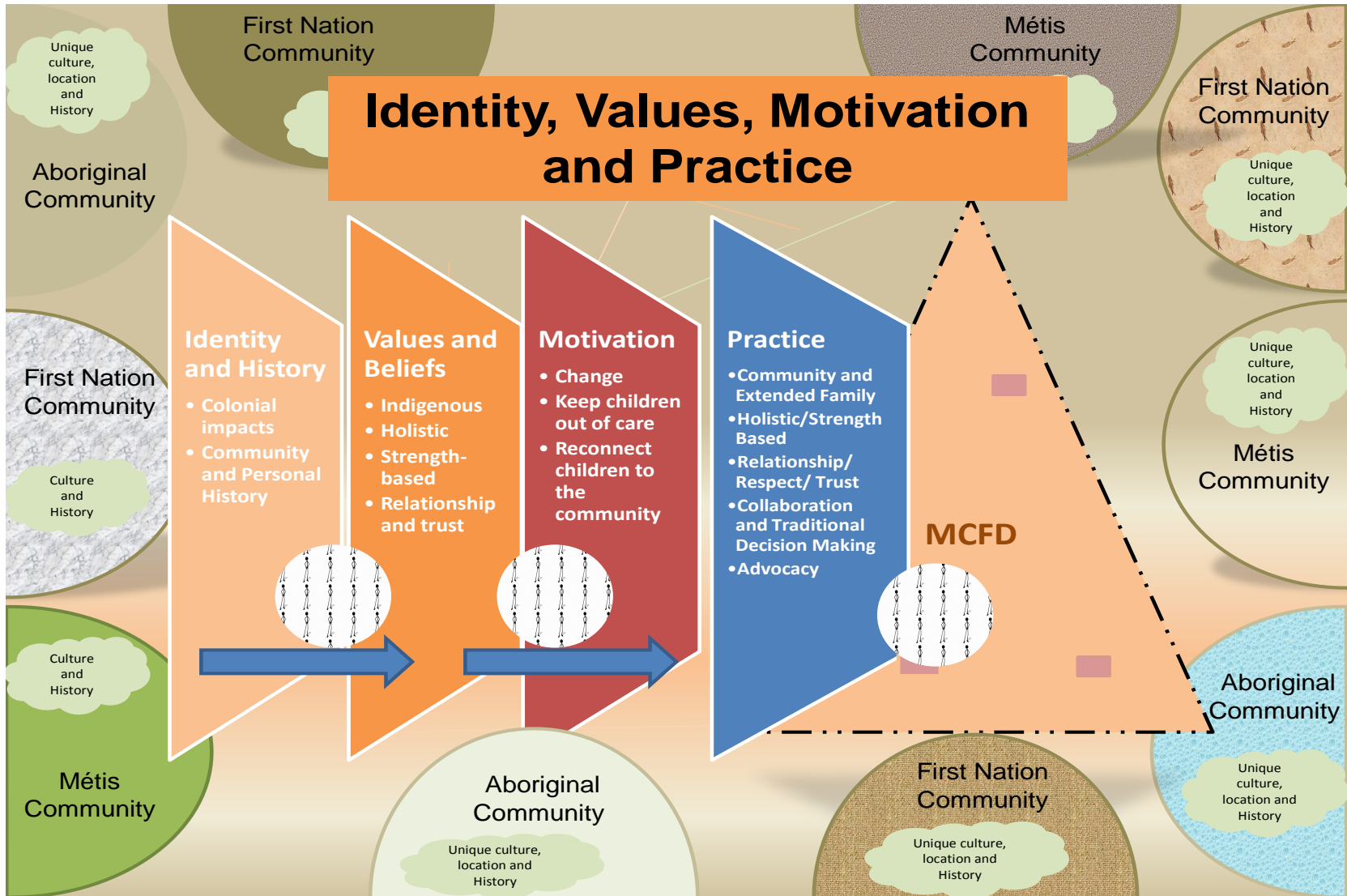
Chapter 5. Identity, Values and Beliefs, Motivation, and Practice Approach

The identities of Aboriginal participants in this study are diverse and rich. Participants fit within a cultural continuum described by various First Nations scholars, in terms of some having been raised in a traditional and connected way to First Nations communities, to those whose families buried their Aboriginal heritage in an attempt to assimilate into the dominant culture more easily and many others experiences which fall in between (Morrissette et al, 1993; Weaver & White, 1997). The impacts of colonization on individual participants, however these have been felt and experienced, appear to shape and inform an Indigenous values and beliefs-based orientation that motivates Aboriginal participants to seek change in the Ministry. Their vision, motivation and practice approaches appear to stand in sharp contrast to that of the existing mainstream organization. Their value and belief-based approaches clearly emerge from lived collective experiences, their desire to express and engage an Indigenous world view, and a deeply internal passion to change and improve services for Aboriginal people.

Participants reveal remarkably similar perspectives of working in the highly complex, emotionally challenging and contentious environment of a government child welfare system that is clearly seen to be complicit, historically and presently, in the oppression of Aboriginal people. Participants degree of congruence envisioning new systemic and practice approaches to providing effective services Aboriginal children and families is striking.

The visual map in Figure 5.1 provides an overview of the identity, values and beliefs, motivations, and professional practice of Aboriginal participants in the study.

Figure 5.1 Identity, values and beliefs, motivations, and practice of study participants.



Identity

Deliberate and careful attention has been made to avoid identifying particular participants as unique descriptors of individual background situations may too easily cause them to be recognized within the Ministry. Participant descriptions of their identity are predominated by their connections to and experiences within First Nations, Métis and other Aboriginal communities. Some were raised in First Nations and Métis communities and experienced traditional community and cultural ways. Others were not and are seeking to explore how their origins impact and inform their identity.

Participants describe both the strengths and challenges of growing up in communities where the internalization of centuries of colonial policies has resulted in widespread poverty and myriad socioeconomic challenges. Feelings of community belonging and cohesion are reported as critically important, rich and plentiful. They exist parallel, and at times in sharp contrast, to the painful knowledge and experience of extensive family dissolution, multiple challenges and the extensive and intrusive involvement of government systems. How these experiences impact future motivations and experiences of working within the system become more revealing when they describe their own or other family's experiences of residential school, child removal, policing and justice system involvement that many times ends with removal and incarceration. A child protection worker who grew up in her First Nations community identifies the root of problems in First Nations and Aboriginal communities as the effects of extensive trauma experienced by all community members through the ongoing impacts of colonization. These include overt and internalized racism, extreme poverty, substance misuse, violence, abuse, and neglect.

While the challenges of community life are described empathetically and honestly, participants stress the importance of sharing the strengths equally alongside the challenges. One participant who grew up in a First Nations community describes his identity as rooted early in his life within the familial and social structures of the community—where everyone in the community knows who you are based on who your grandparents and parents are, what role you hold within your family, who the leaders in your family are, and to whom you are accountable. He recalls the importance of experiencing strong familial and community cohesion, expectations, and accountabilities within the community based on this structure.

Other participants describe experiencing and learning of their Aboriginal identity later in life having, like so many, been impacted by the mass migration of First Nations and Aboriginal people to urban centres. Some must resolve learning of Aboriginal ancestry where their families purposely disassociated or minimized their culture to better assimilate. Several participants were raised with no cultural knowledge or connection in non-Aboriginal contexts. Some attempted to disassociate from Aboriginal identity, only to find a need later to understand more about their ancestry, community, and culture. One Métis participant recalls telling friends she was Hispanic because it seemed “cool” during the era she grew up. She describes “feeling very uncomfortable and then in my early adult years just wanting to know more about my dad and his history...I now have learned a lot.” She compares her experience of identity confusion as a teen, albeit with a very loving and caring non-Aboriginal family, to that of Aboriginal children in care, realizing that the challenges they face to find connection with their families and communities are far greater than her own:

So it wasn't because I was raised in a racist home or a foster home or adopted into a non-Aboriginal home, but somehow I absorbed something negative about being Aboriginal. I know what it did to me and I know how much my life has been changed by reconciling

that within myself, and I think of the children in care and so many of our children don't know their identity. Their cultural identity isn't nurtured.

Another participant reveals feelings of responsibility to her community after spending much of her adult life coming to terms with her Aboriginal identity. She became "quite involved in a traditional way of life, and I was introduced to ceremonies of my people, and on my graduation, they showed up and did a naming and a responsibility of the community and an obligation." The deeply personal nature of this responsibility is something she says she has carried with her throughout her career.

One participant, the child of a First Nations woman raised away from her family and community in foster care, describes grappling with her Aboriginal identity as a new child protection worker in a First Nations community, "I don't really have a whole lot of connections with my extended family, and I feel a little bit like a fraud in a sense doing an interview about Indigenous stuff because I am definitely, definitely colonized." She says she became a social worker in part to address the history in her family and to develop a practice "to sort of make amends. . . . I wanted to ensure that the children that I worked with didn't end up losing their culture, their identity, like my mom, and therefore myself and my siblings."

Another participant describes how her family lived off the land with no electricity and hunting for subsistence. She says her mother, who had experienced trauma and disconnection, being raised in an abusive non-Aboriginal adoptive home (during the Sixties Scoop), attempted to connect her own family back to their culture in another territory and with another First Nations community. This participant, who spent periods of time in government care as a youth, found strength and support from her adopted First Nations community to complete post-secondary education.

Several participants describe being young single parents with government system involvement as a daily part of their existence—much like many of the parents they now work with. One participant, who became a single parent at 16, overcame considerable challenges with support from family and community to return to school and complete post-secondary education.

Values and Beliefs

Participants talked about values and beliefs informed by personal identification within the social-historical context of colonization, holistic approaches, cultural identity, collective well-being through community, community support, diversity of Aboriginal communities and individuals, respectful community engagement, not positioning themselves as “the expert,” relationship and connection, modelling, and collaboration and decision making. These values and beliefs are explored below.

Personal identification.

Participants identify with the needs, challenges, and strengths of Aboriginal people—both children and adults—seems to influence participant values and beliefs. Many participants describe having experienced or witnessed the impacts of child welfare systems personally. For example, Child Protection Worker #1, who works in her own community, empathetically describes the experience of working with parents:

What can I do to help these parents? Because knowing what my parents went through . . . essentially these parents are me, and so I think that is a huge plus for us, being Aboriginal. Most of us have probably experienced a lot of that, residential school, pulled down, all the way down, that that makes it even more real for me. It is like, Okay, what can I do to help the children and what can I do for these parents? Because nobody helped my parents and nobody helped me.

A focus group participant expresses how her experiences help her identify both positive and negative experiences that shape and drive her practices by identifying with the needs, strengths, and challenges of Aboriginal people:

I really recognized the many, many differences of our people and the strength of our people...and treating the person as if they were my brother, my sister, my family member, my child who may have an issue and to treat them with as much respect as they deserve, no matter what their situation and where they were on their path and their journey.

Mental Health Support Worker #2 understands the need to be cared for and understood,

I hold my own story and I was fortunate enough to have people in my life to help me get to where I am today. There are people that believe in me and sat with me and listened with me and talked with me. There are people that guided me and they cared enough about me to help me when I needed it.

Social-historical context / colonization.

Participants clearly value structural explanations of colonial impacts and resist attempts to isolate and pathologize individual behaviour in Aboriginal communities. Shared common experience of the damaging impacts of colonization and ongoing racism often translates with Aboriginal professionals identifying holistically based causes and solutions. For example, Child Protection Worker #5 says, “The social historical context is really important and for me. I wouldn’t be able to move forward without that context being acknowledged and looked at.”

Holistic approach.

The idea of working in the community and understanding interconnected clan and family systems and the need for widespread family and community healing is widely promoted by all participants. Many spoke of Indigenous approaches based on an Indigenous world view; attending to the holistic needs of Aboriginal children and families they are working with—their physical, spiritual, emotional, and cognitive needs as defined through the specific cultural community or group with which they belong. For Resource Worker #1 this is the foundation of her belief system: “First of all, I truly believe in the medicine wheel in regards to just being spiritually connected, emotionally, mentally, and physically...” Some participants referred to balance in the medicine wheel, while others referred to working within an Indigenous world view.

Cultural identity.

Connecting children to their cultural identity was explored by participants as key to Aboriginal child well-being. Several participants shared struggles with their own cultural identity as youth and expressed the belief that focus in practice must be assisting Aboriginal children work through identity issues. Manager #1 expresses the pain she encountered as a youth:

I still know the loss that I experienced by feeling ashamed and not having a lot of knowledge. . . . I know what it did to me and I know how much my life has been changed by reconciling that within myself and I think of the children in care. . . . Isn't that what we are supposed to be doing? I think it has just made me more passionate about the importance that children do know where they come from and that they have that inner pride of who they are. When we don't do that, we are damaging their spirit. We could be altering the person that they have the potential to be.

Provincial Office Employee #2 said: "It's all about ensuring that our Aboriginal children and youth are connected to their families. . . . For me it's fulfilling I think sort of a responsibility and role within my community."

Collective well-being through community.

Another value expressed by Aboriginal participants is a need to partner with Aboriginal communities to explore and reassert cultural teachings and family values in their practice with Aboriginal children, youth, and families. This value, best represented as focus on the collective well-being as critical to health and well-being often becomes contentious with existing MCFD child protection legislation, policy, and practice that focuses on the individual well-being of the child. Participants clearly underline the need to explore the unique structure and process for supporting families with each individual and their community — often doing so through engagement with Elders and other cultural mentors. A reconnection worker describes how a family illness and crisis brought her grandmother and aunties to care for them. "We had lots of moms. We had lots of grandmas. We had lots of support. The concept of family is different. The

concept of community is different. There is less individual.” Then she describes how she integrates her experience to practice:

Every day I’m working in the system, I’m learning from my people, what their tradition is, and sometimes they share with me that little bit of sacred knowledge that they have, or they might be so disconnected, we have no way of reaching them unless we connect them to their roots Children who do not have these connections end up dividing their own culture...can end up on the street.

A guardianship worker describes learning about a First Nations community (not his own) that he is currently working in and how he may help the children and families:

[I’m] constantly thinking of what might be and as I experience the community and connections that I can kind of picture some of that stuff in somebody else’s life. I guess I’m a gatherer in a way. I go out there to be part of the community and collect things and bring them to people.

Provincial Office Employee #2 says, “My first instinct is to look at what can empower community.” Mental Health Support Worker #2 believes that change will not occur in the system until the communities are fully involved in the process:

It is going to be the communities, it has to be the communities, and it’s just because the communities have a vested interest in moving forward. And what you’re talking about is what the Elders keeps saying, we have to know where we come from in order to know where we’re going. It’s such a simple and yet beautiful teaching. It’s not easy to do that.

Community support.

Child Protection Worker #2 addresses the importance of community support in practice:

We had the support of the communities, now I wouldn’t say all the communities. It is always a challenge...They have an expectation of you and they think that you should be working for them, which we are, but we also have to recognize the protection concerns.

Mental Health Support Worker #3 supports this reciprocity:

It is like when you become part of a community, you become part of a community. I am not just an employee that is here to do a specific job. When you are Aboriginal, it is like okay, they are opening their doors to me, that means I need to open my doors to them.

Diversity of First Nations/Aboriginal communities and individuals.

Aboriginal professional participants stressed the belief that each community is a unique entity with different belief systems, social structures, and cultural teachings. Avoidance of what

is sometimes referred to as pan-Indianism—the assumption that all Aboriginal people share static, common cultural and social systems—is another belief shared by many of the participants. They further suggest that cultural identity shifts and changes throughout one’s life. One focus group participant observes:

My cultural identity is ever changing. I have a foundation that I live with. I know who I am, where I am from. That is questionable at times and it is an ever challenging journey, but yeah, I think that from the foundation and working with the people you are surrounded with and your environment and the earth that we are stewards of, I think that it is a good place to be and then try to role model that with the children that you work with.

Respectful community engagement.

A value regarding Aboriginal community engagement through appropriate and respectful community protocol was expressed by several participants. A guardianship worker says:

...I think there is a big part of being included in a hosting nation and being open to that and being aware of protocols, being aware of how to be accepted. And it is sometimes quite a challenge and sometimes it is just very rewarding to get an invite...

The ability to integrate this value into the work becomes a practice approach for reconnecting the child or youth to their own or a local Aboriginal community. A reconnection worker says:

...if there is an opportunity, saying, “Let’s go check out what they are doing over there and maybe we can learn something.” The wisdom keepers of the land could share some stuff. I am honoured if they do that with me.

Nonexpert orientation.

Several participants revealed that communities value professionals who don’t exert an expert orientation and who are not always comfortable with not “knowing all the answers.”

Openness to meeting community members on an equal level and learning about the community improves communication. A reconnection worker, a long time Ministry employee, describes an experience she had in her first year with MCFD:

I arrived at the Chief’s office. He called me in because he was going to decide who would work with his band. He asked me a question, and I couldn’t answer it. He said out of 580 people—they’ve all been sexually abused except about four percent. What are you going

to do for us? I had no idea. That kind of mass destruction in one community, what could we do? I couldn't do anything. I'm one person. What was I supposed to do? So I said "I don't know" and I left his office. That's all he wanted to know. I got the job in that community because I didn't have the answers. I was teachable. What happens is people often making the decisions don't ask "What do you need me to do? How can I help you? Teach me what I need to know."

Relationship and connection.

Developing and maintaining relationships with people they are working with is a key value expressed by many participants. The importance of building trust and respect in relationships and understanding and acknowledging the impact the system has on Aboriginal people was expressed by many of the participants. The longstanding social impacts of colonization also mean building trust requires time and process—but this patience forming relationships is critical to practice. Child Protection Worker #5 remembers:

just knowing and being on the other side, because coming back to the social historical context of child welfare, just my own experiences as a child with my mom when social workers were coming, and I remember my mom physically shaking when the social worker would talk down to her, and my mom was just feeling like she couldn't say anything because there was just that huge power imbalance. So I'm always mindful of how I present to people in a really respectful way and an open way and keeping an openness, like a curiosity. I'm just mindful of the power, and that's something that I really struggled with.

Mental Health Support Worker #3 said forming relationships is actually a value in her community and is not just "an approach," actually conveying respect:

It is just this whole trying to jam as much as you can into a day, which is also against the Aboriginal ways. You don't just jump from—you don't go to a funeral and then go to a wedding right after, do you know what I mean? Because you need time to process what has happened at that funeral and you need time to prepare for the wedding. It is the same as dealing with anything else in somebody's life.

Continuity in relationships was expressed as a crucial element for many. Child Protection Worker #4 describes the potential impact of an often common Ministry practice of reassigning children to another worker's caseload:

I was working with this girl for a year, so I was kind of hurt because she was in my life for a year and she was one person that I just wanted to make a difference for in a positive way.....but she was just taken abruptly, so that hurt. I was really hurt by that.

A focus group participant discussed the use of respectful language with the people she works with, resisting the term *client* because it is “too power-over, that very word implies a deficit, so I don’t like that word. The folks we work with is more suited to me.”

Modelling.

The concept of modelling and teaching in the professional role was also expressed by participants as the ability to lead from behind rather than directing others. This approach necessarily involves more process and complexity in their work; a reconnection worker shared “that is a big responsibility. It is harder to do our job that way than to just bark orders and tell people how to run their life.” This theme also speaks to values and beliefs regarding the positive use of power and authority. Manager #2 explains when she worked on the front-line:

I would use my authority to get into jail so I could talk to the dad and let him know how his kids were doing, absolutely.... I would use it to get into a welfare line or a Gain [social assistance] line quicker. I could use it in that way, but to me that is what you should be using it for is advocacy and support.

Motivation

Closely linked to many of the concepts explored around participants’ identity, values and beliefs is how they influence their motivation to work for and deliver services to Aboriginal children, youth, and families through the Ministry. Many describe their choice to work with MCFD as being personal; one made fully aware of the historical, and arguably current, oppression of Aboriginal people and communities through the child welfare system. They spoke also of the necessity of weighing the advantages of their background and motivations with the challenges of working within the system. Participants anticipated challenges and deficits in

MCFD given their experiences of the system growing up in and around First Nations and Aboriginal communities.

Change and transformation.

An overwhelming majority of participants describe identifying a critical opportunity, in joining MCFD, to change the way services are delivered to Aboriginal people and communities. The language and ideas participants use to express this are highly congruent. Child Protection Worker #2, who worked with families through an Aboriginal community agency for many years, describes her decision to join MCFD simply as “I wanted to know if I can actually make a difference.” Child Protection Worker #3 shares her motivation:

A lot of my family who live in the community were removed. The lifestyle was not appropriate, so therefore a lot of my cousins were taken into care. So I didn't want to do that. I didn't want to be that kind of social worker. I wanted to be somebody who could make some change and who could see the strength in my community...

Provincial Employee #1 was motivated to get her BSW after a difficult experience with MCFD while becoming a caregiver for an Aboriginal child. Experiencing first hand inadequate treatment as an Aboriginal person, she decided that she could offer something different: “I felt that process was such a nightmare for me and I thought God forbid any family that maybe wasn't so connected with the mainstream culture having to go through this.”

Another motivation for participants was the perceived importance of the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and community in the provision of services by MCFD. One guardianship worker says:

There was probably a funeral every month or so on the reserve and it was part of sitting around the fires and digging graves and the mourning and the loss and also the gathering and the healing—so it was a big part of my life. Then continuing my studies, understanding residential school, the Sixties Scoop, and all those teachings, kind of drives my practice today, to get that better perspective, so I can better deal with the families that are out there.

A reconnection worker speaks about the impact of colonial policies and the key need for a strength-based community approach:

I really recognized the many, many differences of our people and the strength of our people and the effects in my own family of residential school and oppression and standing up and treating the person as if they were my brother, my sister, my family member, my child who may have an issue, and to treat them with as much respect as they deserve, no matter what their situation and where they were on their path and their journey.

Mental Health Worker #1 talks about the potential for change she initially identified:

What motivated me was the passion, the idea to actually be able to help communities and the communities having that support from a different point of view. Being so untouched in the sense that there are no services that go to the reserves and being that person who could maybe help bring services. The huge excitement that was in there—it used to feel so, so big.

Mental Health Worker #3 also describes disappointment:

When I was going into MCFD it was a new program and it was an Aboriginal mental health team, which was the first time that the province has ever done that. So my expectation was that it would offer it quite differently, and for the first couple of years it did really well, but then when the team started to expand, that is I guess when that kind of impact would hit me. When we first started working on the team, the small little group of us that worked together, we all shared the same vision (and) direction...and at the time there was also not the pressure from the higher up people in MCFD for it to operate differently because all they wanted was access, at the time, into the First Nations communities.

Excitement for the potential of a new MCFD Aboriginal approach MCFD was broad. For example, frontline practitioners describe seeing change and transformation occurring in frontline practice, while managers describe seeing an opportunity to change and shift the service delivery structure itself. Manager #1 describes being recruited by MCFD from a community agency:

The region was looking for someone from a delegated agency to come and assist, transform, and influence practice...I am trying so hard to be a voice of change within.

Manager #2 says:

I have to say, too, there has been a significant shift. I have told my story lots, coming to work in the belly of the beast. I will leave as soon as those shifts stop, but there have been shifts. When I look at what was happening ten years ago versus what was happening five years ago versus what is happening now.

Manager #3 says:

The more I saw how the Ministry was shifting, the more I became intrigued... I ask myself the question “What good would I do not in the system?” Because we have to change it and I do want to change it. My vision for child welfare is fairly close to what the vision is that we want to get to as an organization.

Sense of responsibility.

Participants revealed clearly that personal responsibility to make significant change to Aboriginal child and family service provision is their primary motivator, especially to make change from within the system. A reconnection worker made this commitment for change to her community:

The Elders gave me an obligation to the community and the naming at my graduation ceremony. I take my obligation to heart...the obligation is to keep the home fires burning, to send children home to know that they know their roots, they know their culture. So, my commitment is to the children, to the community, and I get reminded of it every so often, is to make sure that Aboriginal children always keep connected.

Child Protection Worker #1, who works in her own community, says she finds strength to be in a challenging system through a collective sense of purpose:

The biggest reason we’re here is because we want to help our kids. We want to empower our people. We take the hits that the oppressors do because we want to do good work and we want to promote families. We are resilient, so we’ll do it. This is my purpose, this is what’s laid out for me.

Child Protection Worker #5 similarly finds

the strength in my culture, in my teaching, and the families when I’m sitting with them having tea and they’re passing me their little babies. I get my strength from the women that care for these children, the grandmothers, and that they haven’t given up. I really see it as a duty, I really, that’s my service. That’s what I’m here to do.

Mental Health Support Worker #2 says that she was

really clear about the parameters in which I would be willing to work for MCFD and that my relationship with the community was really important and that if I was to work—if they really wanted an Indigenous counsellor then they needed to allow me to do the work from that place. . . . That’s my motivator to see to children and to love them and to hear them and to let them know that they’re really special and they’re important and we’re blessed because they’re here on this earth.

A guardianship worker relates empathy and responsibility from personal experience:

I want them to know that in eight years you can come from extreme poverty to a place of comfort. I just want them to see that when I was dealing with my own issues I didn't know how to get from point A to point B. . . . I can take a look at any of my clients that are feeling this—even clients that are my age—and I know what they went through because I went through it too.

Resource Worker #1 similarly says, “I can understand where those people are coming from and why their strengths aren't as strong as they should be.” Mental Health Support Worker # 1 says of her motivation, “I don't think that I really made the decision. I think it was kind of set out for me. When I was 13 I came into care of MCFD.” She emphasizes now her responsibility is to support, guide, and empower Aboriginal children, youth, adults, and communities in their interactions with MCFD and to “make the difference.”

Aboriginal people delivering the services.

Along with a strong sense of responsibility and purpose Aboriginal participants in this study express a need for more Aboriginal staff in MCFD to provide services to Aboriginal people. Manager #1 understands “the importance of having Aboriginal people working within to make those shifts” and Manager #2 that there is an “overall recognition for the need for services to be delivered by Aboriginal people to Aboriginal people.” Provincial Office Employee #2 describes having discussions with relatives and friends when deciding whether to work for MCFD:

Many of them saw the benefit of me making the choice to take the position and said that it's a terrific way to not only find out about the inner workings of government, but also to help present that information to our communities as well.

Child Protection Worker #5 is concerned about practice by workers who may not be motivated to understand Indigenous values:

This is hard for me to say, but I would be really worried that somebody would go into the community and not really care and not really understand or take the time to sit and listen to their stories. That would be my fear is this is just a job.

Child Protection Worker #2, who works with remote First Nations communities, talks about the poor relationship between social workers and families in the community prior to her coming as the first Aboriginal worker:

So I think having Aboriginal people doing child welfare is hugely essential. They spread the way of looking at things...they are open to things. They are not closed around working with them. We are not afraid to work with families. I am not afraid to go to (a First Nations community) whereas a lot of these workers are.

A youth probation worker talks about the shared meaning and trust he believes is often established when he is identified as a First Nations person from a local community:

I think for me there is a certain comfort level in working with First Nation's clients because you feel comfortable around them and they tend to feel more comfortable around you, especially when they learn that I am First Nations . . . that is a huge rapport builder for me when I tell people I am First Nations. There is a certain level of trust that comes along with telling a person that you are First Nations and that you have cultural identity.

Keeping kids connected with their families and communities.

Another clear motivator for study participants is maintaining family and community the connections for children placed with non-Aboriginal caregivers. They describe a system that does not value children's connection to family and community. Participants strongly indicate the need to find Aboriginal family and caregivers to reconnect children to. A reconnection worker says:

The obligation is to keep the home fires burning, to send children home to know that they know their roots, they know their culture. So, my commitment is to the children, to the community, and I get reminded of it every so often, is to make sure that Aboriginal children always keep connected.

Resource Worker #2 says, "I have recruited more foster homes that are of Indigenous descent, and this is very important as most of our children in care of MCFD are Indigenous."

Keeping kids out of care.

Strengthening Aboriginal families and preventing Aboriginal children from coming into care appears as a powerful motivator for many participants. Child Protection Worker #1 says,

“My history is their history...that’s why this work is so important, because I want to see those kids stay with their families, but I want to see their parents do some of the work and become better moms and dads.” Child Protection Worker #3, joined MCFD:

to work with the families and do the prevention piece so that we are not bringing kids into care. What can we do to help keep these kids with their families because research shows the trauma created by removing these kids, not only is it for the children but the parents go into a spiral...

Similarly, Provincial Employee #1 says:

I do want the statistics to change. To me it is a crisis that 53% of the kids in care are Aboriginal. It is a crisis but we all sit around like....totally normalized and that is just expected that that is the way it is for Aboriginal kids. So my thing is I want to see those stats go down.

Empowering the people/community.

Another motivation for participants is to empower Aboriginal people and communities to regain control and strengthen their ability to care for children in their communities. Provincial Employee #2 says:

My first instinct is to look at what can empower community. So when I look at the Child and Family Service Act (and) the Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff; the Strong, Safe and Supported document, and any other initiatives and the CAPP as well, I look at the tools within those documents and say, okay, what will assist Indigenous communities to not only self-determine, but to help create understanding for Ministry workers that they seem to exist already within community...

Provincial Employee #3 says he took his job because “I saw the opportunity....for me to create a relationship between the government and Aboriginal people. So that is why I went for the job.” A First Nations child protection worker says “that’s where I get my strength. I get my strength from the women that care for these children, the grandmothers.”

Practice Approaches

Participants were asked to describe their approaches to practice—not necessarily what they define as Aboriginal practice, but how they define their own approach. Flowing from an

apparent strong and collective vision, all participants identify and describe striking similarities with their practice. Rather than describing theoretical social work or psycho-sociological theories—though some do refer to these—they reveal practice derived through experiences in and of First Nations and Aboriginal communities, shared experience of the impacts of colonization, and a strong identification with an Indigenous world view. Their mission is to enact their identity, values, beliefs, and motivation through their work. The next section outlines how they describe accomplishing this.

Study participants say it is critically important to form strong relationships with communities, families, and individuals; to explore and utilize supports in extended families and communities; to engage in strength-based, preventive, and holistic practice; finding authentic ways to connect children, youth, and families to their communities and cultural teachings. They use collaborative approaches, such as family meetings, circles, and other traditional decision-making approaches; focus on education and advocacy for the children, youth, families, and communities they work with; and the influence, education, and support of non-Aboriginal colleagues.

Two key practice goals, consistent with their expressed values and motivations, are identified repeatedly throughout their descriptions. First, keeping children out of government care and second, reconnecting children and families who are system-impacted to their cultural teachings and communities.

Community relationship/empowerment/partnership.

Several participants describe being “shaped” to work the way they do from and through their experiences in their own and other First Nations and Aboriginal communities. They describe an ease with and expectation that practice will occur within the context of the

Aboriginal communities of children and families. A few participants actually work in their own communities and therefore feel compelled to re-negotiate existing relationships. These participants were clear they see community connection as a vital asset. They understand the complexity of unique community and familial social structures, history, and cultural teachings, thus enabling them to better work with children and families. Other participants working in Aboriginal communities other than their own—which are most participants in the study—describe the importance of laying foundations in their practice by building trust and respect with the community through their own presence and actions. Trust building may take time and can occur through participating in everyday community activities, like attending community events, promoting cultural activities and linking to community programming for children, youth and families. of the community. They begin with following appropriate protocols, engaging appropriate people in the extended family and community, and using a collaborative and non-authoritative approach to decision making. Manager #1 says this commitment often means going to the community on her own time,

in order to maintain that relationship and that presence you need to take part in community functions, so like every weekend there is some kind of a gathering somewhere—not that I go to all of them. You are trying to maintain that presence. . . .It doesn't just happen from 8:30 to 4:30. It is a part of your world and you are living it all of the time.

Many participants said MCFD should legitimize informal relationship building in Aboriginal communities as laying the ground work for gaining essential trust needed to work effectively. For example, a reconnection worker said:

When someone gets invited out by the Elder as a social worker to be honoured to go pick medicines, the government has to understand that that's okay. When the medicine person or the sacred person invites a group of social workers to a sweat lodge, they need to go, or to a naming ceremony, and what I find is the good social workers go without being paid. They just go. They show up for their kids at the pow wows. They show up at the namings and the events, whether they get paid or not.

A guardianship worker, who is supported through his office to attend community events, describes how he began to develop the required relationship, credibility and trust to work in the community:

I was talking with one of the ladies and she goes to this turtle circle (a child cultural learning activity) every week...and I asked if I could join. It's just a small group but from there I met some other people in their community...I'm in the position where I'm a little more visible in the community and...A big part of social work is to go to the community gatherings. That is what I've found.

Being open to the community and seeking *their* views and *their* needs for *their* children and families is another approach. Again, speaking of the collective responsibility in an Indigenous world view and an Aboriginal community context, Manager #3 aptly contrasts working in an Aboriginal community context with a child-centred context:

I see myself within a community...collective responsibility is really huge for my culture. So when I had my first experience with child protection it was all about the individual: they weren't engaging with the family, they weren't engaging with the extended family, they weren't engaging—in some cases—with the community very well, with the Aboriginal clients and the non-Aboriginal clients as well. To me it didn't feel quite right. Why are we just working with one person when really we need to be engaging their other support systems? Because that's how it works for me—if someone wanted to help me—they don't just talk to me, maybe my aunty, certainly my mom, maybe some of my uncles, and all plan together on how to help. This is how I like to operate, and I could see how if someone does do all these good things correctly within in that type of position it can make a huge difference.

This same participant addresses how the delegated responsibility of assessing a child's safety and making decisions pursuant to legislation can be maintained while working collaboratively, once an effective relationship is established, within the community:

There are going to be some key people in each community that can help you navigate some of it. There are going to be some families that are not going to be healthy and even though you engage with them they might not come up with the best plans. Yes, so you need to have all those pieces and after you work in a community for a good amount of time then you're able to know what that is, you are able to challenge a little...Certainly what we want is to involve. We don't want people to take over. We want them to inform and direct it but we also have to know what our limitations are and...You need those key people who know the families.

Several participants discussed the need to make space and encourage the community to step forward to fill the void that exists in Aboriginal communities resulting from multiple and ongoing system impacts. With the mass intervention of child welfare and resulting loss of children through the Sixties Scoop and the residential school system, Aboriginal communities are in the process of recovering and reclaiming traditional and cultural teachings, roles, and social structures that enable them to resume caring for their children and families in ways that are consistent with their cultural past and present. So it is critical, Manager #3 highlights, to work with communities where they are at, encouraging them to exercise their own current capacity, and begin building from there:

Really the core of it is our system stepping back and letting the community fill that void. Child protection was imposed into a society that already had those laws in place and we saw the result of that—it's really about us stepping back and our community leaders taking over some of those roles. But I think we fool ourselves because I think many communities—and I think we're seeing this now—have always done this even with child welfare kind of in the background.”

Child Protection Worker #1 works in an office that serves both her First Nations community and urban Aboriginal organizations and describes having informal and formal relationships with both. These relationships enable her to generate more culturally appropriate options:

A lot of the times we'll let the band take care, we're the team in place and it's like okay what does the band want? Let the band take the lead on this. I'm the backbone, or if I have to be the heavy...I can go and say okay from the Ministry's point of view. . . . We want the communities to [be responsible] for their own families so we (work) in conjunction....but when it comes to urban Aboriginals, it's a little bit harder, but.... wherever we can find an Aboriginal concept or Aboriginal resource, that's where we focus our energies on rather than mainstream, because if you haven't lived in both worlds, you have no idea.

This participant says the most important benefit of relationship building is that trust has substantially increased between the community and the Ministry office where she works—to the extent they now share more information regarding safety concerns in the community. She also

says that this collaboration means that her office tends to use more extended family and community options for children rather than placing in foster care.

Child Protection Worker #6 describes frustration working in a remote northern community that has not yet recovered the capacity to take increased responsibility for children and families and instead relies on the Ministry to step in to play what she views as a colonial role of exerting authority:

You are not helping the situation or contributing to reconciliation if you always have to call in the big bad Ministry to make your members toe the line. If you are not...exercising your authority...you are always expecting the Ministry, the white man to do that, I don't think it is healthy and I don't think it promotes self-government or reconciliation.

A reconnection worker reflects on her time as a child protection worker in the Ministry and her approach to facilitating community involvement in decision-making and planning processes in circumstances where a child removal is seen as necessary. She preferred not to take a unilaterally, authoritarian decision-making stance but sought the involvement of the appropriate people within the community by jointly arranging family meetings with the community and often, when the family lived outside the community, bringing them back to the community for the meeting.

So I would go to these communities and I would listen to what they would say and they would present a plan and then I would work with it. So to me it was like okay, beautiful. Why wouldn't I want to do this type of work this way? I am not the sole one responsible for the decision making for the family. . . . so they would come up with a plan, put it in writing, and I would accept it.

The unique ability of Aboriginal people to gain trust and be at ease, in their own, or another Aboriginal community is addressed by Child Protection Worker #2, who worked in an urban centre that provides service to remote First Nations communities:

“So I think having Aboriginal people doing child welfare is hugely essential....I am not afraid to go to [the reserve] whereas a lot of the Ministry workers were damn near afraid.

Child Protection Worker #4 speaks of her developing relationship in a First Nations community that resulted in her engagement, planning and participation in a grandmothers' group: "It's a bunch of grandmothers that come together if I have a family that needs help. I can go to them and we can develop a plan."

A youth probation worker describes working in the community using his background and world view to shape and focus practice to build more collaborative relationships by understanding the culture of a particular community. By attending events like feasts and becoming involved he is seen as a person rather than an authority figure:

. . . when I work with Aboriginal clients I try to be as sensitive as I can to the culture. For example, if I go to the _____ I will often bring a person with me that is from the community, whether it be a Justice, a court worker, or a youth worker that works up there to help coordinate a meeting, and I try to be as respectful as I can. I think a lot of people might try to control the interview, but I try to let them lead the interview, especially if their Chief is there. I thank them for inviting me there... I am not the central figure when I go to these interviews. I am there, I am taking notes, I am asking a few questions, but I am trying to let them guide it...I think the perception...is that government people come in and they take control of the situation, they arrest people, they take the kids away, and they might ask questions but they don't respect them and their culture so much.

Mental Health Support Worker #1 speaks of the inherent difficulty engaging community, determining their needs and their direction while maintaining a supportive Ministry perspective:

The communities are the best ones to know what the proper approach is, but the communities are very guarded with their information that they are going to share, especially with someone from MCFD. So you can't actually do that approach unless you know the communities and spend the time and do the things that build trust, such as helping people clean their house, or being there consistently, helping with getting food and diapers and so much more. You need to be going and knocking on doors, and sitting and having coffee with Elders, and bouncing a baby on your knee, doing everything humanly possible to make these connections before these families are going to tell you. Generally how I approach capacity building is I have spent a lot of time in communities just saying "What do you want? What are your biggest priorities? What do you need?" . . . but the relationship has to be there first.

Mental Health Support Worker #2 speaks of the need, when first developing a new Aboriginal child and youth mental health team, to be in the community to ask what effective

support looks like. This involves spending significant time building relationships and participating with youth, family, and community members:

So getting youth groups happening, having Chief and council...hereditary Chiefs come and sit with us and guide us...that was a really big one for me, it was a big learning, it was to take the guidance from the community. Not to go in as the expert, but to take it from the youth, to take it from the parents, to take it from the Chief and to bring all of that together and to feed it back to them. That was really rewarding and to have the freedom and to have the backing to do that.

Strikingly similar is the observation of Mental Health Worker #3 working in another location:

The flexibility was nice because if it wasn't for that we never would have built the trust with those communities because we wouldn't have been attending their evening community dinners, we wouldn't have been doing all of these different things and because we were able to work out of hours and build connections with people from the reserve outside of their office hours as well just by attending community events, then they were more receptive to us because they felt that we actually cared what was going on in those communities. It is like when you become part of a community you become part of a community. I am not just an employee that is here to do a specific job, when you are Aboriginal, it is like okay, they are opening their doors to me, that means I need to open my doors to them.

These mental health outreach workers all describe a similar period of time over a one-to two-year period when Aboriginal child and youth mental health teams were being established in MCFD. They all noted how their managers accepted a discrete period of time for community relationship building that was then followed by the actual implementation of services within the communities. Unfortunately, the apparent cost of successful engagement and service implementation of this approach meant team members became completely overwhelmed by high caseloads and direct service expectations that meant they could no longer be visible and responsive to the communities' needs. This prevailing theme of working with community through building strong relationships built on trust and respect is pervasive through participant interviews.

Holistic/systems/strength-based practice approach.

Participants in the study tended not to talk about specific social work or psycho-sociological theoretical frameworks for practice. While occasionally mentioning applied aspects of system's and other social work theories, most framed their practice as being holistically based within their own cultural world view, involving focus on the physical, social, spiritual, and cognitive needs of children and individuals within an Aboriginal context. They also frequently spoke of strength-based practices, including a newer approach called Signs of Safety designed by Andrew Turnell and Steve Edwards, a strength-based model of intervention with children and families.

Prevention and support were promoted by most participants, and the ones that work as child protection workers, where critical interventions often can be the "make or break" starting point with families, tended to focus on support services following a critical intervention. They place more emphasis on strengthening families and/or extended families to ensure children potentially remain in or near their communities. Many protection workers in the study describe ongoing tension with their mainstream colleagues who are often perceived as providing an extremely strong child safety stance and potentially fail to spend time identifying and supporting strengths in the family and community. The result is a tendency to remove children from their homes and communities and placing them into non-Aboriginal foster care where they experience loss and disconnection from their family and community.

Child Protection Worker #1 prefers to focus on family support and enhancement rather than becoming too reactive or over-identifying with potential risk:

So if we're not helping the family and supporting the family then this child is going to be lost. So my practice is what can we do to keep this family together. Maybe the parents aren't able to do this, but there's a grandma, there's an aunt, there's an uncle. . . . What can we do to make sure that this child doesn't leave the community or their family or

their friends? Because knowing the experience of my people, that doesn't go well with them. I see that when we send kids to caregivers that are non-Aboriginal they don't understand it. They think "oh these poor kids, they've got nothing." But really they've got a wealth of culture, they've got a wealth of knowledge, they've got a community that loves them.

Strength-based perspectives with Aboriginal people are vital a guardianship worker says, but acknowledges keeping momentum for such an approach is challenging within the Ministry where there is a fear-based culture of failing to protect a child:

I think a big piece of working with Aboriginal people is looking at a strength-based perspective...But a lot of the time we are practicing in fear, a trembling system—if something happens to this child—anticipating—so sometimes that affects how we practice.

Child Protection Worker #3 further considers historical intergenerational impacts and the effects of trauma:

So I wanted to work with the families and do the prevention piece so that we are not bringing kids into care...research shows the trauma created by removing these kids, not only is it for the children but the parents go into a spiral.

Child Protection Worker #5, says a holistic approach involves engaging Aboriginal children and families through powerful, collective cultural metaphor:

...like just being from our culture of collective, like when we are in a sweat lodge, we are human beings. We get really open and honest about things. Like there are some matters that are really personal and embarrassing but usually when it's matters of the heart we really share things. . . I always liked the example of the buffalo... whenever a buffalo is injured or traumatized it goes to look for its pack and then it finds that security in its belonging with its pack. . . . So I always encourage people when we're doing human circles to look at each other in the eye and connect with your pack and so I have really great stories about some of that healing. But again that's two different worlds, two different ways of thinking. I don't want to say that one is better than the other; I'm just saying that they're just vastly different.

Child Protection Worker #2 appears to believe, like many, that foster care must be a last resort which means exhausting all other options first. Of course, child safety is paramount and must be assessed but families also must receive enough support to provide other options.

Aboriginal approaches mean:

...working with the family, always looking at family and community as options. Foster

care is not an option unless that is all we have...but getting resistance from the Ministry staff saying “well, obviously you are not aware of the risks, or you are not looking at the risks.” It is like pull on the horses a little bit here, you know...The kids are safe and we put things in place. I don’t like this one chance only thing.

Cultural knowledge and teachings/Elders.

Participants appear to combine Aboriginal approaches (holistic and strength-based) with mainstream systemic practice, then integrate these concepts into their own cultural knowledge which they implement in their work with children and families. Many participants addressed the considerable differences they see in their approach from their mainstream Ministry colleagues and how cultural teachings guide their practice.

A long time Ministry employee now working as a reconnection worker, says:

Because we are also a very spiritual people the approach is different. We need to put the belief, the culture or the teachings, the ethics, the family values back into how we work with our families and for me it is very, very important we are not policing agents, that we, as one of the Chiefs said, “we lead from behind, we walk, we model, we teach,” and that is a big responsibility.

The same participant explains how direct experience and access to cultural knowledge for children and families within First Nations and Aboriginal communities is a form of intervention that helps reconnect them to their communities and, by extension, to their identity:

There are never enough resources, but it is funny that placing a child or family back into a community that has the resources within the family to volunteer, I truly believe that paid resources are artificial. I truly believe that the most change I’ve seen comes when a family takes in a youth reconnects them to the sweat lodge, the earth. I was out at a ceremony, and they taught the kids how to ride a horse... how to feed the horse, how to walk the medicine wheel. To teach them the singing...to be there in the community with family is a greater learning. That’s where the connections and the memories are, and we do not build memories for our kids in the office. When we talked about deficit, we’re always about the deficit, what they don’t have, but we forget about the earth connection. We forget about the people and keepers of the environment. We forget about other obligations that they can do, and we forget that many people can parent the children.

A guardianship worker is not from the First Nations community where he works, and notes that many children and youth in care, like himself, also find themselves away from their communities. This commonality helps create fluidity of cultural experience for both him and the

children by talking about including, where possible, cultural experience and knowledge of the host territory into their learning and experience:

Culture doesn't only come from the past but it comes from where you are now. So I am in a different territory than where my ancestors come from, but yet I look for opportunities to be invited into (the community's) experience because this is where I am now. The same is with the children that are in care in a variety of different places throughout the nation, they are also in a strange territory and there is a certain amount of adaptation that they must encounter to be part of the community they are living in now.

This process requires patience and one reconnection worker said it helped further shape her understanding of Aboriginal family systems and healing.

My time frames are different than other people's time frames. We work on a healing path. Whatever that is for a child, they need to balance their parts.

Child Protection Worker #6 discusses taking her lead from the First Nations people she works with when they share cultural experiences that are important to them "to help them get past their addictions or depression or whatever issues they have going on that is causing them to come into our attention, then that is available to them if they want it. I support it."

Mental Health Support Worker #3 integrates the Western concept of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) with cultural knowledge she has gained through working in the local First Nations community to better help her share with the Aboriginal children and families she works an understanding of their trauma in the context of their culture and the impacts of colonization:

...if they are dealing with a sexual assault or say it was some kind of abuse within their family...the effects of that... are more extreme than it is in other families because historically they have had to deal with this. So there is this thing that the Elders call emotional memories where in your mind you can forgive and you can forget but your body never forgets. They talk about it in psychology too when you are talking about post-traumatic stress disorder...I would say that probably the majority of the people on reserve have some level of PTSD and that is why the Elders speak like that, because that is just how they express it.

This same participant speaks about her cultural learning and how it conflicts with the organization and delivery of services in the Ministry, impacting her ability to practice.. She

contrasts a highly rigid, task-oriented environment to a world view that focuses on process, patience and presence:

It is just this whole trying to jam as much as you can into a day which is also against the Aboriginal ways. ...you need to be on the same page as that person that you are walking into the room to talk to, right? Say I have a child talking to me about a sexual assault that they experienced and I am still thinking about the other kid who is in jail and all of this other stuff and I am not even going to be properly listening to this kid, right? It is not even human to be able to do that let alone a white thing or an Aboriginal thing or what not. But that is just like I don't hear my non-Aboriginal bosses telling me that ever.

Child Protection Worker #4 shares very similar observations in her approach and the response of her team leader who suggests she spends too long in the community:

I get really stressed out sometimes, mainly because I don't have the time the community wants me to have. The part that bugs me is that I was always taught when you give someone your word...then my new team leader comes in and says "oh you're spending too much time (in the community) you know what I mean, like I'm on a holiday, "Well you need to reduce that down."

A focus group participant commented on the Ministry's inability to support requests for Elder or cultural support to their practice:

I have been here seven years now and we still don't have an Elders' group here... I just say to people who know Elders, "Will you please invite so and so?" or "Do you know somebody that can come and sit with us in a circle?"... I just try to do that because that is really valuable, but they don't see it here.

Another participant, Mental Health Support Worker #3, says that in spite of understanding the value of having Elders available to the children and families she is working with, she remembers not feeling enough trust in a Ministry commitment to respectfully engage an Elders' committee:

In the beginning, the vision of our team was that we would have an Elders' committee that helped us with things like this and there was apparently money in the beginning to do that but it was never organized and that is because myself and the other Indigenous staff were expected to be the ones that organized it and we didn't trust our team yet because it was all fresh and new so how can we go out there and pitch to our First Nations Elders, "oh come and be a part of this," if we don't even know whether they are going to be valued in that system? So there is a lot of concern about protecting.

Relationship, respect, and trust.

Participants talk about the impact of history for any Aboriginal person coming in contact with the Ministry. So the need to build rapport, trust, and respect is identified as critical ground in their practice. This means acknowledging and legitimizing the fears and reactions of Aboriginal people when they come into contact with child welfare services. One participant describes this process as being necessary for every social worker (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal), given the widespread pervasive impact of residential schools and child welfare intervention. The participant stresses that whether this acknowledgment is implicit (internalized philosophy) or explicit (demonstrated practice approach), it needs to be present.

Non-authoritative relationships are described as starting by helping families to meet basic needs, like obtaining necessary food, shelter, medical care, or transportation. Or it may mean just sitting down to tea, talking and “bouncing a baby” on their knee. In other words, relationship building and trust are mandatory starting points. Once trust is established then perhaps more serious issues or concerns that are emerging for the child and family can be addressed together.

Relationships help participants learn more about families, their place within extended family and the community, and provide the foundation for linking potential supports. This is critical when children and families are experiencing crisis so options within the community can be connected more readily. This does not exclude formal services (like mandatory supervised visits) or helpful interventions like counselling but their practice is to remain linked and seek support from the community. The participants also regularly frame their approaches in terms of prevention, support, and early intervention—regardless of service provided (e.g., protection, foster care, mental health, etc.) hopefully with community direction and participation.

Manager #2 describes supporting a parent in crisis and the important effort required to involve extended family and community even during a removal:

That person was hurting and one of the other workers did take her child because she was unsafe, but I also knew that we had canvassed the family, we had worked with the family to see what other options there were. We worked with the community and there were no other options, so unfortunately that child had to come into care. But, of course, all that mom sees is her child is taken from her. So I tried to stay in that supportive role with her. It was challenging; it wasn't easy because she was screaming and she was angry, she was hurt, but that's the core of who I am, that's what I needed to do at the time. As a Ministry worker, there is lots of policy that says, okay we've got to stop this conversation now.... to keep workers safe and I could have gone that route, but I didn't see any benefit to that at the time. Of course, if it got dangerous then that's where we all draw the line. But I didn't feel endangered. I just felt the anger and to me it was okay for me to experience that anger at that time because that's what she needed to express.

Encouraging clients to have the support they need in the face of system intervention is another aspect of relationship building that Child Protection Worker #1, working in her own community but still mindful of the impact of Ministry intervention, describes in her approach:

I want everybody at the table. I'm telling my clients, "You know what, don't come alone. Bring somebody. Bring your mom, bring your dad, bring any kind of support so they can hear what is going on."

Child Protection Worker #6, who works in an isolated rural setting, discusses the common, though controversial practice by many social workers of developing a check list of actions a family needed to accomplish to regain custody of their children:

I don't think it works to just go in and give someone a whole bunch of hoops to jump through without having any relationship with them . . . It doesn't work. You need to have a relationship with your clients and find out what they need and how you can best meet those needs because if you just rely on sort of a formulated approach it is not going to work....

An Aboriginal youth guardianship worker from a small urban office says this effort takes time and patience:

right now I'm just at the beginning of a new group of kids I'm working with, at the very beginning stages of building relationships. I haven't met a lot of people that they are connected with so I've got a long ways to go.

Mental Health Support Worker #3 discusses practice in terms of trust:

Sometimes I think the families do tell you a little bit, but it's kind of an iceberg approach. They are only telling you what is on the surface, not really getting down to what is below. That stuff is very scary for them.

Extended family as support/caregivers.

The importance of engaging extended family as supports to children and families and potentially as temporary or permanent caregivers can help prevent children from entering mainstream foster care. Child Protection Worker #1 describes trying to immediately locate extended family during an emergency removal. Being from the community she says she knows most of the families who can provide safe temporary care. She describes her collaborative approach with a social development worker from the community:

Having two parents that went to residential school and living that intergenerational chaos is all I can describe it as. That childhood was chaos, right . . . I don't want to see—you take the kid away from the community, what are you going to do to that parent, that's already struggling with addiction or mental health? But if they know “okay my kids are with my uncle or my sister or my grandma, I know they're safe and they're going to be taken care of.”

So before anything gets done, we get a big meeting with everybody around the table. We make sure the kids are safe, so “can grandma take them for right now” or what can we do to make sure these kids are safe? . . . So that's how we do business.

Mental Health Support Worker #1 talks about the reluctance of many workers to engage with extended family if they perceive a community as “too” damaged:

Unfortunately some of the communities we work in are so very, very unhealthy—our team skims over the surface and just looks at the unhealthy people that they can't do the work, rather than looking at the pieces some of the unhealthy people could still do if you provided them with some support. . . So our approach needs to be looking more at the family and creating health within the family to get health for that child in the long run.

Manager #2 draws attention to the lack of Ministry recruitment of Aboriginal caregivers:

There isn't one place in this region where there are enough Aboriginal caregivers. Do we have any strategies in our region to address that? No. I am just thinking, okay, if I was a resource team leader that would be the first thing I would do. I would dedicate a staff member and that would be their full-time job. . . . Instead we just say it is just so hard to recruit

Collaboration and traditional decision making.

Another aspect of their practice that many of the participants shared is a focus on collaboration and, where possible, integrating community and traditional decision-making approaches into practice. Mentioned above is the importance of partnering and collaborating with Aboriginal communities and remaining closely linked to encourage autonomy through traditional approaches to planning and decision making.

Many participants shared successes of collaborative decision making:

I was proud to be able to go to a recent gathering of all of the supervisors and team leaders and advise that I didn't, at that time, have one single case in court. What my team has slowly discovered is that by having meetings and inviting family and a lot more people than they normally would invite, people are picking up the pieces. People are helping develop plans. Sure a sister might take a child but someone else might volunteer to drive that child to daycare. (focus group participant)

I was doing some family group conferencing through sacred circles I could not believe how many beautiful strong plans came out of those families and some workers would grab those plans and support those plans and put in what is needed. (reconnection worker)

When you have the whole family meeting, they're accountable to their brothers; they're accountable to their aunts because they'll call them on it, right? . . . So you really get to know the dynamics of the family, you get to know what's going on and who's going to be accountable for what and I think that's way better. (Child Protection Worker #1)

Manager #3 talks about historical traditional decision-making processes and structures within First Nations families and communities, nearly lost due to colonization and other impacts, that are being reclaimed and re-emerging as an alternative to resolving child and family matters without the need for outside intervention. However, there is concern the Ministry has provided limited support for, for example, this manager explains:

That's something we [First Nations] have been practicing for a long time. I mentioned earlier on when any of our community members die there is a traditional decision making process because that goes back to the natural leaders in the community as to what needs to happen. It's a system that works very well because the whole community takes care of it, of that whole situation. We also did that for child welfare except we didn't call it child welfare back then, it was called looking after children. We did it for thousands and thousands of years in that same fashion . . . So when I hear of a traditional decision

making program and this is the latest and greatest practice shift, it's kind of everyday life for me. I get excited about it because I can see the potential for how it can inform our practice as a system.

Advocacy.

Another area of practice that is important for several participants is providing information and advocacy to individuals, families, and communities. Many Aboriginal people they work have little knowledge of social and health programs. Participants said they have a responsibility to provide clarity regarding recipient rights and to advocate for equal access to services.

Child Protection Worker #5 underlines “the need to explain the system to Aboriginal people” she works with—children, families, community members, and leaders:

I provide support to the leadership and I also help them navigate the system, understand the system. I know how to talk to government and that's what they really appreciate...So I'm kind of that bridge already.

Systems that are difficult to navigate require inside knowledge explains Mental Health Support Worker #3, said:

So part of me has always, on the hush side of things, given those kinds of advice to Aboriginal people and communities, but totally off the record—I never said this to you, but if you say this when you are making a referral for services you will be a lot more likely to get the services.

Summary

This section presents findings directly related to the identity, values and beliefs, vision, and mission of Aboriginal participants who work with MCFD. Participants' describe strong connections to First Nations and Aboriginal communities, regardless of whether they were raised in their cultural community or if they came to understand their cultural identity and connection to community later in life.

Participants' values and beliefs are also reflected through many related themes. Participants clearly value structural explanations and resist attempts to isolate and pathologize

individual behaviour in Aboriginal communities. Shared common experiences of the damaging impacts of colonization and ongoing racism allow Aboriginal professionals to relate to and identify structural causes and attempt to intervene with holistic solutions. In the forefront is the key practice of promoting overall community health and well-being by connecting Aboriginal children to their cultural identity. The need to partner, collaborate and gain the support of Aboriginal communities is also a paramount value—with the ultimate goal of supporting and empowering communities to rediscover or energize their individual, unique cultural and traditional ways of helping.

Mentioned above is the important belief by participants that that each community is a unique entity with different belief systems, social structures, and cultural teachings and that community engagement needs to occur through appropriate and respectful adherence to community protocols. Participants underline many valued practices including resisting an expert orientation and of being comfortable with not always having the answers. Creating time, space and process is important to build trust and respect in relationships. Participants said they need to share understanding and acknowledge system impacts. They model their own behaviour as a form of teaching, they “lead from behind.” and share information and decision-making with involved Aboriginal communities.

Many participants describe making a choice to work with MCFD with full knowledge and understanding of the historical—and, some argue, current—oppression of Aboriginal people and communities through the child welfare system. Participants spoke of making the decision to work for MCFD by consciously weighing opportunity against challenge in working within the system. They describe awareness and anticipation of challenges and deficits in MCFD in how Aboriginal communities have and are currently being served.

Most participants reveal their primary motivation for choosing to work with MCFD as the opportunity to significantly impact and dramatic change how services are delivered to Aboriginal people and communities. They are strongly mission-based, expressing a strong sense of personal responsibility to change the way Aboriginal people are served and to see better outcomes. They are also motivated by the belief that Aboriginal people are in the best position to be delivering services to Aboriginal people and communities. They are committed to seeing Aboriginal children connected to their families and communities and ultimately want to prevent children from coming into care. When children do come into care, participants want to see the community regain the capacity to provide care in place of the current overuse of non-Aboriginal foster care. These beliefs emerge for all Aboriginal participants in this study, regardless of their professional role in MCFD.

Aboriginal participants describe the importance of building trust and respect in the community through their presence and actions in the community. Participants frame their practice as strength-based and holistically centred within their own cultural world view. Cultural knowledge, gained through their own and other Aboriginal communities, is described as being vital for informing and guiding their practice in MCFD.

Participants spoke of the fear experienced by many Aboriginal people, due to historical system involvements, when they come into contact with the Ministry. Given this fear, the need to build rapport, trust, and respect with children, families, and communities is identified as critical ground in their practice. Engaging extended family as supports to children and families, and often as caregivers who can help prevent children from having to live in foster care, was also described as important. Many Aboriginal people, especially in isolated communities, have

limited understanding of Ministry programs, so participants describe the importance of providing information and advocacy to individuals, families, and communities.

Chapter 6. Supportive or Disempowering? Perceptions of the Organizational Environment

The organizational environment in MCFD is described by Aboriginal participants in this chapter. Most notable and concerning are descriptions of covert, and sometimes overt, racism viewed by many as a reflection of wider societal attitudes. Participants talk about the subtle and pervasive existence of ingrained attitudes and assumptions that guide practice values, norms and approaches in ways that lead to intolerance of deviation or change. Many non-Aboriginal colleagues are viewed as apathetic to or dismissive of historical perspectives on oppressive practices with Aboriginal people and the significantly increased challenges they face due to the impacts of historical systemic oppression on their families and communities. Mainstream practice norms, characterized by the exertion of power and a low risk approach that often results in child removal, are viewed as prevalent in the Ministry.

Participants point out that some non-Aboriginal colleagues may have low empathy and display low-risk behaviour due to both a lack of cultural competency and a lack of overall support in the Ministry for frontline work. Descriptions of what is often referred to as change fatigue, where constant change initiatives are being implemented at the frontline without clear organizational direction and support, is also viewed as contributing to an overall feeling of powerlessness and apathy at the frontline. This translates into an environment where Aboriginal practitioners have to constantly rationalize and justify, often even conceal, their practice approaches to colleagues and team leaders. The physical environment is described by participants as institutional and cold and also contributing to a poor fit for Aboriginal staff and service recipients. When all of these variables come together in terms of the impact on Aboriginal employees the situation is best described as an unsupportive and depersonalized

environment in which highly motivated and value-driven Aboriginal employees are challenging a rigid practice environment to become more collaborative and community based.

The visual map in Figure 6.1 provides an overview of the perceptions of Aboriginal participants of the organizational environment of MCFD.

Figure 6.1 Participant perceptions of MCFD organizational environment.



Discrimination and Racism

Many descriptions of Ministry work settings by study participants include examples of what they view as discriminatory treatment of themselves and Aboriginal children, youth, and families. Covert racism is described in many situations by participants often defined as the systemic, unconscious furthering of negative assumptions, beliefs, and values about Aboriginal people and their communities. Participants say these views are reflective of existing societal attitudes. However, some descriptions of work scenarios reveal overt and deliberate racism and discrimination.

Manager #3 says the result of the reflection of societal attitudes by some Ministry non-Aboriginal workers is limited openness to the Ministry's "Aboriginal agenda" and therefore the potential to sabotage organizational goals to improve services:

I really think we have to step back from the organization piece and look at the societal and structural piece. Really the root of all that misunderstanding is racism, is prejudice, all of those isms that are out there and are really prevalent in Canadian society. That affects our system and affects our organization . . . because even though we are an organization of professionals, of social workers, we still have a lot of people who have that close-mindedness, who grew up in that family who views Aboriginal people, or other minorities, as just a little bit less than, or they have the advantages because of this or that. That's the most insidious thing in child welfare. The band pays for your housing; how come you don't have a house? The band gives you money for food; how come you don't have food? Which takes us totally away from where we need to be in this shift.

This participant says MCFD must take a clear stance. That is, all staff and management (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) must be willing to address racism in the organization:

There are clear consequences if you say something off colour, and we're not willing to deal with that. To talk about racism, even just a few years ago, was whoa, we don't talk about that, to now when we do talk about it... Still not a very comfortable conversation."

Manager #3 says that non-Aboriginal staff and managers may perpetuate inappropriate or ineffective practice with Aboriginal people and communities because they have not taken time to understand the deep underlying causes of the challenges facing these people:

I'm not sure if many (social workers)... really understand residential schools. We might know the words, what it is important to say when asked about it, but I'm not sure we truly understand the impact. Maybe there is too much pain...

A youth probation worker describes similar observations:

Some of the colleagues I work with...don't want to learn about injustices that occurred...they get insensitive to it and...some people are very blatant and very vocal about it. But it's disheartening for me when we are working with 75% of our clientele is probably Aboriginal and people don't want to hear about it... they just kind of think "suck it up" and it happened and we can't do anything about that.

Alluding to the unconscious nature of racism in MCFD, Manager #4 refers to change management literature that reveals to her that the Ministry may have strongly internalized norms that are obsolete and now somewhat immovable in the face of Aboriginal practice change strategies:

Change in management strategies can be effective to a point, but where you run into roadblocks and why they are not always completely effective is because you are dealing with internal culture, norms, beliefs that are so ingrained that people aren't even aware that they have them—the literature) referred to them as sacred cows. We don't question them because they just are.... They have lost their validity, but our beliefs in them continue on.

I would argue that in MCFD it is not just mainstream norms, it is upper-middle-class, or middle-class, or above-mainstream and boy, they don't like to believe that their norms are not the right ones.

This manager also extends the impact of Ministry norms or "sacred cows" beyond the Aboriginal change agenda to any new perspective, innovation or approach. Joining the organization later in her career she says she was immediately aware of this "immovable" set of assumptions in the organization.

Direct examples of racism within the work place are described by participants below:

That first two years was not easy in the system at all—blatant use of racist or discriminatory terminology around clients ... just always deficit based. Examples would be "oh, they are playing the residential school card now because I said I'm applying for permanent custody."...They do the best they can with what they have. They are not playing a card. . I have had some pretty serious conversations with some of my colleagues, now...letting them know what I was hearing. (Manager #2)

Sometimes it was overt and other times it would be that whole rumour gossip, team meetings and people would—you would hear it around the office... I had mentioned (to a team leader) that I wanted to try guardianship or try doing home studies and resources. And I was told in a team meeting in front of everybody that I have a quarter of the skills that the other workers had and all of the Aboriginal recruits who were still in the system were struggling...shouldn't be senior workers. We shouldn't be in the roles that we were. In front of my whole team, which again causes the subculture. When I approached her about it she told me I was being a victim. (Child Protection Worker #3)

The below examples demonstrate how discriminatory practices generalize from the workplace to the community and clients:

To hear them. . .to be in my office and to hear them speaking with such disrespect for members of our community that are really big, respected members in our community, it just tears you apart...like I would just slam my door or I would actually just leave. Just go "I gotta go for a walk because I'm going to say or do something that I'm going to regret otherwise." (Mental Health Support Worker #2)

Some of the situations that I've come up against that really used to hurt me and make me angry are workers mocking Aboriginal clients, you know the running down of clients. First you blame the parents and then the child grows up in care and then you blame the child, and I'm just like, "Oh my God, will this ever stop?" (Child Protection Worker #4)

Well, it is disheartening for me to hear some of these comments. When they are putting down Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal families for whatever reason and they don't believe that some of the things from the past have affected where they are today. (youth probation worker)

Mental Health Support Worker #2 says she resigned from her position at MCFD because of similar experiences. She describes a situation when staff from the child protection team in the office had a hereditary chief stopped by police and his vehicle searched following a screening report:

There are all these people who have been up to the ceremony—(other) chiefs are going by watching. They had the police and the social workers in there talking to him. Then they took him back up to the reserve and then the band chief and another hereditary chief were there and the social workers wouldn't let them get a word in edgewise. They kept cutting them off and rolling their eyes and they were just really, really disrespectful and they had no idea who they were talking to. They had no idea the disrespect that they were showing to people...then coming back . . . you know bragging about it in the office. That's how I learned about it...and I was so angry and by that time I'd had it. I went and reported what they had done. . . I named the social workers that were there and it was investigated. The result of me holding them accountable is I was blackballed in that office. They didn't talk to me and I didn't learn until later that I was called a mole and a rat. And when I was not there they walk around going "I think I smell a mole. I think I smell a rat." That's how I was regarded in that office and it was acceptable. Nobody held

them accountable. When I went to my team leader and said “What the hell is this?” nothing came of that. I never got an exit interview. Anybody who stood up and spoke up was gone, and there was a few in my time.

Racism based on fear of Aboriginal people and communities by non-Aboriginal

colleagues emerges as a theme for two participants. Child Protection Worker #2 said she had

Ministry colleagues:

. . . afraid to talk to the band reps without another person there. You have people afraid to sit alone with families because they are scared of them. They just don't take the time to get to know people. They make judgments based on what is written on the MIS (computer information system) screen.

Resource Worker #2 talks about a situation where:

a family from my band actually approached MCFD with this mindset: we know our family has high involvement with MCFD, how can we fix this? This family invited MCFD workers to their home for lunch with the whole family, and wanted to know what they needed to do to cut down MCFD involvement with their family. MCFD workers were afraid and thought they were heading into an ambush. They were surprised to find lunch ready and the whole family ready to speak to them.

During a formal quarterly support network meeting for Aboriginal staff derogatory comments questioning why the Aboriginal workers were allowed to have a gathering when non-Aboriginal workers could not were made to one of the attending staff by a non-Aboriginal worker. A child protection worker summed it up for the group:

...What you're dealing with here, somehow because we're trying to do things differently, some people perceive us as not doing our job good enough. We get a lot of flack. We get more run down.

Manager #4 suggested MCFD is unwilling to address racism directly and related an example of a colleague who was reluctant to address a staff member who stated Aboriginal people were not capable of looking after children:

I went into the lunch room one day in the early days of all of this [attempts to disentangle Aboriginal services from mainstream] and there were two staff in there who were asking me about this project that I had just initiated and where was it going to go, and they were thoroughly puzzled by it. They just didn't understand why we were doing this. Then they went to great lengths to explain to me, and because they were so right, they really thought that if someone just explained it the right way I would understand that Aboriginal people were not capable of looking after children and if we really cared about those children, the

best thing that we could do is remove all of them and have them grow up in proper homes. . . . So I thought, you know, her manager needs to know about this. And that was just, well you know, “that’s just her” but it was always “that’s just her” no matter who “her” was.

On another occasion, Manager #4 described an “extraordinarily racist” letter written to a non-Aboriginal team leader who had been reassigned to an Aboriginal team:

I turned it over to HR. They wanted the person suspended on the spot because they were so afraid of the violence contained in this letter addressed to a fellow team leader, but they got over that, and at the end of the day that team leader, with this racist rant, that team leader apologized to his manager and the HR person, and that was the end of it. He never had to apologize to the person he sent the letter to. There was no action taken at all. If that had been a sexist rant about what he was going to do to her as a woman, holy shit, we would have dealt with that. But it’s the last sort of the acceptable forms of racism in our society as a whole and we’re just part of it because we’re society.

When asked why she thinks there is a reluctance to address racism openly, she said:

Because this is an organization of social workers. Social workers don’t have biases, they can’t be racist because they are social workers. . . . Social workers are a liberal, middle-class group of professionals, so you can’t acknowledge that that exists. . . . What’s worse than calling a white, middle-class person a racist? It’s huge.

Mainstream Practice Norms

Manager #3 shares his view that some mainstream social workers seem to have become jaded by their experiences in the community and sometimes fail to see any strength in Aboriginal families “workers are jaded...what they fail to see are the natural strengths.”

Manager #4 speaks to what she sees as a prevailing norm of child protection workers to exert power:

I’ve never met such a collective group of people who are more invested in exerting power over the weak than social workers...I mean they will do anything to protect their power, and I think that’s why people go into that work, they are drawn to it, but they don’t want to admit it. On days when I’m not quite so jaded, I realize while there’s truth to that, it’s certainly not about every worker by any stretch. It’s more of the collective mentality rather than the individual.

Many other participants shared similar observations:

You have too many people that are delegated to remove children that don’t have the experience. Their mentorship is coming from people that practice from an adversarial

place. So you've got team leaders that are delegated who ultimately make the decision to their junior workers...They are not being challenged. They are not being asked to do anything differently...I will bring up concerns to the team leaders and social workers and the response I get is "well we are short staffed, you know how that is." And I do know how that is, however, at the end of the day who are the people that failed because of that? The kids, the families. (Child Protection Worker #3)

One of the downfalls is that you will have to adopt this kind of thinking because otherwise you really stand out...If you don't think like everybody else you're placing a child at risk, you're not assessing things properly or you're giving too much control to the client or the family. (Child Protection Worker #5)

Child Protection Worker #4 reflects on growing up in the same community that she now works in and says practice has not changed since she was a child:

Where does it come from? I don't know. It's just something that's always been there. I've always known it in my lifetime... My mom went to residential school so she never smiled at me or talked to me or hugged me. It [child welfare] was just a lot of—I don't know—I just call it like policing—policing their homes, policing their families, policing their parenting...Where does it come from? It comes from a world view that children should have a nice home, have nice parents I guess.

Two mental health support workers from different offices revealed:

I found a huge contradiction between the clinicians on our team...they can't mix together and somehow it always seemed the psychological work outweighed the cultural work. It wasn't on an even playing ground by any means. It was some kind of add-on to support these Aboriginal kids. It was never seen as a priority. (Mental Health Support Worker #1)

Forget the 60s Scoop...this is still happening...people are taking kids away from families, sometimes for things that are in the Aboriginal culture, part of their culture. They are not going, their kid is not attending school and their kid is not eating what the teacher has given... Yeah, well that could be something cultural that that kid is going through...They don't even know to ask the questions that could very well answer what is going on for a kid. (Mental Health Support Worker #3)

Referring to the screening tool that child protection workers use to determine whether or not to conduct an investigation, the same participant comments:

You are not even going in and saying, "Hey, can you come out and have a coffee with me?" and having just a heart-to-heart conversation about what is going on, which could answer all of your questions for you, instead you go on with this little (risk assessment) list that you have to have ticked off

Child Protection Worker #5 says another worker on her team went into a First Nations community without following protocols with the subsequent impacts: :

That was something that it really hurt me when things . . . I'm going to start crying, when people don't even respect, that when you go to someone else's territory that—like you don't just walk in there. It just hurt me that that was done, and then the Chief phones me and he's all like "how did this happen?" He was really hurt.

Manager #3 speaks of the differences he finds between how Aboriginal and non-

Aboriginal frontline employees approach their work:

With some of the non-Aboriginal employees I've worked with it was really more about seeking answers. "I've got this issue and what do you think?" So we'd talk and I'd try to engage them as I would some of our Aboriginal staff, around exploring it, but I found they were much more comfortable with being told rather than discussing... Certainly there are going to be times when someone has to make a decision and not everybody is going to like it, but we discuss and come to the conclusion within that discussion. Some non-Aboriginal staff were okay with that but quite a lot were...basically, "No, just give me the answer. Tell me what to do. What can I do to do this, right?"...if we just have to tell our people these are the steps, sometimes we might lose out on their understanding why we're doing those steps.

Several participants spoke of mainstream bias within the Ministry to bring children into

care:

You wonder why we have a high number of Aboriginal kids in care, more than any, more than ever before, then you need to look at the front line and see what is going on. There are people there that resist change because they have been in the system so long...I would want to do something [put some supports into a family home]. They say there are not enough resources [for the families] and I am like, but we have no problem removing children and putting them in foster care, which costs more. To me I am like [removal is the] last resort. If you absolutely have nobody and these kids are literally abandoned, then yeah.

In our Act [CFCSA] we are supposed to be notifying and consulting the band, and yet all the bands get are a faxed copy of the court docs and no phone call. So that they [Ministry worker] could put it on their court doc and say "I faxed them" and so if they don't show up in court they can say "I've done my due diligence." To me here, I am like "okay, not good enough. (Child Protection Worker #2)

Child Protection Worker #3 believes too much value is placed on risk assessments and

paperwork:

There is that disconnect—get the paper work done, get the risk assessment done. My idea or my thoughts of good family support work is you manage what needs to be done, you help the families, you get out.

Low Support For Aboriginal Agenda

A number of participants said they felt that there was little support for real change in

Aboriginal practice in the Ministry:

My boss told me that the biggest complaint about me was that I was too focused on Aboriginal Services and not the overall good of the organization...I don't think the values were there. It was very clear, I think to everyone, myself and other managers, people who were for (Aboriginal service improvement)... opposed to it, or just didn't understand it, we all seemed to be of the same mind, and that is the only reason we were doing it in this region, because provincial office was forcing it, that our regional executive director (RED)...needed to look good to provincial office... And again, people like me, that wanted to see it happen, and people who were opposed to it happening, none of us saw any commitment to it. (Manager #4)

We worked towards getting an Elder into the office and so that was good. But we jumped through a lot of hoops for that and...the room got quiet when we entered... especially for the Elder. They would never say anything out loud when she was there, but they certainly didn't have time to hear what she had to say either. Space was never made for her to enter in any meetings or anything like that. They said it would be too much of a breach of confidentiality. (Mental Health Worker #2)

The reconnection worker said some staff on the Aboriginal team were treated poorly by

colleagues:

...social workers (were) rude. In fact, one of my Aboriginal helpers there at the community office could not believe how they would talk to me. I developed plans that the family had developed, present the plans, and they wouldn't support them...disrespect by some (MCFD) social workers, judging and pointing their fingers, shaming, blaming, treating me and other workers—that we were second-class because we did things differently....

Mental Health Support Worker #1, said:

I feel that whenever I fight for Aboriginal stuff, in whatever realm it is, I lose credibility. So if I'm fighting for Métis community services—that there are good Métis people there...some look at me like I'm just crazy. "Oh shut up, it's not a big deal." Or if I'm fighting for the fact that we need to have more cultural resources, or anything like that, someone is undermining me... Again, it is so hard to separate yourself when you're not just talking about a job. This is my family. Sadly there are some families who are part of my community on these caseloads... (and)people talk about Métis stuff in dollars and cents, the total mandate—which they don't even get right—which is a whole other thing—but this is my family, this is my community and it does invoke this passion in me... There's a huge reaction to it so if you do try and practice differently people react to that. It's also very two-faced, "oh, it's great what you're doing for those people but this

would be better”—this mainstream context—and there’s just not a lot of support from the other mental health teams.

Frontline Staff in Ministry Lack Support

While considerable focus was placed on frontline colleagues, difficulties in mainstream practice, and resistance to Aboriginal practice approaches in the interviews, many participants provided observations about the lack of support the Ministry provides for all staff trying to support improved practice agendas and for all workers, given the traumatic nature of the work that they do—working with traumatized children and families in all program areas. Mental Health Support Worker #3 said:

People get into social work and get into counselling because they care...I really think that the organizational structure and the restrictions that are placed on staff create the environment that exists right now. From a social work perspective, from a mental health perspective, from every perspective, everyone is disconnected from the people that they are serving and...disconnected from the environment in general...that is how the burnout happens....When you start isolating social workers into just doing child protection or just doing resources or just doing adoption, then they miss out on the sense of community that exists out there.

Mental Health Support Worker #2 said that some MCFD workers tend to simplify, resist, and numb themselves to the complexities of responding to difficult situations because they become traumatized by the work:

They have to make them terrible, horrible, awful, no good human beings, to justify defending themselves and to justify pumping themselves up to try and survive the onslaught that they’re going to endure. So it’s just such a vicious circle... I believe that they do care, but it’s so frickin’ overwhelming it’s just natural and normal for us to start blaming the people we’re supposed to be helping and that’s our own trauma.... There’s nothing in the system that supports our social workers from that, because the system itself is violent in its nature...it provides some explanation for how—they’re not monsters, how did they get there? How did they become so insensitive and in this separate place...they truly believe that they are actually trying to teach them something...It’s hard to have compassion for them (social workers who behave this way), yet to not have compassion for them would mean that I ventured into that same place. So it becomes my responsibility. That’s what I was fighting against in that office and trying to stand up to... It’s vicious. It just goes round and round.

Child Protection Worker #5 worker shared:

I would really wish that people can really approach things from their heart, like with an openness. You know, I don't know how we've gotten to a place where everything has to be so policy driven, like we're policy'ed to death almost you know...it's not advice that I need, I just need an openness, someone that I could just sit with and say "this is how my day or week's going and I hope you can see what I saw."

The participant also commented on how she sees MCFD eventually pull both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff into the powerful mainstream internal culture of the organization.

Well I've seen a lot of the colonistic—I've seen people change when they come to government, like knowing them before they came to government, and then somehow almost being processed through the system where they develop and adopt colonistic thinking, those mainstream approaches that aren't really consistent with the needs of that particular individual or that family or that cultural group. One example I have is I was transferring a file, a young woman to an Indigenous social worker, and without meaning, finishing what I was going to say about what her needs were, she just made an automatic assumption that the youth needs treatment. I thought "whoa, wait a second, first of all we need to get client consent and first of all that needs to be assessed, right?" Right away that whole fixing model, that colonistic—like you're deficient, I'm going to fix you by sending you to treatment, then you're going to come out and you're going to fit in. So that's been some of my experiences, and that's not really our way, well when I say our way I can only speak for myself, like in my culture, that that's not my way, our way of approaching and healing that way.

Mental Health Support Worker #1 described an overall "feeling" within MCFD:

It's not just Aboriginal people, it's repressive towards a lot of people, and I think there needs to be some discussion as to why that is—why everyone is so unhappy. There is a lot of doom and gloom... so much sadness within the Ministry itself...When you see clients back to back to back, you are done by the end of the day. It's way too much...whether it's mainstream or not—doing it that way. It's horrible and you become burnt out...I look at the social workers and they are so strapped, they don't even get to do the work they want to do anymore. The child protection workers are so busy and they are dealing with the most horrible, sad things in the whole entire world and they've got nothing else to balance it. Most social workers are there way later than I ever am, and on my late days a couple are sitting there just trying to catch up some work because they have to, and it's so sad. So they are dealing with really crappy situations, overworked, overtired....we're so strapped on the front line and the budget keeps getting cut, cut, cut.

Change Fatigue

Manager #2 describes a kind of change fatigue where the promotion and implementation of new initiatives and strategies rolls forward consecutively without clarity causing more fatigue for already busy and stressed Ministry staff:

It is about the dynamics of people that have been around that have been through change three or four times, my goodness. They have seen it. They have experienced it or they have been through a process and treated badly... If you look at how things happen and how you practice, there is some part of your experience too, how the system itself, organizational culture, treatment of staff...So it goes back to the culture.

Provincial Office Employee #3 speaks to ongoing reframing of initiatives and how this impacts non-Aboriginal staff:

I can understand where that is coming from...some people are just like “ah, another Aboriginal thing.” It is like, yeah, okay. Five years ago was the planning committee, now it is this, now it is this.

Physical Environment

A number of participants talked about the physical environment of the government buildings and offices where they work and question whether these settings are suitable for Aboriginal clients—or even themselves:

I would never, ever bring people here, ever. I think I had a couple here once only because there was some concerns about my personal safety...Folks that I work with never came here. (focus group participant)

Our rooms aren't big enough. We get offices that are so small...some of my co-workers say “I never meet with a family here. We can't get them in a room. We all feel cramped, and the boardroom just doesn't feel right.”...It's like going to a medical building or something. (focus group participant)

Yes...we have to have a barrier (plate glass window between administration and waiting room) out front...because all our people are violent. They're going to jump over the gate or whatever and attack people. Come on. Elders don't feel comfortable coming here. (reconnection worker)

The reconnection worker compares the reality of the physical environment at MCFD to that of delegated Aboriginal agencies that she has been in:

Where, of course, you walk in, but you can go right past reception—you're into a great big family area. You grab a coffee. You sit down. Somebody's teaching crafts in one corner. Somebody's working with the kids here. They're doing hands-on stuff, showing the parents, and they have freezers with stuff and collecting the traditional foods and have days where everyone goes out together, gathering the medicines. They have the gifts for the give-away. They have all the stuff that they need to do the traditions.

Mental Health Support Worker #2 talks about sharing space with the child protection team:

So...when you're working in counselling the most important thing is to create a safe space and that was a huge challenge for us. . . . It's hard to counsel somebody when you hear a small child screaming "No, don't leave me here" down the hall.

Child Protection Worker #1 talks about visiting an Aboriginal colleague in another office:

She was given a full case load over there. No mentorship, a political one to boot, like she has no experience training in court, no support. She can't be herself, she can't smudge, she can't—it was like her light was getting put out. And I went to go visit her once in that office and I was like, "Oh, my God, are you kidding me?" Like the energy in there was like "shhh" and she was like, "I'm suffocating here. I don't know how much longer I can be in this environment." It was so non-Aboriginal like, right?

This participant also said non-Aboriginal staff requested that smudging not be practiced in this office so it is no longer allowed. So "we went outside. So like suppressed little Indians, we all had to go outside the door, go around the corner, not in front of the building but be on the side, and then do our smudge." She also shared disappointment when an administrative vacancy in the office went to a non-Aboriginal person from another office instead of the temporary Aboriginal staff that was already working there:

You know what when people come there, they want to see somebody who's similar to them. This is a big thing...She had the same competency of the work, right but she was an auxiliary.

Provincial Office Employee #2 talks about the provincial office work setting:

This big red brick building...I think as an Aboriginal or as an Indigenous person in the practice that I've had in the past there's always been some sort of reflection of Indigenous culture within the office settings.... I worked in small organizations in the past where everybody was accessible that I needed to work and build relationships with and here, I think it feels quite different in terms of that we all have our own little departments that we work within... I think I'm not used to seeing people in ties and suits, button up shirts all the time as odd as that sounds. Working in an Aboriginal community you don't see that as often. People are dressed comfortably because under our social context it's that your action in the work that you do that reflects your work.

Don't Fit In to the Team/Setting

A number of participants said they experience poor fit within their MCFD work settings:

I didn't fit. I tried to fit. I did the best that I could and I couldn't fit into their... office (or)...the culture of it...I would always be on edge about what was the next thing that I did wrong that my team leader would come in and berate me for, as opposed to every other person in the office, they might have messed up more than me.... I was even on the other side of the office building and there was open offices closer to the rest of the team and I was always here and they were always there. (Child Protection Worker #3)

I think the most unfair part about my job is like I'm not allowed to...just be social. I can't understand—like I'm not listened to or talked to.... (Child Protection Worker #4)

When I first came to MCFD I felt... alone...I wasn't involved with the group right away whereas the other workers here have been here for years upon years. It felt like I never got an opportunity to really express who I was or why I am here. There are personality clashes if you don't fit in, then they are not going to welcome you and they are going to get rid of you as soon as they can. I think it is just this established group of people... I felt like an outsider coming into an unhealthy environment. (Resource Worker #1)

Cultural Competence Within the Ministry

Many of the participants revealed a belief there is a lack of basic Aboriginal cultural competence in the Ministry:

...everyone is supposed to be embracing the Aboriginal framework, it is everyone's responsibility and I completely agree with that...if you have never worked in an Aboriginal context, it is not something that you just get right away. The reality is there is a lot of education needed within the Ministry. There is a lot of hurt within the Aboriginal community. I just want to do it. I don't know if I have the energy anymore to keep educating and explaining this. I just want to do the work in a good way. I don't want to try and convince people. (Manager #1)

One manager advocated for a way to address this issue by developing a parallel or corollary Aboriginal stream with dedicated management support:

It is like how are they [non-Aboriginal teams serving Aboriginal families] being useful? How are they involving community decision making and planning? I know without a doubt if I was to go ask those team leaders what they have done to nurture and support a child's cultural identity, there would be nothing. So at least in the Aboriginal team that is talked about. I am not saying that we are necessarily doing a great job in all of it but it is certainly part of our vocabulary and discussion whereas I don't see that in other places. In this new system all community service managers are responsible but whether they are all equipped at this time, I don't know. With most people working in the Aboriginal teams you are not having to educate or to send something or explain something.

A reconnection worker discussed the variation of staff cultural competence in the Ministry:

People who came to the Aboriginal team who are non-Aboriginal (required)... a lot of shifting and changing in philosophies to work with the community. Or some just step right into it and they're great because they understand the issues.

As such, non-Aboriginal colleagues often depend on Aboriginal staff to connect to the community. Participant Mental Health Support Worker #1 said:

I was often turned to as the person to connect with Elders or to bring in some sort of awareness with the local First Nations. That should not be my role, the Elders or the community members of those communities were the more appropriate people but the team itself was so naïve as to how to even go about connecting with these communities that there was some level of basic understanding that I had to help the team with in order for them to even get to the stages where they could even go and talk to an Elder.

Mental Health Worker #3 shares a similar concern when she left MCFD:

I think that having me left and having the (only other Aboriginal) worker left, they are probably feeling quite concerned right now and maybe a bit hesitant when they go to the reserve because they don't have that same relationship with the communities as me and the other worker did...They don't have the confidence to just ask at the reserve...they are scared. They are scared because they don't want to be disrespectful, but by being scared and not saying anything, they are not being outright disrespectful....What they don't realize is that Indians expect white people to ask stupid questions and they will answer them.

Responding to a question about whether she believes it is possible to educate all Ministry staff to internalize Indigenous values (as proposed in the Aboriginal conceptual framework) to be culturally competent in their work with Aboriginal communities, Mental Health Support Worker #1 says:

I don't think it's possible. I love the idea. On its face it's a wonderful idea. I think that's really the way we should be going forward. The practicality of it is that the week-long cultural sensitivity training that we did was great, but that was a scratch at the surface for those people. And then what you have are these people with a certificate in cultural sensitivity who feel they don't have to do any other work. It's not something you can do in a week.

Placating Aboriginal Communities with “Polite Racism”

Several of the study participants spoke of Ministry community engagement initiatives (like providing service contracts) for Aboriginal communities as often simply a way of placating the communities. That is, they provide support, funding or resources with minimal concern for

objective service provision and positive outcomes for Aboriginal children, youth, families, and the community that the agency or community is serving. First Nations and Aboriginal participants commented on this practice as an ongoing colonial attempt to deflect and pacify an underserved but politically volatile interest group by providing funding with little to no expectations. Mental Health Support Worker #1 spoke about an Aboriginal agency she says is widely known to have poor performance and outcomes but continues to receive Ministry support:

It's horrible, it's hurting children, and has failed numerous audits, and they keep on giving them more money. Because MCFD is not doing what they ought to do—not going in there and saying “this is ridiculous.” Good workers have left there, kids are not getting the services they need, and it's all just being tucked under the rug. It just makes you lose faith in the Ministry you are working for when you know that they know what is going on...it just fuels the fire for people to say “Oh, the Aboriginal people can't do it(and)when those are your community members, it's reflected on you. It's just so stereotypical of what you would think from an Aboriginal agency, and because MCFD is just letting this go.

I call this polite racism because these are power-heads of Aboriginal communities—and they have no respect in their own Aboriginal communities, just within their own organization, if people actually looked into that. But they are such huge powerhouses and they start throwing around this Indian card, which isn't right for them to be doing, but this is what's going on, and MCFD is too polite to call it like it is and say, “No, this has nothing to do with a racist thing, but has to do with the fact that the organization is failing.” They are too polite and are worried about politics.

Provincial Employee #1, referring to a federally and provincially funded First Nations delegated agency that has ongoing critically low performance audits, says:

Why do we keep funding this agency and pretending everything is okay? That is offensive to Aboriginal people and to me as an Aboriginal person. Nobody says what is going on here. Everyone just pours the money in and everyone knows what is going on. It is time to cut that off. . . . I have heard another person talk about that whole specific situation and I think she called it polite racism, that unwillingness to offend, that fear of the political repercussions. I can't stand that because it gives all Aboriginal people a bad name. I think you should be safe to say if there are serious issues going on, whether you are Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal and kids are being impacted, you've got to say something, right?

The participant refers to “polite racism” also in the context of the Ministry hiring Aboriginal people for key leadership positions and then silencing them:

Hiring people just because they are Aboriginal (and)...Like taking someone from a supervisor at a small agency and putting them in a director position—it is just a huge jump and not fair to that person. I think it sets them up for failure as well. . . . I was really disappointed in these Aboriginal leaders that were hired to make a difference and work in a different way that did exactly the opposite. They were not expected to have a voice... So the few times that I tried to speak up I learned very fast you don’t do that...you got reprimanded for it. So now at the end there is a host of issues—when you have inexperienced people in those roles and there are negative consequences . . . really poor decisions were being made and impacting people.

Provincial Employee #3 said that: “We always joked around, or I always joked around, that it is like we are a band office. It is like there is no trust and there are politics all over the place.”

With a large group of Aboriginal people in this branch, this participant couldn’t understand why a non-Aboriginal manager was consulted when Aboriginal staff were not:

If you were going to do anything from an Aboriginal viewpoint or perspective, then why not approach the Aboriginal people in the office and do a little working group instead of approaching managers that are not Native and trying to come up with something through their experiences?

Risk Aversion

Several of the participants spoke of the risk-averse environment at MCFD which discourages staff to vary their approach, or attempt more creative or appropriate practice for their clients and community:

...in this Ministry—in times of crisis...I have learned, and myself included, how shit runs downhill and I am at the bottom of the pile, right? I have learned that here, that it is not about “oh my goodness, something terrible has happened and how can we support the family?” It is about immediately “how can we assign blame and responsibility?” (focus group participant)

A focus group participant describes how managers became involved when an Aboriginal child was moved from a non-Aboriginal home because it wasn’t meeting the child’s needs. The foster parent filed a grievance which the participant felt caused managers to step in and manage

the matter, examining the work of the participant, due to concerns about overall impact politically to the ministry.

We were... (planning) to remove this Aboriginal child from a non-Aboriginal home. She filed a grievance. We couldn't move the child and then I am in this great big meeting.... they really look to assign blame when something goes wrong. (focus group participant)

A manager talks about the impact of the Gove Inquiry on practice in the Ministry

resulting in risk-averse practice:

So we are talking after Matthew Vaudreuil—five years after the Gove Inquiry—so lots of system change toward protection. So very, very set in “remove, remove, remove” and—wow! It was just quite the eye opener. So I got labelled pretty quick as a trouble maker and I didn't know why because my main goal was my families, to be able to have a relationship with them... (Manager #2)

Child Protection Worker #1 commented on the comprehensive risk assessment tool, or

the standardized approach that social workers utilize, to assess families in the Ministry:

Which is so negative. Even if I (had the tool applied to herself) I always scored 3s and 4s because of my family's past history...intergenerational residential schools...I would need a risk reduction plan to even raise my own kids. And I'm the worker and I was like, yeah this doesn't make much sense. So when I do my risk assessment, mine is the family meetings because you're asking the questions and your risk reduction plan is the meeting because that's where the whole family, the community, develops the plan.

Child Protection Worker #2 said there remains bias toward bringing children into care

despite knowledge that outcomes for Aboriginal children are already devastatingly poor:

But we are not willing to take that risk of [working with the family]—we would rather not know than know. That is the part that I find the hardest is social workers are willing to take the risk of not knowing what is going to happen to these kids if they are returned to their families versus putting them into care. They are fine with that and they can go to sleep at night.

Child Protection Worker #3, left MCFD worrying about families on her caseload who are

now with social workers who she believes are risk averse: :

I still struggle with that now. I hear what is happening with the families that I left and it is out of my hands, right? Because the worker that they now have is so not culturally (competent)...does not view families in our system the same way, or value the connection to culture, and kinship. . . . There is that disconnect. Get the paper work done, get the,

you know, risk, risk, risk, there is none of that, like what it takes to actually do this kind of work.

Resource Worker #1 who had three different team leaders in six months said:

I hear a lot about team leaders not being supported by upper management. When something goes wrong they feel like they are the ones being prosecuted. I would just hate for something to go wrong and then it be turned on me.

Summary

Many of the Aboriginal participants describe the MCFD organizational environment exhibiting discrimination and racism toward Aboriginal staff and Aboriginal children, youth, and families. Covert and overt examples of racism are provided with the former viewed by some participants as the unconscious expression of negative assumptions, beliefs, and values about Aboriginal people and communities that are ingrained in larger society perceptions. The somewhat liberal concept that social workers could not possibly be racist was suggested as a potential explanation for why racism is neither acknowledged nor addressed in the organization. Fear, immovable assumptions, and overall unwillingness by leadership in the organization to directly address discrimination are offered by some participants as the basis for ongoing discrimination within MCFD.

There is a prevalent theme that emerges regarding the potential for mainstream practice norms preventing Ministry staff from acknowledging the natural strengths within Aboriginal families and communities. It was also suggested by many participants that there is a tendency for Ministry workers to exert power, inherent in the child protection legislation and role, in situations where such action is not necessarily required to achieve a mutually satisfactory result for the worker, child and the family. Concern regarding bringing new workers into MCFD to be mentored by seasoned professionals steeped in adversarial approaches may further crystallize already unhelpful mainstream practice embedded in the organizational culture where power and

control are primary values. Further, participants describe pressure to adopt and reflect this orientation. The end result is that biases in practice culture are seen to result in a tendency to bring Aboriginal children and youth into Ministry care.

Many participants commented on receiving little real support for Aboriginal practice and the promised change agenda among their colleagues in the Ministry, and little encouragement for any staff, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, to improve or change practice towards an engaged, holistic approach. This, combined with poor communication, confusing objectives, “secretive” planning and ongoing flawed initiative implementation exacerbated the already traumatic work environment, causing more fatigue, decreased optimism for change, and increased probability of employees leaving MCFD.

Many participants also addressed the unhealthy organizational culture in terms of the perceived inappropriate working environment for both employees and Aboriginal people. Several expressed a growing lack of fit with their team, leadership, and physical environment further exacerbated by their view of an overall, low level of Aboriginal cultural competence in the Ministry.

A term coined by one participant as “polite racism” was described as a Ministry practice of placating Aboriginal communities by providing generous support and resources without concern for accountability or outcomes. Similarly, some participants described the Ministry tokenizing Aboriginal people by hiring some to key leadership positions only to impose a vague or poorly understood bureaucratic structure around them, thereby diminishing or removing their ability to directly influence, change or provide a voice for improved culturally relevant practice.

MCFD was also seen as overly risk-averse and inhibitive towards finding or implementing alternative, more appropriate solutions to removing Aboriginal children and youth

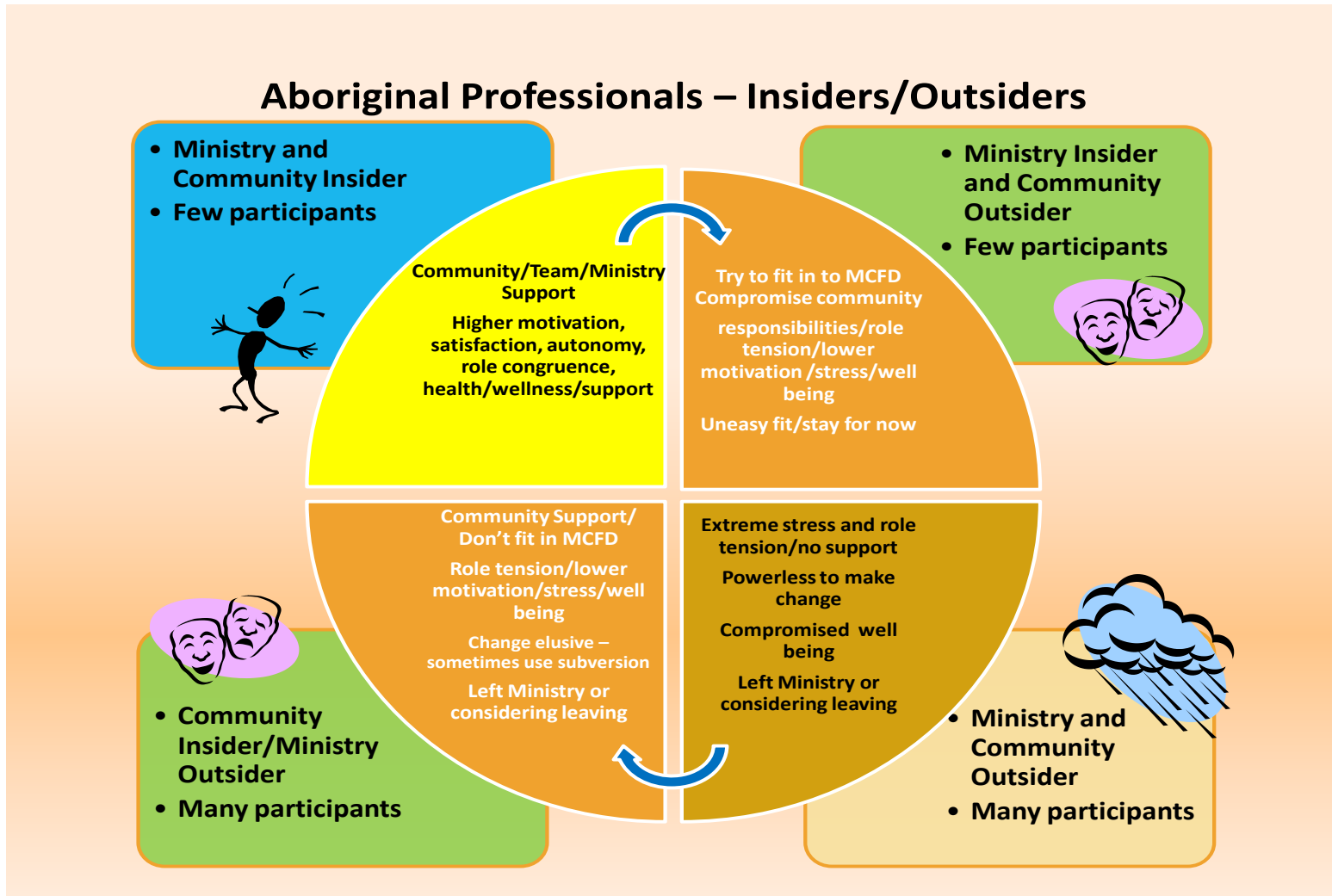
from their communities. Instead, more familiar, rigid and “risk-free” child removal practices were more often continued and encouraged. This approach was noted as further reinforced because less time, staff and resources are required than patient engagement, relationship building and planning with respect to more engaged, creative or community driven solutions.

Chapter 7. Aboriginal Insiders/Outsiders: Experiences and Strategies

Several important themes emerged when exploring the experiences and the strategies utilized by Aboriginal participants in the Ministry. The core or central theme concerns the role tension they experience due to competing accountabilities involved in dual community and Ministry roles. The reality faced balancing these dual accountabilities seems to frame and reinforce many other experiences described (like being tokenized, having an uncertain sense of belonging, not feeling heard, low support and safety, feeling powerless, and resorting to subversion).

Ultimately the uneasy existence that many participants experience attempting to manage the tension inherent in competing roles, leaves them with conflicted feelings of whether to stay or leave the organization. Unfortunately many leave and those that remain question their effectiveness in an environment that is largely unsupportive of their goals and objectives. The participants that report role congruence, and the ability to achieve their objectives of serving Aboriginal children and families in more effective and relevant ways, describe supportive organizational environments where their team and colleagues share similar values and approaches. They also describe higher levels of community support and a higher level of support in the organization for autonomous decision making. These (very) few participants describe achieving a fairly good fit both within their communities and in the Ministry and the ability to balance the accountabilities—they have achieved an insider position, although often tested, within both environments. The visual map in Figure 7.1 provides an overview of these themes.

Figure 7.1 The experience of Aboriginal employees: insiders/outside



Insider/Outsider

Participants describe how they experience being both insiders and outsiders, often in both their communities and in the Ministry:

Manager #1 underlines how her role as a community insider impacts her commitment, which she identifies as a necessary response of a member of a traumatized community, to her professional role in the Ministry:

Because it isn't like this is just a job to me...There are a lot of social issues there and tragedies in every family [community]...It doesn't just happen from 8:30 to 4:30. It is a part of your world and you are living it all of the time. All of the issues that child protection might be involved, you are dealing with in your own extended family...There is not that separation and that does have a toll on your work life. You don't leave it at the end of the day. There are always challenges but I have always felt like community was glad I was there and I felt like I was helpful. I just don't know, in terms of personal satisfaction. I hope I am making a difference. I don't know.

Referring to herself as a Ministry insider and in a unique role to be “a voice of change within” she relates concerns that “I know if I were to leave” she would experience guilt and feel that she has failed her community.

Child Protection Worker #1 discusses the sense of responsibility and accountability she experiences working with people from her community. Being both an insider and outsider, she recognizes that despite this commitment she needs some distance and lives in town:

...there is lots of good and there is lots of bad included in that. I guess the bad would be I always have to be a role model. I have to go out of the city or something if I am going to be a little bit crazy. So within my community I have to role model how I am going to be and that is not a stretch because I am how I am all the time anywhere I go, so it is no big expectation.

The thing that I like about it is, if I'm working with a band member from here, there's a little bit more accountability than another social worker in this office has because they're accountable to me, not only as their social worker, but as a community member right? And they feel bad too, but they need to be honest with me because I'm going to find out. I always find out....Then when you have the whole family meeting, they're accountable to their brothers; they're accountable to their aunts because they'll call them on it, right? ...So you really get to know the dynamics of the family, you get to know what's going on and who's going to be accountable for what and I think that's way better.

There are big expectations for you though at the same time, for your community. I remember going to university and saying “oh you know, you are going to come back and help the people”.... Like you don’t get the—oh maybe I don’t want to do it. You didn’t get that opportunity, like if I failed that’s huge. That would be a failure for my family, that would be a failure for my community, that would be a failure for my people right? So that wasn’t an option and I struggled a lot.

It’s like, you know what...I just want to live my life and I just want to do the work...but I feel I have more on my plate because of that. But then the good stuff is working with my own community and the families that I work with sometimes are even more rewarding because you know these people...so it kind of keeps you in check at the same time but then you don’t have the anonymity right? I don’t live on reserve because I don’t want everybody knocking at my door saying “so and so is having a party, their kids are there.” I enjoy living in town just because I don’t have to be the MCFD social worker. If I lived on reserve, that’s what it would be.

Despite positive feelings of congruence providing direct services in her own community she at times experiences herself as an outsider:

Well I remember going to a meeting there and they’re like “Well you’re MCFD” and I was like “That doesn’t mean that I’m not a community member” right? Like I’m trying not to be looked at as the enemy and I said “you know what, you can think that if you want to think that, but really you should be thinking ‘wow we’ve got an Aboriginal person in the Ministry, maybe she can help us make some change’”...It’s like you know what, a lot of our community kids (are involved with the Ministry)...You want to give them to a white social worker? At least now they have a brown-faced social worker that understands them. That’s what my biggest reason for wanting to be in the Ministry was.

There are times when a client will object to her being their social worker:

I’ve a few calls like “I don’t want (participant) to be my worker because she’ll blab it all over the place” which isn’t true, they just don’t want to be held accountable to me...[This doesn’t happen] too much because our team is doing such great work with the community.

A reconnection worker discusses the enormous sense of responsibility she carries as a community insider and the impact it has on her work at MCFD:

I think one of the biggest turns for me in not being ashamed of my culture was when my Elders came after graduation and gave me a naming and gave me a responsibility to the community. Before then my practice was pretty straightforward as to how Ministry had trained me and then I started to think about my responsibility...I had to really think about the responsibility that the Elders had given me to not take children away but to keep them connected to their culture, their identity...

Manager 2 describes being perceived as an outsider to the local Aboriginal community due to the perception of her as co-opted into the Ministry:

That that is so hard...it is double sided right?...you've got it coming and going...."you are the protection worker, so you are not an Indian. You are a red apple. You are a white on the inside." Those kinds of comments, those were difficult, very difficult....(even though) I wasn't attached to this community here.

Manager #4 talks about duality of the insider/outsider role for Aboriginal people practicing outside their own communities but how their colleagues still look to them to interpret cultural practice they are unfamiliar with:

We also have to gently bring people back from this notion—this pan-Aboriginal concept—you know, I'm [First Nations] therefore I know everything there is to know about Coast Salish. Well these people are foreign to me too. I'm not from here. Sure we have some things in common and sure I've learned something here, but it doesn't make me one of them. I'm an outsider here. Yes, no more than the guy that grew up in rural Tennessee has a lot in common with the guy that grew up in Nigeria. They're both black but...

Child Protection Worker #6 grapples with the concept of being an insider and an outsider in the Aboriginal communities where she now works. She has experienced the impacts of colonization being raised outside of her cultural community because her mother, impacted by the 60s Scoop, was raised in a non-Aboriginal adoptive home. She describes painful feelings of displacement and uncertainty as she attempts to learn more about her cultural identity:

I think it is so indicative of the internal conflict that I go through trying to figure this out. It would be just as easy for me to go along and just pretend I am all white because people don't ask and, again, I feel it is embarrassing to have to justify it...So now you know I have my own story and I am an Aboriginal person too. I mean I am here to support you. I don't want families taken apart...it would be easier if it was more visually self-evident that I was Aboriginal because then it wouldn't be like why is this white girl trying to pretend that she is something that she is not or whatever.

I don't know if I am going to be helpful to your study or not, because I get it, because you want to know the feelings of you are towing the line of MCFD but is that going to be in conflict with your cultural values, motivation and whatnot? I am such a different person that I am not cultural but I have been impacted by my mom's experience and I want to be cultural but at the same time I feel like a fool trying to engage in culture because I don't feel welcomed or whatnot because I don't want people to think I am all wannabe...I don't know if it is even like one foot in both worlds at this time for me. It is being in this world

and kind of peering over the edge at that world....The internal piece is pretty private and it has been ongoing for the last many years. Organizationally I am happy with the way that things are moving towards supporting Aboriginal families and keeping Aboriginal families together.

Child Protection Worker #2 discusses feelings of being an outsider at MCFD while working in her own community:

Because of the attitudes in there. So out of all, say about 40 employees, I would say there was about three Aboriginal social workers that identified themselves as Aboriginal. There were other workers in there that were Aboriginal but would not identify themselves as Aboriginal...The two Aboriginal social workers that I know of that are in that office out of 40 are struggling continuously.

She sees the combination of being Aboriginal, and her commitment to practice differently, as being the major factors in feeling like an outsider in the Ministry. Her association with the Ministry also conversely means she is scrutinized by the community and seen as a possible outsider:

I was warned too, “Be careful—you’re passionate about keeping kids with families but people might see that as absolute.” I am like “no, I am not worried because I know in my heart I would try everything absolutely possible and I wouldn’t just be that it’s absolute.” If I go along and work hard with a family and there is absolutely nobody in that family, community or even a significant person, than CCO is the only way to go but I have done all of that prior to know that.

I feel sometimes the community thinks that is what we do, side with the Ministry, and not work with our families...It is hard to listen to... so when I hear that I have to just count to ten and remember, yeah. Because we have dual responsibility and they have an expectation of us and when they don’t see that then they think that we are not doing our jobs...I am like “if you only knew. I am battling in court for you families,” but again, I really have to remind myself not to take it personally. There is a history there. It is really hard to show them. Well, they don’t want to hear it. They want to see it, definitely.

As Child Protection Worker #3 started a new position with MCFD she also had conditions placed on her through a supervision order while she was providing kinship care to a relative’s child. The situation she says resulted in perceptions of her as an outsider to her family, community and the Ministry:

Yes. So that made it tenuous because then I have a colleague that I am working with that then has to come and get me to sign this supervision order and family members calling because I didn’t let them see their daughter because I can’t because the supervision order

says this, this and this needs to be in order and the Ministry promised visitation...and they wouldn't provide it. So I was again stuck...I have (family who have) lots of issues with MCFD...the unhealthy (family members)... who couldn't see—they personalized it to...I wanted her for myself. I was MCFD so I was all of these things. So I was ostracized now by my family and community. Then (the father of the child) would phone and if I didn't do what he wanted he would threaten me. He would threaten me where I lived, he would come and shoot me and her. I reached out to MCFD because I didn't know what to do and they were like "oh well, call the cops if he does it again or you hear about that," nothing really helpful.

So it became harder because that now impacts my own family. That is impacting my other two daughters, that is impacting my partner, that is impacting me; unannounced home visits, needing to come in and see my house—"maybe you have a Section 13 concern"...their team leader at the time thought I was hiding something. ...I was vocal about having (the child) in my care but I thought that was a good thing, not a bad thing. I didn't see where it becomes a negative because you are a client. It affects you—at the end of the day I could only do what I could do.

I thought it would be different going back (she was on a parental leave for a period of time) because I didn't have my kith and kin agreement anymore but I went back to the office where I previously was a client with the same workers. They knew certain things about me that I hadn't told any of them...at the end of the day I would come in and do my job and then I would always be on edge.

Working in a community where she grew up, Child Protection Worker #4, one of two

Aboriginal workers in a Ministry office that has approximately 40 staff, describes feeling like a Ministry outsider:

It is really because I've only been here two years and I know that it takes me a long time to build up relationships and make it a place where it's going to work. It's only been two years, and I know things always get better for me all the time, and I'm at a place in my life where I can work on things—like I can struggle upwards. I just saw that today. I can struggle with the problems. I need to because it's important to me. Because I need to at least try and make a big effort because I know there are going to be Aboriginal workers after me.

Working in the small community where she grew up (though she is a registered member of another First Nation) she remains careful of her role as a Ministry worker:

Oh yeah, because with every new intake, every new report, I just get nervous about meeting the next new person because you see that person in the supermarket or wherever, right? That part is really hard.

Resource Worker #1, also comes from a different community than where she works now, reflects on her growing insider role through marriage:

They are hereditary chiefs, there are the feasts and the clan systems and I will be getting married up here so eventually we will be adopted into their culture....me and my children.....

A youth probation worker sometimes works with people from his own community due to its close proximity to where he works now:

Well I mean I try not to work with clients that I am related to right? I mean I have the odd one a very distant cousin or something like that that I have worked with but I try to hand them off to my co-worker. Another thing too is a bunch of the clients that I work with they will tell me that their dad is so and so and then I will mention the last name and sometimes I realize that their dad or their granddad is related to another partner that is married to one of my aunts...So that makes things interesting too because I will joke about it based on that I know that they are related through marriage right.

Provincial Employee #1 spoke about the pressure and responsibility of performing her duties and the challenging dynamic of being rejected from the community she works in:

...an Aboriginal family would be with a non-Aboriginal worker and they would say “can you put me with the Aboriginal worker and think that I was going to [be easy] or something. So that kind of thing was difficult...that expectation that I was going to somehow [not ever] have the removal occur....it’s quite difficult... because you still want to be accepted as Aboriginal in the community and this is my community although I am from (another)...You don’t want to be seen as a Ministry person. You want to be seen as an Aboriginal person, right? So that work and community was a difficult one to manage and working with Aboriginal service providers that I knew well...there should be a different way of working and I was hoping that I was doing the work in a different way, the bottom line if the kids were at risk you still had to remove right? .

She provides contrasting feelings as an outsider at work:

...I didn’t have any connections with team members and they would make comments like racist, kind of negative comments. One time just walking through the hall someone said “oh I was looking to send to my child somewhere to school,” and I said “well what about _____ school” because they were out that way. And they were like “oh no, all the reserve kids go there” and I was like “well what does that mean?” Then that person would come back to me and they just said “oh I didn’t mean it how it sounded,” and I am thinking “well how did you mean it?” It only sounds one way, “all the reserve kids go there so you would never send your kid there right?” So I think she caught herself after, but there was no explaining around it. So those kinds of comments were rampant and about messy houses on the First Nations homes and...

Mental Health Support Worker #1 relates how different it must be for a Ministry colleague versus someone like herself who has responsibilities to the community:

When she leaves from working on the reserve, she gets to go home and doesn't get phone calls, and she doesn't have family that's involved within the community or anything. For me when I go home, I still have to deal with my dad phoning me and saying, "Oh did you know blah, blah, blah is happening with Métis staff and they're trying to fight against this and what do you know about this?" and then I have to go to a Métis function....and people are asking me about my work and I run into clients there, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. It has actually resulted in me not going to as many community events because it's hard for me to deal with doing both. It's very stressful being part of the community—there's the best support in the world—but it's also very stressful. There's a huge political string to it and I can't mix working at MCFD and that political string. It's almost too much. There is just too much going on in both of those worlds so I just smile and say there's nothing going on...but this is my family, this is my community and it does invoke this passion in me.

Mental Health Support Worker #2 speaks about not fitting in, not having freedom to practice in a different way, combined with hearing colleagues speak negatively about her fellow community members. She eventually felt compelled to leave her position following an experience where she believed a community member was purposely humiliated:

I want to make it really clear that the results of me holding them accountable is I was blackballed in that office. They didn't talk to me and I didn't learn until later that I was called a mole and a rat....When I went to my team leader and said "What the hell is this?" Nothing came of that. I never got an exit interview.

When you're working for the government, you can't speak up against these kinds of things or you can't speak poorly about the government you work for and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I didn't come right out and speak out against it, but I sure as hell wasn't going to back it up either. How I dealt with that tension. . . I recognized. . .and people were careful with me because I worked for MCFD....I was really clear that I got my pay check from the government and my accountability was to my community. My community it has to come first.

Mental Health Support Worker #3 describes feeling like an insider with the small group of mostly Aboriginal staff on her team who were tasked with establishing relationships in First Nations communities. Then tension between her role as an insider in the community increased as the team grew and she lost trust and the feeling that she shared the same values:

So they were also giving us the free for all and giving us all the resources we needed and then once we had those relationships established then it started to change a little bit and when we had a new team leader come on then it changed a little bit more and then when the team expanded and a whole slew of non-Aboriginal staff came on, that is when it started to just create concerns for me...I was hugely concerned because the communities

that I was working with and had built relationships with, I had their trust and I did not trust the people that I worked with to care about the communities and not just go in there and say “this is my job, this is what I am here to do. I don’t care about that part of it. That is not my problem.” So it kind of hit me differently then.

I had a level of personal credibility that I had to maintain because in the end of things I am always going to work with Aboriginal people. They are my people. They are the people whose lives I want to help. Just because I am not a mental health worker (now) does not mean that I am never going to deal with those people again and I have to maintain that and it is something that is so easy to screw up because I worked for government. So it was about personal credibility really and it was also the part about protecting was that I always felt a need to protect the Aboriginal communities from MCFD policy and procedures like protect them from the pressure and mistrust that they are going to automatically feel and the effects that having MCFD step foot on the reserve is even going to give them and help them be comfortable with MCFD but at the same time not trusting MCFD myself to do an appropriate job with them. So there was like two different kinds of trust there that I was worried about.

Child Protection Worker #5 describes being a community insider in the work that she does with Aboriginal people:

I mainly work on reserves so I think they are in my experience really different. I think it’s comfortable for me because I grew up on a reserve and I feel more comfortable. Like when I was working [in a non-Aboriginal office] I didn’t feel comfortable in that environment. I have that experience in [a local First Nation community] I have been working there for about eight years and so I am there every Tuesday all day, and so people will come to me as an insider because I have a connection to the Ministry. They will say things like “oh _____’s kid got taken. Do you know where I can find the social worker?” or you know, “My daughter, she’s really struggling with her new baby. Who can I talk to about that?” So I kind of get everything. That’s my impression of being an insider.

They have always from what I understand and my experience with them, they have seen me like as (her first name) first, right, that she’s here and she helps out with other things and yes she does take kids away at times but the feedback that I’ve gotten around that was “it was good that you took _____’s kids because those kids were in a lot of trouble at home, there was things going on.”

I also feel the need to explain the system to Aboriginal people. Well basically because from my own experience being on the other side too, even when I was working at [a delegated agency] I was not even knowing how the system worked, what was its purpose? Like what is a protection concern? Not even understanding what a protection concern was, like if they get a call from the school about a child bringing cheezies, like is that a child protection concern?

So just to be really clear with families about what the Ministry would be looking at as concern so that they are not so fearful that they are being watched, like there’s a watch

dog watching them all the time. Being clear that when I'm at home games or in ceremony that I'm not there you know spying on them.

Role Tension and Dual Accountabilities

Participants further disclosed considerable tension they can experience between their cultural identity and responsibilities and their professional role in the Ministry:

Manager #1 tries to balance her Ministry responsibilities and trying to support First Nations and Aboriginal communities with limited resources:

One of the challenges that I personally have is a dual relationship with MCFD employees and the Aboriginal community. I know how very easy it is to lose trust and how difficult it is to regain it. People call me about everything...So I do feel that extra burden or responsibility to be the voice for the Aboriginal community again. I am just feeling like I am not being very successful because...I will bring a matter to a manager responsible for that area and I find I am tired of trying to explain the concern... I feel like Ministry staff is so protective of their own employees. I don't hear what I want to hear. I want to hear "yes, let's address this and deal with it," it is like "well, the workers did talk to the individual " they are trying to make excuses. It is like, even if she did, that is not how the community is feeling and that is what they need to address.

I have always felt very accountable to communities because when you are working on reserve in community you've got eyes on you all the time and you have to consult and involve family with the band social worker, whoever it is and if you didn't you would be fired. Accountability to community is so strong and coming from that into such a big bureaucracy it has been definitely different for me. I just find that so much of what we could do could actually be quite simple but I still think as much as we say we are going to take the family and community's views into account there is still somehow this undertone of the Ministry still knows better and I don't think we have moved from that.

I feel, because of my background and the person that I am, I am probably really well suited for this position because I can walk in both worlds very comfortably. I feel people can say things to me and even if they are not—even if they are kind of inappropriate or subtly biased or whatever, I would rather people say it to someone like me because I can—I know if some of the things I heard were said to some other individuals it could be very damaging to relationships and that. So I do invite people to feel safe with me and say what you need to say. Don't feel like you have got to filter your words. Just say what you mean so we can talk this through....I do find myself feeling and getting tired or just feeling disillusioned....A lot of the things I deal with—a lot of the things that I dealt with in the community that were challenging at the time I might have thought the grass is greener on the other side but the challenges I experienced within the system, it's a different kind of challenge and I can handle community challenge much better than I can handle this bureaucratic challenge. It is just a different level of stress or frustration. I don't know how to explain it better. I would take the challenges that sometimes come up

with chief and council over trying to convince a team leader why they need to do something. I would choose that challenge any day over that challenge.

I don't know why I am feeling this more lately than before but for the last, I think since the summer I have been feeling very overwhelmed and I haven't been able to shake it yet

I do feel that I am somebody who is very comfortable in both worlds and if I am struggling I can't imagine how, like say my partner who is right from a reserve, very First Nations environment how he would ever survive in this or—I just don't. I don't know how someone who has been raised and gone through various forms of trauma that so many Aboriginal families experience how they would do well in this environment because I am struggling and I know I can handle a lot of things but I am starting to struggle. So I think that is an indication of something, something has to change for people, for this Ministry to be a place that will ever be able to recruit and retain Aboriginal employees.

A focus group participant relates how recommendations she made on an Aboriginal committee to inform MCFD were dismissed and the tension this caused her in her role:

So I was a Ministry employee seconded and hired by an Aboriginal committee and group of people that was representative of the Aboriginal urban population. I did a whole bunch of research and I was still pretty naïve I guess about just how much the values conflicted and how much I still had all of this hope and promise and belief that the Ministry had the potential to do great things with my Aboriginal community that I was affiliated with. I encountered considerable resistance initially from the Aboriginal community....How many times have they been interviewed....research upon research and nothing came of it in the vision of how we as Aboriginal people see results... the results were just so powerful I thought that the Aboriginal community and the committee that I was working for took all of this research and essentially put it into specific recommendations for the Ministry to follow. The Ministry just did something totally different and then I had to show my face in the community and that was really hard because I had gained so much trust that this was different because I was doing it and I was Aboriginal and I understood but really I didn't, I didn't get it. So I felt a huge backlash personally. I lost a lot of face in my community with my relatives.

Another focus group member talks about the tensions between her role within community and the Ministry—she stays strong knowing that she has a role to influence and teach others:

When I made the decision that I was going to do child protection I had the support of my family but a lot of community members were like “you are going to do what? You are going to work for who?” and it is because of the stigma of what happened, residential schools and that kind of stuff. So it was kind of hard sometimes to—when I got hired with the Ministry and the community was not quite sure what the hell I was doing there, thinking “what, you are going to work for them and you are going to be the enemy?” In my head always I thought how better to... give teaching moments than to be within the Ministry. How can they learn from us if we are not in the Ministry going “hey, no, that's not okay,” because I am a “hey, that is not okay” kind of girl. I am not a quiet kind of

person and I will always kind of speak my truth. So for myself, being in the Ministry is for my people. It is for my people because how can I make a difference in this Ministry if I am on the outside?

Another focus group participant has had to come to terms with resulting loss when family and community would not support a decision to join the Ministry:

I spent a good week praying about it, thinking about it, talking to my grandparents and Elders and there is still that negative image. A lot of the Elders and my grandparents that I had spoken to didn't accept it and still probably haven't accepted it....That still is prevalent in the community, people coming in and grabbing children. But you are never the community member ever again.

Another focus group member simply says "I struggle and I still struggle because I don't have that entire support from a community behind me."

Manager #2 reveals talks about needing to use a relationship-based approach with management colleagues, often stepping back from her position:

...I had to be a real bureaucrat to gain the trust which created some internal dissonance if you will, because you are balancing that stuff off....Anyways, I was able to do it...and now I am able to advocate in a different way because I have pretty strong relationships...after this many years, some have common goals.

Manager #3 talks about the tension in his role with clients and how he tries to come to terms with the varying dynamics in his work:

Also I had... verbal attacks from some of the clients because I am Aboriginal and they were Aboriginal and they didn't agree with what I did. Calling me an a-hole or why are you doing this to your own people? The usual behaviour associated with someone who is in a lot of pain and is having something imposed upon them. They are looking for someone to blame whether I was Aboriginal or not. As a worker, you take that blame, just, it's different if you're Aboriginal or you're not Aboriginal.

Manager #4 uses an analogy of joining the enemy and co-opting it's authority when she moved to the MCFD and the tension it causes her between her community identity and commitments and the Ministry role:

When I went to work for MCFD in the circles that I moved in we cracked lots of jokes about going over to the dark side...I have been doing battle from within community...and you just feel like you are hitting your head against a wall. Maybe part of the answer is to get inside and try to make changes inside. So that is what got me to accept the job in the first place. Since then it has been sort of, I guess a roller coaster. I flop back and forth

between thinking there is no way to make a difference in this organization to being quite hopeful that changes can happen...

She discussed encountering resistance and racism when she accepted an assignment to try disentangling resources for Aboriginal services:

There were a lot of very nasty and very personal attacks. The racism in general and the racism directed at me specifically started coming to the forefront in a big way. As we went through that process people were less and less careful about hiding it....It came from all different directions. It came from my fellow managers, it came from admin staff and frontline staff. It came from some contractors.

After recommendations, initially backed by her executive managers, were not given support to move forward she says she felt her credibility in the community, and as an Aboriginal person, was in danger of being compromised:

When it was happening one of the really hard things for me was feeling that I'd lost all credibility in my own world and that's what was really devastating about it. In addition to their getting screwed, and I know they're getting screwed. And I was part of it. But there were people who sort of understood how I was feeling. ... But it still galled me to have been any part of it. And I felt like a fool, I felt like a complete fool, thinking, believing—it's that roller coaster thing—really believing that we were going to make a difference and then feeling like I'd been sucker punched.

She has managed Aboriginal staff who work in their own communities and underlines concern that enormous tension is emerging from the lack of organizational support:

When we talk about Aboriginal social workers there are so many different issues. There is the sort of generic—being of another ethnic group working in a mainstream organization—with being specifically Aboriginal working in an organization that has such a (conflicted) relationship with Aboriginal people. But there are also workers working within their own communities and that's a whole other issue and we don't do anything to support them. Nothing. Nothing. I mean I've seen workers who are laughed at and made fun of for attending a cultural event—or ceremonies—because they are working in their own community going to a ceremony and being mocked in meetings because of it. Nobody understanding what it's like to take your cousin's child into care. Or even if you're not the one doing it, it's on your team that it's happening and that's your cousin's child, but we're not doing anything around that.

What I'm finding with Aboriginal employees—the ones I've talked to—they don't want to become team leaders. They don't want to be seen as rising in this organization, and for different reasons. Like some of them have talked about it in terms about what it says to their community, those who are generally working with or very close to their community, because that makes them more of a sell-out.

This reconnection worker talks about the additional commitment she and other Aboriginal workers have to the community and the children, ones that are not even on their caseloads, and the tensions this creates for her knowing it is unrecognized by the Ministry:

Yep, so last night I went to the Métis celebration. This weekend, I'll be at the pow-wow on my own time, and in the last months, I probably spent 40-60 hours with a kid in care, who's on a different caseload, but she's adopted me and a friend that is like auntie, and we ran around with her and a cousin who had a baby, and we gathered all sorts of stuff we could from yard sales and everywhere for months so they could have a decent giveaway those kids for their namings. That is something that is sort of obligation to the children which has nothing to do with being a social worker. You shouldn't have to, as far as I'm concerned, have to deal with all of that stuff out there and then have the strength to deal with the internal battles of the director and the Ministry and the changes, and then constantly have to explain what it is to people who don't get it and don't understand. That takes energy. Then to have some managers that don't even support their staff, don't even think it's important to do the family values that are within the Aboriginal system like honouring.

While Child Protection Worker #1 says she is able to manage role tensions in her workplace, some of her Aboriginal Colleagues have left MCFD:

I've had two friends leave the Ministry....(one new social worker) was given a full case load over there. No mentorship, political one to boot, like she has no experience training in court, no support, she can't be herself, she can't smudge, she can't—it was like her light was getting put out. And I went to go visit her once in that office and I was like, "Oh, my God, are you kidding me?" Like the energy in there was like shhh and she was like, "I'm suffocating here. I don't know how much longer I can be in this environment."

Seeing the struggle of her colleagues causes her to question the tension between roles:

But there's a lot of struggle sometimes, "Am I doing the right job? Am I here for the right reasons?" Mostly that I am here for the right reason but sometimes you doubt yourself and it's those days when you come back from those meetings and you've sees your coworkers in so much pain.

Child Protection Worker #6 struggles with her cultural identity and is offended by a Ministry manager who she feels identified her as contributing to poor Ministry practice to gain favour with a community:

I don't know if it was her way to try and get on side with the band but she started in by saying how important it is as far as protocol so that the Ministry can't just come out here with police cars and take away your kids and we were just like "ah!" because that is not what we do. That is never what we do especially with the band. We have all—like myself

and my colleagues have practiced with respect and dignity and in consultation with the bands....So I debriefed with her after the meeting about that because, I mean, it felt unfair because I knew that wasn't how we practiced and she said "well Bonnie, you know when I say that I don't mean you guys, I mean like the Ministry as a whole and your colleagues and this and that" and I said "well you know what, it is never easy when generalizations are made about anyone." You know what, I am on my own journey trying to figure out who I am within this cultural context and when you are negating that journey by just lumping us all in together as a bunch of baby snatchers to try and get the band on board, you are not promoting reconciliation.

It negated the fact that if anything...I am a victim of these policies so to treat me like I am part of the machine is really demoralizing. ...I think it is so indicative of the internal conflict that I go through trying to figure this out... I have the sort of organizational conflict going on at the same time I am trying to work out some really personal issues about that internally.

Child Protection Worker #2 deals with the trauma of removing children only by knowing that everything will be done to see if they can be returned to their family and community:

It didn't start there, that's for sure. I had no intention of ever working for the Ministry. When I went into social work I was aware of the social problems obviously I am a First Nations person too as well....this community is a very redneck community....so growing up we had to deal with all the racism and then having our [extended family and community] kids removed by the Ministry and then placed with family, like we were always taking care of them. So those were my first experiences with the Ministry....So then I took a job with protection. I worked with the rural and remote team and our communities...very isolated and very small and lots of problems, lots of challenges.

So then I started going out there....I was worried because again before I came into that job I was told that they are going to be removing 17 kids when I go there. So I was all worried. I thought "oh my god" stressed out. I hadn't had a removal in a year and a half when I was at that other team, working for the other team in the Ministry I hadn't had a removal. I avoided removal by placing with family but I had never had a removal. So then getting into this team I was like "okay you are going to be removing. Are you ready for this?" and I thought "you know what, I know what kind of person I am. I know what kind of practice I want to do. Let's see what I can do.

Then I removed five kids when I got there which just totally devastated me. I really had a hard time with that. Removing kids should be a hard time. It shouldn't be like "oh, yeah I am removing." I understand that the child needs the protection, I get it, but removal should be difficult. There should be some sort of emotion attached to it, I feel. But my belief was, "okay, so we are removing kids. We are always returning." Well that wasn't the belief that I had to deal with my team leader. She believed, "no, if we are removing kids we have tried everything possible and now we are at the end when we are removing" and I am like "no. no, no, no, we're returning and how could you possibly say that? We are only at the beginning stages." "Well this is ongoing stuff." I am like "yeah, every family has ongoing stuff." So I was challenging that. I said "okay, just let me do my work with my families and at the end of the day if I do everything and it doesn't work out then

at least I have tried everything. So my team leader was like “go for it. Do what you need to do,” and supported me on everything that I did.... And at the end of the day I did return the majority of those kids with the supports in place for those families. My practice I see it as working with families, always. Never working against families.

She talks about being confident in her approach and how it eases tension for her:

People knew and yeah, I just did the work. I didn't have to hide or no. I felt strong enough in who I was and in my practice, I had confidence, that yeah, they knew...I analyze myself all the time. I am questioning why I feel this way. I am always checking and rechecking and sometimes I do get defensive and people say “oh, you are defensive and can be intimidating at times,” and I am like “I guess because I feel very strong about this.” When they don't even listen to you it is like, well then I really feel like I need to be a stronger voice, especially for those families that are definitely oppressed.

Child Protection Worker #3 talks about the reaction of the Aboriginal families that she is working with:

The hardest piece for me was learning not everybody is going to like you in a social work position at all and they didn't but I took the time to build the relationships. I didn't come in with the attitude that I have the power here and I am going to shove that in your face or throw it in your face all the time that if you don't do this I will do this. I find that that is a huge difference in how I practice.

She explains that she could not find support to manage the tension brought by conflicting roles and responsibilities and she felt compelled to leave the Ministry:

So the support from the management dwindled. I did have some support but that was because I sought it out. It was “how do I manage through the system?” Give me some tools because I am not going to quit my job. They are not going to break me down and I am going to stay in this,” because it felt like the push to push you out. “You are not what we want. You don't fit in our little cookie cutter. You are a little too—whatever.” Whatever they could use and yeah, so I would seek out mentorship—okay, “you've worked in the system. How can I stay and how can I keep working here?” by the end of August I couldn't do it anymore. I had tried everything and it wasn't getting any better so at some point you start to doubt your own skills when you know you are a great worker, a good worker and with some mentorship you can be an excellent worker and a value to the system. You have to make a choice right? And so I left.

Child Protection #4 said she personally struggles while working in an office where she feels at odds with attitudes and practices because she is not able to be open about her feelings.

“We share a lot. We're shaking our heads and thinking, “Oh my god that shouldn't have happened or that shouldn't happen.” But it's not safe to openly say something.” However, she

manages this tension with the hope that future workers will have a better workplace if she can manage to stay with MCFD, “I can work on things—like I can struggle upwards. I can struggle with the problems. I need to because it’s important to me. Because I need to at least try and make a big effort because I know there are going to be Aboriginal workers after me.”

Provincial Employee #1 struggles with political interference with regard to a committee (the Aboriginal Adoption Exceptions Committee) that makes decisions regarding whether an exception to policy can be made for Aboriginal children to be adopted into non-Aboriginal homes:

Yes, so although they say they want the Aboriginal voice or have things in an Aboriginal way that anytime we are giving input it is not accepted...I was sitting on the Exceptions Committee, now that was a difficult thing to be an Aboriginal person and sit on that Exceptions Committee....also had a high turnover of Aboriginal community members, so the Aboriginal community members were also finding it difficult to be on there. It seemed like that committee ended up just being a rubber stamp. I remember at one conference we were at [a respected chief] said that the committee was genocidal. I was like “oh my god, and I am on the committee,” what the hell? So that kind of stuck with me when he said that. I mean I respect him and think the world of him so for him to say that I was just like “ah.” I remember almost crying.

She describes being pressed by MCFD executive to place a child with foster parents who were strongly advocating to adopt an Aboriginal child even after some family members were located as a potential permanent resource:

....I think it was a political decision because the foster parents were going to make so much noise. They were very strong and out in the media and out in the media from the very beginning and so yeah, I think it was a political decision.

Provincial Employee #3 talks about feeling culturally compromised in consultations with First Nations people:

I guess that is when it brings in my Aboriginal beliefs of being at a table and when I am given so much respect at a certain table.....I had an experience with an Elder at the table, she gave me a lot of respect, she gave me a lot of trust...so when she came to me and they were looking for information and I couldn’t provide anything, it felt like I was disrespecting them, so it was against...you know it is an honour to be given that respect and then to not be able to give them anything back, it felt like you were disrespecting

them...I just felt more stressed...this is the first time I have ever felt incompetent doing my job.

Mental Health Support Worker #1 reveals conflicted feelings for how her cultural knowledge and connections may be used by colleagues to simply gain access to communities. She has developed trust issues with her team concerned that it may not be in the interest of the community to share this knowledge and that her team members should be making their own efforts to engage with the community:

There are no other Aboriginal people on our team right now. At one point when the team started there was myself and three other Aboriginal people and now there is just me....So I was often turned to as the person to connect with Elders or to bring in some sort of awareness with the local First Nations....That was really difficult. I had to connect with Elders in the area and make sure it was okay to pass on information because I wasn't really sure of my role around that. Depending on who you talked to, was it okay or not. That made it challenging as if I was not allowed to share info due to my Elders' advice, but the team needed to know this for a client, it would place me in a difficult position. I think it was also our team's desire to have it quick and easy instead of actually doing it the right way that they didn't want to do the hard work and try to get the information that they needed from the communities....I didn't like being put in that position so I ended up becoming quite silent in my conversations with people because I didn't want to be put in that role or create that sort of expectation.

Yes, and I'm not even from that community. It was sort of a feeling that you know people in this area or you're Aboriginal so you're going to know everything about Aboriginal stuff and I didn't like that. I felt really, really uncomfortable.

Some attempts by non-Aboriginal colleagues to learn about the community sometimes feel intrusive and disrespectful. She says she feels the need to be vigilant and protect the community:

At the beginning it was very interesting. Lots of people wanted to know things more about the spiritual side of First Nations stuff and it almost made me mad, I guess. I appreciate that people want to know but I also find it very pushy. I appreciate them asking me—you can ask me any questions you want to know—but people need to respect when I can't answer something, and also respect the knowledge and the teachings. Where the pushiness comes from is that so many people would ask, "Oh I want to come to the next sweat with you." Or "I want to come and smudge with you." This irked me because it is something that is part of our community and culture and you can't just buy in like that, or it's not something you're going to have some crazy vision over. You're not going to be able to play Indian for a day....I'm particularly protective over it because it's been

so hard for my family to relearn our culture. We know what colonization has done, it has absolutely torn our family apart and our generation is trying to bring that back together.

It's a total trust thing because there are many people who don't have a problem bringing these things up to me but I also have to have trust in that person, to know that they're really going to understand. I also don't want to be an idiot because that looks bad on me when I bring someone [to the community] saying racist comments or something. That's very painful and you get enough of that. There are very few places you feel safe at and I don't want other people invading that for the safety and well-being of Aboriginal people.

Mental Health Support Worker #3 says she felt in conflict with the structure of the

Ministry right from the beginning when she realized the MCFD Aboriginal Child and Youth

Mental Health Five Year Plan that was to support her vision for how to really engage and

support community mental health services, was not being well implemented:

The way that the plan was written was about making services more accessible, all of these other things that I thought that it was going to be an all hours outreach around the clock different kinds of things, not doing necessarily crisis work but fitting to people's schedules, fitting to—if you were working...I thought well children and youth, well they are in school all day so this job is probably going to be an evening job when I applied for it...So I was really frustrated with that outcome (lack of flexibility and support)

It is like when you become part of a community you become part of a community. I am not just an employee that is here to do a specific job, when you are Aboriginal, it is like okay, they are opening their doors to me, that means I need to open my doors to them.... If there are all of these little restrictions that is not how these communities work. If you go in there and you want to help them...don't tell them that they can turn to you and then turn them away, which happens quite often.

Child Protection Worker #5 feels uncomfortable about being brought into difficult

situations to ease community tensions. She compares it to a relative who is in policing:

He (a relative who is RCMP in Ontario) gets sent to—back east it is similar to Oka. The most recent call that I recall him going to is Caledonia when they had the standoff recently and I remember him being on the front lines and just being really torn between his duty as a police officer but really feeling torn because he believed these issues to be important and true and because it was our people, our [First Nations] people. We talked about that...I'm being kind of like positioned or asked to go in just because I'm Aboriginal that can make a difference.

However when she wants to share important situational insights she feels perceived as

biased:

...I am seen as being not as credible as other social workers because I am Aboriginal, like somehow I'm closer to the issues. You know because it is personal for me, these are my people, right?

Role Congruence

A small number of participants describe achieving some congruence between community and professional responsibilities

Manager #3 who is closely connected to his First Nations community did an initial practicum with the Ministry but then worked in different capacities as a social worker for a number of years before he felt ready to return and manage dual community and professional roles in the Ministry:

I was much younger, less experienced, but I still felt that the values that were strong to me and in my practicum with the organization, it wasn't a complete fit for me so that's why I didn't pursue it. So theoretically I could have thrown my name into the hat and applied for a position as many of my colleagues did at the time...for me I don't know if it was not fitting well or maybe not enough experience or comfort with my own identity. I don't know if that played a role in it or not. Certainly some of the values were difficult but whether I had enough strength or self-knowledge on how I could operate within that and still be myself I don't know.

He feels that he has been well supported by his family and community throughout his education and subsequent career and continues to be as a manager at MCFD:

It was one of pride because it requires education, requires a degree, it is a very important position. It is a sacred responsibility for my culture to care for children and protect them and those roles are usually not just within one person, they are with our hereditary chiefs, the grandparents, the mothers and fathers. So my family was very happy with my accomplishments throughout my schooling journey and throughout all my positions. I think that's also the reason why I was able to be successful in education which is really the root of any success in our society right now. Because I felt that support at home with my family—and when I say my family—I mean more than my mom and my dad. It was my *whole* family—over 50 aunts and uncles between my mom and my dad that were supportive.

He describes feeling able to guide his practice from both a professional and culturally congruent perspective and used the below example of a child removal:

We worked with the community and there were no other options so unfortunately that child had to come into care. But, of course, all that mom sees is her child is taken from her. So I tried to stay in that supportive role with her. It was challenging, it wasn't easy because she was screaming and she was angry, she was hurt, but that's the core of who I am, that's what I needed to do at the time....There are all those policies in place to keep workers safe and I could have gone that route but I didn't see any benefit to that at the time...I didn't feel endangered, I just felt the anger and to me it was okay for me to experience that anger at that time because that's what she needed to express.

He also describes his ability to remain congruent in his cultural identity through his determination to stay and work in the system:

This system, in its current form, has done so much harm to so many Aboriginal communities across BC...We have more children in care than we ever did at the height of residential schools, so I ask myself why would I want to be part of that during the reflection piece? For me it's always come back to what can I do about that? It doesn't lead me to want to leave; it just leads me to want to do something different...I can reflect that I could either leave or work within it.

Child Protection Worker #1 works in her own community and feels supported to be congruent in her community and professional roles. She attributes this to support from her community and an MCFD team leader and colleagues committed to practice in a historically informed, holistic and culturally engaged way. She also says it helps considerably being bicultural and living both on reserve and in town:

I know that's where the difference is for me, is because my parents couldn't live on reserve because there was no housing, so we always lived in town until I was 16 then I went on reserve. But we were always on reserve anyway, my grandma lived there, you know we did that. So I've learned to walk in both worlds. So it's okay to put on your little white face when you go to school and then come home and take that off and you are the Indian self or whatever, so I really learned to walk those two roads. I was able to assimilate into the white world. Then go home and just be me right. Do it up front.

Like many social workers she describes stress in the job, but does not "feel stressed about how I'm practicing....I love my job. Love to come here. I mean, if I had lots of money and I didn't have to work, I wouldn't be here. But I love the work that I do. I love everybody that's on my case list and it's really about what can we do to make sure the kids are not in care?"

A guardianship worker also says being bicultural helps reduce tension between his cultural identity and his professional role.

Like I said, I kind of think of myself as a bi-cultural person so I can understand the mechanisms of the system and the world out there, but I can also identify with spiritual, cultural realms. I kind of link people with who they are.

A youth probation worker has worked in his role for well over fifteen years gaining skills that enable him to work within the Ministry without compromising his cultural and personal identity. Some of this he attributes to having a degree of autonomy to support his approach:

I like the job. I like the work. I like the people that I work with and the autonomy does have its good sides too, right? I wish there was a little more supervision there but the autonomy and my approach to how I do my work in the various communities is basically up to me. I don't feel like I am discouraged in doing that kind of work. In fact I feel encouraged in doing the kind of work that I am doing both through my managers and my team leader, when they do hear about the work that I do.

Provincial Employee #2 is mindful of maintaining congruence between his cultural identity and community and professional responsibilities by engaging his Indigenous lens before his Ministry lens.

It's very much in the nature of my family in terms of how we've advocated for Indigenous rights within our community. I firmly believe that our children and youth within our communities have an inherent right to be attached to family but to understand and know their cultural rights as well as individuals. I think it's a natural fit because I live my life where I tend to try to think more from my Indigenous lens first before my Ministry lens.... I always ensure that those perspectives were well thought out before I explain them to people as well or if I'm stating something from my cultural perspective, I'll explain clearly where it comes from and how my family's rights are tied to that as well. I try to reflect that these are rights that are likely something that the Aboriginal children and youth that we represent have as well... I feel that if I'm not grounded within my Indigenous ways, than how can I be an example to not only the coordinators and practitioners, but also the children and youth that I do meet when I travel from community to community through the work that I do.

Role congruence is also high because he has relative autonomy to work within the program:

...they allow me to assist and to help resolve issues or concerns first before it gets to the point where I need to talk to my supervisor. I can honestly say that there have been less

than a handful of times where I've actually had to approach a supervisor to say I need support or guidance....

He describes MCFD leadership and team support for both his identity and practice

approach:

I think as a representative here I think in some forums where many of our leadership have been in attendance, I've always stated very clear that yes I am an employee of the Ministry, but I also have obligations to my culture and to my family as well in that I bring that knowledge and integrity of my family into the work that I do.

He describes at times feeling "like a borderline mascot" when asked to speak at executive and leadership meetings but takes advantage of and "exploits" the opportunity to make it a learning experience for Ministry colleagues:

I mean there are certainly times where I have felt like it's been a tokenized position, but like I said earlier, I maximize those moments to generate awareness and I think what may start off as a tokenized role I think I transform it into a learning experience for folks to understand at a greater depth why these things are done...So I'm hoping that through the work that I do, that people remember that oh you know it's much deeper than just the song it's actually an inherent right that that person brings to the table as well...my hope is that when they go to the table with other people from other Indigenous communities that they remember those little components and say oh they probably have Indigenous rights (too).

When I travel to other Ministry offices throughout the Province, my experience is that fortunately and gladly to say that most people are wanting that information as well. So, when I'm able to attend events, I bring my family's practices with me because I can't mimic or speak on anyone else's behalf, I have to do things in my family's way. So when I bring that information, I try to introduce myself in a traditional fashion, utilizing my languages or explaining where my family comes from because a majority of the time there are Aboriginal employees there or there are Elders present as well. One of the first things an Elder will say to me is "Where are your grandparents from?" so I try to explain those components as well when I do go to different settings. I think for the most part it's readily received.

He also speaks of being "bicultural" and how this enables him to relate to his colleagues and "build my comfort level" to create "my own family within the place" he works.

"Recognizing the strengths of individuals within our office as well in terms of I know I can go to this person for this support, or I know I can go and get this information from this person, I think is something that is definitely an innate practice is recognizing those skills and just utilizing

them.” He describes maintaining an ongoing balance between his community and professional roles:

through teachings within my community. And how we conduct business within our traditional teaching as well, is we never rely on one perspective to develop any initiatives with our family, but it’s us as a family as a whole getting together and then deciding the nature of the work that we need to do. So for me, in my work that I do, I naturally do that with the people that I work day to day with in order to create those supports and things that we need to go and carry on with. It is a balance sometimes especially when it comes to barriers around policy development. There are certain things that contradict our traditional ways of being as well, so those components of the work that we do, I just have to find ways to correlate it to our Indigenous ways of being as well within my family. Then just find ways to correlate and to make it work as well because there’s always going to be a way and some of that may be either a culture or language barrier at times.

Token Role In MCFD

Participants talk about experiences that they have had within the Ministry where they have felt that their Aboriginal identity has been used in token ways. Manager #2 reflects back several years when Aboriginal people were being introduced into the management structure of the region:

To me it was a tokenized position because what can one person do with 65 First Nation communities, six delegated agencies? There is just so much work and we had lots of different skill sets that were just amazing and still are. So they would utilize them in that area but really when I don’t know, this is just my perception but they were just tokenized positions. They weren’t really—lots of issue management to keep people out of trouble when we had issues with the community or whatever right? Because there would be that person with the relationship so they could, you know.

Participants talk about being asked to sit on committees to provide feedback when in reality their attendance was really just a formality so colleagues and management could report that an Aboriginal perspective was included:

...there was one other Aboriginal manager at the time and we were both being asked to participate in everything. People really seemed to want to hear what we had to say. It wasn’t terribly long though before it began to become uncomfortable. We began to realize that we were tokens at various tables...and nobody really wanted to hear what we had to say but they wanted to tick off that box of their membership. (Manager #4)

So I came back to government but I said I would not sit on the (Adoption) Exceptions Committee (mentioned above) this time. So when I came back they asked me “would you sit on...” and I said “no, I just can’t do that again”...because you don’t have a lot of say in that. So having someone there is almost....just having someone there just for the sake of having them. (Provincial Employee #1)

Participants spoke of being held up as First Nations or Aboriginal people on teams as a way for the Ministry to say they are being “Aboriginally” correct:

I did feel token for the first three or four months that I was in this office because they fought for me even though I didn’t have any skill and they threw me in a position because I was Aboriginal and I was from the [local First Nation]. (Child Protection Worker #1)

[My team leader] is quite open about it. I think it is her sort of little nugget or something that she has an Aboriginal worker on her team. (Child Protection Worker #6)

Provincial Employee #1 describes being on an Aboriginal team that was highly bureaucratized and mainstream functioning but when there were issues or problems Aboriginal staff were told:

to solve this in an Aboriginal way when you have done nothing in an Aboriginal way. So, it made no sense whatsoever and then it loses its whole meaning and then to be truthful I didn’t even feel like it wasn’t about being an Aboriginal in any sense or form, I just felt like nothing, like that wasn’t even part of anything to do. I wasn’t respected as an Aboriginal person. My actual voice wasn’t heard so why would I bring any of that to the team? I just shut that completely down because I didn’t feel it was respected and then I was really—the ones that did bring it forward I felt that it wasn’t real. So then I was thinking I don’t want to be part of that, I don’t want to bring forward who I am when this is so—it seems to me to be so not real.

Related to the feeling of having to be a cultural “expert,” many participants describe expectations they should know everything about Aboriginal people and provide the answers:

And you should know how many Chiefs are out there, I mean just goes to tokenism around knowledge stuff like that, or an address off the top of your head to a community—yeah right. (Manager #2)

Yes, and I’m not even from that community...you’re Aboriginal so you’re going to know everything about Aboriginal stuff and I didn’t like that. I felt really, really uncomfortable. It absolutely encourages a pan-Aboriginal approach. (Mental Health Support Worker #1)

I can’t count how many people ask me if something is culturally appropriate or not and I say “I don’t know. Go ask the chief if that is culturally appropriate. How the hell am I supposed to know that”? So just constantly having to be the person that is trying to explain culture to non-Aboriginal workers within MCFD but always being hesitant to do that because I am not the expert and I might say the wrong thing and what I say for one

community could be completely different for another community. (Mental Health Support Worker #3)

Then I was kind of called to kind of be the cultural teacher and I said “I’m not comfortable with that because that places me in a power and an imbalance with my co-workers and it’s hard enough for me right now to fit in.” So I really, and that’s not my way of doing things, I was always taught if people want to learn information, they come and then you share. (Child Protection Worker #5)

Tell us what to do. You are Aboriginal you have the answers. Look out!...so a lot of people see all Aboriginals as part of that big group. Pan- Indianism right, to use some of the old language. Yes, people just see an Aboriginal person and they want to engage and say, “How can we work with Aboriginal people? You’re one of those persons, give me some insight? You’re the expert and you should have all the answers”....But I soon learned when they asked, “Well what do you think their Chief wants?” “I don’t know, have you talked with them?” “Well, no.” “Oh, well that would probably be a good first step.” (Manager #3)

Mental Health Support worker #3 says that she felt she and others on her team were used to help non-Aboriginal workers gain access to the community:

There was an expectation that me and the other two team members, just bring this new staff in and there was going to be automatic trust. We had to stick our necks out to do that. I am the Indian expert, definitely the Indian expert and if MCFD can’t get access to community they will send me in. I find that in my new role as well, that it is like “oh, why don’t we send you to talk to all of the people that don’t agree with this program”? I am like “okay, well I mean I am not like your token Indian just so that you guys can get the answers that you are looking for. Why don’t you go build a relationship with them and ask them yourself?”

Resource Worker #1 says there is an assumption that because she is Aboriginal that she can automatically recruit Aboriginal caregivers “so I hear a lot about “okay, you’re a First Nations worker, maybe you can go and recruit First Nations caregivers. I feel like they are putting the onus on me”... She feels that there is an assumption that this is enough to overcome all of the other barriers preventing Aboriginal people from being caregivers.

Mental Health Support Worker #1 thinks that setting up a specifically Aboriginal team but not allocating the appropriate resources to it means that it is “perceived by the communities as being tokenized....here’s this team that specializes in Aboriginal people, so does this mean all the other teams don’t have any knowledge?”

Child Protection Worker #5, on a newly disentangled Aboriginal team, says there is nothing to distinguish the Aboriginal team from any other team in the Ministry because her colleagues are mostly non-Aboriginal and aren't sure what they are supposed to be doing differently. "So nothing's really changed because there wasn't really any clarity about what does being on an Indigenous team mean? So nothing's changed. We're just workers on something called an Aboriginal team."

Sense of Belonging/Isolation in Organization

Some comments here are similar to participant feedback above regarding organizational fit but are more thematically related to participants' feelings of belonging and acceptance or, alternately, isolation from their teams and the Ministry environment. A sense of isolation is described below:

Exactly, just feeling like you are on the same page. You are not having to educate or to send something or explain something...I don't know how someone who has been raised and gone through various forms of trauma that so many Aboriginal families experience how they would do well in this environment because I am struggling and I know I can handle a lot of things but I am starting to struggle. (Manager 1)

The learning curve is so incredible and it's not just about the work, the practice, it's about internal systems and not getting support. You know so the regional belief around it is throw you into the deep end and you sink or swim, you'll figure it out. Which is pretty horrible actually. (Manager #3)

Because of the attitudes in there. So out of all, say about 40 employees, I would say there was about four Aboriginal social workers that identified themselves as Aboriginal. There were other workers in there that were Aboriginal but would not identify themselves as Aboriginal. (Child Protection Worker #2)

We were not welcome at all. It was quite evident from the workers because there was such hype around that the media said that we were highly skilled, highly trained workers who were going to change the system. So that kind of created, again, this—between us and them and the current workers who were working their butts off were basically getting treated—well "you're not doing your job so we are going to bring in these Aboriginal women and they are going to do better because they are better" so it created a real sense of unbalance. We wanted to feel like we belonged so we voiced our concerns and we didn't move forward on. We needed to fit in we didn't want to draw more attention to ourselves. (Child Protection Worker #2)

Yes. I struggle. I struggle daily but I keep thinking it's only been two years and if I could endure another two years. It makes no sense....because if you come to work in a stressful situation everyday it affects your health and I don't want to be not healthy in two years. But I try to relieve it as much as I can by taking part in stuff like deep breathing because I know with every inhalation, every truth that I tell, it's going to get a little better. It will clear a little bit more of a path for myself...I think the most unfair part about my job is I'm not allowed to go to work and say be a little bit social—just be social. I can't understand—like I'm not listened to or talked to... I just don't feel safe and don't want to make that extra effort, but I do with certain people. (Child Protection worker #4)

When I first joined but I am not too sure if it was just because I was away so much doing the training...I am not too sure but I felt really picked on...The team leader didn't properly do introductions, just kind of set me in my office and that was it. I didn't get introduced to the staff right away. I had to kind of go out and meet them on my own. I think it is just this established group of people. I mean they have been here for so long and so there is a tight group and then if someone new comes in, then you know, I guess if they don't like them then they will do their best to make sure they are not here anymore (Resource Worker #1)

I do not think my cultural identity fits with MCFD. If it did, I think MCFD would realize I am an asset rather than a burden. I know the people from the surrounding reserves, and rather than gain knowledge from me, the workers tend to shun me. (Resource Worker #2)

...how do I explain that. . .because the right words were being said when you went to go and talk about it openly, there was no “problems” and yet there was undermining happening. You couldn't always name them, couldn't always. . .but you know when you walk in a room and everybody goes quiet, it's kind of obvious. So the environment was quite unfriendly...It was really toxic. . . I tried to go in and actually ask...”Have I done something wrong? Do we need to clear something here?” “Oh, no. Everything's good. Everything's good.” And I can't work with that. There's nothing to work with in that. (Mental Health Support Worker #2)

So I have to carve out my little niche where I can, and I have. I really feel like I—and I guess we all do, like I change a bit when I come to the office. Just because of my experiences....I feel valued because I've also worked hard to make relationships with my co-workers and stuff. I do feel like I don't think what I say makes a difference, but I think they like me, enough. (Child Protection Worker #5)

These participants expressed a feeling sense of belonging in the Ministry:

When I look at them I see white but something just really shakes up my reality about how incredibly astute and sensitive and caring and open to hearing what the community is saying and listening and following through and putting the power in the hands of the people where it belongs while still doing a legislated and mandated role. (Focus Group Participant)

...something I naturally try to do anyway to build my comfort level is you create your own family within the place that you work as well and your supports. Recognizing the strengths of individuals within our office as well in terms of I know I can go to this

person for this support, or I know I can go and get this information from this person....
(Provincial Employee #2)

Voice

Another theme which emerges from Aboriginal professionals' experiences is whether they feel their unique voice, concerns, and viewpoints are heard and respected in the Ministry.

Some participants strongly feel their voice is not heard by colleagues and leadership in the Ministry:

I am cautiously optimistic that maybe something is going to change but I also look at this government and how much money they poured into the 1996 Royal Commission and whatever happened to that? I think it was already said...how many times do we have to tell our story? It is not getting us anywhere so I don't want to tell it anymore. (Focus Group Participant)

I find MCFD to be stifling.... I would love to give information where it is needed, but if co-workers treat me as a burden, then this does nothing to strengthen the inter-office relationships that are integral to doing a good job...rather than gain knowledge from me, the workers tend to shun me. (Resource Worker #2)

Provincial Employee #1 talks about being on an Aboriginal team where initially she had many Aboriginal colleagues who felt they had voice but this shifted suddenly with leadership changes on the team, and was exacerbated by a resulting loss of Aboriginal staff:

So finally there was a place that there was more than one or two Aboriginal people....and we would talk about Aboriginal issues so that was exciting for me to be part of that and I felt like that was where I should be at that branch and doing that kind of work. I don't know what happened. At the same time it seemed like everyone was jumping ship...so there was this whole thing about us kind of against the Ministry...and that fight was getting too tired for people. They felt that their voice was going nowhere, wasn't respected and so quite a few (staff) left.

So I felt like we did have flexibility of doing things in an Aboriginal way or lens to some degree and then that got taken away and so then people started to leave. I mean why would you stay there right? So your voice wasn't heard anymore as an Aboriginal person. At that point and that started all of that internal, like lateral violence I think because we weren't doing any work...

We lost a bunch of staff and really a lot of really highly qualified.... knowledgeable strong Aboriginal people...who had been around for a long time...that weren't afraid to speak their mind.

then I started looking for other work because you are not respected, your voice is not respected, the Aboriginal lens isn't there.... You got reprimanded for it. So the few times that I tried to speak up, I learned very fast that you don't do that.... kind of then I think I was seen as a disgruntled employee or something, I don't know. It never was followed up. Nothing ever changed. I was really open with [managers] about the work and what I felt happened

Mental Health Support Worker #1 says that she funnels her perspective and concerns through a trusted Aboriginal colleague in management to attempt to have her voice heard:

I think there is an Aboriginal in upper management that I can phone anytime and he is always there, and that's really supportive. I feel I can talk to him more than I can talk to other people and he will get messages out and that is really important to me.

Child Protection Worker #1, who works with a team that she says reflects her values, says that she and her colleagues do have a strong voice with their current team leader. She anticipates that he is going to retire soon:

So I pity the person that takes over the torch if they aren't like-minded like [the current team leader]. You're going to see anarchy in the Aboriginal office here because none of us really know how to keep quiet.

Manager #4 says she believes that nobody has a voice in the Ministry:

Here it's a topsy-turvy world where we pretend everybody has a voice, even though they know they don't really have a voice.... they don't feel legitimately involved. Yes, it goes back to that whole congruency, the lip-service.

She uses two interesting analogies to reflect the climate she sees in the Ministry whereby Aboriginal people feel the need to appease the larger dominant non-Aboriginal group:

...the Vichy government was about appeasement and I've always seen that in certain components of the Aboriginal world, but I see it very strongly within the Ministry—Aboriginal people working in the Ministry—a strong desire to appease the majority, and to be seen as easy to get along with, cooperative, that's where the “we must be inclusive thing” comes from, I think.... they don't want to be the trouble makers; they don't want to be the strident voice. They want to be seen as cooperative, understanding, easy to get along with.

Like the Vichy government, you've got this overwhelming occupying force that can mete out pretty harsh punishment to you, and you want to avoid the punishment. It's like a battered wife almost. You try to keep them happy, and don't have them focus on you; you don't want to be one of “them,” the troublesome ones. And then for some it's the whole internalized racism that gets caught up in that too. The “I rose above it, why can't they”? There's lots of—we're dealing with humans after all. It's crazy and complicated.

Powerless to Make Change in MCFD

Another theme emerging from participants' experiences in the Ministry was a feeling of being powerless to achieve the change that motivated them to work for the Ministry. Manager #4, from just above, says she is convinced that her efforts have not resulted in the change that she believes is necessary and the only thing keeping her in her position is concern that anyone within the Ministry that may step in does not share the concern or commitment she does:

And you know this is a little bit embarrassing but the truth is....the reason I'm not giving my resignation today, is even though I'm pretty burnt out, who are they going to get that gives a damn? And that's another ethical dilemma.

Manager #1 describes feeling blocked from doing the work she knows needs to be done:

It is really frustrating to know what I know and then to be at meetings and hear people talk who really don't know...just in their actions and their decisions, I know they think they know, but I know they don't know. I really think you have to experience working in community to ever really understand. If people really understood where the Aboriginal community is at in terms of the loss, the trauma, the poverty on so many levels, most of the discussions that we have sitting around talking about, we wouldn't be having. We would be doing. So it is just very frustrating. I don't know if that is incompetent but feeling like I know what is needed and not being able to do it or not having the resources.

The high level of bureaucratization makes the Ministry seem immovable in terms of the current change initiative that she is involved in:

When you are working in an agency you don't have all of these levels of people that you need permission from. There are just not all of those barriers....there is a barrier everywhere and it is so big that it is really hard to change the system when there are just so many layers to it and that is just very frustrating...I am really starting to feel like I don't know if this is achievable. I keep telling myself things are going to get better, this is part of the transition but I have been basically doing this role for four and a half years and I just don't know if it is achievable.

I am trying to change the way we do the work and it just feels really difficult to do that. I am getting tired of trying to say the same thing over and over again...I just want to do it. I don't know if I have the energy anymore to keep educating and explaining this. I just want to do the work in a good way. I don't want to try and convince people. I know that is not very good but that is just how I am feeling. I am tired.

She feels there is inadequate resourcing and concentration of the people who are committed to the work in the Ministry:

Well and there are people out there that would do this work but we are all scattered and they've got other responsibilities that I just feel very fragmented and I just would like to be part of a team and we are all moving this agenda forward together and we meet and we talk about how is it going? We are all just scattered. Maybe it is just part of not having enough time to develop this vision and this regional approach because we are in that transition. Everyone is sort of going through changes and I know that it is always a difficult time but I guess I am just feeling very heavy with knowing what I know and wondering how to do it all and sometimes feeling like people will say they understand but they really don't.

She notes how many Aboriginal employees have left the region and feels given her own experience that she wouldn't recommend working in the Ministry:

We have had a lot of Aboriginal people leave our region and I know why they have left because they will tell me but they won't necessarily share that in their exit interview if they do one. It is that feeling like there is so much on your plate and not necessarily feeling like the people around you really understand...If someone came to me today and was considering a job in the Ministry, would I encourage them or would I say no? It's better to stay with an Aboriginal organization. Today I would say I don't think I would encourage anyone to join.

A focus group participant feels powerless to make change after seeing a group of committed managers unable to remove bureaucratic constraints:

The managers that I was working for were very, incredible people who I would just love them to pieces but when it comes right down to it, even those beautiful people, when they sit down and start going into the visions of what really is going to need to happen within the constraints of how the bureaucracy does, it is day to day business that I think that there is a lot lost.

After working toward the formation of a new Aboriginal Child and Youth Mental Health team for two years Mental Health Support Worker #2 felt that change was not possible within the Ministry office where she worked:

There were times when I was having to deal with the social worker and the team leader and going to bat for a child or youth that was in care and needed resources and I'm the one like justifying that and I'm just left to do that and it was exhausting. ... always having to justify that I actually knew something about something, you know?

Mental Health Support Worker #3 says that the realization that she couldn't impact change in the Ministry affected her deeply, eventually resulting in her leaving:

Yeah, it was a lot of stress and I would always stay strong at work but I would come home after work and be really frustrated and I think that I did go through periods of almost depression because I have gone to school for eight years now to try and make structural changes in the world and I just felt like now I am in this position where I can't do that and that was one of the reasons I left because I wanted to be in a position that held more power where I can make those changes.

Well I can say definitely that my work with MCFD which was the last three and a half years, it surprised me to start feeling burnt out....but I think the other part of it is that the longer you work in a place like MCFD at first you have hope that you can make the difference because you don't understand how complex that structure is and when you start learning how complex it is, then every barrier that you run into and learn about at every level going right up to the top, it steals away a little bit of your hope. So by the end of my time with MCFD I didn't have much hope left.

Disappointed with the lack of change following the formation of Aboriginal service teams, Child Protection Worker #5 says she has come to the conclusion that there never was any intention to change practice:

This is the part that's really confusing...they keep talking about Aboriginal teams and different things but nothing's really, I don't see that happening. That's really odd to me.... The only reason they formed these Aboriginal teams was to form these little pockets because it's easier to manage when they start to offset (devolve services to the Aboriginal community through the Aboriginal Regional Authorities which failed in 2009)...this is probably the worst I've ever seen it

Leaving the Ministry to work with a delegated Aboriginal agency seems to Resource Worker #1 a better possibility to achieve change than with the Ministry, "because it just seems like, I am sorry to say but it just seems like MCFD is just stuck in one way of focus." Child Protection Worker #4 also believes leaving the Ministry is the only way to achieve change:

truthfully, I'd like to be a team leader in an Aboriginal agency so that I can at least have some control on how to help poor Aboriginal families and make sure we are as unobtrusive as we can be, but positively impacting their lives. And not just referring them to who knows who, but to work with them.

Safety and Subversion

Mentioned above, and focused here, is how unsafe Aboriginal participants feel to practice within, or even provide or identify with an Aboriginal perspective in their workplaces. Related to this is the idea that sometimes participants feel the need to be subversive or even manipulative to practice in a culturally consistent.

Safety.

A reconnection worker talks about the impact of self-identifying as an Aboriginal person after joining the Ministry:

It was like going into a frying pan, and the more oppressed I felt....none of us were valued. My best girlfriend, who was Métis was pushed to the point she just up and left for another province. Another lady who was just amazing was beaten down so badly, she just quit. Like, it was insane, and no matter who you talked to, you were looked like you were the problem.

And another focus participant says:

To know some of the concerns...it would be really nice if some of the people that aren't scared to speak out, that feel safe enough to speak out..... Do we all feel safe? No. Do we all feel safe with some of the managers? No. (focus group participant)

Child Protection Worker #1 says there continues to be conflict between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff in her worksite:

A couple of racist comments made. Not safe. You know what, a lot too are I think oppressed because we can't smudge. Because I think there are four workers and then they said there's one that doesn't want to come out of the closet because...It's not safe. But if they are feeling like that, what are the clients feeling like? Educated people and how do you think their clients are feeling?

Child Protection Worker #3, recruited through a recruitment project in the north region, says a newly hired cohort of Aboriginal staff (through the recruitment initiative) who were facing workplace challenges did not openly contact or gain support from each other because it was not safe to do:

It was like we were all falling off. I kept a support network with my colleagues [in another office]. It's still hard for me to wrap my head around that.... the rest of that group kind of felt as though it was like—if we were associated, it was like the association with

us nobody will stick their neck out if it would cost them repercussions from their team leader. So people kind of separated themselves without saying things but you felt it.

Child Protection Worker #4, also recruited through the same project, reveals feeling inhibited to speak openly with her colleagues and team leader:

I'm just putting it out there but it seems like they always have a flat this is the way it is supposed to be.....No, I couldn't share it.

I can definitely share with (some of) my co-workers, those I trust and those who trust me. We share a lot. We're shaking our heads and thinking, "Oh my god that shouldn't have happened or that shouldn't happen." But it's not safe to openly say something.

Mental Health Support Worker #2 talks about open hostility toward her after she confronted what she felt were racist and unethical practices in her workplace:

They didn't want to be accountable to the community, they liked holding power. They liked having the power over and they sure as hell weren't to have any Indian tell them how to run things...It was very discouraging and it just slowly it just deteriorated and deteriorated and deteriorated...Anybody who stood up and spoke up was gone and there was a few in my time. At least two. Almost three I think.

Mental Health Support Worker #1 describes being unable to talk about the CAPP initiative in her office and the feeling that information is held by certain people in the Ministry and, "Yes, that it's all a big secret. If you even try and talk about it your hand is slapped."

Subversion.

These participants talk about how biased policy, practice and attitudes toward Aboriginal families in the ministry force practitioners to manipulate the system to meet the needs of the child and the family:

There are ways of manipulating the system. That is what the Ministry is teaching me—how to do is how to manipulate their system. Okay, so how can I buy more time for this family before we go CCO (continuing care)? So it is unfortunate that it has come down to that. The system is set up that way. It is like, okay, so there is your rule, now how can I manipulate it so it best meets the needs of our families. That is a pretty sad thing when it has come down to that, where anything that is coming at me, how can I manipulate the system to best meet the needs of the family? What is that about anyway? (Focus Group Participant)

Are there are MCFD employees who are stepping beyond the requirements and the intentions and the policies and protocols of the Ministry to meet the needs of Indigenous

people? Absolutely. I don't think any of us in this room could probably be here and doing this job if we didn't do that...I don't believe I would be here today anymore at this point to do this job if it wasn't for the fact that I could step outside and do things....Are there indigenous services going on? Yes, there are lots of services going on but are they from MCFD? Are they part of MCFD's plan and their implementation? Are they training us how to do that kind of stuff? No. we are doing that in spite of it.....The rules also keep us in a box and what we learn more and more to do as workers is to manipulate the rules so we can move or get exceptions from outside of the box for what works for that family....It's the right thing to do. Are they flexible enough to understand that this family might be different or this community's different or these teachings are different, and we need something here or that when I tell you it's important that we spend the money on this family travelling here to his community, that that's important to meet the child needs. (another focus group participant)

Like I tried to take on the bigger system and got burnt. I decided I am pre-Elder and it's time just to do what I can do, but I will not tolerate—because I couldn't care less. They can fire me. They can do whatever they want. I'm really close to getting off the train, and then I will go work in the community the way I want to work and continue the work I continue to do the way I've been trained by the community. (reconnection worker)

So part of me has always, on the hush side of things, given those kinds of advice to Aboriginal people and communities but totally off the record “I never said this to you but if you say this when you are making a referral for services you will be a lot more likely to get the services.” I never advise people to lie about things but I would just get them to maybe exaggerate the extremity of something. (Mental Health Support Worker #3)

Safety and subversion.

Child Protection Worker #5 talks about safety and subversion as related issues for her in the workplace:

I would never tell my team leader about how I do that [building relationships in the community] because everything comes down to timelines, getting your paperwork done, and prioritizing court over relationships, things like that. So I would never tell my team leader about the relationships that I do have. I'm so terrified because sometimes as a non-Aboriginal person team leader, you know what I mean, heterosexual Christian values, things like that, it can do a lot of damage and really bring that really mainstream. So I find that when he kind of gets in there the relationship gets ruptured.

I keep it really covert, who I know, the relationships that I'm building with community professionals and leadership as well as some of the stuff in the big house, thinks like that, I don't talk openly about it because I always get the “oh well you know well your risk assessment's important, your CPOC is important and court is important,” but nothing about relationships comes out as important...So these kinds of experiences make me reluctant to keep going to the team leader or management, it just makes me more reluctant to.

Informal Support

Participants talk about how and where they find informal support, from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal colleagues, and from both inside and outside the Ministry. Manager #2 describes how she gained support from another Aboriginal colleague on her first team:

Well one person at that time.... a First Nations woman, strong in her ways.....we would hunker down in our office and we would do that debrief right after talking to a foster parent that—just some very racist comments again right? Or trying to get in with another team because all of a sudden we were doing this work and it was seen as it wasn't as important as the protection or family service. But there were only two of us.....

She also valued the support of a non-Aboriginal worker:

I was very lucky, there was a seasoned worker who kind of took me under her wing within weeks. She could see what was happening and she was a non-Aboriginal person but 10 or 12 years older than me so more life experience right? And a different life experience completely. She had 2.2 kids and, you know, but just the heart of hearts. She kind of took me under her wing so I had that other safe place to explore and what happened from there was I was able to explore the work and she was able to explore the (Indigenous) lens. So there was that reciprocal learning. So that kind of sort of brought me more into the building and so more relationships and started to shift a bit. There has to be support. I mean there doesn't have to be formalized ones...because that creates that other disconnection from the rest of your colleagues because of that. (Manager #2)

Below are other descriptions from participants about the importance of informal supports:

So I have had some really good support but not sort of formal structured (where it is their job to support me) just more informal. When I first became a manager there was one other Aboriginal manager and he and I were really, really good about supporting each other. After he left that didn't exist anymore but I had support from some of my fellow managers. (Manager #4)

I enjoy it. There is never a dull moment and I laugh a lot and I have some good friends and we laugh about it and I think that has been sort of my saving grace is just being able to have tons of humour about it all. (Child Protection Worker #5)

My husband is very supportive. I have people or team leaders that I have had in the past that I can go to and feel safe to talk to about stuff, colleagues that I have worked with in the past that I trust, friends that I haven't had before I was even in the Ministry that are working in the Ministry that I go to all the time. I just go with people that I know that I trust and there are not very many because I am very wary about talking with people I don't really know. (Child Protection Worker #2)

But he [team leader] really supported that work together and us [participant and another Aboriginal colleague] connecting which was great I thought because it kind of gave me someone else to...you know. [Provincial Employee #1]

So finally there was a place that there was more than one or two Aboriginal people. I can't remember how many there were at the time and we would talk about Aboriginal issues so that was exciting for me to be part of that and I felt like that was where I should be at that branch and doing that kind of work. (Provincial Employee #1)

So I think that's something I naturally try to do anyway to build my comfort level is you create your own family within the place that you work as well and your supports. (Provincial Employee #2)

In a sense I guess that is why we have our team. I mean we have our own little team meeting and we do a round table before everything and there is personal stuff we talk about or how we feel about different things that are going on in the office. I guess that would be a similar thing. I guess for it to be just Aboriginal, either way I guess....That is where I guess I am open to whether there are non-natives there or not, because if they are open to being there, then they are open to listening. (Provincial Employee #3)

There's my old boss—he was Indigenous and he was the only one who ever gave us support and he's gone on to bigger and better things and meets us for coffee every once in awhile. He is the only one who really understands....I feel like you can't talk as frankly about stuff with a non-Indigenous colleague. They just don't get it and I can't describe it so they can get it. One of my dearest, greatest friends is on the team and she and I can chat about a lot of stuff but even she doesn't get it... (Mental Health Support Worker #1)

I went to Elders. One of the good things that did come out of that though is that we worked towards getting an Elder into the office and so that was good. But we jumped through a lot of hoops for that and, but it was never utilized with the other part like it was meant to be for the whole team like the whole thing. (Mental Health Support Worker #2)

Balance/Health/Personal Wellness

A prevalent theme emerges when participants share how their work impacts their personal wellness and the challenge of maintaining balance between work and life.

There are benefits but I never have time. I never have time to go to the dentist. You can't even take advantage of anything, of the benefits. It is like, that's not really helping me. (Manager #1)

Well, it takes its toll and for me part of it has been that I guess once this project really kicked into high gear, from that point up until recently, until last month, I wasn't looking after myself because that just took everything, it was all I could do. So I really neglected my health and over a year ago I got quite sick and came back to work way too early. I checked myself out of the hospital against doctor's orders and came back to work early and that has a cumulative effect so it's really my fault that I never looked after myself. Yeah, so my life expectancy is probably impacted. (Manager #4)

You're dealing constantly with this level of wellness, and so sometimes, then the clients are joining them, the staff, because they're not well enough, themselves. You have to

constantly remind yourself, and you need the encouragement to be here in wellness. And there have to be boundaries in your involvement. (reconnection worker)

Well, I mean, you have to do self-care, right? Like, I mean, my dad passed away in July of 2009 and I had to take a leave. I was gone for two and a half months. I don't know how non-Aboriginal people grieve, but Aboriginals grieve hard and I needed that. I don't understand how people lose their relative and they go to work three days later. Plus we have traditions that we need to follow. For 30 days I had to take a medicine bath every morning so we would make this Indian Tea and you would have your shower and at the end of the shower you would pray. I would pray for my dad to find his way to the red roads and make his journey successful and then you pour it over yourself. So you have a medicine bath for 30 days you do that. You can't do that if you're at work.....so for two and a half months I was off work because of that. I needed that...You are so consumed with everything's that's going on, you just want to just to crawl in a hole sometimes and not go to those community events or not even go visit anybody. So important for keeping us to make sure that we're taking care of ourselves. (Child Protection Worker #1)

I have some really good friends in the Ministry and we support each other but yeah...I try to have as complete a life as possible outside of work so that I am just not consumed by it all. I have friends and family and a husband and animals and hobbies and whatnot to keep myself busy. I take care of myself. (Child Protection Worker #6)

I still feel down but that is because I haven't allowed myself to take the time to just go within and do my pledge and just let go of those negative pieces. So spiritually I know I need to do that but I needed to get my work done with school so I didn't allow myself time for that. Culturally, with my family, they are coming back, we are calling each other. That connection is coming back whether it is because of MCFD or whether it is because of just time passing. Physically, I just need to find time to go to the gym. When I was on my mat leave, this is an indicator of stress, when I am stressed I eat. I eat and I was on my mat leave, when I started at MCFD in that recruitment program I gained 45 pounds. When I was pregnant I lost weight and when I went on mat leave I lost more weight. When I went back to MCFD I gained 50 pounds. (Child Protection Worker #3)

I've been healing myself for a long time, for a long time, and I know how to do it. I know how to get to that place where I'm okay. I'd like to be able to be at a place where I'm better than okay—where I am more able to give and not just to balance. (Child Protection Worker #4)

...well I went on medical leave and then when I came back I kind of came back refreshed in a way that I started doing the work again...Before that I was just feeling that whole pressure of my job is on the line because of my comments or I wasn't getting the support...So when I came back my manager was a bit more supportive. (Provincial Employee #3)

It was hurting me. The stress level that I was going through I actually had. . .when I quit my job I had severe back pain and I truly believe that it was largely due to stress. It took me about a year for that back pain to go away and that's trauma. And I'm strong, I know I'm strong. (Mental Health Support Worker #2)

Summary

Several important themes emerged through interviews with Ministry Aboriginal professionals with respect to their experiences in the organization. The experience of identifying themselves as insiders and outsiders in both their communities and the Ministry highlights the high degree of role tension that participants experience on an ongoing basis. A recurring theme again, but focused here, was participant feelings of being tokenized as Aboriginal people. This contributes to a further sense of isolation in the organization, loss of voice, feeling powerless, unsafe and having to use subversive tactics to meet objectives related to ensuring Aboriginal children and families are receiving appropriate services. Participants talk about seeking informal support within and outside the organization and impacts to their personal health and well-being.

Participants spoke in depth about experiences of being both insiders and outsiders in their communities and the Ministry. As members of traumatized communities the need to take action and seek change through their work in the Ministry is important and deeply personal. This often places participants in a difficult role characterized by dichotomous role expectations. Participants describe being supported by community as insiders and at other times they feel that they are seen as being co-opted into the Ministry and therefore treated separately, or suspiciously by community members. They describe being viewed by MCFD colleagues as Ministry outsiders—too strongly biased by Aboriginal perspective and community association. Sometimes this means that participants feel their non-Aboriginal colleagues and managers see them as lacking credibility and objectivity (and therefore fail to support their practice approaches). Other times, they also feel they are being used strategically to gain access to the community by non-Aboriginal colleagues and managers to alleviate difficult situations.

Closely related to the difficulty participants experience in the insider/outsider role is the tension caused attempting to balance cultural identity and responsibilities with their professional role in the Ministry. Participants describe experiencing these feelings most when advocating and trying to advance Aboriginal practice perspectives. Several participants also reveal this tension emerging from the lack of understanding of and acknowledgement in the organization for their unique role as Aboriginal employees.

A small number of participants describe their ability to achieve congruence between their cultural identity and responsibilities and their roles in MCFD. Those participants describe coming to the Ministry having considerable support from their families and communities to work in the Ministry. The notion of personal awareness and expression of “biculturality” helps several participants manage their competing roles. These participants also describe feeling supported by Ministry colleagues and team leaders to practice from both a professional and culturally congruent perspective; two were in positions where they have a large degree of autonomy in their roles.

Feelings of tokenism are a recurring and pervasive theme revealed by Aboriginal participants. Some dedicated Aboriginal management positions in the Ministry appear to have little operational support and, rather than designed to implement and support change, serve only to manage challenging or difficult situations where Aboriginal communities or agencies require “placating” by an Aboriginal MCFD leader. Indeed, many participants reveal feelings of being placed on committees for the “Aboriginal perspective” only to see their role as symbolic and not really to provide input to inform better outcomes. A related issue raised was the idea that Aboriginal employees are viewed as cultural experts for all Aboriginal people, groups and

communities who can subsequently produce definitive answers to question on wide-ranging issues while also gaining MCFD access to Aboriginal communities. .

Lack of belonging and feelings of isolation in the Ministry were described by many Aboriginal participants. The issues described as contributing to these feelings range from racism, indifference, lack of support and understanding of unique goals and perspectives, bureaucratized internal system focus, stressful and unsupportive work environments and lack of collaboration. Some individuals develop ways to “fit in” primarily through informal support systems.

Losing voice within MCFD is another recurring theme. Some participants spoke of sharing approaches to advocate for change in MCFD over and over again with no results. Others describe not being given opportunities to sit on committees that actually inform Aboriginal practice issues—or supported to feel they can contribute to the development of practice solutions. The Ministry is described by one participant as “stifling” and that she is seen as a burden to her co-workers. However, another participant says she has worked on a team where there were a number of Aboriginal people that did have “voice.” However, this same participant also notes some Aboriginal leaders are simply symbolic and not expected to have or provide a voice. Moreover, another participant believes that no one (Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal) really has any voice, acknowledgement or input towards helping to develop better models. She also suggests that Aboriginal people in the Ministry are encouraged to appease (in a form of dysfunctional collaboration) the mainstream culture of the organization—thereby losing more voice.

Related to loss of voice is the feeling of powerlessness by many participants who joined MCFD to make real change for Aboriginal children, youth and families. High levels of

bureaucratization, inadequate resourcing, low cultural competence, preoccupation with issue management and overall inertia are contributing issues that lead to these feelings of being powerless to make change.

A theme about how unsafe Aboriginal participants feel in their practice, and sometimes how unsafe they feel about even identifying with an Aboriginal perspective in the workplace emerged in the interviews. Related to this was how sometimes they feel a need to be subversive or even manipulative to practice in a way that is culturally consistent for them—in spite of the system. Participants talk about how particular policies or attitudes within the Ministry are biased against Aboriginal families and force practitioners to manipulate the system to meet the needs of the child and the family.

Aboriginal participants also described accessing informal support from colleagues (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal). They describe experiences of accessing informal support through relationships with other Aboriginal employees where they can share their perspectives, concerns and aspirations for the work. Some non-Aboriginal colleagues, those who share similar values and support Aboriginal practice, are described as strong allies, and often as mentors, to Aboriginal participants. Other participants describe having to “internalize” their experience and then access healing through cultural practices with the support of family, Elders, and community.

**Part 3: Organizational Support, Structure, and Responses that Impact
Aboriginal Human Service Workers**

Chapter 8. Rhetoric or Reality? Organizational Structure and Support for the Aboriginal Agenda

Aboriginal participant experiences and observations of how the Ministry organizational structure impacts the Aboriginal agenda and their ability to achieve their objectives in the organization are presented here. The first part of the section highlights what appears to be a unique perspective from Aboriginal manager participants who, while being aware of some of the implications for direct practice, are also uniquely located closer to the top of the organizational hierarchy where strategic leadership decision making with respect to the Aboriginal agenda occurs. These participants were with the Ministry minimally for the preceding four to five years, and were quite aware of the Aboriginal change agenda. This included the period preceding the study where a reorganization of the regions by the Ministry to reflect an organizational structure consistent with the Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff and the CAPP practice change agenda had occurred. Some of their observations are that while there appears to be strong conceptual support from Ministry regional and provincial leaders with respect to the Aboriginal conceptual framework that there is a relative disconnect with the operational structure of the Ministry and frontline. This becomes an essential contradiction for effective Aboriginal service delivery. An important component of this observation is that there didn't appear to be culturally competent and committed management support for Aboriginal service delivery. Mainstream managers require considerable cultural competence training, support and firm direction from leadership to effectively support the required practice and management shifts to achieve the vision of the Aboriginal conceptual framework.

The second part of this chapter considers the observations and experiences of the entire highly varied Aboriginal participant sample—frontline direct service professionals, program

coordinators, practice, operational and strategic managers—and provides rich, in-depth and wide-ranging perspectives on the effectiveness of the ministry organizational structure in supporting Aboriginal employees and effective Aboriginal children services.

The rigid hierarchy that is described by so many participants is viewed as creating a huge disconnection between leadership, management and the service delivery frontline. This is due to a number of factors. Limiting communication through prescribed narrow and formal channels works to decrease the amount of information available both to the frontline and to the decision makers at the top of the organization. The hierarchy is characterized as being personality driven, based on longstanding relationships, like-mindedness, regional bias, and narrow communication where there is a superficial appearance of conformity to the top which ultimately creates a buffer for the deputy minister who is purposely shielded from the reality of what is happening at the frontline. First Nations individuals placed into key leadership positions are seen as unable to make any changes in an impenetrable hierarchy. Relentless ongoing strategic service planning is viewed largely as rhetorical without enough sustained effort or sufficient resources being directed to actual implementation. A highly bureaucratized workplace, driven by mainstream policy and practice approaches, inadequate team leader support, inadequate training, high caseloads, and a constrained union environment in which professionals have limited decision-making autonomy translates to a structure that is unsupportive to Aboriginal employee attempts to shift practice to a strengths and relationship-based approach that requires more time spent in the community and with families.

A very important finding in this chapter is the critical importance that team leaders play in supporting Aboriginal participants. Nearly every participant, including the managers and directors, said clinical team leaders are vital to supporting successful Aboriginal practice

approaches. Most ministry team leaders seem to be promoted based on their compliance to the existing structure and practice approaches. However, the information provided by participants in this study indicates that team leaders who are effective in supporting Aboriginal employee approaches have experience and interest in working with Aboriginal communities, understand how systemic oppression has impacted Aboriginal people and communities, have similar values and beliefs influencing practice approaches, are able to discuss and reflect on practice possibilities and alternatives, and are aware of the challenges Aboriginal professionals face. The visual map in Figure 8.1 provides an overview of the themes that emerge in this chapter.

Figure 8.1 Organizational structure and support for Aboriginal agenda.



Aboriginal Managers

Conceptual support for Aboriginal agenda.

All of the managers who participated were keenly aware of executive leadership support in the Ministry for the Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff, just released the previous spring. Although the framework had yet to be operationalized, the planned management restructuring had moved forward in each region and included a newly developed position called the director of Aboriginal service change (DASC). All these regional positions were filled, and planned training for staff (for the evolving Aboriginal conceptual framework) was in progress. All managers acknowledged strong and consistent support from the deputy minister and executive management, including the assistant deputy ministers in each region. Manager #2, for example, said:

It is just amazing because the messaging is the same from the deputy minister, from my supervisor, the ADM, and from other colleagues. You look at that and the work that we are trying to get to through the conceptual framework, to me it is brilliant and the fact that it is an internal shift for us, it is not about what we are going to do for you out there, First Nation community or Aboriginal people. That conceptual framework is about an internal shift and it is just beautiful. How we get there, pretty big piece of work but the dream, at least we can dream about it, right? And try to actualize some of it. It is an important piece of the work and that the work is not moving forward without the principles being, regardless of what business area you are in, in this Ministry those principles will be applied. You will look at it through a self-determinant lens. You will look through its culture and language. You will look like through to the holistic approach.

Structural change necessary to support Aboriginal agenda.

One of the managers spoke of the work he saw as a precursor to structural change:

Do we want our social workers typing or do we want them out working with families? My answer every time will be out working with families. We have to start somewhere... We've just got to make sure we support the group that we intend to support through this. Let them know up front, "you know what, I believe this is something we need to do and I'm going to take the heat on it but you, as the worker, you're also going to feel some heat, so I want to make sure I provide you with some extra support to get through that, because I think that's right and our system thinks it's right, and we're going to challenge those who don't think it is."

Lack of operational support for the Aboriginal agenda.

In spite of the conceptual framework and structural reorganization, all the managers revealed challenges that continued to thwart their goals and objectives. Manager #1 spoke about the difficulty in having only the one executive role (mentioned above as the DASC) in each region trying to implement all the principles in the new Aboriginal conceptual framework.

...people will say “well, you have to prioritize”... But it is just sort of unmanageable to be that advocate for the entire region ... I cannot be everywhere or I trust that when I am gone things will be addressed. When I follow up with community to see how is it going and I hear “well no, there has been no change” because I have a relationship and people are perhaps a little more honest with me too... you’re dealing with a system where everyone is so busy and just no one has time. It leaves you feeling like where’s the light at the end of this tunnel?

With the scope of the DASC role too wide and too much responsibility in the role this participant feels unsupported and unable to do any aspects of her work well. If the Aboriginal practice change is going to occur, this director suggests that more dedicated Aboriginal representation at the regional leadership level is required:

There would be a person responsible for reconciliation initiatives, there would be a person responsible for the implementation of quality assurance, contracts, HR, etc. Everything would be on one team and we would be working together as a team. We are a team—we have a director of practice who is very supportive—but her plate is really full and she is over there and I am here and we are supposed to be working together but I don’t know when I can ever have time to meet with her to talk about an Aboriginal approach to practice. We are all scattered. .

She also feels constantly confronted with the apparent lack of experience and cultural competency of Ministry staff, including management:

Everywhere you look in our region there are issues that need to be addressed and yes, it is the responsibility of each of those managers that are responsible for those areas but do those managers necessarily understand? Do they see and hear what I hear? Do they have the knowledge to be able to address those issues in a way that is not defensive of their staff? Well if we are moving through their system where everyone is supposed to be embracing the Aboriginal framework, it is everyone’s responsibility...it is not something that you just get right away...I just feel very fragmented and I just would like to be part of a team where we are all moving this agenda forward together and we meet and we talk about how is it going?... I guess I am just feeling very heavy with knowing what I know

and wondering how to do it all and sometimes feeling like people will say they understand but they really don't.

Manager #1 says there is a lack of concrete support for the reconciliation initiative work in the region:

I offered to lead a session on reconciliation. And it was a lot of work just to try and come up with an agenda and you can't have a session on reconciliation without involving the Aboriginal community. The location of the leadership gathering was in a difficult location geographically. It was quite out of the way to try and get community partners to come to for an afternoon. It is like a two and a half hour ride from any direction...So just the logistics of it were really challenging to me...But then any time you ask for help it is like a big issue. So it is just easier to do it yourself. So it has been like that. Trying to organize that and also keep up with the rest of your job was difficult. I didn't want the Chief and the Elder to have to pay for their room. I wanted to have their rooms paid for up front. The honorarium was available and I just wanted all of that taken care of and I went to the finance person—well, I sent an email like two weeks before and never got an answer.

Finally it was coming down to the crunch and I emailed again, and it was like Friday afternoon before the event. So you end up paying out of pocket.... So the finance person said "well, the answer is no" and I just was in shock because I thought "what, what do you mean no?" I was expecting "no problem." He said no and he was going off about all of these policies about financial best accounting practices or whatever the terminology is. He would have to get approval from the regional executive director. The fact that it was coming from me wasn't good enough. He just went through a long series of excuses of why this would be problematic and it would take like a mountain to try and get over to make this happen. I said, "Okay, forget it...I was so frustrated that I ended up—he left and I just started crying because I was so mad that everything you try to do, it is complicated and yet we say we are trying to rethink in a culturally appropriate way.

I know it is sort of a minor thing, but for me it just really highlighted, I felt really devalued....the response was "tell them to go through their band. Get their band to pay and then we will pay the band." And I said "well, the band has got nothing to do with it. It is not their band that is sending them to this. I invited them to come to our little event." I said "why would the band be involved then?" I don't know, it kind of got around to "well if the band wouldn't support the Elder I would question the Elder." I said "what?!!!"

If we can't even do that, that was enough and I was really stressed out because there is just so much to do and very little help. There are those kinds of attitudes out there and again, I am glad those things were said to me because I can handle it but I know it really upset me and I just thought I am just tired of everything being a barrier and then having to go back and try and fix it and make it easier the next time but I never have time to go back and fix it to make it easier because there is no time... I am still feeling very isolated, alone and somehow carrying this big burden and even how to communicate that to the senior management teams and those that give us solutions because it would mean changing everything and I just know that is not going to happen...

...I don't feel like everybody is excited about the Aboriginal agenda. So I feel like I am always sort of walking in a room and I even feel it in people's body language when I go to speak. I can just kind of see it in their faces or their eye contact.

Manager #2 spoke similarly about the lack of support for the Aboriginal agenda in her region:

So there was just me and so I was asked to act in a position and then they changed the name of the position but I was covering five positions. I was covering his, mine and the two Aboriginal service managers plus the one area that didn't have an Aboriginal services manager. So I was covering—it was a mess. It was absolutely a mess and I did that for nine months. I lost my hands with eczema, I had to wear gloves. It was crazy. So it was more about fires, I didn't have the ability to do any really good work, it was just one thing after the other after the other after the other.

Manager #3 said both workload and expectations were barriers to practice change:

Well, luckily for me it's only five offices, but it takes three and a half hours to get from one end to the other end so there is a challenge, and the needs of each community is so different. In my previous role I was in the offices more supporting some of the work we were (but)...Since I started this position about the beginning of November I find myself stuck to the computer and reading and signing things so it is a whole different world. I want to get out to the communities....

He also reveals concerns about the reactive, fear-based response of MCFD which he links to a slow organizational response system:

...Our system responds very slowly—it reacts very quickly unfortunately because that's usually to the bad news stuff—but when you want it to respond to something...I just see it moving slowly towards that and it's frustrating.

Sometimes our organization doesn't like to make decisions. It's just too easy to let it float, and let it float, and let it float—for fear of many things—for fear of making a wrong decision, for fear that a backlash might come out of this, because that's how bureaucracy is... I don't know how it can change, other than shifting how we make decisions.

You know when I was just talking about that I was thinking about our hereditary Chiefs. They are the ones in our society, in our culture, who make the decisions for everybody. But the same thing, they don't make them unilaterally, they listen, we provide our feedback, and then as hereditary Chiefs they make those decisions and then it's the responsibility of the rest of us to carry out the decisions.

Contradictions in messaging from leadership.

Manager #4 said there was a lack of structural support from regional leadership to support specialized Aboriginal service teams:

These are the same people who are telling us you can't have additional staff. You can't even fill your vacancies. It's the same people who tell us to practice differently. And in the Aboriginal context, on an Aboriginal team, when you're down a couple of workers because they are on stress leave because of the workload, you can't work differently because in ten minutes you can decide to remove a child, put him in your car and take him back to the office, and tell resources to find a home. And when you've got five other emergencies backed up that's what you do instead of taking the time to sit down and go knocking on doors, go find auntie to see if she can take the kids for the weekend while you work out other things. It's crisis management, that's all it is. So the people who are saying an Aboriginal approach and working differently are also the ones who are saying that you can't have any of the things you need to work differently...I don't think the values were there... We never saw any commitment to it. .

The senior management, the three bosses right. One totally opposed and made no bones about it and didn't even try to hide his racism—he was quite overt about it because he's right and he sees no reason to hide it. And then one who would like to see this stuff happen but doesn't have the foggiest notion how to make it happen and isn't comfortable standing up to the other two. And then one who made a very sincere effort and great strides in trying to understand the issues. Made those efforts because, well because of his personal ambition, but that doesn't matter, it was an honest effort and did come a very long way. He's now moved into another position so his approach is modified again. This seems to have fallen off people's radar.

She also reveals administrative challenges and “fallout” from staff being moved from mainstream teams to Aboriginal teams because of workforce realignment to support the creation of Aboriginal teams:

We were, all of us—the team leaders and myself—caught up initially in dealing with complaints and putting out fires and “yes I know I wanted to be on this team, but I didn't know it would mean I would lose my window office,” that kind of stuff, to fighting with office space. Dealing with if you're on the Aboriginal team you're not allowed to use the government car because they belong to someone else . . . all of our days and hours were dealing with that kind of stuff. Then the team leaders who were new to Aboriginal services were so overwhelmed, so stressed...They didn't know that some of the ugliness that they saw me dealing with, that they too would have to deal with...but now they've joined Aboriginal services, they didn't foresee their own colleagues turning on them. So they were under a huge amount of stress. They were (also) dealing with stressed staff...

I wasn't bringing them into all of the decision making and discussions that I should have...they were putting out fires constantly, so they were struggling just to become a team...So it didn't play out the way I thought it would, the way I intended it to. The learning curve is so incredible and it's not just about the work, the practice, it's about internal systems.

Structured support and training missing for new managers.

There was also a lack of training for new managers, particularly for those new to MCFD or who came from other specialties (like probation, rather than protection services, etc). Manager #4 says:

For people who have been in the Ministry for 20, 30 years, who joined as social workers...became a team leader...and then became a manager, they know all of the systems. They grew up in the system. So those of us coming from the outside in as managers, we don't have that experience or that knowledge of all those systems. So we don't know what we don't know. That used to give me nightmares... There is no policy manual that anybody can give you because our whole system is so fragmented. So in terms of the structured formal support, no. that still doesn't exist.

All Participants

All participants describe variables that impact the degree of middle and executive management support for the Aboriginal change agenda.

Hierarchy.

Participants clearly revealed an understanding of the intentional hierarchical structure that characterizes MCFD. A guardianship worker explains that the structure works to disconnect front line staff from decision making because it prevents “a feedback loop” for ongoing organizational learning:

...right from the minister's office all the way down to where the real important work gets done...there is a real disconnect and there is an unspoken rule that you are not allowed to speak to anybody other than your team leader about a problem, especially about how service is delivered. You are not allowed to talk to the (assistant deputy ministers) of the world about how things are really going...so by the time that it goes all the way up the chain, the true meaning and spirit and intent of it gets lost and I have a feeling that is by design....

He contrasts this structure to the delegated Aboriginal agency (DAA) where he once worked which had a flatter or horizontal management structure. The executive director and staff attended community events together and staff didn't “jockey” for position. In times of crisis they

supported one another. In sharp contrast, he says the Ministry responds to crisis by criticizing employees at the bottom of the hierarchy and those in most direct contact with families:

I have learned here that it is not about “oh my goodness, something terrible has happened and how can we support the family” but that the immediate reaction is “how can we assign blame and responsibility?” That is what it comes down to and I have seen that here over and over and over again.

Manager #1 climbed the employment hierarchy with hope to move “the work forward for Aboriginal and First Nations people in this realm”; however, she found she still had little impact or influence and must “fight for it to happen.”

Another manager says the hierarchal structure also limits the amount of information available to the deputy minister:

“I imagine that the deputy is like any one of us in that we only know what our direct reports convey to us. We don’t know two, three, four levels down what the heck’s going on. So sometimes I watch her and think oh you actually don’t know because they’re not telling you”

She talked about a forum the deputy minister hosted with executive and middle management where she told them it was a “safe place” in which one could “speak your truths and there will be no repercussions outside the room.” One of the managers from her region spoke about some of the concrete challenges around inadequate office space and access to government vehicles:

two of three senior management cornered him and read him the riot act for saying anything and making our region look bad. And several of us were standing around and we’re going “whoa!” He didn’t say anything untrue, he didn’t exaggerate, he wasn’t whining. He also said some good things.

The manager described how, again later that evening, when the regional management group met for dinner, this manager was chastised in front of the whole group. “So, safe place? I don’t think so.”

This manager commented that the whole hierarchal structure has a long established history which is “personality driven” by a limited number of individuals with regional bias,

longstanding familiar relationships with like-minded peers and well-established communication rituals and a superficial conforming interplay with provincial office:

You have one person who is the conduit of information, who is the primary, where the regional buck stops, and they decide what the priorities are. They decide what is really a priority opposed to what is a lip-service priority. They set the direction for a region and they are also the ones who are dealing with the deputy so she knows what they tell her. So they can go off and steer a course over here but if they tell the deputy they are steering her course, how is she going to know any different. So the direction of the region is dependent on that personality's priorities and understanding of the issues, and then the provincial offices' understanding of the region is dependent on—that person is the lynchpin. There are some great lynchpins and some not so great perhaps, but it's all dependent on that one lynchpin, and I think that is a big flaw in the organization.

This manager therefore believes the deputy minister, who usually is not hired from within MCFD, has very little power and influence “in what happens on the front lines in actual practice and what happens in families.”

This same manager said her previous organization blended top-down elements of their hierarchy by ensuring those with subject-matter expertise were involved in both decision making and direction in the organization. Top down approaches should be implemented only in some scenarios like ensuring a direct “no tolerance for racism” intervention. She contends that MCFD pretends:

...we're this kind of collaborative, all inclusive organization... (where) we consult with each other on everything and make joint decisions....Here it's a topsy-turvy world where we pretend everybody has a voice, even though they know they don't really have a voice.

Provincial Employee #1 revealed being “thrilled” when a new deputy minister appointed a First Nations assistant deputy minister from the community. Disappointment soon followed after realizing that the hierarchical structure remained in place and the ADM's inexperience within MCFD translated to less, rather than more, autonomy for Aboriginal staff in her branch, with staff feeling no longer:

supported, voice not heard, taking this top-down approach is not so Aboriginal, right? The DM telling us what the Aboriginal way was—she would draw these circles and explain to us and I am thinking—I have never seen that before. How she would describe

an Aboriginal community and this Aboriginal model and I was like—it doesn't look like anything I know of. . . . Anyways, she was going to tell us of how it was. I was really disappointed that Aboriginal leaders seemed to lose voice. That was very disappointing to me as an Aboriginal woman.

She explained that her previous non-Aboriginal director was actually an inclusive manager but was replaced with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leadership that re-bureaucratized the workplace resulting in staff having less autonomy to provide advocacy and support to the community:

So do you have an Aboriginal Services Branch just to say that you have an Aboriginal Services Branch in the Ministry? Because at the end I didn't find that our role was really actually clearly defined what the branch was supposed to be doing. . . . Then everyone kept saying how busy we were . . . but I would have time on my hands constantly... Why did they hire me as an Aboriginal person to be there? Why not just hire another non-Aboriginal person? So what did you expect from me to bring to the team? Why was my voice important and what was it going to help change or work on that was never the end?

Resource Worker #1 says her experience was one of staff being “micromanaged” and she constantly feared she would “mess up.” Mental Health Support Worker #1 explains that hierarchy extends also to professional designations, where power and influence rests with psychologists, nurses and clinicians rather than the Aboriginal support workers who work directly with clients in their communities:

It is really interesting how...just by virtue of my role it comes with a little bit less power. Even though everyone on the team says it's not supposed to, it does... I just think it's an interesting dynamic.

Communication.

Hierarchy in organizations often affects the style of communication, and several study participants commented on low and poor communication. Provincial Employee #3 talks about how the undesirability of having employees communicate issues outside their formal reporting structure also corresponds with information not flowing from management back down: “There is not a strong communication between all of the different positions.”

The Aboriginal Services Branch at provincial office supports the delegated agencies, Indigenous Approaches (community contracts), and policy and treaty responsibilities. A participant who works in this branch said important communication and discussion areas that could help coordinate work with other teams was poorly shared: “you are dealing with an agency that you haven’t seen for a year” and are there to discuss delegation “but they (agency) have a work plan in another team [and] we don’t hear anything about it.” The result is the agency must work and manage their relationship with a number of different people and programs in MCFD that are poorly linked, and nobody “knows who is who and who does what.”

Child Protection Worker #5 talks about a collaborative circle that her team leader attends with other community team leaders to discuss practice issues instead of just speaking with Aboriginal staff. “So they wasted a half a day talking about cases when, if that social worker could have talked to me, I would have been able to (respond)...it causes more conflict.”

Lack of management support for the Aboriginal agenda.

Given their location at the front line, professional staff participants identify multiple areas where operational support for cultural practice is necessary. Participants discuss their perceptions of management support for the Aboriginal practice change agenda:

A couple of years ago...We were honouring with certificates our social workers...Oh, that’s nice. We all sit. We’re invited. We watch. We’re in the same Ministry. Either the managers didn’t talk or the one manager didn’t think it was important, or the Aboriginal manager didn’t have a budget, but nobody who worked in the Aboriginal stream was honoured....so I sent a complaint up. It’s been over a year, almost two years, and still you would think they’d have another one to honour our social workers or people they missed. No restitution and no making it right. It’s a pet peeve of mine. Myself and another worker were going to be honoured in a longhouse ceremony and they would not give us a day off to even go. (reconnection worker)

Those on the committee and the other people that volunteer their time (for events like Roots ceremonies where children-in-care are connected to their families and communities) get nothing (for example, time off or pay in lieu of time worked). So, is it valued? I don’t know. Are the projects that are truly focusing on Aboriginal children valued? It seems like the more kids you have in care and the more court you do, the more

points you get, but it takes way more work to do the work and safety plans and have nobody in court and keeping those kids in the home or connected to their communities. (guardianship worker)

Oh, yeah, they're supporting it, but when you come up with a good plan from a community and "Nope, can't do it. These kids are better off in foster care" because of the attitude of whoever. Why? (Child Protection Worker #2)

Child Protection Worker #1 notes a concerning shift from supporting specialized

Aboriginal teams back to a generalized approach:

What also scares me is that we don't have the CSMs (community services managers) now for Aboriginal Services...we only have one Aboriginal (leader) up there. And if she's not going to get supported, we may not even have her. Okay, you guys say Aboriginal is the pillar, but we're not seeing it. Now they're talking about transformation and mainstreaming our offices. That will only hurt.

She describes how the region she works in previously had a parallel Aboriginal stream to the mainstream one with a director, a manager, and a number of community service managers dedicated to the Aboriginal stream. She says the director, although non-Aboriginal, was a strong ally and capable of moving an Aboriginal approach further because he had concrete operational power and influence in the region. However, this director retired. This event combined with a province-wide reorganization of managers and positions, resulted in this significantly positive, progressive structure being abandoned.

Child Protection Worker #2 reveals a disconnection between Aboriginal managers in her region (who appear spread too thin) and the frontline Aboriginal staff:

The Aboriginal services managers, no, there was definitely no support around there and I am open with that...I have enough of a relationship with [an Aboriginal manager] where I can say "you know what? You weren't there for me. You weren't there for us." So when I did get a chance to sit with the regional executive director and share how I felt, he said, "Well I kept her pretty busy."

Too much change / new initiatives never fully implemented or resourced.

Participants address the amount of organizational change and ongoing roll-out and implementation of new practice initiatives with inadequate resources.

It seems like every year it always switches and all I can say is keep your practice consistent because I'll just stick to the micro right now (versus higher level provincial office directives) and try to do my job of getting people home, kids home, connected...I've been through changes and changes in government and law and lip-service and—Oh, yeah, we got this new thing. Oh, yeah, and you get all excited, and then—Well, we won't put any money in it. (reconnection worker)

I think a big problem for the mental health team that was started up here was that it was never given the resources for a fair shot. It was always treated as a “lesser than” program than any other program. There wasn't a psychologist attached to it; there was no psychiatrist attached to it; there weren't the books; there wasn't the space. We were shoved into a little corner that other people with the same seniority would not have been subjected to. We were really given the bottom of the barrel. It doesn't make you feel very good. You don't feel, in the government, that you have any priority with people when you are treated that way. To this day it seems like it is a constant fight if you want to practice differently. If you want to conform, just be the norm, and do everything the same then the fight isn't there, but there is absolutely no way of bending around to try and practice differently. (Mental Health Support Worker 1)

Disconnection between management and frontline.

Several participants refer to incongruence between what is messaged by management and the reality of the frontline work:

So the management piece had this great dream of change and it really sounded positive, but that didn't trickle down to the front line. (Child Protection Worker #3)

Their frontline staff do not respect the management. I know that. I heard all of the comments in there. “Oh, they don't know what they are talking about. He has never done practice on the frontline.” Like, hello, these are your own people within saying this stuff ...We don't feel supported. (Child Protection Worker #2)

A reconnection worker shared an analogy shared with her by her cultural mentor that she feels could help bridge this gap:

Last year, two years ago, they took me out and taught me how to crawl around underneath the trees so I could see the tea. Couldn't see it. “Where is it?” You know what? Unless you are lying on the ground looking, you can't see the tea. The Elder introduced me to the tea and then I could see it and it was everywhere...It's the same with Ministry. Unless you get down on your knees, and you're down here (frontline) working and experiencing, how do you know what it is? You can't see it. They don't get it, and battling with them and fighting verbally with them is just more abuse because they still aren't going to get it.

Mentorship/training inadequate for new Aboriginal employees.

Several participants discussed concerns regarding a decline of learning and training opportunities. Manager #2 said this creates a serious barrier for Aboriginal employees, who require information, skills, mentorship, support and advancement opportunities. Other participants spoke of these challenges:

I never get sent to training for anything Indigenous, like nothing. No abilities to network with other Aboriginal agencies or people like for our own spiritual and professional development. That's not even—in all my time here I've never been invited to or offered to attend anything. (Child Protection Worker #5)

The stress is learning the work and not having any proper training that is visual or hands on....for Aboriginal people it's so hard to do things online. It's so hard because we're taught you learn by example. You learn visually. You need to have that right in front of you, so I think I'm such a failure, I don't get this...and I'm thinking, "am I missing the boat?... For two years I've bawled my face off. (Child Protection Worker #1)

The first year was great, I got to do a couple of trainings and that really made my work more enjoyable. Then all of a sudden everything was cut and you're not allowed to have any training anymore...It was never supported. All these things were never supported... Why wouldn't you want the people on the team trained? (Mental Health Support Worker #1)

Caseloads too high for appropriate Aboriginal practice.

Several participants say providing services to Aboriginal people in a culturally relevant way is difficult due to high caseloads:

I think it's really, really, really hard to—when you've got a (high) caseload and you've got a wait list of a year—and all this pressure from society—to care for this with a year-long wait list—and family members are phoning...It's almost easier to go back to your six to eight sessions in the office because that's the mainstream way of helping kids. That's the way you get through the wait list...I don't necessarily feel supported by managers ...I've seen myself progressively decline in my involvement with my communities since I've worked at the Ministry...I almost feel too stressed out—I've kind of placed it that I feel too stressed out at work to go and tackle the stresses within my own community. . . that we have more support in staffing so we can get through our job. When you see clients back to back, you are done by the end of the day. (Mental Health Support Worker #1)

Time.

Time to work in an Aboriginal practice framework is too limited, participants said:

...it is just part of not having enough time to develop this vision and this regional approach because we are in that transition. It is that feeling like there is so much on your plate.... (Manager #1).

Our system doesn't...support the very reason people come into the organization to begin with, to help, it doesn't...so where is the time?...It is an engagement thing and you feel for somebody and you want to help them move through something...but this system doesn't promote that right now. (Manager #2)

You know, for two years I was running a girls' group out at (community) and that was really good. I was starting to make a lot of connections with the kids but some stuff about the girl's group wasn't working because I was out there on my own, and to run a functional group I would have actually needed the support of two or three of my team mates. But we're so strapped that there was just no possibility that was going to happen. (Mental Health Support Worker #1)

Union environment / work standards conflict with need to be flexible in community.

Mental Health Support Worker #3 spoke about employee union restrictions and the impact of providing flexible service according to established work standards:

The way that the [Aboriginal child and youth mental health plan] was written was about making services more accessible...I thought that it was going to be an all hours outreach around the clock, different kinds of things, not doing necessarily crisis work but fitting to people's schedules...you are not going to do it Monday to Friday between 9:00 and 5:00 pm, right? So I was really frustrated with that outcome just because of having flexibility...I don't see it working as easily now because the people who are hired on are 9-5 people, that is how their lives go.

if it wasn't for (flexible schedules)...we never would have built the trust with those communities because we wouldn't have been attending their evening community dinners, we wouldn't have been doing all of these different things and because we were able to work out of hours and build connections with people from the reserve outside of their office hours as well just by attending community events, then they were more receptive to us because they felt that we actually cared what was going on in those communities.

No support for non-Aboriginal staff forming Aboriginal teams.

Child Protection Worker #5, who joined with a group of non-Aboriginal colleagues to form a new specialized Aboriginal services team, discusses a lack of motivation, orientation, and expectations for the new team to provide an Aboriginal practice approach:

When I canvassed my co-workers...they felt pressure to be on the team. It wasn't because they wanted to necessarily work with Indigenous people. But the general sense was that they were kind of pressured into being on the team. It started out very tense in the beginning when the team was first formed...No one really told them what (working with

Aboriginal people and communities)... would look like... Do we have to go to sweat lodge? There was a lot of fear and confusion because nothing was really clear to the team what being on an Aboriginal team would look like. Then I was kind of called to kind of be the cultural teacher and I said, "I'm not comfortable with that because that places me in a power and an imbalance with my co-workers and it's hard enough for me right now to fit in."...

I'm not going to come in as the Aboriginal expert and start writing things on a flipchart about cultural sensitivity. That would not be helpful. So I think that's still a lot of the worry. So nothing's really changed because there wasn't really any clarity about what does being on an Indigenous team mean? So nothing's changed. We're just workers on something called an Aboriginal team.

Team leaders.

Nearly every participant, including the managers and directors, said clinical team leaders are vital for supporting successful Aboriginal practice approaches. Results are reported in three sections: the importance of team leaders, supportive team leaders and unsupportive team leaders.

Importance of team leaders.

Well if you look at our practice standards and our legislation already, if we just followed that, we would be doing better practice but I don't think we understand what it means to involve a child's Aboriginal community. That interpretation I think is so different...I really think the team leaders play a huge role... it is hard not to sound judgemental but if I was the team leader of employees who were at a table saying "well we're the Ministry and we're the authority" I would be saying "wait a second. No, we are not the authority. The community is and we are going to take the communities lead... (Manager #1)

Manager #4 talks about "making sure that team leaders who will set the tone for their first experience have some training, some guidance, about how to support Aboriginal employees. Understanding that there are cultural differences without assuming that those differences apply to every individual."

Child Protection Worker #3 says that the workers being promoted to team leaders may not be the appropriate choice because they are rewarded for conforming to mainstream values like completing paperwork on time, winning court decisions and having the ability to comply well to basic Ministry expectations.

There are reasons why the workers leave and so it is building the team leaders that get it....finding those ones and identifying them early and supporting their growth. They have a different lens.

Mental Health Support Worker #1 talks about the difference between a good team leader who is supportive and a team leader who has the relevant experience and background to be able to support Aboriginal practice:

Our team leader is amazing. He's a great guy and there's not a thing I could say bad about him as far as management went in the sense of being respectful to us and all that, but he himself is not Indigenous nor has the long term training from the communities. So when he's doing supervision with any of our practitioners he can't push them towards acting more cultural as he does not know. I just wish he knew more culturally and put pressure on the team as to how important cultural stuff was. His job could be sitting down and looking at the clients, meeting with clinicians and saying what are you doing culturally for this kid? Maybe he advises with the Elders culturally—and not just having a ticky-box like they do with every other social worker program—oh you've done your Comprehensive Plan of Care (CPOC) yeah! No, but what have you actually done? And I don't feel we have that.

My old boss—he was Indigenous and he was the only one who ever gave us support...he meets us for coffee every once in awhile. He is the only one who really understands and I feel he's in enough of a position of power that when I chat with him, he will put me in good light to the other people in positions of power and be able to bring some of my concerns forward because he knows how valuable they are.

Child Protection Worker #5 talks about what she needs in a team leader and why it is important for her:

So I think to just let go of some of that fear, not to hang on so tightly but just to trust. We're practitioners and we know what we're doing, I know what I'm doing, right. I have a style that seems to be working and so I would need trust and openness so when I go to my team leader I don't need advice, like I don't need the defensiveness, I just need like an open heart, someone that can just really be open about the challenges and just listen to me.

Unsupportive team leaders.

A focus group participant referred to a practice situation where non-Aboriginal foster parents wanted to cut the hair of a First Nations child whose community and family beliefs do not support cutting the hair of young children. Manager #1 refers to this situation below:

Why is that even being debated? Wouldn't the team leader...know you can't do it? End of discussion. Why does there have to be meetings about it. I don't get it. It frustrates me.

Other participants spoke about what they view as unsupportive team leaders:

Then they transferred me to the Aboriginal team and the manager was top-heavy– who did not work well with the Aboriginal ideas, didn't even understand the concept of culture and traditions. Policing. Well, power and control. So, being that I do reality therapy and control theory and worked in a way that does not involve top-down authority, it was very difficult. I felt bullied. I felt bullied to the point that people, you know, on the team were dropping like flies. I'm not a linear thinker. She wanted me to be linear. I'm a divergent thinker. I work with stories. I work with metaphors. That's the way I was trained. None of us were valued. My best girlfriend, who was Métis was pushed to the point she just up and left for another province. Another lady who was just amazing was beaten down so badly, she just quit. Like, it was insane, and no matter who you talked to, you were looked at like you were the problem. (reconnection worker)

Their team leaders don't understand the concept. I mean I hear they are nice people but really they are not willing to risk it. They see it as a much higher risk to do the work that we do. They don't have the experience and knowledge of what Aboriginal people in history has been. They don't get that moving our kids into white homes is repeating history and what that does to our kids...Really they're all just child focused. (Child Protection Worker #1)

You have too many people that are delegated to remove children that don't have the experience. Their mentorship is coming from people that practice from an adversarial place. So you've got team leaders that are delegated who ultimately make the decision to their junior workers. These team leaders are not good team leaders. (Child Protection Worker #3)

I know they had weekly team leader meetings. I know they talked about us [Aboriginal recruits]. I know that it wasn't positive stuff. Our specific team leader advocated for us the best that she could but there were several others, other team leaders that weren't supportive. Then our team leader had to leave for various reasons. So it was sink or swim...Narrow world views, not open to change (Child Protection Worker #3)

Child Protection Worker #5 talks about having to work covertly in the community as she

feels she would not be supported by her team leader:

I would never tell my team leader about how I do that because everything comes down to timelines, getting your paperwork done, and prioritizing court over relationships, things like that. So I would never tell my team leader about the relationships that I do have. I'm so terrified because sometimes as a non-Aboriginal person team leader, you know what I mean, heterosexual Christian values, things like that, it can do a lot of damage and really bring that really mainstream. So I find that when he kind of gets in there things, the relationship get ruptured. I keep it really covert the relationships that I'm building with community professionals and leadership as well as some of the stuff in the big house, thinks like that, I don't talk openly about it....

When I ask my team leader...what does he see as important about team leading...his response was he likes to teach about doing better practice... It is very closed, there's no

openness. I think he really does think that his job is to correct us, is to manage us, is to teach us about a better way of working.

Supportive team leaders.

Then I moved to (new worksite) where I came on this incredible team with a white team leader...but something just really shakes up my reality about how incredibly astute and sensitive and caring and open to hearing what the community is saying and listening and following through and putting the power in the hands of the people where it belongs while still doing a legislated and mandated role. It can be done and it just renewed my faith that this Ministry can do that but I will tell you I see, I see my team leader just being pushed up against the corner, continuously being shoved into a corner and beaten and battered and bruised to stand his ground and accomplish these things and it just makes me sick that it has to come at such a high cost...He has been around for so long he pushes back. He knows the lingo and how to do it and not become corrupted but you see him being beaten down (Focus Group Participant)

So my first experience as a child protection worker I had huge support from my team leader...That relationship needed to be real and that team leader made it real, so it wasn't like we were friends, but it was more than just a general team leader/worker relationship. It was a bit more than that. That person supported me I think, through that. That person was willing to listen to some of the things that I had, they were willing to listen to the challenges that I had and were willing to do something about it, were willing to teach the pieces I brought in and incorporate it into their practice as well. That was what she did for me so I felt very much that I was part of a team with skills, ability and knowledge that would complement the team rather than he's the new guy....Yes, I was new to the role and I had to learn some key skills and knowledge but the skills and knowledge I brought were valuable. Also I had open conversations about Aboriginal issues, about how I felt as an Aboriginal person doing the work I was doing. So having a skilled, experienced team leader support me not only as an Aboriginal person but as a new worker because there is that growing piece that has to happen. (Manager #3)

My first manager I had was someone who was very ethical, very moral, who worked in an Indigenous population and was really one of the first areas to be delegated. So he really pushed and worked and I saw it in action, but every Friday, if you wanted to go to the sweat lodge at three o'clock, you were allowed to leave to go to the sweat lodge. If you were invited to a ceremony, you were there. If he was invited, he was there...You still got your work done. (reconnection worker)

I know in my team I have always had a lot of support from my team leaders but to take time when I am under stress or to take time to deal with family issues or things like that. I don't think that everybody does that and I think that it should be more promoted and just doing more community work rather than social work and taking time to go and volunteer hours of your day towards different things. (Mental Health Support Worker #3)

Okay, first of all we have a supportive team leader to take a risk...he's willing to do that... we do not need to take children into care...He supported us where other team leaders aren't prepared, they say "oh, that's too much of a risk" but they don't have the knowledge and history of residential school and the impact of colonization, what

removing a child does to a community and what it does to that child. It's an open, honest relationship in here. This is a really safe environment. Sure we can get on each other's nerves...but every staff meeting we go around in a circle...The team leader here has been working for 30 years with Aboriginal people in different kinds of offices. He's worked in delegated offices, he's worked all over the place and he really understands and he's gone to Sundance. . .you know really trying to understand what's going on, so for the most part yeah, my values and how I believe in what my people do is honoured here in this office. It's honoured, like they really respect my culture, they respect my people and my people respect them...So he gets a lot of it. (Child Protection Worker #1)

One team leader that I had was very supportive. If my name goes on those court docs, I want to know that I absolutely tried everything that I could and she was all for that. (Child Protection worker #2)

You could go to her [team leader] and say "this is what I want to do with this kid" as long as you had a good plan with the family, as long as you could back that up with strong reasons, she would mitigate the risk. She could see the value in the cultural pieces. She got that. She was the only team leader that I know of that gets it. If you could create a safety plan that also preserved relationships, she would support it. (Child Protection Worker #3)

...so he wanted me to work with Aboriginal families exclusively, so have an Aboriginal caseload and I hadn't had that before and I was up for that, I was interested in that. What was good was that he recognized that work was different with Aboriginal communities and that I would probably need a smaller caseload, that I wouldn't be able to do the same case load and do that kind of work the same as my colleagues. So I got a caseload of about 12 where everyone else was sitting at 20 to 30 but that built resentment with other workers. (Provincial Employee #1)

Mental Health Support Worker #1 talks about a previous Aboriginal team leader who is now a manager but continues to provide support to her and other Aboriginal team members:

He's able to make me feel I'm not crazy...he's also able to build up my self-esteem, to make me feel I am going to be able to do bigger and better things. He also supports me in help with applications, so I can get there and pushes me a little bit towards doing those things rather than letting me flounder in my misery. He pushes me to try and get better. He also supports me by saying I am doing a good job and there are people somewhere out there in the ivory tower of Ministry-worldness acknowledging there is good work being done because you don't ever get that feedback. I could probably go to work every single day and not do anything and hear the same amount of feedback as if I worked my butt off day in and day out because the governmental system isn't set up for that.

Mental Health Support Worker #2 describes her initial team leader who she felt was very supportive:

She's not Indigenous. She's a psychologist. The best way that I could describe her was she's been doing the work long enough, she has nothing left to prove, she was just doing

the work. I really was grateful to her for her willingness to trust me and to allow me to do the work that needed to be done in the way it needed to be done and she stood behind me. When I made a decision, she was willing to stand behind me and if she didn't understand she took the time to understand it and see my point of view and to see where I was coming from. She was really good at backing me up in a way, like she was solid. . . . She was good at her job. She was good at what did, so she would back me up and to be able to do it with such finesse that it seems silly for somebody else not to agree with her in doing it.

Ministry strategic planning.

Participants underlined the concern of ongoing rhetoric regarding high level (provincial and regional head offices) strategic planning of new initiatives and change strategies intended to change direction and improve practice. One First Nations participant who came from a different child welfare system in Manitoba said she felt that the “Ministry doesn't want to move past the concept of ideals and ideas. As far as the very people that can tell them how to put those things into practice, because we are doing it, they don't want to hear from us.”

Manager #4 reflects on a deputy minister hosted forum held with Aboriginal employees and her attempt to use humour to address the lack of congruency between what she sees as rhetorical strategic direction in the Ministry and the reality of what is happening at the front line:

As the conversation was unfolding and moving around the circle and there were people there who spoke very much from the heart...I took their courage to heart so I talked about some of the experiences that I'd either had myself, or I had witnessed. But that led into the lack of congruency between what we say and what we do and I put forward my notions that we really need to have a manager of congruency. So that what we say and what we do—you know when there is a lack of congruency there is someone in charge calling us on it. From the look on the deputy minister's face, she was not amused.

A reconnection worker talks about new initiatives in the Ministry being developed from other jurisdictions rather than from within the philosophy and world view of the Aboriginal communities of the province:

We [on the Aboriginal team where she works] really have an idea where to go, and we will take other suggestions from the community, but what really bothers me is when some big program comes up because it worked in some other country or it worked somewhere else, and yet, it doesn't have those fundamental values.

Child Protection Worker #1 has a similar observation about the resiliency component of the CAPP training that she attended, where the facilitator talked about concepts of attachment:

Anyway he's blah, blah, blahing about resilience and he's talking about attachment and I said "you know what? I think culture needs to be there just as important as attachment, because you know what—it is attachment for Aboriginal people." So he was talking about this—"well this is how the attachment works"—and he was talking about this study that was done in England and how they took these adolescents that were in care and put them in these structured homes and how these kids all started going back to school and how they succeeded. So I said "Oh, so you're going to take Aboriginal kids and you're going to put them in white homes and you're going to say this is going to work?" I said, "You're going to see some failure there." He didn't even think about. Then we really talked about that and I said, "Culture is just as important as attachment. I think those need to be in sync with each other when you're teaching this resilience, because Aboriginal people by far are resilient."

Provincial Employee #1 spoke about how "Aboriginal transformation" was framed for her and her colleagues:

At the same time of this the messaging that was being put out is this idea that that we are doing things in a different way and this is the Aboriginal way of doing things. (But) it was never more non-Aboriginal...S then you get really—not disgruntled but you are thinking what the? Because you sit in a meeting and you see your executive director saying "you know, we are doing this in a different way and that is why it is hard. Change is hard for people." And I am thinking "we are not doing this is an Aboriginal way in any way shape or form." So putting Aboriginal people in those roles who pretend to be the traditional and Aboriginal ways of doing things and they are going to change things with no depth to it really actually rubs me the wrong way as an Aboriginal person and I think it gives us all a bad name.

Provincial Employee #2 talks about how an Aboriginal community reconnection program, Roots are Forever, implemented just four years earlier, is losing support in the regions and provincial office:

Unfortunately it's shrinking. I think due to the change within Ministry over the past two years, I think it's had a lot of our practitioners scared for the loss of their role or position, so they've just decided to move on before. So before the transformation has even happened, there's been a reduction in some of our experienced workers that have been doing it for over four years. It's a tremendous loss.

Mental Health Support Worker #1 talks about the implementation of the Aboriginal child and youth mental health plan in 2007, which precipitated the formation of the team she is on.

The five-year plan is a joke because the five-year plan was never given the tools to be successful. A year within the plan it is my understanding that they had already diverted off the five year plan. They were supposed to have X amount of workers and then every year they would be adding on more workers and here is what needs to be successful. The five-year plan has never been implemented the way it was supposed to work so that to me is a big waste of time.

Asked what the barriers were to implementation, she replied:

Money, time, people caring, I think. Within the process what happened with the five-year plan obviously our economy took a dive and there has been a lot of cutbacks...I think a big problem for the mental health team that was started up here was that it was never given the resources for a fair shot. It was always treated as a “lesser than” program than any other program.

Suspicious of most planning at the strategic level, she says:

I’ve actually tried to stay away from all these plans, the talk, and all these things, because they actually upset me. Every plan that I’ve ever seen from MCFD has never been followed through exactly the way it was supposed to be. I find them actually frustrating and a waste of time and don’t like to be involved in them.

She also spoke about the CAPP initiative and how it had not been shared openly:

It kind of scares me a bit that it has been kept so secret because I don’t know if it’s going to impact Aboriginal people on the teams differently or if the way it is being delivered is in a very oppressive way, so is it going to be more oppressive once we find out what’s going on? If you even try and talk about it your hand is slapped. I really don’t like that approach in general about the Ministry. It feels like everyone has these pockets of information and it’s all kept secret. I don’t understand it really. I can see if it has to do with a specific individual and there has to be some confidentiality, but there has to be some transparency too because right now it doesn’t feel that way.

Mental Health Support Worker #3 talks about what she sees as the futility of the various initiatives that are rolled out; she feels the money could be better spent doing participatory research through actual direct staff practice in the communities:

What I do think when they come out with all of these new frameworks and stuff is that I think that they waste a lot money on research and writing and getting people to come up with these reports when those resources could be like going towards spending time in the community and giving staff the hours to do that and you know what? Then your staff are learning first hand and you are going to learn a lot more from spending time in those communities than you are going to be from reading some framework or some research that came out. When you read it on paper you are not getting the experience and it is lost again. Everything is so disconnected. Until that changes nothing else will improve I don’t think.

Policy.

Participants note that Ministry policies have important impacts on Aboriginal practice but appear mostly to be an after-thought or add-on in MCFD, rather than incorporated or embedded to create systemic practice change. A focus group participant says:

I wish there were Indigenous actual programs that the Ministry was doing, that there were rights of passage for our children, that there were ceremonies and seasonal ceremonies and celebrations for our children that they could attend, that was part of our policy because everything has to be written down, right? I wish that was the case. Yes, we are getting things like counselling if you want to call that an Indigenous service...the ministries policies that they have just coated with the word Aboriginal I see in so many ways.

Manager #3 said that many Ministry policies are developed without consideration for how they may impact or become a barrier for First Nations and Aboriginal communities who value and possess longstanding cultural and traditional ways of caring for children through the extended family:

Certainly many of our policies, because they were based upon the mainstream culture, don't quite fit with the cultures of Aboriginal people, and here in the north that's 80% of what we do, and in the province it's 50% [the percentage of Aboriginal children in care]. People still say, "Why do we have to do it that way, why do we have to cater to just Aboriginal people?" People don't realize that is the majority of our work.

An example he provides is the recent provincial discontinuation of new applications for the Child in the Home of a Relative (CIHR) program. A new extended family program requires relatives of a child who are providing care and require financial assistance to have a home assessment. All existing and "grandfathered" recipients of the CIHR program must have child protection screening:

Yes, because people would look after other people's children and we would do the care in the home with a relative on reserve. Now we're seeing the reaction to that. There's quite a process on that, because we're dealing with it like a child protection call, so we have to do all the checks on the caregivers. We're just starting to see the impact...Now the next step is the families will no longer come to anybody for any sort of aid, so we're not going to get a clear picture of how the communities take care of themselves anyway.

A reconnection worker also referred to the inequity of applying this process to First Nations and Aboriginal communities:

But there is a new program they want to put in place [screening CIHR families], we're supposed to police 100 some files of families that used to get assistance to rear relatives kids. I don't get the type of control. That's intrusive. Right. That's just "Big Brother." Like the concepts in the Ministry over the years, they go forward, and then they go five steps back, and then they go forward a step. Things were working well, and then we had both backward and forward stepping because of one kid's death/recommendation. Some of the recommendations are really great and then we went back to deficit thinking. .

Referring to legislated timeframes for children to remain in temporary care prior to a child protection worker seeking permanent custody, two participants observe that this creates bias toward Aboriginal families who have complex intergenerational issues to address:

So it is just reconnecting people. Giving them the opportunity to connect back, showing them how to parent. Time frames, for me—We didn't have time frames in the Aboriginal community and all of a sudden, we must do it in this much time or we go CCO (for permanent custody). Well, who says? When you're dealing with a family who has... historic alcohol and drug abuse...intake after intake, and you start talking to them, and there was residential school stuff. There were beatings. There was all of this horrific stuff. You almost feel traumatized just by listening to their story, and you understand, and you go, "Wow, have you ever come a long way." (reconnection worker)

That is the other punitive thing that we do. We give our families X number of months. So if your child is a certain age you've got 18 months before we go CCO and there is that pressure to bear on families and I can't control that. Actually, lie, I can. There are ways of manipulating the system. That is what the Ministry is teaching me how to do is how to manipulate their system. Okay, so how can I buy more time for this family before we go CCO? So it is unfortunate that it has come down to that. The system is set up that way. (focus group participant)

Another participant, Child Protection Worker #4, addresses the potential inadequacies of the brief intervention style of the Ministry service delivery structure for assisting First Nations and Aboriginal families to address complex intergenerational issues:

I go into a home and it's messy and there is no food and the kids are not properly clothed and I'm supposed to refer to these people to help them with their parenting and their alcohol and drug issues and never it seems do they ever deal with the trauma of coming from a history of oppression and poverty and anger and sadness and just the confusion of what it means to be a family. So, I'm supposed to go in there and refer them to all the right people and they are supposed to do it in six sessions, three months, or whatever time limit we have for them. They are supposed to do it in a certain amount of time when it

took years and years for them to get to the point where they couldn't be a family, a happy family.

Resource Worker #1 comments on the preference in policy for providing formal supports rather than community or culturally-based or informal supports to families that are more congruent with their experience:

...I mean more engaging in culture (so)... the worker will understand where they are coming through with their lens. I don't know if this sounds right or not but I am thinking like sweats and feasts and providing services to regain culture within the people who they are working with. I know that is just a traditional approach but it has got to start somewhere... So I guess one of my goals is to eventually look at policy and maybe change it.

A youth probation worker notes that some policy in his program appears supportive of youth engagement in the Aboriginal community:

I mean from the policy that I have seen...any approach which builds rapport with an Aboriginal community or with an Aboriginal client is encouraged in the types of reports that we write and how we work with Aboriginal clients. There is a lot of policy, I can't really explain all of the policy but there are various pieces of policy that encourage that.

Mental Health Support Worker #3 refers to processes that she is aware of in the Ministry that she believes are valuable for informing policy, but is skeptical that decision makers are meaningfully involved:

Well I think that they are doing a positive job with the youth engagement stuff...in the end the people who are making the decisions, are they the people that engage with those youth or are they receiving a report and then they make the decisions not ever having seen one of those kids shed a tear, right?

This participant also comments on the tension between the influence of Western concepts of individualism and First Nations and Indigenous concepts of collective responsibilities.

Some of the problem is that the traditional ways conflict with the current ways, even as far as how the communities would have traditionally dealt with a sex offender, for example. You know it is totally against human rights standards and so stuff like that. So they can't even do their traditional ways in dealing with some of this stuff because it's illegal these days. I mean even things like Big House. There was a court case where a man who was kidnapped and thrown into Big House made a claim against the community for unlawful confinement and kidnapping and all of this stuff and it went through even though that was their cultural practice.

Another participant, Child Protection Worker #5, makes a similar parallel with the limits of confidentiality, saying the rights of the individual go too far and may put the collective safety and rights of the community at risk. She refers to withholding information from child protection screenings from the band social development worker and community leadership:

I don't agree with that...Because if there is some really significant risks...I think when we look at leadership in the community that they need to know about. So I see it differently than say a policy person would see it. And sometimes those ideologies just don't, they don't mesh...I believe in respecting people's privacy and not interfering, and I think that, yes, there needs to be confidentiality but yet I think that needs to be negotiated. How that's going to look like, I don't think it should be one sided. I think leadership should have a say in how they're going to maintain and manage confidentiality too so they have some say because they have some pretty interesting things to say when they get wind that a child is at risk, they've got ways that they handle that. If it's a mom that they see may be depressed, they will say like, "There's a babies' program on Wednesday" or "I'd like you to check into public health nurse" or they send the public health nurse to the home to visit mom. Yes, and like just being from our culture of collective, like when we are in a sweat lodge, we are human beings. We get really open and honest about things. Like there are some matters that are really personal and embarrassing but usually when it's matters of the heart we really share things.

Mental Health Support Worker #1 says that she considered moving into a policy position with the Aboriginal policy branch but heard that the approach was not congruent with engaging the Aboriginal community in the policy process:

I know that they've got those Aboriginal policy positions and the Aboriginal policy positions scared me because they were to be done from your desk and I thought, how are you supposed to do Aboriginal policy without consulting with Aboriginal people—by doing phone calls and these sorts of things? So I think that was a joke and really offensive.

Resource/funding.

Two participants expressed concerns regarding limited funding for Aboriginal or other strength-based approaches:

I guess there is only a certain amount of funding for something...I just know that it should be more of a strength-based approach. (Resource Worker #1)

Recruitment.

Many participants spoke about inadequate recruitment and rigid hiring practices in the Ministry:

Out of all of the managers, team leaders, I am the only Aboriginal person and... in a high Aboriginal population, we can't even get Aboriginal people to come and work in our region. We create positions (but)...we are not even posting externally to try and recruit Aboriginal people. (Manager #1)

I got hired and...my team leader who fought for me to be able to be on this job because the government was saying "she's an auxiliary [a temporary worker who other more permanent staff have seniority over]. She can't be hired." So here you have a [local First Nation] person. Social worker you have a position available in [their community] but bureaucracy is saying "you can't hire her because she is an auxiliary." (Child Protection worker #1)

So there are lots of barriers for Aboriginal people even to get into the Ministry. It was crazy because the panel process is so non-Aboriginal. It is like straight faced, no encouragement, no—and you are thinking you are doing really good, "I am answering these questions" and I am like "oh yeah, I think I did great" you know. Then you get the phone call...saying well "no, you didn't answer this question correctly." I said "this is how I interpreted that question" and she goes "oh, I could see how you could interpret that." So there was no give on how to interpret a question. (Child Protection Worker #1)

I walked in and there were nine people at the table and I was just like Holy Dinah! One of them was a person that I experienced some racist behaviour towards family, some racist behaviour towards me, probably not so overtly with me but I could feel it and that caused an issue...and I lost it. (Manager #2)

Speaking of barriers in the screening and interviewing process for recruitment of Aboriginal people, this participant notes:

It's everything from the behavioural interviewing format which for some traditional people is—you are asking them to violate everything—what they've been told is the right way to be in the world, participating in that sort of process. In some teachings you are taught that you must never be boastful. It's not up to you to point out your accomplishments. If you have accomplished something or done well at something others will see it and note it, and they may point it out or not, but it's just considered so crass, so inappropriate, to boast about yourself so going into a behavioural interview and talking all about your accomplishments is not appropriate. That whole concept of selling yourself, promoting yourself, is just horrifying. And you see it in the sort of self-effacing, self-deprecating humour of many Aboriginal people because that's the appropriate way to be. So there are all kinds of things like that. You can change how you get that information. You have to be open to asking the questions in a different way. Some Aboriginals, not all, but some, their writing skills are not what you would expect of their credentials and that's a result of a number of things but understanding why that is as

opposed to thinking they are Indian, therefore they are stupid. I've heard those kinds of comments. Not acknowledging ways of knowing. They are different but knowing their educational background is different. (Manager #4)

This participant also notes there have been attempts to recruit Aboriginal people by hiring outside government (which is how she was hired) but hiring restrictions imposed in 2009 across government mean that all position postings are restricted to existing staff in MCFD, and therefore mostly filled with non-Aboriginal applicants

Provincial Employee #1 also comments on the lack of Ministry human resource initiatives to recruit either Aboriginal staff or culturally competent non-Aboriginal staff:

There was never—I don't think there was ever any recruiting of Aboriginal staff, an actual program, process—you know, they always talk about it and I would see it in the Ministry service plan but I never heard of anything like that [official HR approach]...So hiring a certain amount of Aboriginal staff I totally support but also the non-Aboriginal staff to have a true interest and have shown some type of experience...It felt like we were just picking and choosing from God knows where sometimes, I don't know, people that didn't have that commitment or had ever worked in the Aboriginal community.

Mental Health Support Worker #1 discusses how disentanglement processes, designed to dedicate service teams to Aboriginal work, did not support the recruitment of Aboriginal professionals from outside the Ministry because existing staff, within the Ministry were moved from mainstream to Aboriginal teams:

There was also the disentanglement thing that happened, which was great—we got lots of new workers—but actually what that did was create a whole bunch of drama because people were then mad at our team for getting so many more workers as they lost workers. Also because there was no hiring or firing during that time it forced a relocation of workers rather than allowing us to hire Indigenous people.

She also notes that the Ministry's reputation as being a poor employer for Aboriginal people is felt widely in the local community:

I think there needs to be more of an influence of Aboriginal people and talking to some of the communities as to why they don't want to come work, like actual community members, like social workers, like why they don't want to come, because I think that's important. It's funny because every Aboriginal person I know has really bad stories and has felt a moment of racism or prejudice, and some of the stuff is pretty horrific.

Equal, special, or equitable treatment.

A theme around perceptions in the Ministry about whether Aboriginal children, youth, and communities require equal or equitable treatment emerged among several participants. Some said they felt that non-Aboriginal colleagues believed Aboriginal employees and services for Aboriginal children may be receiving preferential treatment or funding:

I think it is a struggle for us when people think we were only hired because we were Aboriginal. (focus group participant)

The deputy minister . . . brought Aboriginal people to a forum. She sent out an email saying Aboriginal people will come to Victoria and we went to Victoria, but my goodness, we heard comments like “well, just because I am not [Aboriginal] I don’t get to go to Victoria?” We need to have that and it is not about an us and them, but it is about that space to be. (Manager #2)

“Why do Indians get special status when I’m Italian-Canadian. Shouldn’t I get status too?” (Manager #2)

...the Aboriginal people need their support group...because there are other issues...not only do we often seemingly battle the concepts of philosophy, the institutionalization, the colonization, but we are also battling sometimes being shunned by our own communities for working for what is perceived the institution. (focus group participant)

They would say stuff like “well, the Aboriginals get this and Aboriginals get that.” It’s like you know what, 50% of kids in care are Aboriginal and we’ve done squat for them at that point, so yeah we’re getting an office, yeah we’re getting some seed funding. But we’re taking over huge amounts of work. It’s just that concept, they just think that we get away with everything and that’s because they don’t know the history. We don’t have a level playing field, that equality doesn’t work, that liberal idea of equality means nothing. (Child Protection Worker #1)

And if they told us, okay, well, let’s give every person the same amount of money, then they’d be really crying if that happened, right? So we’ve got this many on our caseload, but we’ll take our fair share and see what happens. We know right now that that the non-Aboriginal team has a lower caseload than we do. (Child Protection Worker #1)

You still get the comments... that the only reason you got the job is because you were Aboriginal...From your colleagues. (Provincial Employee #1)

...you would get flack from other staff (e.g., limited travel budget), like “well, why do you get to go to the Aboriginal thing? I don’t get to go to (Girl) Guides?” (Provincial Employee #1)

It is almost like because we were Aboriginal that they were not allowing us this [flexibility to attend community] because then it will bring back that stereotype of being an Aboriginal branch or an Aboriginal office or a band office. (Provincial Employee #3)

Summary

Aboriginal manager participants were observed to be keenly aware of executive leadership support in the Ministry for the Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff that had been released the previous spring. Most managers worked directly in the implementation of this change agenda and recognized considerable differences between conceptual goals and actual available support required to initiate and sustain this change agenda in the Ministry.

Managers spoke of significant challenges in the organizational structure that impede their ability to move forward, including: slow organizational system response and decision making due to the reactive and fear-based nature of the organization, a lack of concrete operational support from regional leadership, and the absence of structured support and training for new Aboriginal managers who have not previously worked with the Ministry. Many Aboriginal participants describe a clear and well understood hierarchical structure that seems to work to disconnect the front line from decision making and to prevent a feedback loop for ongoing organizational learning.

Leadership is described as being personality driven and held by a limited number of well-known and established individuals who have special access to executive leadership and control of information. Participants describe decreased individual autonomy resulting from this type of leadership. Several participants said that when the organization places Aboriginal people in leadership roles these individuals either do not have or are not given the opportunity to learn about MCFD culture, have a voice, influence, or power to effect change.

Poor communication flow, caused by the discouragement of communication outside formal reporting structures, exacerbates the rigid hierarchy of the organization discouraging

collaboration and potentially useful sharing of knowledge and experience with regional and provincial office decision makers. This disconnection is complicated by the lack of, or highly filtered, communication back to the frontline from regional office and headquarters.

Participants also spoke about a range of areas where operational support is necessary, but absent, for them to initiate culturally relevant practice. Further, well-established and engrained procedures in MCFD encourage practice and resource policy that is inconsistent with Aboriginal practice approaches. The many change initiatives in the Ministry are described as improperly implemented and poorly resourced. And positions created for Aboriginal regional managers meant to promote Aboriginal change were implemented without enough planning and resources. These Aboriginal managers lacked meaningful authority or control of resources and were soon spread too thin.

Another major theme emerging from participant interviews is the apparent and significant incongruence between optimistic leadership rhetoric and the reality of frontline work. Other very basic organizational supports like training, mentorship, recruitment and working standards (such as flexible hours of work, limiting caseloads, etc) are described as problematic and insufficient to support Aboriginal participants. Nearly every participant expressed the critical importance of having team leaders who effectively support Aboriginal employees and Aboriginal practice approaches. Participants describe unsupportive team leaders who perpetuate mainstream practice norms and are promoted for their ability to adhere to rules, complete tasks and other valued Ministry procedures, including completing paperwork satisfactorily. Supportive team leaders are described as having insight into the dual and sometimes conflicting accountabilities inherent in the Aboriginal professional roles in MCFD. These supportive leaders tend to have extensive experience working with Aboriginal people and have a high degree of understanding working in

the community. They also have insight and reflect an understanding of practice that acknowledges the history of oppression that Aboriginal communities have endured.

One last theme that emerged around organizational structure and support is concerned with what participants see as perceptions within the Ministry of Aboriginal employees and service recipients receiving equal or equitable treatment. In some cases participants had experiences that lead them to believe non-Aboriginal colleagues feel Aboriginal employees receive preferential treatment through their education, hiring, and supports provided to them in the Ministry. This becomes a barrier to Aboriginal employees receiving support through specialized support networks and other possible specialized recruitment and retention approaches.

Chapter 9. Service Devolution or System Improvement? MCFD Aboriginal Service Improvement Strategies

Aboriginal participants, as well as three non-Aboriginal managers who work in MCFD Aboriginal practice, describe how Ministry initiatives and strategies to support and improve Aboriginal services for children, youth, families, and communities impact the ability of Aboriginal practitioners to provide effective services for Aboriginal children and families. Results from this chapter illustrate how preoccupation in the preceding years on devolving services to the Aboriginal community appear to have resulted in under-resourcing and a lack of focus on the effectiveness of existing Aboriginal services in the Ministry.

A compelling example of the effectiveness of a specialized Aboriginal management and service stream which accompanied disentanglement efforts in one region of the Ministry is reported by Aboriginal participants as providing them a highly supportive organizational environment where they were able to focus on relevant and improved services for Aboriginal families—what is concerning is that this approach was also being de-implemented at the time of the interviews in favour of what is now a generalized management structure in the regions for all services (Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal, all services such as child welfare, mental health, youth justice, etc). There may potentially be significant promise in this approach and it deserves further consideration as a more effective approach to focussing on the unique requirements and aspects of Aboriginal practice as a strategy across the Ministry.

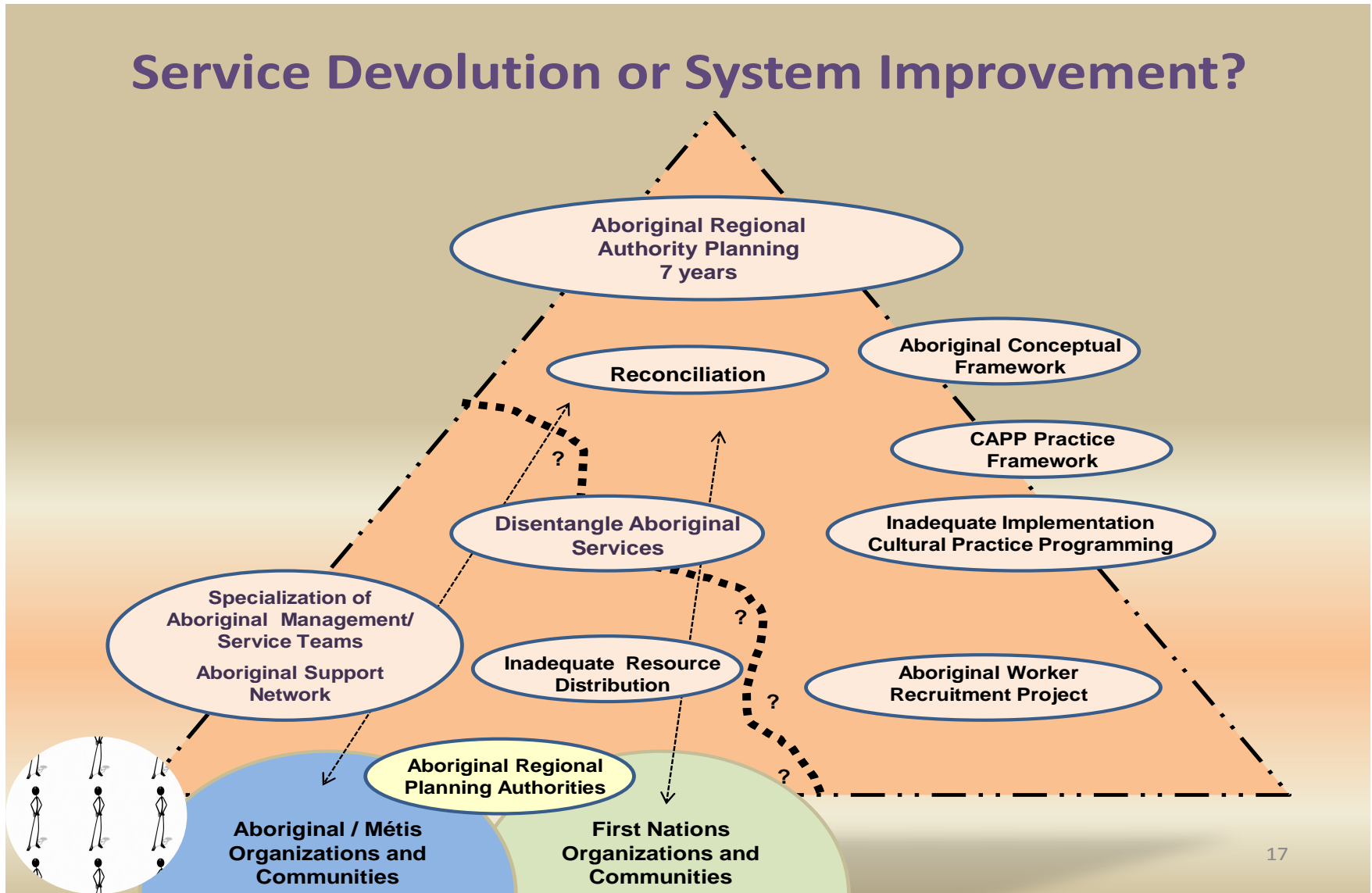
Another strategy that shows promise is an Aboriginal social worker recruitment project that occurred in one of the regions. The initiative was successful in increasing the number of Aboriginal employees in the region—although all of the recruits of this project that were interviewed had either left or were seriously considering leaving the Ministry. However, Aboriginal participants, including an Aboriginal manager who was a project co-lead, and a non-

Aboriginal manager from the region, all comment on the need to focus on more intensive preparation both for recruits and in the proposed worksites where they are being placed. Some of the most extreme examples of racism described by Aboriginal participants in the study occurred in some of these worksites and it must be acknowledged that any recruitment strategy needs to be coupled with anti-racist and other strategies targeted at the culture of these worksites to ensure healthy and supportive settings exist to place and retain recruits.

This section also highlights the degree to which participants feel much of the strategic planning initiatives that emanate from the Ministry provincial office are rhetorical in nature and seem out of step with the reality of the practice at the frontline. They also point to the winding down or de-emphasis of existing and newer Aboriginal practice programming such as the Roots are Forever program amidst an environment where the rhetoric that speaks to an overarching Aboriginal conceptual framework focused on indigenizing the ministry and a newer practice model are being emphasized.

The reflected themes of MCFD Aboriginal service improvement strategies are reflected in Figure 9.1 below.

Figure 9.1 MCFD Aboriginal service improvement strategies.



Devolution of Services

Participants acknowledged that the devolution of child and family services to Aboriginal communities on and off reserve has been occurring for the past four decades, primarily through the development and growth of delegated Aboriginal agencies (DAAs) that deliver services (that MCFD would otherwise provide) under provincial legislation. Many participants were aware of the recent failed attempt by MCFD to develop regional Aboriginal authorities (which would have resulted in a parallel Aboriginal service structure alongside MCFD). Some too described the recent move of the Ministry toward providing financial support directly to First Nations communities for the development of self-determining models of children's services based on their own inherent jurisdiction (known at this time as the Nation to Nation contracts – later to become known as Indigenous Approaches).

A reconnection worker who has worked at MCFD for many years said she fully supports the devolution of services to the communities but sees that the process is taking too long and is meanwhile impacting the Ministry's ability to provide safe, effective services to Aboriginal people. Moreover, the current delegation model which involves a high degree of government program oversight simply promotes mainstream approaches:

In the meantime people fall through the cracks...a part of the Aboriginal community is saying you're just telling us how to run another institution [delegated Aboriginal agencies], we have to do it your way...then others are saying the only way we'll be able to do it with our children is if we jump right in there and do it the way you say, and then hopefully, we can evolve it and change it internally. Often what they find is they get focused on the way they are to do things because they're still being audited and looked at exactly [as if they were government].

A youth probation worker is concerned about how devolution processes have strained relationships between the Ministry and Aboriginal organizations that are to potentially provide

services due to some Ministry worker (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) perceptions that devolution means they will lose their jobs:

I still see a lot of “us and them.” There is a fair bit of animosity between the Ministry and the Aboriginal organizations...there is continuing to be a fear about Aboriginal organizations taking over, getting their delegation and taking over all the Aboriginal clients. So there is a fear that people will lose their jobs...I think it does come up especially at certain times when there are cut backs or when Aboriginal organizations are moving further along in terms of their delegation...and then people, of course, they are concerned.

Provincial Employee #3, who previously worked with an Aboriginal Authority in planning, is also concerned about the impact devolution has on Ministry and Aboriginal organization relationships. He says in addition to this there is a high degree of skepticism about the potential for successful devolution of services beyond the delegation model:

I can understand where your workers are coming from because all of a sudden I am in your office trying to basically take over some of their jobs or positions. So I can understand how they are going to feel that in ten years [or less] they are done. So I just said “I can understand where that is coming from,” so I guess when you see the Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff and some people are looking at it and some people are just “ah, another Aboriginal thing.” It is like, yeah, okay. Five years ago was the planning committee, now it is this, now it is this.

Manager #2 is inspired by the recent move by the Ministry to provide funding to support First Nations communities to explore the delivery of services through their own jurisdictional prerogative:

So looking at those Nation to Nation pieces of work, I mean what is there 17 across the province now. Yes, and they are just amazing to read what they are going to do and how they are going to do it. We go to the Nation to Nation gathering in Harrison Hot Springs in October and our Deputy says “We are not waiting, you want to deliver your own services, well figure it out. If we have to realign legislation, we will realign legislation.” Hello! That’s pretty exciting times right? That stuff makes me...that’s why I like the new role. You think about being a part of all of that right?

Provincial Employee #1 however is skeptical whether the Ministry has enough resource capacity to provide ongoing support to the Nation to Nation contracts that are intended to potentially result in alternate jurisdiction for Aboriginal communities to deliver children’s

services. Similar to a comment above, this participant is also concerned the ongoing service the Ministry is providing Aboriginal children in the meantime is not adequate:

Are we being realistic with people that we can actually fund all of these Nation to Nation contracts or are we just setting up the Aboriginal community one more time? Spending probably millions of dollars and then saying “oops, we can’t do that after all.” I mean if we can, great then full speed ahead but I just don’t have confidence that we can do that. So that worries me too and then what do we do in the meantime with all of the Ministry kids? To me in the absence of having Aboriginal communities working with them...then you should have a strong Aboriginal staff or some kind of policy....something to support (them). They keep talking about the delegated agency...but most of them are still with the Ministry.

Mental Health Support Worker #2 believes the devolution of services will not occur in a beneficial way for First Nations or Aboriginal communities:

So call me cynical, but they have every intention, like every other program that they do this to, they want to hand over the exact same work load with all of its history, with all of its pain, they’re going to hand over all those shadows of hurt and disconnection and trauma and then they’re going to give them what, two thirds of what they used to get for it? Yeah. And then when it all falls to crap, they’re going to go “see, I told you those guys don’t really know what they’re doing. What the hell are we doing this for? “See they’re just dumb, drunken Indians. What did I tell you? Second-rate citizens.” It’s the same old story of colonization that repeats itself over and over again. That’s my position on it. I mean, it’s happening already. Why do the Aboriginal teams get a third. . .you can only hire a third of maybe what the rest of the team is when the workload is actually at least half. It’s 50 percent but you can only have a third of funding to do that 50 percent and where I worked it was 90 percent. Absolutely totally under resourced. And that’s even bigger than MCFD. That’s the history of colonization right from the get go. That’s the Indian Act Policy, that’s the policy of deprivation.

Child Protection Worker #5 similarly speculates the Ministry under-resources Aboriginal services because of the eventual transfer of services to Aboriginal communities:

I’m wondering if the lack of focus on Indigenous workers or supporting [them] is because there is that move, that intention to move towards Aboriginal agencies...I agree it’s a neglected area because it’s like well why would we put in all these resources internally when we’re going to transfer the services? The only reason they formed these Aboriginal teams was to form these little pockets because it’s easier to manage when they start totransfer services.

Disentanglement of Aboriginal Services from Mainstream Ministry Services

Aboriginal Participants in two regions refer to the “disentanglement” of Ministry Aboriginal services from mainstream services as a process undertaken as a precursor to the proposed, but never realized, transfer of services to Aboriginal regional authorities. Two non-Aboriginal managers responsible for Aboriginal services in another region describe disentanglement as the identification and separation of resources both for internal Ministry staffing for specific Aboriginal service teams and also for external service contracts the Ministry uses to provide necessary support services for the families that it is working with. Disentanglement of services occurred in one region about six years prior to the interviews and about three years prior in the other. In the region, where the non-Aboriginal managers referred to in this section work, disentanglement had been occurring for approximately five years.

Aboriginal participants in one region reflected on the inadequate number of resources assigned to support Aboriginal teams and recent restructuring that had reduced them further. One participant says a negative culture was created on Aboriginal service teams because non-Aboriginal staff was adverse to being assigned to them so “those that were placed weren’t happy.” In spite of this it is noteworthy that participants from this region describe workplaces as being overall the most supportive among participants in the study. (See more in-depth results in the case study section.)

Provincial Employee #1 comments on the disentanglement process and creation of Aboriginal service teams occurring in the regions:

Eventually the Aboriginal teams came up and that was their answer because they were going to be transferring authority to those teams...but half the time there was nobody Aboriginal on the team. Language is important I think and especially when it impacts you as a person so if you have Aboriginal employees there, thinking about that language is important right? So I remember when it came out it was always the big joke “well Aboriginal team, no one is Aboriginal on the team.”

One of the non-Aboriginal managers in another region notes that the Aboriginal planning authority in their region was involved in providing consultation to the Aboriginal teams that formed as a result of disentanglement and to some extent directing how resources for service provision outside the Ministry should be utilized in the contract sector. However, once the legislation for regional Aboriginal authorities failed to pass in 2008 both non-Aboriginal managers from this region note that the teams have drifted somewhat. One of the non-Aboriginal managers notes that there was a quick turnaround in forming the Aboriginal teams, from existing non-Aboriginal teams, and that many staff were just appointed to the Aboriginal team in spite of their not wanting to be part of it.

That makes it difficult because then when you've got these teams forming and people are appointed to go, it is not a good feeling right? Rather it is better to recruit where people want to go in terms of the work they do.

The other non-Aboriginal manager from this region spoke about the way in which disentanglement occurred. The new Aboriginal teams formed without an environment or culture in the teams that is "Aboriginal" or relevant for the very few Aboriginal employees they have on their child welfare teams. The only way to shift the culture from this manager's perspective is to increase the number of Aboriginal employees on the team through recruitment—however with a managed staffing strategy in place that is difficult to do.

Both of the non-Aboriginal managers in this region spoke about and contrasted the disentanglement process for child welfare teams with the creation of Aboriginal child and youth mental health teams where they were able to recruit Aboriginal professionals from outside the ministry. On these teams they note a high level of cohesion and comfort for Aboriginal staff who are greater in numbers and have increased opportunities to work in the community and to utilize Aboriginal practice approaches. They both indicate that the workload standards for child welfare

teams, with high caseloads, have created a barrier to implementing some of the same or similar opportunities to practice in a culturally relevant way.

Manager #4 who works in another region was tasked with most of the strategic planning for disentanglement processes in the past three years and found the process extremely difficult. Though regional executive management voiced support for her work, there was little observed concrete or demonstrated support. This participant vividly describes the tendency for fellow managers to protect what they see as “their” resources—the resources that the Aboriginal component for services is being “disentangled” from:

Oh yes, we’re so far behind other regions it’s embarrassing. But in other regions it was senior management that made a commitment and it wasn’t left for sort of newbie managers coming in from the outside to make it happen, senior managers making decisions and making it happen and being committed to it. We never had that here in this region.

I mean the initial process was very transparent. All the information was laid out. This is what’s in, this is what’s out, this is what we’re talking about; this is what we’re not. Now all of a sudden everything is hidden and it’s all double talk and no actual production of documents. Just no it’s not as much money as we thought.

My boss told me that the biggest complaint about me was that I was too focused on Aboriginal Services and not the overall good of the organization. I kind of thought Aboriginal Services was in my job description but I guess I didn’t understand....Team leaders telling people that I was single-handedly destroying everything they built....[that] I was a vicious negotiator. [That] I didn’t seem to care that the staff that were left for mainstream that they would have to reconfigure and reorganize themselves and they had been through so much in the past few years....The way that I interpreted that was that I wasn’t willing to just accept what they were willing to give me. I also called them out when I was able to document instances of them fudging numbers and manipulating stats and things.

Well these were sort of the old school CSMs [community service managers]. The CSMs used to be seen as where all the power resided, power and control and authority...these are people going into it from that perspective and they had over a lot of years built a system that worked for them and I was disentangling it, I was dismantling it. Even if it wasn’t me doing it, I was the face of it and it was impinging on their power and control. These were people whose stature is gained from the size of their budget, the number of staff, that’s how things were measured at that time. Even if that wasn’t a part of it they were still being asked to give up things and they didn’t see any good reason for doing it in the first place because they were doing fine for Aboriginal people. It was also seen

very much as a slap in the face, as an implicit criticism—you're not doing good enough around Aboriginal services. Yeah, on so many different levels.

I don't think the values were there. It was very clear, I think to everyone, myself and other managers, people who were for this, opposed to it, or just didn't understand it, we all seemed to be of the same mind and that is the only reason we were doing it in this region, because provincial office was forcing it, that our RED (regional executive director) was being questioned about why we hadn't moved along this path and he needed to look good to provincial office... We never saw any commitment to it.

For our direct delivery of services and staffing, that's one we have not come to grips with yet and we do talk about practicing differently. Right up until you say, okay the staffing ratios are too different and that's when it all comes to a screeching halt—at least in this region and I don't know how others have dealt with it or not, but here it comes to a screeching halt. When we were negotiating the staffing ratios in the [sub region]—and it was one of the things I got into trouble for—was I kept arguing that point [that in fact you need more resources to do Aboriginal practice] and, “Well we need proof, we need this, we need that.” You know what—the Ministry developed a kids workload model and they did all the research; they looked at all the variables and what they said was if you are carrying an Aboriginal caseload, you need plus 20%. So let's start from there. And, of course, everybody was completely horrified by that because it would mean the workload would go up to non-Aboriginal teams and we couldn't have that. It never went anywhere.

But we couldn't even balance available resources. For example, if you've got a non-Aboriginal team and the average caseload on that team is 20 to 22, and then you have an Aboriginal team do the same work, same service work, and they are carrying an average caseload of 41. Can we split the difference and balance the staffing so everybody is carrying a caseload of 30? Let's forget that the work is different and we're supposed to be working differently. We weren't even able to do that, that's when the silly bugger started going with staff and people not closing files so that they could keep their numbers up. And the team leaders were laughing about it and talking about it very openly, that that's how they were manipulating things so that we wouldn't get more workers. And then their managers pretending to be unaware of it and demanding that you prove it. Well the only way to prove it was to go in and do comprehensive file audits and there was no way we had the resources to do that so it's that kind of stuff that goes on.

But these are the same people who are telling us you can't buy additional staff. You can't even fill your vacancies. It's the same people who tell us to practice differently. And in the Aboriginal context, on an Aboriginal team, when you're down a couple of workers because they are on stress leave because of the workload, you can't work differently because in ten minutes you can decide to remove a child, put him in your car and take him back to the office, and tell resources to find a home. And when you've got five other emergencies backed up that's what you do instead of taking the time to sit down and go knocking on doors, go find auntie to see if she can take the kids for the weekend while you work out other things. It's crisis management, that's all it is. So the people who are saying an Aboriginal approach and working differently are also the ones who, and are on front line levels, who are saying that you can't have any of the things you need to work differently...It's not big on the radar anymore...things in the (region) went off the rails.

This participant also describes how the contract renegotiation to allocate resources to Aboriginal agencies was reversed and stalled “and all hell broke loose because the new person running that told the Aboriginal world ‘well, we’ve committed this much money but we’ve taken another look at the budget and it’s this much less.’” Her personal integrity suddenly became at risk in the community:

I was horrified, absolutely horrified, and I spoke out about...”No, no here is the document. Here’s what it was. Here is executive signed off on it. These are the agreements and decisions. Here it all is.” So I don’t know what this new stuff is about, but they are right, this is all agreed to. And executive all signed off on this.”

Child Protection Worker #5, from the same region, recalls that when the Aboriginal team which she is on was formed during disentanglement of staff, that non-Aboriginal co-workers felt “pressure to be on the team, it wasn’t because they wanted to necessarily work with Indigenous people....no one really told them what that would look like, what does that mean?”

Specialization of Aboriginal Services versus Generalization

It appears the move to disentangle child welfare services in the Ministry created dedicated teams of social workers providing services to Aboriginal children and families. Following the Ministry Aboriginal Child and Youth Mental Health (ACYMH) plan in 2007, several dedicated Aboriginal CYMH teams were also established across the regions. Participants varied in their views about the specialization of Aboriginal services versus maintaining an integrated service delivery system.

Mental Health Support Worker #1 said she “loved the idea” of integrated service delivery but says “I don’t think it’s possible.” Citing low cultural competence in the Ministry and the difficulty for non-Aboriginal professionals to gain the necessary experience to work effectively in an Aboriginal context she feels that it may be preferable to recruit Aboriginal and non-

Aboriginal staff who demonstrate knowledge and skill in Aboriginal practice approaches to specialized teams in the Ministry.

The practicality of it is that the week-long cultural sensitivity training that we did was great but that was a scratch at the surface for those people and then what you have are these people with a certificate in cultural sensitivity who feel they don't have to do any other work. It's not something you can do in a week. You look at anti-oppressive practices—most people study that for four years in their social work degree—how can you study Indigenous in a week and indigenizing in two weeks?

Manager #1 refers to a recent move away from specialized services in the region consistent with the Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff goal of ensuring that all staff in the Ministry are culturally competent and capable of providing appropriate services in Aboriginal communities:

This is all of our jobs. How do we want to do this together? Even in saying that I don't know when I look at our community service manager group there is really only two that have a lot of experience working with Aboriginal communities...in this new system all managers are responsible but whether they are all equipped at this time, I don't know....sometimes feeling like people will say they understand but they really don't.

Child Protection Worker #1 does not support the current move to integrate all services in the offices in the region:

Are you kidding me? That will only hurt the offices. That will only hurt our practice. That scares me.

Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff

It seems that managers are far more likely to be aware of the content of the Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff introduced in 2010 than frontline participants are. The managers also seem more optimistic about its potential impact than do the staff who are aware of it.

Manager #1 refers to the new framework but also acknowledges that not everyone, particularly those in her regional executive management group who have different priorities, feel as positive or supportive of the framework and the implications for its approach as she does:

I think the framework is a beautiful document and I think I am just really happy it is there and I hope it is used as a tool all the time. I encourage community members to use it as a tool to hold Ministry accountable and to hold ourselves accountable.

I remember being at our (regional) meeting a year ago when I was told the Aboriginal agenda wasn't the priority and it was just like "oh!" and so at one period of time I was feeling very much like I was inferior and not very relevant and all of a sudden now it is a priority and I am in this leadership position and even though people aren't saying it I know there are people that are feeling resentful...all of a sudden there is all of this attention on the Aboriginal Agenda.

Manager #2 talks about the framework providing more validity to the Aboriginal Agenda:

It just gives it more validity, that it is an important piece of the work and that the work is not moving forward without the principles being, regardless of what business area you are in, in this Ministry those principles will be applied. You will look at it through a self-determinant lens. You will look through its culture and language. You will look through to the holistic approach. You will look through honest approach, culture and language, self-determination, non-discrimination...I think we are doing that through the conceptual framework too...it says, this is an internal guide, it is for us. How do we do that?... It will be interesting to see where we are in five years because of what is happening right now. I am quite excited to see what that looks like and where would it be. Seriously, what is that going to look like?

Manager #3 sees implementation of the Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff achieved through meaningful dialogue and engagement:

I don't know any social worker who wants the outcome that our system generates so to really bring people back to that reality that this is what is happening in our system right now, this is what is happening in our communities right now. You want to believe that racism doesn't exist? I just experienced it over lunch. If I can experience it what do you think your clients are going to experience? So a lot of discussion around that, even a lot of discussion around the Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff. I found when the document came out a few months later people still didn't know, people still didn't read it. For lots of different reasons, maybe they've got a huge caseload or they just delete all those emails from provincial office. If it doesn't reduce my caseload or work right now I'm not going to read it. So having discussions like, what does self-determination mean in our practice; what is the holistic approach in our practice? I'm not saying I have the answers but I think we can have a discussion and take their reality and apply some of these principles to their work. Just going back to your asking what we could do to engage with the staff, I think that's huge.

This focus group participant, who may be supportive of concepts within the framework, seems skeptical about the ability of the Ministry to implement it and what impact it will have:

We hear the catch phrases coming down from the powers that be and a lot of those catch phrases ring true in our hearts because those are the catch phrases that have been sung by our ancestors for thousands of years. We are doing those but was it the Ministry's idea or was it ours? It is not important to me. What is important is just getting out there and meeting with these children.

A reconnection worker talks about seeing the same or a similar approach rolled out ten years previously:

I'm tired of it. I thought it would have happened ten years ago. We were working there. We almost had it there, and then all of a sudden, all the rules came around. "You can only do this, and then you can do this," and God.

Child Protection Worker #1 is also skeptical of the sincerity of the Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff given that the recent orientation and training for CAPP was delivered in a very non-Aboriginal way through web-based training—and it promoted concepts like permanency without considering cultural connections just as important as a consistent caregiver:

I call bullshit on that because when we went to training and this fucking crap and this CAPP stuff, I rarely get in a pissy mood. Really I think my inside voice was on the outside. So we went to this resiliency workshop where they had the guy on a webcam rather than being there at a meeting. Aboriginals don't do well with that because we weren't able to see the person talking to us. We go by everything, not just what is said..the sense of the feeling of what they give to us.

...Then we really talked about that and I said "Culture is just as important as attachment. I think those need to be in sync with each other when you're teaching this resilience, because Aboriginal people by far are resilient."

Child Protection Worker #6 in a northern location wasn't aware of the framework at all:

I mean on the practice level I am not really sure what you mean. When I hear 'Aboriginal Approach' it brings to mind all sorts of images like medicine wheels and whatnot and holistic approach and whatnot which I think can get overused and tokenized as well itself.

Child Protection Worker #4 in the north thought an entirely different initiative (the reconciliation approach) was the same as the Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff. However, Resource Worker #1 in another northern location was aware and said:

Well I know that they are trying to implement the Aboriginal Service Delivery Change as a conceptual framework for Ministry staff. I can see some of it happening in regards to maybe camps, if children need to go to camps but I don't see anything in regards to cultural language or holistic approach in a way but I do see staff that do meet with the bands and the hereditary chiefs when needed. Other than that I don't really see too much.

Provincial Employee #2 spoke about the potential for wide application of the Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry staff but also shared concern for the sustained Ministry support of the approach:

I think the document is quite good and very general conceptual framework, so it can be supported under many different capacities in that sense that because it is general, certain sections can be broken down directly to families or it can be specific to a cultural group if they chose to do so. I think there are definitely tools within to utilize. I don't think it's the final answer for development within Indigenous communities...Obviously the document's fairly new. I think the proof is going to be in the continuity and the sustainability of those supports...My experience in the past is that, unfortunately things look good on paper but are they being enacted?

Mental Health Support Worker #3 is suspicious of the framework, saying:

It was just kind of a glance over. What I do think when they come out with all of these new frameworks and stuff is that I think that they waste a lot money on research and writing and getting people to come up with these reports when those resources could be like going towards spending time in the community and giving staff the hours to do that and you know what?

Reconciliation

It was primarily the participants in the north region that were aware of Touchstones of Hope, a government/Aboriginal community reconciliation process initiated in the north about two years prior. Manager #2 describes the process of meeting with Aboriginal and First Nations leaders from across the north:

...this region has now completed five Touch Stones events with delegated agencies, so approximately 35 First Nation communities and we sat in a room with them (and) the leadership from this region and we have...truth telling, reconciliation, acknowledgement and restoring rights. We have had those types of discussions...where it is not personal but here is our history and here is what happened and how do we move together through this to get to where we want to get to...Touchstones...is another brilliant piece of work that we have had the luck to be involved with or to be a part of those...I really I think...we will find a way to reconcile with Aboriginal First Nations people. (Manager #2)

Child Protection Worker #2, who had attended a Touchstones event, was concerned about the sincerity of Ministry participants in the event:

So when I was in the Ministry, and there was talk about Touchstones or if anybody would talk about Aboriginal Agencies or bands they [some workers] would roll their eyes... honestly there are people that will go to these things and they will criticize everything... and afterwards they will bad mouth it...just very disrespectful.

Child Protection Worker #3 related a similar experience:

I went to the Touchstones and another worker went and she is non-Aboriginal and MCFD took a lot of heat... I was hurt...(when) a team leader had said in one of our focus groups “do you know what? You people just need to get over it. You need to get over it and move on and heal.” Yes, and I said “how can you say that people need to get over it when this trauma is still happening? You are not recognizing that we are still doing this, we are still doing it”

The three other participants in the north region were also somewhat wary of whether there was positive impact on their non-Aboriginal colleagues:

Provincial Employee #2 is aware of Touchstones of Hope in the north region and feels it can bolster Ministry learning and current initiatives such as CAPP:

(MCFD) has been influenced by the early Touchstones work that started probably about four years ago. Much of the structure that is in place now has been developed and influenced by that practice itself and to my understanding much of that work was done in partnership with the First Nations communities up north. I think for myself it is a good template for starting. It’s not the complete answer to the need, but it certainly helps because it is coming from an Indigenous perspective.

Mental Health Support Worker #3 said she believes the potential value of reconciliation work between the Ministry and Aboriginal people could be to impact Ministry workers understanding that the current relationship must be framed by the colonial history of child welfare:

A social worker steps out that door, that social worker can be the nicest person in the world. You know they can have every good intention. . .just be really well meaning, but if that social worker doesn't understand that they are standing at that doorstep and when that person opens the door that's not just that social worker, it's that social worker and every other social worker that every stepped in that door, that ever stepped on that reserve, that ever came and took a child, that that's who they're representing. It has to be acknowledged because as long as it isn't being acknowledged, not only will that relationship not repair itself, but every single social worker will slowly go down the tubes themselves, their spirits will get killed. Because...we all need to be accepted. We all need to have relationships. When we get rejection after rejection after rejection, we get hard, we get cold and we get bitter. That's what's happening to our social workers. When that happens, then they start getting rigid.

Child Protection Worker #5 concurs:

I support that. I totally support that. I have voiced that to individual social workers before who have been kicked off of the reserve and said to them "you know, when you are getting in trouble from the community for past things and you stand up and say 'I realize that but right now, blah, blah, blah...' they are not going to work with you because you are not even acknowledging what happened before." I think that that would be a huge step in the right direction. I think that that if they followed a similar process to what the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is doing right now that that would be ground breaking for Child Welfare in Canada. It would show the commitment that MCFD says that they have to working better and doing this and that.

Manager #1 was just in the process of planning reconciliation in the region:

I am tired and it is terrible because I just started this job but I am talking about why reconciliation is important. I just want to do it. I don't know if I have the energy anymore to keep educating and explaining this. I just want to do the work in a good way. I don't want to try and convince people.

Child and Family Support, Assessment, Planning, and Practice Framework (CAPP)

More participants seemed to be aware of CAPP, a Ministry developed relationship-based approach to responding to client needs for frontline. Some participants say they thought it may be compatible with their practice approach:

That's right...we will do that assessment but off the hop we are going to assess your safety. Have you eaten today? Do you have a home? We are going to make sure they are safe in other ways first. That is a pretty big shift...It's quite the shift, the key worker and we are not going to be called social workers anymore, we will be called practitioners. There is quite the shift there and the one person coming through the door, that is your main contact from now on. (Manager #2)

Well they now have the CAPP right? So that is supposed to be changing their practice because the families have one worker or two workers throughout their whole existence. (Child Protection Worker #3)

The relationship. That's one thing that these are the values, this is what CAPP is supposed to represent. (Child Protection Worker #5)

Child Protection Worker #1 believes CAPP fits with her own and her team's existing practice:

We're doing CAPP already, you know I went to that workshop and I was like "Are you kidding me?" and I looked around and I, okay this is an eye opener for me. So we went to this CAPP orientation...I happened to sit with the Aboriginal community members because I sat down and they all just came around me. This is CAPP and we're doing this and we all just kind of looked at each other and went "we're already doing that"

Child Protection Worker #6, completely unaware of the Aboriginal Service Delivery

Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff, talks about the compatibility of CAPP with her approach:

I don't know how things are going to change because of CAPP... So I don't know how that is going to change things for us. I am excited to try and figure it out because it sounds a lot like how I want to practice...It is pretty much everything you learn about how you do social work while you are in university and then you are on the job and it is not exactly the same. Still I am hopeful that operating in a new way, stepping away from the risk averse model to one of the relationship and support bases will help us actually make lasting changes in people's lives.

Aboriginal Social Worker Recruitment Project

A number of participants participated in a unique Aboriginal social worker recruitment project designed to target, recruit and support Aboriginal child welfare workers. The project was jointly initiated by the Ministry, delegated Aboriginal agencies in the north region and the University of Northern British Columbia social work program. Aboriginal Participants will not be identified in this section to maintain their anonymity. An Aboriginal manager who was a co-lead of the project and a non-Aboriginal manager from this region were also interviewed and provided observations with respect to the project.

The Aboriginal manager co-lead describes the project this way:

The discussion was senior managers and all five Aboriginal people that worked in the organization across the region, all five people who were self-identified as First Nations....from there the money was approved.

I flew out to the First Nations University in Saskatoon. You would want people who were finished or who were finishing their degree—if they were in their third year and they were thinking about it. That went into *Wind Speaker*, an Aboriginal type newspaper, delegated agencies because they were partners in it because the practicum was also done with them, so there was the relationship. So they had it on their websites and within their offices and then word of mouth.

[They] went through this process and I had to really influence the beginning process—I wanted to spend the first 15 minutes with them [the recruits]...so just having that real honest dialogue about the importance, the shift that was happening for the Ministry but I built a relationship with them in that first 15 minutes and we talked about what they could bring to the role and what that would look like for 80% of the children in the north being of Aboriginal descent right? So your caseload would be Aboriginal people and why wouldn't you want to bring your lens to that work right? So I talked about some of the positive things that you could do with families in that position.

I talked about—that this is not the Ministry's interview. This is your interview. We want you. Turn that table around, we need Aboriginal people to do this work and we have partnerships with all of the Delegated Agencies in the region, so if it is not a good fit for you and you have relocated, but you can only work for an agency, let's find a way to partner here and increase Aboriginal people in positions, whether it is in government or with First Nation agencies.

That proved—that really brought people in when they got into that process they weren't so 'deer in the headlights' and they thought about why they would want to do this and that came through in their interviews, it really did, around their passion and who they are as Aboriginal and First Nations people. It wasn't behavioural question number one.

We did three cohorts so I think—2007/2008—oh we got the Premiere's Award. That was pretty cool. We haven't done one [a new cohort] in a couple of years because we had the hiring freeze but we are looking at doing it again.

So we have this training that is being done here and you are having comments like "well they are not getting the real training." So the dynamics of that were quite something and again not about the people but you go back to our organizational culture, you are not fit unless you have gone through the Justice Institute training. Meanwhile the training here was involving some of the experts within the region to provide that training. Way better, who wants to be outside—a plane ride from home and family going through this? So way better process.

You had to sell it. I mean even getting positions put forward at first. It was just—again, it is not about my colleagues, it was just about the way the organization was then whatever the feedback from the front line would be. Again, it is hard to decipher what that was about....you know what, they're Indians, so they don't want them so they are just going to

make it difficult but I don't see it like that. There were other things; again, what role did the organizational culture play? What was the role in that as it would go all the way down to the line right?

It was quite amazing that first group because they had quite a schedule. We were talking six months—they didn't have to travel to Vancouver but they were all placed all across the North and they would come in for a lot of program days but weeks for their risk assessment training.... They were a very, very tight group. They were able to, as a group, advocate for certain shifts in the program but they were also able to talk about what they were experiencing out there and they were very honest about some of the things that were being said and how they felt in certain offices right? It was really an opportunity for us to do some learning around—how do we shift that? Are there any major themes first of all coming from it? And is there more of a regional approach that we can take to kind of shift some of that type of behaviour? Where do we need to be more “Hey, this is not okay?”

Some of the same experiences I had and again, just not always about the people. Just not understanding. “I have already taken First Nations 101. I'm good. I don't need to know anymore.” Yikes! I learn more everyday about my own being, my own culture and other people's culture. I am gifted everyday across this region and this province through different cultures and traditions that I will never be an expert on, but some of the things like that and they hurt. The rolling of their eyes. Just all of this just brought—it's just that experience.

The manager felt some of the recruits through the project experienced difficult and sometimes discriminatory treatment at the frontline. She had an Aboriginal intern (who would not have the same qualifications as an Aboriginal social work recruit) at the time of the interview. She says that lessons had been learned through the project and that more preparation needed to be done at the worksite, including consideration of the environment that they were placing recruits and interns in;

I will not want them to swim alone. That's why I am here. I made it very clear that if we are going to have Aboriginal interns, you are not putting them in an office. I want them safe. I want them somewhere safe and if I am not the supervisor, fine, but I want them somewhere close so that there is me...You have got to have a relationship where you feel trust and you can say “I felt discriminated against today,” or “this person didn't treat me so well” and whatever...and give them a place to let it go and know that it was safe and they weren't going to get retribution back in their office because they were saying it. So we had to create a safe space.

Addressing the retention rates of the individuals recruited through the project this manager says:

I think we did pretty good and if we did lose...I think we only lost five or six but they went to agencies, four have moved on...I mean it got better and better. By the time we got to the third cohort there were beautiful placements and conversations with CSMs...Yes, they are looking at doing it again, for sure.

I think we have increased [the number of Aboriginal people working in the region] to 25 people with that program:

Several participants shared their experiences as recruits in the region. The participant below said she was recruited after being told by several Ministry staff associated with the recruitment project that the Ministry approach and practice was changing:

So I went through this program thinking that the Ministry is changing. It needs to. They have to. So we get going. We do all of our training and first of all we are placed with teams, and I was fortunate enough that I was placed with a team that was doing Family Development Response Work....So I had support in these teams where it was like “great, you want to do this. You want to be creative. Excellent! I will support you.” One team leader that I had was very supportive and so her team which is Family Development Response, they were all working that way. So the colleagues on that team were good.

So I took the position with the Roots program with the Guardianship team. I went there after and let’s just say it was short lived because the Roots practitioner was not being utilized the way it was meant to be. Roots was where you were trying to locate family or trying to connect kids with their culture and at Guardianship on this particular team the focus there was adoption. So maintaining family connections was not a priority. They didn’t want it because they were adopting kids out so they shouldn’t have any connections. They are getting ready for adoption. So it totally went against everything I believe in and I am not against adoptions but about the family connections and the cultural pieces.... I was also seeing that family had not been fully explored before they were going to adoption. I had family members calling me in my role saying that they were never [contacted]....They wanted us to explore the family pieces and get a cultural plan in place so that they could adopt these kids out. So it was just to do that required piece of the work to say you checked that box off and away you go.

So I would get frustrated and I thought “I am not making a difference here at all. I am just getting more frustrated and I feel like I am going to quit...”

My belief was, “okay, so we are removing kids. We are always returning.” Well that wasn’t the belief that I had to deal with my team leader. She believed, “no, if we are removing kids we have tried everything possible and now we are at the end when we are removing” and I am like “no. no, no, no, we’re returning and how could you possible say that?... So I was challenging that. I said “okay, just let me do my work with my families and at the end of the day if I do everything and it doesn’t work out then at least I have tried everything. So my team leader was like “go for it. Do what you need to do,” and supported me on everything that I did.

After spending nearly three years employed by the Ministry another participant shares her observations regarding the recruitment project and MCFD support for Aboriginal social workers.

She also suggests some strategies she believes could help improve this initiative:

Well I know in the Ministry they need to support their Aboriginal social workers more. There are only a handful of them...They [recruitment project leads] didn't follow up I am just being honest, after the program was done it was done. There was no follow up. There were three cohorts. We were the first one and there was no follow through before that, "so how are you doing?" or even bring the group together to say "hey!" They (the region) won an award apparently, well, we had no idea. It was like, honestly, we were the token Indians and it was unfortunate but that is how I felt.

During our certification we had lots of support from UNBC staffing and stuff that people were designated to help us with. I definitely felt supported that way but I wouldn't say that we had MCFD (support) per se...After we did the education piece which was about five months it was done...So we were basically put in these offices and then done with.

Another participant who started her employment through the recruitment project

describes her experience:

There were nine of us....that was 2007, the first year of the program....the hype was so much change and it was exactly what I wanted to see, listening and paneling with those two women, I was like "yes, if they work for the Ministry I want to be a part of this because I want to be that part of significant change." So that is how I got brought into the Ministry. We had to do a five month course which usually would take a full year to do and we had to do it in five months plus work full time and manage our families and get decent grades and get delegated and be accepted into the Ministry by our peers.

The management piece didn't align with the frontline piece. So the management had this great dream of change and it really sounded positive but that didn't trickle down to the frontline. So frontline workers, auxiliary workers who were in line to get full time positions didn't get them, we got the positions. So that created some animosity. We were questioned if we even had our degrees, if we were even competent to do this job. We were not welcome at all. It was quite evident from the workers because there was such hype around that the media said that we were highly skilled, highly trained workers who were going to change the system. So that kind of created, again, this—between us and them and the current workers who were working their butts off were basically getting treated—well "you're not doing your job so we are going to bring in these Aboriginal women and they are going to do better because they are better" so it created a real sense of unbalance.

It seems to be how management goes, they need to kind of remove themselves from you so there is not this perceived favouritism. Although they [project co-leads] were our contact we still had to go through our team leader at the time, our team leader advocated for us but at the same time, in the beginning stages, we didn't want to cause any more issues. We wanted to feel like we belonged so we voiced our concerns and we didn't

move forward on. We needed to fit in—we didn't want to draw more attention to ourselves.

This participant then went on to describe the role of the project co-leads and the team meetings:

They [project co-leads] in our meetings they were well aware and it went up higher. The response I think at first was meeting with us and having lunches and having some debriefing sessions for us to try and manage our way through because none of us were willing to give up (but)... the strategies other than going for lunches with them, there wasn't much.

I know they had weekly team leader meetings. I know they talked about us. I know that it wasn't positive stuff. Our specific team leader advocated for us the best that she could but there were several others, other team leaders that weren't supportive.

My team....within the first three months that we were there we lost...four of our senior workers left all at once. So then our senior worker was someone with only a year experience and she was an auxiliary worker who was upset that we had gotten the position before her. So voicing our concerns to her didn't really help the matter and then our team shifted and the dynamics shifted and our team leader had to leave for various reasons... she was the only team leader that I know of that gets it....So it was sink or swim. Here is your certificate. Our original team leader had the confidence in us that she knew that we could do the work whereas subsequent ones didn't have that confidence and still don't have that confidence.

A non-Aboriginal manager in the region where the recruitment project ran felt that there were benefits from the increase in numbers of Aboriginal staff but also identified some challenges in the process and in retaining employees. She acknowledged the improvement in moving away from the formal Ministry interview panelling process and engaging recruits in a conversation around their interest in working with the Ministry. She thinks that the process should have involved more frank discussion about the challenges that Aboriginal people face in the Ministry. In retrospect the participant manager says that there were a number of things that may have been done differently with the Aboriginal Employee Recruitment Project. She refers to the possibility that Aboriginal staff were not well enough prepared to address issues in the professional role in advance of their placements with Ministry teams:

We had some hiccups with it where really I think we almost persuaded people to come into the program who had a lot of misgivings and then ended up not doing very well at all and we had some things happen with staff where they have really started reliving their

own childhood trauma...because of the work and not doing well and then not managing it very well with their behaviour....and that has been a challenge.... what we saw is that some folks that came on were just so uncomfortable and were going to struggle. We didn't have a mechanism in place to allow those people to bow out gracefully. It then started to feel punitive because there were performance issues started right away, just misunderstandings about, you know, expectations we had....And the co-lead might say, "Well no, really you guys were way too rigid." We didn't have a good problem solving mechanism in place. It became kind of adversarial where I felt like the project co-leads were trying to protect these staff and that the community services managers were just trying to off them, you know? For lack of a better word. And they were trying to protect them and say, "You need to be more understanding. You need to be more..."...we were saying, "Look, we are not being mean to these people in any way shape or form but they are just in the wrong place. This is not the time to try and persuade them to stay. We need to find a way for them to exit and do it with dignity and with respect," right?

Unfortunately it became with some folks I know they ended up feeling very disrespected and it was a very negative experience for them because we were being...we had to...we got forced to really start using a disciplinary pathway because that was the only thing that was, you know, we were saying, "Well now you have to use a disciplinary pathway with this. They are not performing; they are not performing, right?" And it was very uncomfortable I know for I know the manager he felt very uncomfortable and he felt that it wasn't right but at the same time he felt frustrated with our process because he had identified very quickly, "hey, let's get this lady out of here. She is just not going to cut it. It is not going to work. Let's do something else very quickly," and then everyone else said, "no, no." He felt that internally he got kind of labelled as, "oh, you are not cooperating. You are not supportive." He was trying to be...he just said, "Look, let's not make this painful. It's going to become painful," and it did.

She believes that the screening process was inadequate to prepare the recruits for the realities of working in the Ministry and "sold" the process a bit too much and acknowledges the tension between the professional role and the applicant's identity, which sometimes included past direct experience of child welfare systems, became an issue:

....really not saying, you know, it's a fine line to walk with somebody to say, "You have your own experiences with the child welfare system, now how is that going to feel for you?" And even some of our employees had their own experiences as parents with their own children because they were more mature, they had had their own journey. They had come to a different place; they did social work where they had been at one point, a receiver of services from the MCFD as a parent of children in care, their own children being investigated or being investigated by us for child protection concerns.

So it was a funny dynamic for some of the people that came into the program where they a) had been children in care themselves or had their own experience with children with our system and had had their own experience as parents with the system and then making the choice to take social work and then apply for this opportunity to work in the system.

We didn't really think through enough with them I think how it might end up making them react and be. It was painful for some people, it was.

She acknowledges that better preparation of staff at the worksites by managers would probably have been helpful:

So we didn't prepare—so we didn't spend enough time in terms of the impact on the people we were hiring and we didn't spend enough time preparing the team and I think, you know, and I am sure if the project co-lead was here she would probably say “I gave you a lots of time and I was counting on you, the CSMs to do that ground work with the leaders and to do that stage setting because that is who needed to do it.” And I would say that in some areas the CSMs did better jobs than others, right, of trying to set that stage based on even their biases I guess.

This manager felt that the recruitment project was a very valuable project that could be improved upon and strengthened through the learning that she and other managers in the region gained through the five years that it ran. Unfortunately no evaluation or summary of the project was completed prior to or after the termination of the project.

Other Cultural Practice Programming

Participants also describe their experiences of other MCFD Aboriginal practice programs.

A focus group participant comments on a lack of support for Aboriginal programs:

When a program is started that has what I would say an Aboriginal flair, I do not see management supporting it enough to really get out of it what it needs. Roots, they throw some money at it but they don't support it totally.

Referring to the Roots program in her region, Manager #2 describes how changes were made to its delivery after she and a colleague had developed and built it up:

So it was taken away and put into another stream of the region. That program at the time, my colleague and I, we were leading the province in getting these done and we were teaching the rest of the regions how to move forward in the process and within two years after that the region had not been able to sustain the process ...we came to absolutely having no work done in that area.

Also referring to the Roots program, and an annual festival the region put on, this reconnection worker reflects on the investment of time put in by herself and other staff, and questions whether the Ministry values projects that focus on Aboriginal children and families:

We put on a Roots Festival every year, and you will not believe how many hours goes into doing stuff for the Roots Festival that they may give them one or two days off for. Those on the committee and the other people that volunteer their time get nothing. So, is it valued? I don't know. Are the projects that are truly focusing on Aboriginal children valued? It seems like the more kids you have in care and the more court you do, the more points you get to keep the caseloads down, but it takes way more work to do safety plans and have nobody in court and keeping those kids in the home or connected to their communities.

I don't think any programs that are really truly supportive of Aboriginal—that they truly take seriously. They don't fund enough. They don't put enough effort in. We say we need cultural planning, but they won't assign anybody to help with cultural plans. They have Roots workers so overworked, trying to do everything for everybody.

A guardianship worker, also reflects that time put into planning cultural events is often not counted as work time.

The Roots celebration, so it's an event where we get the kids together and have a mini pow wow kind of thing, a showcase of different nations and cultural activities. I do it mostly on my own time.

Provincial Employee #2 refers to decreasing support for the Roots program:

Unfortunately [the Roots program] it's shrinking. I think due to the change within Ministry over the past two years....There's been a reduction in some of our experienced workers that have been doing it for over four years. It's a tremendous loss. I think there were concerns around the funding. The majority of our Roots practitioners are contracted through MCFD as well....To my understanding I think there is still a lot of support for Roots and Roots-like practice. I don't think the program in itself will entirely fade, but I think some of our objectives as a program will have to shift.

There's a perception that their Roots practitioner will take on much of the cultural planning for a child and will take on the obligations of ensuring that that child is having visits to family or to home as well, whereas those are roles within the CFCSA that social workers are obligated to take on as well. So it's more of the concern of ok we can't do all of this.

Child Protection Worker #2 reflects on her time as a Roots worker where the program was being used to satisfy the requirement for a cultural plan of care for Aboriginal children that were being adopted by non-Aboriginal caregivers:

Then a Roots position came up with the Ministry, a Roots practitioner and I thought "Oh my gosh! I am going to work with CCOs that have been in care for a long time and I am going to work on getting family connections and cultural connections. Beautiful. That is what I want to do." So I took the position with the Roots program with the Guardianship

team. I went there after and let's just say it was short lived because the Roots practitioner was not being utilized the way it was meant to be....

Resource Worker #1 talks about the barriers to recruiting Aboriginal caregivers:

That has been on my to do list but it seems like there are road blocks every time that I would want to focus on recruiting First Nations care givers. I guess in regards to—I mean we need approval for everything and then we have to go through the mediation team to get something printed in the paper and then working with Family Services with their Resource Worker, so we are supposed to work together to recruit foster parents but it just seems like that hasn't been going anywhere. I don't know—yeah. So this is a new position for me and I am not too sure how to go about recruiting foster parents, First Nations foster parents.

In regard to the CFCSA Section 8 kith and kin agreements (this part of the legislation allows for children to avoid being placed in care if there is a relative or close community member who can provide care for the child) this participant says:

If there is a criminal record you've got to go through a team leader and community service manager. I mean you have to go through all of this red tape in order to get them opened, even if it is just something small on the criminal record check that you can go and mitigate but still you have to go through all of these different layers of hierarchy to get the family approved and opened.

Mental Health Support Worker #1 refers to a lack of support for cultural work and approaches from non-Aboriginal clinicians on the Aboriginal child and youth mental health team she works on:

I found a huge contradiction between how you do psychological work from the clinicians on our team and how you do cultural work and somehow they can't mix together and somehow it always seemed the psychological work outweighed the cultural work. It wasn't on an even playing ground by any means. It was some kind of add-on to support these Aboriginal kids. It was never seen as a priority.

You know, for two years I was running a girl's group out at _____ and that was really good. I was starting to make a lot of connections with the kids but some stuff about the girl's group wasn't working because I was out there on my own, and to run a functional group I would have actually needed the support of two or three of my team mates. But we're so strapped that there was just no possibility that was going to happen.

Mental Health Support Worker #3 reflects on not being able to implement planned cultural programming in her team because of uncertainty about whether cultural competence existed in the Ministry to be able to maintain and utilize the resources in a respectful way.

In the beginning, the vision of our team was that we would have an Elders committee that helped us with things like this and there was apparently money in the beginning to do that but it was never organized and that is because myself and the other Indigenous staff were expected to be the ones that organized it and we didn't trust our team yet because it was all fresh and new so how can we go out there and pitch to our First Nations Elders, "oh come and be a part of this," if we don't even know whether they are going to be valued in that system?

This participant also says initial capacity building in the community, where she and other support workers were able to engage the community around its needs, could not in the end be delivered, because the dominant Ministry model of mental health practice seemed to take over after that first year.

I couldn't run any serious group activities or anything like that because there would need to be myself and another clinician and there just was not support on my team.

Aboriginal Employee Support Network (AESN)

In 2009 one of the regions initiated an in-person information-sharing and communication network meeting four times a year for Aboriginal employees in the region to gain support, mentorship and share unique learning and experiences. Participants of this network group agreed to take part in a focus group for the purpose of the study. They describe the benefits and support they gain from participating in the AESM:

Just feeling like you are on the same page. You are not having to educate or to send something or explain something. You can just be yourself and just sort of know—you have a common experience and that is really hard to—that has been really hard to find and maintain. (focus group participant)

Aboriginal people need their support group that got started because there are other issues. Because not only do we often seemingly battle the concepts of philosophy, the institutionalization, the colonization, but we are also battling sometimes being shunned by our own communities for working for what is perceived the institution. When foster care is also perceived as another institutional goal such as residential school, then when you're working within it, it's a struggle. I can say I've struggled, and I know my mom's experience in residential schools, and there are times when I go through something and it triggers all these memories and stuff that has occurred. So, it's not about them not having it. It's about honouring and respecting what we have. (focus group participant)

I think it's helpful internally for the individuals. I notice a lot of them feel supported within the group so they can go to (someone) and ask for some support and it's usually presented to them. Also their colleagues are supporting each other. Just another connection with people. I'm glad there is something there that people can come to and get support, and for me, I like going to that. (focus group participant)

You know, it just blows my mind. I love my job and I love working but what I don't love is hearing the struggles of my other team...I am glad we have this group because it is [a place where people understand]... (focus group participant)

I don't think they listen to us. I think because they allowed us to make recommendations as an Aboriginal Support Group [AESN] we are getting it, but I don't think they take us seriously...because it was identified that we were losing too many Aboriginal people or whatever the reason it got started, it started as emotional support, but it also started to start educating. It's taken a while just that we feel comfortable and safe enough to start speaking out about what we hear. Like, this isn't right. This shouldn't happen, and there is an educational component, and we have written proposals, and we have said this is what we'd like to see done. (focus group participant)

We need permission, even to go to the employee network [AESN] meeting. Well, wait a minute. For some offices, we just tell them, "oh, the meeting's this day," and "yep, okay, no problem." Unless there's a crisis where one time there was a whole bunch of people who had been out sick, and I said, "No, I volunteer to stay behind." So I think it's the little things that count for me. (focus group participant)

What's going on because some of our people aren't even allowed to come to these meetings, which [a regional executive] had said, "no, this is mandatory they can go" but they're not getting travel time...Like this was made to support us...to make sure that we have a place that we can talk about our work together because we do experience a difference than a non-Aboriginal social worker. Okay. What can we do as a group to make this not so bad for them? And so we've got a team leader now that's Aboriginal. One of the plans that she was saying was I can bring this up to the team leader level. (focus group participant)

Aboriginal employees need the support. I truly believe that they also need a support group for the people that work within the Aboriginal stream. For all employees because you deal with abuse, oppression and violence on a non-Aboriginal person on the team too.....somehow because we're trying to do things differently, some people perceive us as not doing our job good enough. We get a lot of flack. We get more run down. (focus group participant)

Reacting to a comment made the morning of the meeting by a non-Aboriginal colleague that it is unfair that Aboriginal staff get their own meeting, this participant says:

Both times our meetings have been in that office, that's the same comment that has been made because they see us as threats. For some reason we're threatening....That's how I feel....it's like, "Why do you look at me so differently? Why am I just so different? Why are you threatened by our presence? We can only help enhance you." Like, you know,

we're not saying we want to take over but maybe they're worried about their jobs. I don't know but there's no reason that they should be acting like that.

Aboriginal staff attending the meeting were also asked by the office manager at the

location to smudge outside the building:

But some of us want to smudge and we are to be respectful of the traditions. We are here because we are bringing back the traditions... (focus group participant)

So like suppressed little Indians, we all had to go outside the door, go around the corner, not in front of the building but be on the side, and then do our smudge. We have a sacred ceremony and we're not allowed to do it because someone said, "Oh, we don't like smoke." Well, I feel angry and think, "Then get off our team." (focus group participant)

Other participants in the interviews, from other regions, talked about either previous

experiences with an Aboriginal employee support network or about the concept generally:

...so having that group was amazing and the Ministry actually supported it and would give us snacks and pay for a room or give us a room or whatever. That was really good and I can't remember why...they didn't want us to have that group for some reason, I remember, so we stopped meeting. So that happened for about a year...So I think we used to meet on a monthly basis for about a year. So that was really great to have that—your peers, all Aboriginal to talk about their experience of working at the Ministry, being Aboriginal. (Provincial Employee #1)

I think support needs to look like it's not just a pat on the back. Support needs to look like actual stuff is being done, so if there was a support group that was started up for MCFD employees and they were given permission...that those concerns of the Aboriginal employees would be brought forward and actually implemented. Because right now it feels like a lot of talk so until Aboriginal employees feel like they actually have a say in what's going on, and you can see some direct implementation, I don't think you are going to get that level of support you are looking for. It may seem menial at times, like maybe its coffee, or whatever it is, but that legwork has to start and be small and incremental before I think anyone is going to feel supported. But talking about how Aboriginal people are feeling within the Ministry would be a really good place to start... (Mental Health Support Worker #1)

Summary

Aboriginal Service Improvement Strategies in the Ministry are characterized by a number of initiatives that were implemented in the years prior to the interviews in 2010. Aboriginal participants referred to these as either supportive or unsupportive of their role in improving

Aboriginal services in the Ministry. One ambitious, large scale initiative, disentanglement of services to Aboriginal communities, occurred as a result of the growth of delegated Aboriginal agencies and in anticipation of the Aboriginal regional authorities. Many participants spoke of the recent failed attempt (when legislation failed to move forward in 2008) to implement Aboriginal regional authorities following the Tsawwassen Accord in 2002.

The focus within the Ministry at the time the interviews took place was to support First Nations communities to develop self-determining models of children's services based on their own inherent jurisdiction (known as the Nation to Nation contracts). While many participants are supportive of the devolution of services there is concern that ongoing failed initiatives in this regard should not impact the responsibility of MCFD service teams to provide effective services in the interim. Other concerns raised include whether the current Nation to Nation approach is realistic, whether adequate resources are being provided to support transferred services, and whether the current and ongoing under-resourcing of services for Aboriginal people in MCFD is due to anticipation of the eventual transfer of these services to Aboriginal communities.

Another consequence of the anticipation of devolution of services from MCFD to Aboriginal agencies or the regional authorities is that existing Ministry staff were reassigned, sometimes reluctantly to Aboriginal teams. There also appeared to be verbal, outward support by executive management in one region but little concrete support. Meanwhile, manager colleagues fought to protect their own resources (meant to be transferred to under-resourced Aboriginal teams). Participants in one region described having more success with disentanglement because there was development of a specialized regional Aboriginal management and practice stream. Unfortunately, by the time of these interviews, participants reported that the region had

restructured and the Aboriginal specialized management structure had been dismantled. The Aboriginal teams were retained but did not necessarily have leadership support.

The move to disentangle children's services was interpreted by staff to serve different purposes but what it did was create specialized teams of social workers providing child welfare services. In 2007 following the Ministry Aboriginal Children and Youth Mental Health (ACYMH) plan a number of dedicated Aboriginal teams were also established across the regions. Several participants that commented on this approach to dedicated services favoured the idea of integrated service delivery but did not think it was possible citing low Aboriginal cultural competence and support in the Ministry. Recruiting appropriate Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal professionals for dedicated teams serving Aboriginal communities is viewed potentially as a better approach.

The *Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff* is a document that manager participants were more likely to be aware of. Managers were positive about the intent of the framework feeling that it provides more validity to the Aboriginal agenda in the Ministry. The few frontline staff aware of the framework are suspect of actual implementation through sustained Ministry support. Frontline participants seemed to be more aware of the Child and Family Support, Assessment, Planning and Practice Framework (CAPP), a relationship-based approach to responding to client basic needs through continuity of service provider. Many think it may be compatible with an Aboriginal practice approach.

Participants in the north region were more likely aware of reconciliation processes that had been occurring through the Touchstones of Hope project that was implemented there. Several participants were suspect of the sincerity of their non-Aboriginal colleagues when

engaging in reconciliation events. However, some participants felt that the approach has potential for shifting mainstream values and attitudes in the Ministry.

A targeted recruitment approach was another unique initiative in a region where it was utilized to recruit more Aboriginal child protection workers. A manager who was involved in the project observes that some new recruits experienced difficult and sometimes discriminatory treatment at the frontline. A learning that emerged from this was that more preparation was required for the worksite, including increased consideration of the environment where recruits were being placed in.

Several participants in the study were recruited through this project. They describe the recruitment approach as appealing to their desire to see Aboriginal services change. However, they describe experiencing discrimination and resentment because of pervasive negative attitudes about Aboriginal people and the perception that these recruits were receiving preferential treatment.

Lack of support for programs that support Aboriginal practice is noted by several participants. The Roots program (which links children in care to their families and communities) in particular was mentioned by participants as initially being strongly promoted but then disappointedly deconstructed by MCFD. Participants observations of decreased support for Aboriginal approaches to practice coincide with the recent implementation of the two highly conceptual initiatives described in the *Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff* and *CAPP*.

Chapter 10. Case Studies: Effective and Ineffective Worksites

Resulting from descriptions of Aboriginal participants in the study four specific MCFD locations emerged as significant locations worthy of further analysis and comparison. They are divided significantly as two being described by study participants as very effective and two being described as highly ineffective worksites for providing appropriate support for Aboriginal employees and effective Aboriginal services. These four worksites are evaluated and described from participant narratives, analysis of team leader interviews, and from census and Ministry data.

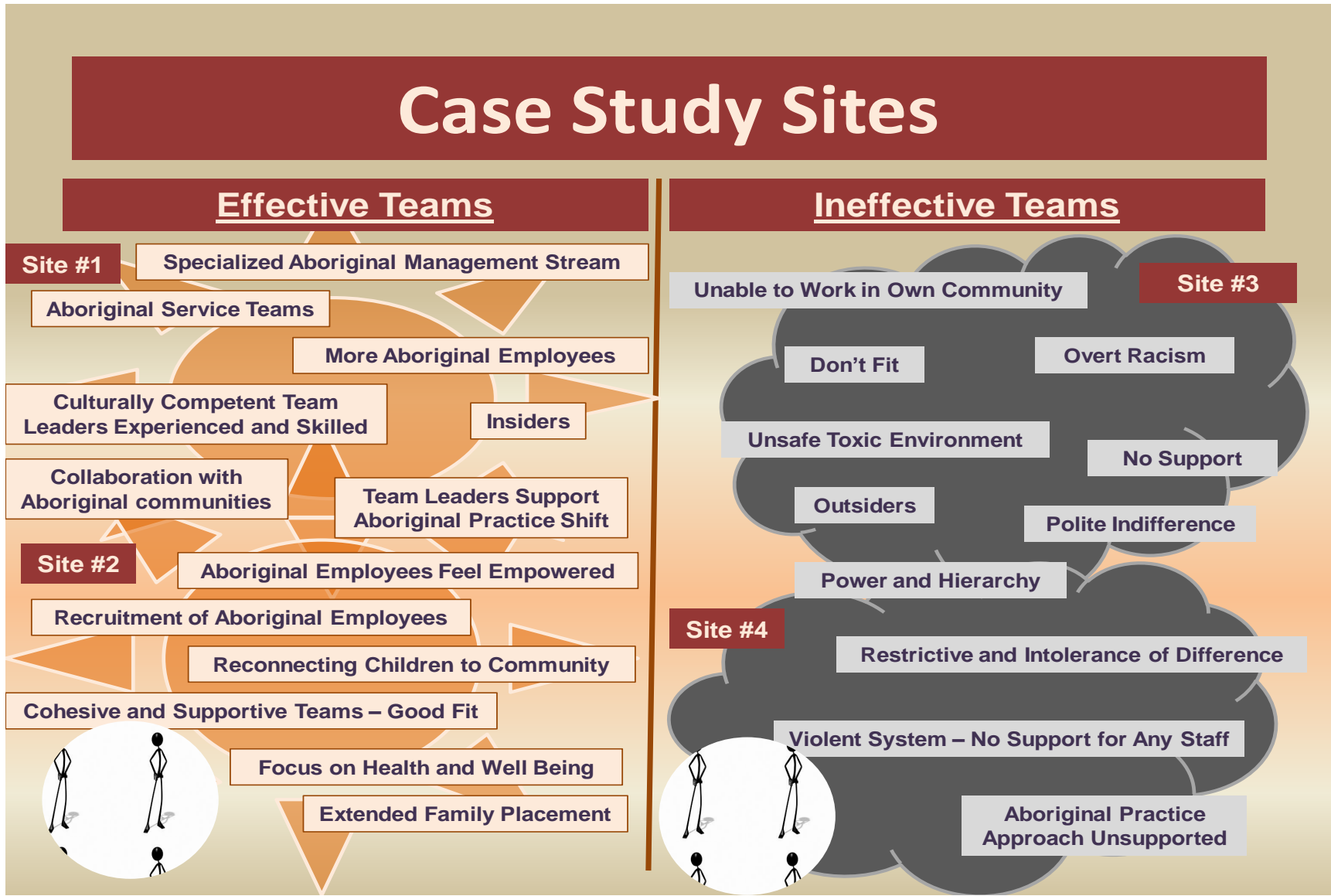
The two effective worksites are characterized by higher numbers of Aboriginal employees; high satisfaction of Aboriginal participants; active recruitment of Aboriginal staff; team leader and colleague support for Aboriginal staff, community collaboration and practice approaches that focus on avoiding child removal by keeping children connected to their communities; highly cohesive and supportive teams; and focus on health and well-being. Team leaders of these effective teams are characterized by their ability to build strong relationships and trust with Aboriginal staff, service recipients and communities; they have many years experience as both frontline workers and team leaders working in Aboriginal communities; they are committed to ongoing development of cultural competence and community learning; and actively identify that they are attempting to engage in a practice shift. Both were involved (at least initially) with a specialized Aboriginal management and practice stream of support in their region which enabled them to access resources to build their teams and create physical spaces that are more appropriate and comfortable for Aboriginal people. Both of these team leaders identify that outcomes for both teams have been fewer removal of children from their families

and communities and increased connection to community for Aboriginal children that are in care of the Ministry.

The two ineffective worksites are described by participants as highly restrictive and intolerant worksites. One worksite would not allow an Aboriginal participant to work within her own community (citing a conflict of interest for working with anyone in the community known to the staff person). Another worksite provided so little support to the Aboriginal participant that she found it extremely difficult to work in her community. The worksites are further characterized as repressive environments dominated by an ethos of power and hierarchy; low team leader and colleague support; polite indifference; as unsafe and toxic; and lacking support for all workers and relationship-based practice approaches. The participants in these worksites describe themselves clearly as Ministry and community outsiders. All participants had either left or discussed feeling the need to leave the Ministry as a result of the restrictive nature of the worksites on their practice approach and their personal well-being.

Analysis of the effective and ineffective worksites provides a comparison of the two environments and as a result very valuable information about what some of the critical elements to supporting Aboriginal employees and practice in the Ministry are. Perhaps one of the most critical findings is the significant influence and role that team leaders can play in creating supportive environments for Aboriginal employees and effective Aboriginal practice. Another critical finding is that dedicated Aboriginal management structures can also be a key mechanism to ensure resource, policy and other organizational support are formalized and available to create and sustain effective Aboriginal service teams. The visual map in Figure 10.1 provides an overview of the various themes found in participant descriptions of the two effective and two ineffective worksites.

Figure 10.1 Case study site themes.



Work site locations are not identified for purposes of confidentiality. Team leaders who describe unique organizational settings and the context of effective worksites were interviewed and their descriptions of the worksites are included. However, team leaders from identified ineffective worksites were not approached to avoid identification of Aboriginal participants. The reader will find longer detailed descriptions by participants included in this section due to the contextualized nature of the situations described. The four sites are presented and examined below. The first two sites (#1 and #2) are described as the highly effective worksites and the last two (#3 and #4) are the ineffective worksites.

Effective Worksite #1

Site #1 is an Aboriginal-specific worksite composed of one team that delivers integrated child welfare services (child protection, family support, guardianship, resources) to Aboriginal children, youth, and families in a small city with a census population of approximately 43,000 people, of whom approximately 1,800 self-report as being of Aboriginal ancestry (Statistics Canada, 2006). Although Statistics Canada updated the census in 2011, the last year that the Aboriginal Population Profile was included was 2006. This worksite also provides services to several nearby First Nations communities with a combined population of just over 2,000 people (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013).

Of the ten staff on this team, four workers and one administrative staff member are Aboriginal. The team leader and four remaining staff are non-Aboriginal. I was provided with a tour of the office by several participants who work there. The office immediately appears warm and welcoming and there is an impressive, large and beautifully rendered painted mural completed by children by from the local Friendship Centre. Administrative staff are not separated from the waiting room by Plexiglas commonly found in MCFD children services

offices. There is on the adjacent wall a plaque presented to the team by the local First Nations community honouring them for their successful work with children and families from their community. The office atmosphere is friendly and inviting, with a meeting room and kitchen area used for meetings with families. Staff indicate every effort is made to ensure that Aboriginal children and families they serve feel welcome.

Aboriginal participants.

An Aboriginal manager and two participants who work directly in this worksite commented on the support and effectiveness of the team in working with Aboriginal people and communities.

Team supports Aboriginal staff and practice approach.

A participant (manager) identifies this team as particularly successful with supporting Aboriginal staff and Aboriginal practice approaches:

When I look at the work that the [Site #1] Aboriginal team is doing and they appear to be practicing in a way that is acceptable to communities and I don't understand why is it doable there and it is not happening in other places? What is it? In listening to the workers from [Site #1] today describe, basically they have it, they really do and they talk about their approaches and they are very much into their motivations, their spirit, and their identity, but it is almost like somebody has to let them do the work.

A participant at the worksite does not hesitate exclaiming that despite systemic difficulties, "I love my job. I love to come here. . . . I love the work that I do. I love everybody that's on my case list and it's really about what can we do to make sure the kids are not in care."

Another participant at the site who describes being unsatisfied at other MCFD offices said:

I see white (team leader and staff at Site #1) but something just really shakes up my reality about how incredibly astute and sensitive and caring and open to hearing what the community is saying and listening and following through and putting the power in the hands of the people where it belongs while still doing a legislated and mandated role.

Another worker from this site says:

Just to add—the office that we work in, I am able to practice how I have been raised and that is phenomenal...

Yet another said Site #1 is an ideal place to practice:

So it is just really good to work in a place how I was raised and it feels like home. When you talk about Family Development Response I am thinking; we're doing that. And we don't call it that. We call it family meetings. We call it sitting around the table, being honest and open with each other and doing that. That is how all practice has to be done and I think maybe having other team leaders come to different offices and seeing and experiencing how it works...where some of these people have spoken about so positively, it is just an excellent team to learn great case practice and just not even great Aboriginal case practice, just great case practice. I just was at this meeting about how the Ministry is doing with Strong, Safe and Supported and the Aboriginal pillar. A bunch of people from [the First Nations community served by Site #1] stood up and said "well we've been doing that here in [Site #1]" and she points her finger at [the team leader]. That is a validation..... So that is what I have to say, is that that question made me think of how the community totally validated the work that was being done with the [Site #1] Aboriginal services team.....just to reinforce that if there are solutions you will see the solutions by the tangible results. Don't look at validation from within the Ministry, look at it from coming at you from outside of the Ministry.

Team actively recruits Aboriginal staff.

A Site #1 First Nations child protection worker recalls that when she was first hired by the Ministry she was going to be placed in another community because there was a job opening. She recalls how the Site #1 team leader advocated until he made sure that she joined the team so she could become involved and work in her own community as she had hoped.

Team avoids bringing children into care.

A participant talks about the team's commitment to avoid child removal however possible, describing an approach to ensuring that children, even if they come into care under a voluntary care agreement, are in the care of relatives:

So we had to remove the children but we didn't take them—we removed them but they went to community members that night. So, we went and saw the family and we said..."we need to come up with a better plan. So here are your options; we can either go to court.....or we can look at a voluntary care agreement where you guys remain the guardians, we will look at family to take care of the children until you guys can get your shit together." So rather than having to put them in care—I mean they are still going to be caregivers but these ones were Aboriginal and these were their family. So yeah I had to

go make sure those kids were safe and take them out of their parents care, but we put them with community members.

She describes how, when the Aboriginal team formed in 2006, there were already a number of children under continuing care that the team became responsible for, but that most of their focus now is on keeping children out of care: “I’ve inherited CCOs (permanent wards), so they were already in care before I came along. But most of my families are family service files where really we try to do everything possible we can to put supports in place so that none of these kids come into our care.”

This participant describes the team process (from screening to investigation) before determining the child protection response:

It’s the way it should be...We do the intake only on reserve and asses it. But we get everybody together. The first thing we do is phone the band social worker. “This is what we heard is going on, what can you tell us about it? We need to meet with you.” So before anything gets done, we get a big meeting with everybody around the table. We make sure the kids are safe, so “can grandma take them for right now?” or “what can we do to make sure these kids...?” So that’s what we do for our investigations. We go and make sure we have a big family meeting before we do anything with these kids.

Community collaboration through strong team leadership.

When asked how they are able to work in such a collaborative way with the community, this participant says:

First of all we have a supportive team leader to take a risk...he’s willing to do that, and he’s leading the boat...we do not need to take children into care. He supported us where other team leaders aren’t prepared. They say “oh, that’s too much of a risk,” but they don’t have the knowledge and history of residential school and the impact of colonization, what removing a child does to a community and what it does to that child.

All efforts are made by the team to utilize available First Nations and Aboriginal resources and options.

We’ve got more options. When you are working with a band, you get the band’s social workers. You’ve got what the band can offer? A lot of the times we’ll let the band... take the lead on this. We’ve got contracts with the Friendship Centre, so we try to keep the resources as Aboriginal as possible. Like wherever we can find an Aboriginal concept or

Aboriginal resource, that's where we focus our energies on rather than mainstream because if you haven't lived in both worlds, you have no idea

Team dynamics.

The same participant describes team dynamics, cohesion, and support:

It's an open, honest relationship in here. This is a really safe environment. Sure we can get on each other's nerves . . . but every staff meeting we go around in a circle. Even our staff meeting is held in a holistic manner. My mom, who is the Elder attached to this team, she gave us a bundle so that we could go around the table...so this is how we start our staff meeting: we all stand, we hold hands and somebody says a prayer...to the Creator . . . or to God or to whoever you believe in. So we go around the table and we hold hands and we pray and give thanks and this to help us for the day and the meeting. Then we go around and do a personal check-in with each and every one of us. That's how we start our meeting and then we go into business. Sometimes we have a beef and this is the place that you should bring it up, like this is where you should feel comfortable. Sometimes I have a beef with my boss and I'm able to express myself to him without worrying about any kind of repercussions.

She provides an example of when she felt comfortable to confront her team leader in a meeting:

Actually a couple of weeks ago he was in a pissy mood and his attitude was really pissy and we were all kind of looking at each other going "what the hell's going on?" I just said "You know what I think? You're being pissy and this is really bothering me...We hash it out right there and then he says, "Okay, well this is what's going on for me, this is why maybe I'm projecting this" and after that he had a whole different kind of manner.

She also talks about her comfort with discussing cases and making a case for a particular approach or decision:

We can agree to disagree, but at least I've had my say. Like when [the team leader] will say "okay prove it to me or tell me why." He might say no but come back to me "if you've got an argument for this I'll listen to it" So that's what we're really fortunate with this team is he doesn't just set his mind on "I said no, that's enough" because that's not the Aboriginal way. The Aboriginal way is to talk out until we come to some sort of agreement or something. So all of us feel that with our team leader.....generally this team is very cohesive. We get along great, we work in sync with each other, I am personal friends with two people outside of the office. Like we're really tight as a team and a work team, but two people in this office I cherish and we do things outside of work as well. I've never really had that before, besides being in my own community....

She talks about how her team leader's approach to Aboriginal practice and supporting the team fits for her and within her cultural value system:

He's been working for 30 years with Aboriginal people in different kinds of offices. He's worked in delegated offices, he's worked all over the place and he really understands and he's gone to sundances, he's done. . . . You know, really trying to understand what's going on, so for the most part yeah, my values and how I believe in what my people do is honoured here in this office. It's honoured, like they really respect my culture, they respect my people and my people respect them. Like this is an office that can go our reserve, go to functions...of course there's the few clients that they know they're in shit with us so then tend to not want to talk to us or whatever. But we're getting more calls on our reserve about child protection concerns than ever before and that's because they're feeling safe that we're not going to rush out and remove the kids. Before they would be afraid that a worker would come and just take the children.

Aboriginal employee support network.

Site #1 sends four Aboriginal staff to the Aboriginal support network every three months, regardless of the pressure that it places on the other staff. Staff members are also supported to include time spent in the community as part of their work day.

Yes, like I said we're fortunate here. We get thrown out the door and say, "Now, how many of you are going? Get out of here. We can manage the office."...I had two of my families there (Métis community event and)...was able to eat dinner with one of my CICs...and visit with them and then another one of my CICs that are being adopted and saw them and then them seeing you just as a person not just a social worker interacting with them and, you know, how important is that?

Focus on health and well-being.

The same participant also talks about being supported to engage in self-care:

So that's what's keeping me here is because I'm keeping [care of] myself—and if I'm not, these guys are going to kick my ass and say, "You know what? You're not doing okay." and trust me, they do. That's the kind of team that we have, when somebody's not okay, we should feel safe enough to say "What's going on? You're not at your best."

Aboriginal team transforms practice.

The reputation of the team prior to becoming an Aboriginal team in 2006 is something that this participant remembers as a community member:

Yeah I inherited CCOs and I heard from other Aboriginal clients that were freaked out and they were like "wow you're a different kind of social worker. The one that I worked with she'd been afraid to be honest" and that's not okay. Our client should feel safe to be honest, right? I'll always say "be honest to me. Were you drinking? If you lie to me this makes it worse for you." "Yeah I was drinking, this is what I did" "Okay great now we

can go from there. Now I don't have to do a hair sample, now I don't have to be intrusive on you." What can we do to support that?

Perception of team leader's support in Ministry.

When asked if she thinks her team leader is supported to lead the team the way she describes within the organization, this participant says, "Sometimes, but a lot of times he has to fight for everything that we get. Everything good that we do - he has to fight for it." She considers the possibility that the team may begin to be viewed positively, given the Aboriginal conceptual framework and CAPP: "Maybe it might start to be, because we're looking at this transformation, this let's roll into CAPP, which we're doing. We're doing CAPP already."

Another participant from this site says:

It can be done and it just renewed my faith that this Ministry can do that but I will tell you I see, I see my team leader just being pushed up against the corner, continuously being shoved into a corner and beaten and battered and bruised to stand his ground and accomplish these things and it just makes me sick that it has to come at such a high cost. What is going to happen when he retires? Who is going to step up then? Who is going to be able to fight that bureaucratic monster that keeps pushing? He has been around for so long he pushes back. He knows the lingo and how to do it and not become corrupted.
(focus group participant)

Effective Worksite #2

Site #2 is an Aboriginal-specific worksite composed of one team, with a single team leader, that delivers integrated child welfare services (child protection, family support, guardianship, resources) to Aboriginal children, youth, and families in a small city of about 55,000 people, of whom approximately 3,300 self-report as being of Aboriginal ancestry (Statistics Canada, 2006). This worksite also provides services to a nearby First Nations community with a population of just over 1,900 people (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013).

A tour of the office was also provided by a participant and his team leader. The office also appears warm and welcoming and again, there is no Plexiglas security features that

characterize many MCFD child welfare offices. The team leader says she was able to address workplace safety issues and standards without having a restrictive barrier. Local First Nations and Métis artifacts are beautifully displayed throughout the office. The front waiting room has a child-sized teepee and many First Nations books and toys are available. A very large kitchen and family meeting room area are used for honouring ceremonies and for meals the office has with children, youth, families, and community they serve. Having these larger spaces means social workers have smaller offices and, in some cases, shared offices—a sacrifice all were willing to make to provide a comfortable place for Aboriginal people they serve. The team leader reports that of the 13 staff in the office, three are of Aboriginal descent.

Aboriginal participants.

Two Aboriginal participants in the study worked in this worksite and commented on the support and culturally competent approach of the team.

Team supports Aboriginal staff and practice approach.

Two participants from this office indicated very high satisfaction with both the team and team leader; they say that as Aboriginal people they do not feel compromised to work in this setting. One participant from this office says that how the team functions is “quite a bit different and there’s a lot of learning that’s going on.”

He credits a team of mostly non-Aboriginal people who have the experience and perspective necessary to do the work well.

I think the majority of the workers here, they’re not Aboriginal—but a lot of them “get it”—we use that term. They understand enough about the First Nations people, Indigenous people that they can work with the community in a respectful manner in the job. There’s still some that are kind of not quite sure, but they tread cautiously around cultural, so they are sensitive, but it’s noticeably that way. And a lot of them have lots of experience, so they come from a world of knowledge around the system, so as far as investigations, child protection, child services, they’re right on top of the service they are familiar with.

In terms of being able to practice in a way that is congruent for him, this participant says:

I'm not that radical of a worker. I would consider myself and my approach a little different to what is out there—more relationship building, more community connection, that kind of thing. I like to be connected to the people in the community, so the [urban Aboriginal Agency] I've built a big connection there—working with bands.....A big part of social work is to go to the community gatherings, that is what I've found. That's my understanding.....and this office in particular is very keen on making those connections. I'm very pleased with working here and the approach that the team leader has.

Community collaboration through strong team leadership.

This participant credits much of the approach of the team to the non-Aboriginal team leader:

She “gets it” big time. I think that she's more or less adopted into the community. She has a world of experience as well working up north in amongst the communities there. Yes, and she's very flexible about what is considered work and if there are some hours that I spend doing the work in the community, she says, “Oh yeah, make those your flex hours or something.” So those kinds of things are perks I guess.

He focuses on the strength in the practice, with co-located contracted Aboriginal program workers on the team, and the need for more focus on strengthening families in other part of the Ministry.

The decisions we make, they are very strong decisions around family and they impact people, but there is much more that needs to be done in other places that have yet to “get it.”

Reconnecting children to community.

The participant spoke about the importance of having the specific focus (especially in his position as guardianship worker) for reconnecting children to their families and communities and being supported to do so on his team:

Reunification kinds of meetings. It might look perfectly okay, everything is all set up here, they are succeeding in school, they have a good foster home, but it's just being connected in some way, because they do tend to grow into adults and they can make their decisions then.

He says that he and his team work toward being acknowledged by the community for being helpful, successful and contributing to the health and well-being of the children and families they serve.

Just being more visible in the community. I would like the whole team of our office to go to the reservation and be honoured with a gathering—like the Elders and the community members presenting us with a meal and saying, “We’re really impressed with the work you’ve done with our children.” That would be the best thing that could happen.

Effective worksites #1 & #2 team leaders.

The leaders of the two effective teams were interviewed to gain understanding of their approaches and those of the team, in terms of supporting Aboriginal practice.

Building relationships and trust with Aboriginal staff.

Both team leader participants agree that the Ministry needs to develop better supports for Aboriginal employees that reflect the challenging nature of their work while acknowledging the considerable value they bring to the Ministry. This is particularly relevant given the troubled historical relationship between children services and Aboriginal communities. They also speak of how they approach building relationship and trust with their Aboriginal employees.

The Ministry needs to find a way to support Aboriginal people to be able to work within the Ministry because they are such an asset to the Ministry and to the families and communities that we serve. There is just an ability to relate right away when you are serving Aboriginal communities when you are Aboriginal yourself. It is not to say that non-Aboriginals can’t do it but there is a lot of time and energy that is invested in building relationship and trust. It proceeds a lot quicker when you are of Aboriginal descent.

Yeah, and I think it’s a lack of understanding by the organization and as you gain a further understanding the Aboriginal colleagues that you are working with, as you demonstrate that you have begun to understand some of their experiences and what they have gone through you can help support them in a better fashion. If you don’t, like you know, years ago people probably didn’t understand about colonization. They didn’t understand about the connection to the land. They didn’t understand about the effects of residential school and stuff and to a certain degree I think there is a greater awareness but there still needs to be a further understanding of that. I am hoping that some Aboriginal people do feel a bit more supported because we do have a greater understanding, but I

don't know. I mean I think this office is kind of unique too. I mean from what I hear from my Aboriginal team members, it is not at all like here. (Site #1 Team Leader)

The Site #2 team leader says there are engrained, exploitive approaches in the Ministry for working with Aboriginal employees and community partners. Her ongoing attempt to gain clarity and seek awareness allows her to acknowledge her own mistakes:

Motherhood statements, trotting [Aboriginal employees] out for the show or bring the Elder in for the show and then after it is over complain bitterly about how much time the Elder took, or why do they always have to pray, or "Good God, can you get them off stage?" Well, how much do you have to pay that woman to come and open the meeting with a prayer/welcome? Why do we have to say something about the Nation? Can't we just get, you know, this Elder...can't we just get them to do them all everywhere we go? We work well with them...or... There are just so many different ways that it is offensive. And, I am sure that I do the same crap at times because I make mistakes on a daily basis. That is the one thing I hope that I role model back to my staff—I know I am going to screw up over and over and sometimes I am not going to have a clue where I have screwed up and how I have offended somebody. But, it is going to be clear that I have offended. So I hope that I always recognize when/where I have offended, and make an apology and ask forgiveness and assistance in teaching me what next time I shouldn't be doing or should be doing in a different way.

It is okay. We are human. We are going to screw up. It is not from an intension to cause harm. There is always an intention to work in a good way but sometimes I just don't know what I don't know and staff are in the same position. Staff that have had even less experience working in the community, it's harder for them. So there is fear and there needs to be a lot of patience and acceptance and openness so that they can admit what they don't know and be willing to learn and take the next step.

Team leader experience.

Both team leaders have worked extensively for many years with a number of First Nations communities and are committed to building their capacity as non-Aboriginal people for Aboriginal practice approaches.

Site #1 team leader spoke about his career working in First Nations and Aboriginal communities, beginning as a residential youth care worker almost 30 years ago:

My previous experiences have really assisted me in being able to be who I am right now and I have had many, many teachers over the years that have assisted me in my growth and development to become the leader that I am presently. So I will start right from the beginning.

That [working as a residential youth care worker] was my first real exposure to the Aboriginal community, and I just embraced it. I just really loved being involved with the community and being involved with people. . . . I played hockey with them. I was the only non-Aboriginal that played hockey and just went to all kinds of different events and ceremonies and was welcomed by the community. I used to go and get day-old bread from the grocery store and pastries and stuff and just distribute it because there was lots of poverty on this reserve and there were lots of alcohol issues and stuff like that. We had quite a few kids from the community in the receiving home and just embraced the parents. We invited them up as long as they were sober or whatever and we opened our home to the community and people really appreciated it. So I learned a lot from that experience and I gained the trust of that particular community as well as my wife and stuff and we really loved it.

He then started working as a Ministry social worker in a northern location:

Because of my prior experience with the Aboriginal community, they decided to have me work with [a number of different First Nations communities, one which] was a pretty remote community five hours away from town. . . . I always seem to end up working in Aboriginal communities and I gained lots of experience.

He worked in other locations around the province for a number of years, always with

First Nations or Aboriginal communities, and also for a period of time with a delegated

Aboriginal agency.

I worked at a delegated agency for a couple of years on a secondment . . . and again invaluable experience learning from Elders, learning from the staff there and then sharing my knowledge and the information as to my work within the Aboriginal community and stuff like that, just you know, picking asparagus or picking pine mushrooms, again participating in various events and stuff within the community. Wonderful experience and great learning opportunity. And when I came back from there the Ministry was once again reorganizing and they were in the midst of developing the Aboriginal team so they immediately wanted me to form the Aboriginal team here.

Site #2 team leader also worked for many years in northern and remote First Nations communities prior to leading the Site #2 Aboriginal team.

I was very fortunate that I started my career in [an isolated northern First Nations community] as an itinerant worker. The colleagues that were hired at the same time within the delegated agency as family support workers, they all went to MCFD core training with me. And so when I would return back after each of the training sessions, my colleagues were family support workers at [the agency] and I loved the community. I didn't think I would when I first arrived but the community was so fabulous and it was about a 50/50 split in culture and population, non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal and it just felt great to work there. I loved it. I had a fabulous team and then when I moved back home here where I am from, (and that is the only reason I left the north). When I returned

it seemed to me that the Aboriginal community here was almost invisible and I felt like I was completely removed from the work I had been doing with Aboriginal people. For the next eight, nine years that I was in [this community] . . . and when this opportunity came up I, like I said, begged, “Could I please be the one that gets to start that team, at least on a temporary basis until the other person that is supposed to be assigned comes back, please?” So they let me and I was thrilled.

Building trust with the local community.

Both team leaders stress the critical importance of building relationship and trust with First Nations and Aboriginal communities through openness to participating and learning about their unique culture, acknowledging the diversity and uniqueness of each community, and working in a collaborative and integrated manner. Site #1 Team Leader says that he has utilized a culturally directed, strength-based approach for many years,

again, working very closely with the Aboriginal community, trying to work in a way that was kind of, I think, ahead of the times, working from a strength-based approach, working with the Aboriginal community instead of telling them what they needed to do and stuff. Again, a number of Elders and people that we are engaged with, as I began to develop their trust, of course I became closer to the communities and going to funerals, building relationships, going to various community events, participating in ceremonies, like I would be invited to sweats or a pipe ceremony or a Sun Dance ceremony or whatever. I was able to experience lots of different ceremonies and stuff like that. So all of that built my credibility up within the Aboriginal community and also recognizing that the Aboriginal community is very diverse and just because you worked over there doesn't mean that you know how to work over here. What I did learn is that it is important to learn about the community that you are serving, learn what their traditions, what their culture is, what their experience, what their history is and try to be a listener to learn as much as you can and then work with community in trying to serve the families and children that you are engaged with.

Formation of Aboriginal teams / Ministry practice shift.

Both team leaders were involved in the development of new Aboriginal teams in their sites at approximately the same time, around 2003, as the Ministry began to disentangle human and contracted resources for Aboriginal services in anticipation of the formation of regional Aboriginal authorities. Both team leaders saw this reorganization as an opportunity to create teams focused on a values-based approach to Aboriginal practice. Site #1 Team Leader remembers that there was also a shift in Ministry practice at about the same time:

We went from the _____ era [former provincial director] where he kind of stated that no child in BC will die and that we operated under the risk assessment model and it wasn't really strength based and it wasn't really driven in that direction. It was based more on a deficit model and more in my mind of covering your ass and I have always operated on, you know, for us to be successful in communities we have to find family strengths and we have to help engage the families and the communities to make the changes that are needed, that they feel that they need to make also recognizing that there are some situations where absolutely protection is required and we do have to be more intrusive. I think the direction that the Ministry is now moving is less intrusive and does look at strengths and stuff like that. I think that would be a rub with Aboriginal employees because they do look at strengths. They look at challenges but they also look at strengths. I have always practiced that way even during the risk assessment model, although it was largely based on deficits or challenges that people were facing, I encouraged my team or my team members to look, okay, what strengths are here? How can we build on those strengths and how can we mitigate the challenges or risks through those strengths?

Site #2 Team Leader notes:

Aboriginal authorities were going to take over all of the Aboriginal work that we had and there was this great plan that we were going to divide off all of the family files that looked like they were Aboriginal, keep them separate and either hold them on a separate caseload or team or just keep them separately so that when the authority took over in a year they would get these files. Well that didn't happen and our network decided that probably wasn't the best way to go. It made better sense not just to hold those people with those files in a pattern until something happened but to actually create a team around them.

Building an Aboriginal team.

The specific approach to building their teams and descriptions of how they support them are provided by the two team leaders. The steps they describe are disentangling the human resources for the teams, including Aboriginal community members in recruitment processes, and co-locating staff from Ministry and Aboriginal agency to provide service. These steps are described below.

Disentangling the human resources for the teams.

The decision-making process for redeploying staff for the Site #1 team has occurred on two occasions. The team leader says he feels it was thoughtful when the team was initially

coming together, but that a recent reorganization and reassignment of resources occurred in an “arbitrary” manner. He remains uncertain about how equitable the outcome has been.

Well, from there we came up with the team and there was quite a negotiation between myself and the colleagues in the [region], okay, how many people does it take to operate this service because in effect we were taking away work from the non-Aboriginal teams. So how many people does it take to do the work that we were engaged with? Well we went through some kind of formula at the time, socioeconomic . . . you know, travel was considered because we cover a larger area and stuff and just based on numbers we kind of determined. . . . I didn't determine it. Management determined what an average caseload looks like.

Initially when the team was set up we didn't do investigations . . . but very quickly the reserve community came to us and said, “We want you and your team to do investigations on reserve,” and I indicated to them, “Look you know, I would really like to do that. I need to approach my team because we are not staffed for it.” So I went to my team and said, “Look, we need to do this because the community is asking us to do it. Let me keep track of the number of investigations that we do, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah” and then I will make an argument in a year's time that we should get the required FTE to be able to do the job. So I did all of that and went to management and they said, “Sorry, we can't give you a position.” I said, “Well that's okay. We are not going to do investigations anymore. We aren't staffed for it. We aren't going to do it anymore.” Well that went over like a lead balloon. They weren't very happy with me. . . . They found a way to come up with a non-funded FTE which is a position that was granted that could be added to my team to do this work but it was non-funded. At the time that wasn't a huge issue because there wasn't a lot of accountability around our spending. I since lost that position because of the climate that we are in right now.

But I feel that over the years we have had higher caseloads than everybody else but they weren't unmanageable from my perspective. So it is all relative. But with the latest reorg that has occurred within the area and that part of my reason for leaving is that I felt that it was completely arbitrary. It wasn't really based on any kind of facts. So they looked at like how many CICs would make a caseload, how many family services would make a caseload, how many investigations would be allocated to an FTE to do in a year's period, that kind of stuff. So when the team was formed, I didn't feel it was arbitrary. I feel that it was arbitrary the last time that it was done.

We lost a position. I still think we are the busiest team. The position that we lost was the unfunded position and in these times of fiscal restraint anybody, everybody lost positions that were unfunded. I still think that if they did an examination of the workload, because I have done it, we would have more team members. But our caseloads aren't yet at the point where they are unmanageable. What it does mean is that we won't be able to do the same kind of work that we were able to do in the past in terms of . . . like it is critical in my mind. You have to build relationship and maintain relationship in the community. It is all about relationship, it is all about trust and we just won't be able to do the same kinds of things that we have done in the past with less people here. It just makes sense and our caseload numbers are increased because we have less bodies to do the work.

The Site #2 Team Leader agrees that what was initially a more equitable distribution of caseload for the Aboriginal teams is now changing and caseloads are increasing which in turn creates an adverse effect on capacity to do the work:

But when work load increases staff feel that they start falling back in those areas first and it is unfortunate because it takes away our visibility in the community and that is what creates our relationship. And then it starts coming back to—the community is very quick to pick up on that and read into their own understanding of why that is happening and usually it leads into a bad place. It is never looked at as being about workload or time; it is looked at as maybe this is racism now.

Including Aboriginal community members in recruitment process.

Both team leaders conducted interviews with potential workers for their teams by including Aboriginal community members in the process. They selected individuals they believed would provide effective Aboriginal practice. Site #1 Team Leader says:

So I shared with the people [regional management] that wanted to build this team the way the team needed to be built was it had to have, people had to have a heart for serving the Aboriginal community and the Aboriginal community should be involved in the selection of whoever was on my team....when we had the panel process there was members from the Aboriginal community involved in the panel process....I have learned over the years that the best way to do things, which makes sense, is engage the community that you are serving so that they have an appreciation and an understanding of what you have done and where you have come from.

The people that came to the team were interviewed as to some understanding of residential school, colonization, that kind of thing, why they wanted to work with the Aboriginal community and stuff. Then we would have a discussion to see who we thought would be successful....and as it turned out the way that the questions were as such that if you didn't understand about some of the things that were important to the Aboriginal community you wouldn't pass the panel.

He says he thinks this was critical to the success of the team:

So that was a little bit different in some of the other Aboriginal teams that formed throughout the province because those teams people, some of them were just kind of put there or some of them went there and the Aboriginal community probably wasn't real pleased that they were there and didn't have a say in the process...people ended up—they were resentful. They didn't really want to be there.... If you have people that don't really want to be there, you face real challenges and your clients and your families and your communities aren't going to get the service because people really don't want to be there.... and plus it just, it spoke volumes to the relationship that was built within the community at the formation of people being on the team.

Site #2 Team Leader was also able to introduce a process that involved the Aboriginal community in the selection of workers for the team.

Well, we had a unique way we also started the team. Everybody that came to it came by choice. Nobody was ever assigned there and to get to our team you had to go through a panel process. I was the only Ministry person on the panel. There was the executive director of the [urban Aboriginal agency], the band manager at the time from the [local First Nations community]. Then from the [Métis agency], their ED as well, and so we were the panel, only one Ministry person out of four. So the panel was very different than the typical Ministry panel. So it just changed the whole flavour.

The panel questions are very different from the standard Ministry ones. They talk a lot about attitude and skills and knowledge in a variety of areas—culturally and cultural competence that we wouldn't normally cover in regular Ministry interviews for a child protection team. It talks about, you know what, there are going to be a lot of activities outside of your regular standard office hours. There is a lot of work that is different. How do you feel about that sort of thing? What do you know about the history? I think anybody coming through the panel to start with has this feeling that this is not quite Kansas anymore. . . . The majority of people came because they truly had a passion or commitment around Aboriginal services and wanted to work there. That is certainly why I am the team leader. I begged for the opportunity to start the team. Originally that wasn't an option for me.

Co-locating staff from Ministry and Aboriginal agency to provide service.

Site #2 Team Leader introduced a different model for the team by combining Ministry and Aboriginal agency staff and co-locating them in a new office space purpose-built for the Aboriginal team.

Staff combined for one team . . . into Ministry space and the very name, we don't call ourselves MCFD; we say [Site #2] first and MCFD in the back of that. So I think that is probably still unique within the Ministry. We have grown from—I think we moved over there to that building (five years ago almost now) with four social workers, a Roots worker that was with the agency, myself as team leader and then two admin staff—to now we have 17 people there. So we had this big space and lots of empty offices and now we have every space crammed full and four offices are shared including mine.

So now there are four agency staff. I forget now because they are one team and it took a long time to get there for the first several years, I would almost say it was Ministry “snobbery” at that point. Ministry staff considered themselves the team and then the contractors were these other people. It has taken a long time, over the years, to know we are a team and our team includes staff from both Ministry and agency. There are still some people sometimes that get to that point where, “Yeah, but they are not really . . . are they really allowed to be here?” From the start it was, “Well can they be in our file room?”

Can they look at our files?” “They,” “Us,” “Them”—that happened a lot. I don’t hear that very much anymore at all. I can’t remember the last time that I heard that.

I guess I would probably say that it was a lot my own vision. I didn’t . . . I am kind of bad about not really seeking direction. It was never my goal to make anybody look bad but I get really pig headed about things and think I have got a certain plan—the way I wanted to see things happen and the way things were happening for Aboriginal services. It just didn’t feel right and the way it felt in [the previous community she worked at in the north] although there were lots of problems there too, the community, it just felt different and I thought it could feel different here too.

I can’t tell you how many times I went. . . . I would stand at the door at the end of the day, it might be seven, eight, nine o’clock, whatever ridiculous time I was out of there or the weekend and just stand at the door and look back and be smiling because I couldn’t believe that this. . . . I got to work here! This actually exists now and I just felt so much better at work. . . . I felt almost like quitting the job just before that happened. Again because I just felt disengaged about work and there.

Physical appearance and environment of office.

Site #2 Team Leader talks about the purpose built office space for the team:

The physical structure of the office was very much a planned difference from normal Ministry offices. The opportunity came just at the right time when we had to move out of the building that we were in and we were able to move into our own space and do some planned work to make it fit for us.

One of the very first things that was key for me in doing this was that we eliminated those physical barriers at the front end of the office. When people came through our door it didn’t look like they were being ushered into a prison waiting room of some sort or something slightly better than that. So we took away the high counters. There is no Plexiglas, there are no locking doors. There actually is no barrier whatsoever separating anybody walking in the front door from the rest of the office. We didn’t know how that was going to go in terms of the Ministry itself and occupational health and safety (OHS) concerns and all those pieces. So we had a door created, a little half swinging door that would lock if we absolutely had to put it up. It exists somewhere. I don’t know where it is now. It was built and never put on and we didn’t seek permission to set up this way in advance . . . or after the fact.

A lot of things that we did, have not been rule breakers by any stretch. I don’t want my managers to ever be in a bad position because of anything that I have ever done or my team has done. So it was just a matter of knowing that it didn’t break rules but it didn’t necessarily follow the way things have always been. I have found over the course of my career, but particularly in the last seven years since starting this team, that I need to get out of my own way a lot of times and forget about doing things just because that is the way we have always done them and start thinking about them—well, why not? Instead of “well, you can’t because. Well, it has to be this way.” Well, why not? Why do we have to question that all the time? Coming from that perspective has changed a whole bunch of things about how things have to be or should be and right from the basics of how

physically the office looks. So I think just starting out that way, that physical environment made a huge difference (for staff in particular)—that this isn't the same kind of Ministry. This is a different kind of place and it certainly has made a huge difference to the community. So when you have those two basic changes from the start and challenge people's perceptions, then the whole working environment and relationship changes too.

The other difference that we have—well, there are so many differences, but I am thinking the physical things that . . . just providing coffee, water, tea, drinks, snacks to people as they come through our door as if they are coming to our house rather than coming to a waiting room or an office. Being greeted, having conversation with—you don't just sit there until we get to you. That doesn't happen. Help yourself to the water cooler that is there and the cups are sitting and waiting there for you. You are offered coffee. That would be a pretty rare situation that you weren't offered something when you came in.

To do this you have to have admin staff that are okay with it. It would be very frightening for staff that have always had the standard Ministry way of doing things. To suddenly do that it would be really unfair to everybody involved to try and do that and it wouldn't work unless you had people that were prepared to try something different. I had the great fortune to hire a really open, creative office manager at that time and the new staff that were hired hadn't been with the Ministry before although they had been in government service but they were very open to it too and they set the tone of our office completely. They make it. How they greet people coming through our door. So, that makes a huge difference and then that just flows all the way back.

Shift the practice and human resource approach.

Site #1 Team Leader spoke about valuing the community through changing the Ministry approach to developing their relationship and becoming more knowledgeable about the people they are working with:

We try to make our office very friendly to the Aboriginal community by plastering it with pictures and different Aboriginal things to make it friendly to the community, to make it a warm and welcome place. We break bread with the community by having a potluck with the community where we actually provide the main course and we invite the community to do those types of things. We support Aboriginal Day. We do many things together to learn about the community. We, at times, go for a walk on the land with an Elder where they can share some of their knowledge which they wish to share with us. I would invite Elders to come into my office and they would share with me what they felt they could share with me. My team would see that, various people.

Site #2 Team Leader talks about challenging what is mostly a non-Aboriginal team to practice in a different way:

Rather than jump to that presumption we need to be questioning ourselves. What are we really doing? Is this about us being in control because we can, because we have the

power to say yes or no? Or, is it really a good plan that is in the best interest for the child and family that we are working with—even if it wasn't our plan? It's a struggle everyday because it is so easy in stressful times to just fall back to that old and safe position because you know it is going to fit standards and policy. You know technically it is the correct answer to reject this family's plan because they didn't follow all the rules and jump through the hoops we put before them. And, there is a lot more support from your non-Aboriginal services colleagues around going that direction rather than working from relationship and strength-based perspective.

It isn't about ignoring policy and standards. We still have to follow all of the same ones and we still do. It is more about slowing the process down in that, yeah, we can say that we know the right answer and this is what has to happen. But, it turns out there are lots of different ways to get to the same good results—it doesn't have to be our way. There has to be a willingness to trust that maybe the family does know what works best for them, which is hard for us Ministry people. It is all about trust and relationships, and also accepting that we are going to make some mistakes.

I mean history has shown us that we have made tons of mistakes doing it our way and it hasn't led to better outcomes for kids. So let's take some calculated risks in planning. And, we don't leave kids at risk or in danger—the risk is in doing things a little bit differently and questioning—“Why not?” We need to stop and think and ask, “But why do you have to do it this way?” Well, why not try it that way? I keep drilling down, “Well, you can't.” “Well, why can't you? What are you worried about? What is it that might not work? What is the community saying about that?”

We don't/shouldn't make a decision without the band there, without the Aboriginal agencies and the Métis staff, without the family. We have family circles to bring all of the family together to make a decision, a regular Ministry Family Group Conference, but just from a more cultural perspective. We don't think we own everything anymore.

. . . Our staff room is our kitchen, it is our community room, it is not just a staff room. No one has ever called it a staff room, it is just the kitchen. You can go there at any time and there may be . . . like Elders just drop by to have tea and visit and see what is happening. The families that are having visits they choose often to have their visits at the gathering place because they like hanging out there and they've got the kitchen and they've got TVs and couches and they can catch up with their worker at the same time. So you can go into the kitchen and find the conversation happening with an Elder, an abusive parent, some foster parents, some social workers, some kids all sitting down and having something to eat and a coffee together or whatever. That is our staff room; it isn't a typical Ministry staff room.

so why would we create policies and rules that push us in the direction of bad service delivery? That is pretty simple but it's, you know it's the simple things that often make the best sense and might be what we need to look at when we are trying to figure out how we should deliver services in this Ministry. There are lots of things that we do—like refusing to have people share your coffee room. How does that honour the people that you are working for? What does that do to enhance service? And if it doesn't do anything good then why do we keep doing it?

People will come to us before things get bad. They will share information before we get to that point. They will share information that helps make better decisions, that saves time in the end and we get to know our families so much better because if we are spending time in the community, it might look like fun from the outside (and it is fun) but at the same time the sharing of information that is happening at that time is far more than you are going to get in a formal interview setting.

I mean everything that is good for working in the Aboriginal community, it is also good for working in the Ministry and it is also good for working with non-Aboriginal families. We have families that have ended up on our team that really work, there is no Aboriginal background whatsoever, but they like the way they get service from us.

Strong relationships, trust, and accountability with community.

Site #1 and #2 Team Leaders work hard to establish and maintain relationships, trust, and accountability with the Aboriginal communities they serve. For Site #1 Team Leader, it is critical that decision making regarding both the team and the practice are shared with the community. Having established this type of relationship with the local community prior to establishing his office and staff helped him build the team and include the community; he says, “because of the relationship and trust that I built with the Aboriginal community they trusted my judgment.”

Site #2 Team Leader spoke about working with all of the new staff on her team to have a different perspective on the Aboriginal people they were serving:

It was just a clear expectation that we are going to treat people coming through our door as if they were the reason that we are here, not the other way around. They didn't exist to keep us in jobs and if they are coming through our door it meant that they needed help and we needed to deliver our help in a way that was acceptable and not demeaning and was supportive and that we heard what those families, youth and children were saying and what their communities were saying about the services that they needed, and not fall back to—”Well, the Ministry doesn't do that. We can't do that.” Or the standard answers that we often gave—”We will tell you what you need to do and you better do it or we will take further action against you.” That was pretty standard.

One of the most important activities the team initiated, which has helped to build relationship and trust with the Aboriginal community, is holding events and dinners for the community which staff and their families also attend.

The staff with children that bring their children to the events, they are just one of the other kids participating. They often are finding out that they are classmates with children

that are in care as well—so they knew each other in a different context anyway. I don't remember any events where birth families have been uncomfortable because their social worker was there. The last Christmas dinner we did...we've done Christmas dinners with the Elders' group that we work with. They are very much part of our team as well. They host a Christmas dinner every year and every year it has gotten more and more successful to the point where we are almost victims of our own success. This last dinner I think we fed 450 people. That was pretty crazy.

So yeah, those activities, it has taken that barrier down between us. We are all people and it is pretty easy to see at those times that social worker's kids have just as many challenging behaviours as families kids and foster parent's kids. So yeah, it's kind of nice that way.

The team initiated a community survey to learn about how they are serving the children, families, and community and how they may improve their approach.

That is another thing that the Ministry doesn't do is ask "well how are we doing?" of the people that we are serving. I thought it was about time that we did that. If we really say we are doing it differently, well are we or not? So we took a risk by asking for feedback from the people that get our services.

Okay, the key questions were more along the lines of how do you feel when you come to the gathering place? Do you feel respected when you come through our doors? What do you think of the way it looks here? How are you greeted? Do you feel like your issues are heard? Does somebody care about what happens with you? Do you feel your worker, like who in the office do you feel cares about you or do you feel anybody cares about you? Actually, we asked about each of the service areas that people coming through our doors would encounter, how are you actually feeling or made to feel by being involved with these services? I didn't know how it was going to go because I was hearing that things weren't good. But it actually came out quite beautifully. There was more positive than I expected, for sure, and we are due for another survey now.

Attracting and retaining Aboriginal employees.

After building their teams, both team leaders have attracted Aboriginal employees wanting to transfer from other Ministry offices to their teams:

When I first formed the team, I didn't have four people of Aboriginal descent. I fought to have (more)...plus people seemed to like working [here] so they just gravitated...They went through the process though of the Aboriginal community being involved in the selection, they ended up on the team, which was a good thing. (Site #1 Team Leader)

Yeah, I get regular applications and résumés sent to my attention that if a job comes up that they would like to be able to work there. They are interested in any position. That never happened before. (Site #2 Team Leader)

Supporting Aboriginal employees, mentoring, modelling support.

Both team leaders clarify how they support Aboriginal employees on their teams. Site #1

Team Leader says:

You need to develop a table where people can trust, where they can share whatever is going on in their mind, not that we are going to social work people or whatever like that, I have heard that expression, but again it is all about relationship. So one of the things that I tried hard to do is develop relationship with everybody on my team, no matter if they are Aboriginal or not Aboriginal. I think as a team leader that is critical. If you develop that you are going to be able to support your team members . . . where people have an ability to share what is on their caseload or what challenges they may be facing where the team keeps it within those four walls and they support each other....is what I tried to do. I think my past experience working within the Aboriginal community helped bring me some credibility with them in that I have engaged in a number of things that maybe they haven't even engaged in. . . . I have chosen to learn and be involved in that which helps them know that I have an understanding. I think it is important that I know about some ceremonies and know about some stuff and sweats and different things, recognizing the importance of relationship, of recognizing the connection to the land, recognizing an understanding of the oppressive stuff that has occurred in the past by the government and that continues to occur at times.

Being knowledgeable and going to community events and encouraging them to go to community events, encouraging them to break bread with the community, encouraging them to practice from a strength-based perspective and in a different way and modeling it. Not only encouraging them but being out there. If I go to a community function there will be people that come up and they will greet me and they will hug me or they will shake my hand or they will do whatever. Everybody in the community is watching to see who is doing that and when you have gained the trust of the community you have to have very influential people in the community that do that. Now I don't go to—it just happens but my team members also see that, they recognize that. They recognize my passion for working with the Aboriginal community and that is also supportive.

So I guess what I am trying to say is I think one way to support the Aboriginal employees is to build the relationship with them and try to understand where they are coming from, how they might practice and support that as best we can and support them engaging in the communities that we are serving. . . . It is about we and it is about serving. It is about working together and listening instead of dictating. Recognizing that we don't have all of the answers and also recognizing the importance and the strength of family and community and if you shake the tree hard enough you find some family members or community members that will assist that child or family.

You need to acknowledge that. You need to understand that the Ministry has done some very negative things to the community and acknowledge that and ask permission from the communities to say, "Well can we try to do things in a different way? And I recognize that maybe you don't trust me at this particular juncture in time but hopefully by the time we are finished the process that you will have gained an ability to trust me somewhat and

also recognizing that there are lots of strengths in the community so let's work to getting me not involved. I mean you have lots of resources here to be able to support you in your challenges. Let's work to get me out of it."

So coming from that perspective I think is really important in supporting the employees. The employees at times or my colleagues and team members may have some very challenging things that are occurring and I always place an emphasis on your family is most important, then your health and then work. They know that I come from that perspective. So if you they are facing challenges, I will do whatever I can to support them, if they allow me.

We need to have people in this organization to serve the Aboriginal families and communities and if they need extra support or different support in a different way, we should be supporting that.

Site #2 Team Leader says that changing the "atmosphere" through the physical appearance of their environment, shifting non-Aboriginal employees' practice and approach to align with a more appropriate cultural orientation, and ensuring that employees are committed to being involved in the community in a positive way supports Aboriginal employees in the work of the Ministry.

Well, there are so many cheap and immediate fixes that could happen just in the physical environments. If you are not reflected in your environment at all you don't see yourself there in any way shape or form reflected back to you then it is not your place. So if at least you can change the look of your—it might be as simple as putting up a couple of different posters or just recognition and honouring of the community in what you display in your office and in what you are allowed to display and who sets those rules. But changing the atmosphere that way.

Absolutely and that whole pan-Indianism, that this one response is going to fit for everything/everyone. Clearly it doesn't and it shouldn't and having to make use of all the resources within our community and continuing to find other options because we don't have all of the resources in our community either, to have expectations of all staff that they participate in community events, that they be visible, that they make themselves visible in the community, to recognize that if you don't and help them to understand what that actually means if you don't make an effort to do that. It is just words and no action at that stage, no matter what your intention is. To help staff, I mean these are all team leader things in doing clinical supervision—to help your staff grow so that there is an understanding and growth in skills. And then when you have that and that just enhances it for the staff who already do have it and it creates a much more supportive environment.

Insider/outsider acknowledgement.

Site #2 Team Leader also resists and challenges the situations where Aboriginal employees become tokenized:

Why should they have to constantly wear their Aboriginalness on their sleeve and be the expert on everything, that it is so unfair. . . . Aboriginal staff get used, I would say, in all sorts of inappropriate ways in terms of “they are supposed to be the expert”; “Well, we need to do a smudge. Can you do it?” “Well no, that is not my way and not my practice and I don’t know the first thing about doing it.” “But you’re Indian.” “Well, thank you for pointing that out.”

It is hard enough to work in the Ministry to start with, to care, to be the flagship for everybody and expect them to know all of these things when there is a whole range of experiences. Maybe they are not connected at all in their community and their own background themselves to be wanting to promote and being able to promote and being able to find answers for people and direct them in different ways. We have that whole range of staff and we have to be respectful of all those ranges and honour where people are at. That is hard for people that don’t understand what that experience is.

As hard as it is to work in our office I think it must be so much harder to work in an office where you know, it is not okay for overt racism in our office. It might happen occasionally but it is not okay and it will be challenged. But in other offices, no, that would be “ha, ha,” go along with the jokes. It is all good and funny right? I have heard comments from Aboriginal staff that it is, “Hey, it’s take an Indian to lunch day today.” Just such overt stuff that I think; can that really happen? Is that really...? But I guess it is. So if it that is the environment that we are working in, how hard must that be?

Site #1 Team Leader says there is little appreciation in the Ministry of the challenging experience an Aboriginal employee has coming to work for the Ministry:

I don’t know if the Ministry appreciates what is the Aboriginal person, what are they going to experience from their family and from the community for the fact that they are willing to go and work for the Ministry. Because we don’t have a great reputation for the most part with the Aboriginal community. We are trying to improve it and some of us have better relationships than others, but for an actual—for an Aboriginal employee to risk, “I am going to go and work for MCFD,” they are going to face a lot of probably people looking the other way. “Why the hell are you doing that? What are you doing going to work for them? You are going to take our kids away?” Challenges that we would not experience if we are non-Aboriginal.

Unconditional support for the Aboriginal employee support network.

Site #1 Team Leader credits an Aboriginal manager who started a group that meets on a quarterly basis for information and support.

She helped form a group of Aboriginal employees that would meet on a quarterly basis and they would talk about what it was like in the Ministry. I encouraged all my team, you know, “You should go to that. You should be going to that.” They would get to that table and they would find that other people would talk about their experiences in the office and they would not be supported to go. They would not be given government cars to go. They would not be encouraged to go. They would be told, “you’ve got too much work to do, blah, blah, blah,” where I saw it as critical. So my team of course appreciates that and they would share at the table what was occurring in this team.

Site #2 Team Leader also supports this group:

Having that community of Aboriginal employees at the Ministry that come together and get a chance to debrief and talk about what is difficult and what is going well and what could work in one area that maybe could work somewhere else and having it recognized and supported. It wasn’t huge dollars. If we didn’t have polite indifference those things would just exist on an expanding basis. It would be recognized that this is important, it needs to happen. We wouldn’t have to make a case for it.

Site #1 Team Leader spoke about resistance and objections relayed from other staff in the region that this group is being provided special privileges:

I have heard that before too, “Well they are special.”...I just say “Yeah, they are. We are fortunate to have them.” We are fortunate to have Aboriginal people that want to do this work. We are fortunate that an Aboriginal person will risk working for this Ministry because of the way that this Ministry has worked with the Aboriginal community in the past. We are very fortunate. We should honour that and we need to support it.

Current recruitment and retention issues.

Both team leaders comment on a number of issues regarding recruiting and retaining Aboriginal employees. Site #1 Team Leader spoke about difficulty opening up competitions to attract Aboriginal people:

I really feel that it is extremely challenging for people of Aboriginal descent to move up if they want to become team leaders because now team leader positions, because of the restraints that we are under...there is a job freeze (and they are only opening panel situations to (existing staff within) the service delivery area (and) I don’t think Aboriginal people feel supported, so not a lot of people are staying within the Aboriginal framework and why would they step up to become team leaders when they are not being supported at a line level? Even when you move up from a team leader, how many Aboriginal managers are there, of Aboriginal descent? I don’t think there are a lot. Why is that? There needs to be an exploration as to why. . . . And I think even getting in at a line level, it is challenging for some people and I learned this when I was working at the delegated agency and stuff, we need to find ways of selecting people and supporting them within

the job to be able to continue working in the job because many of them come from very challenging places. They have had some challenging experiences.

I was also part of helping a couple of Aboriginal people at a delegated agency move on too because they weren't ready to do the work that we do. They hadn't addressed their own issues and it was affecting their ability to do the work. It doesn't mean that at a later point in time when they have dealt with their issues that they couldn't come back and be a social worker. It wasn't me that said, "You've got to go." I just helped them come to that decision by themselves.

Site #2 Team Leader says:

My personal thoughts of the Ministry whether it is our office or the larger Ministry offices are a very difficult place for Aboriginal people to work. I think it is also a very difficult place for people that want to work with the Aboriginal community in a good way to work. I find it personally very challenging on a regular basis from the experience of overt racism that exists within the Ministry to the polite indifference that exists.

Now the polite indifference is almost harder to accept than the racism because it is what keeps the status quo going and often it is coming from those leaders that are in the position to make the change and who somehow seem to think that they are...they've got all the right words, it looks good but I don't think really there is a clear understanding of what their words really mean. It is all well and good.

Results or outcomes.

Site #1 Team Leader talks about the outcomes he witnessed from the efforts and

approach of the Aboriginal team:

Results, we remove very few children. We find ways of supporting kids within communities and families. So I mean we have the largest number of extended family program situations in the province as a team and that is a much better way to support families that are facing challenges by having those children and kids placed within, you know, either extended family members or community members....I think it is really important the work that we do with families when we build relationships, our success is that... We work hard with family to make sure that we can try to overcome the challenges. I don't...we haven't had a lot of kids go CCO because we work with community and the community knows that. They are happy that we are willing to engage with other family members to support them to be able to have the kids recognizing that the parents have some challenges.

The community knows that we do that kind of stuff and they appreciate. We build relationships and trust with the band social workers because we don't know the communities as well as they do....they have an intimate knowledge and understanding of the community. If they tell me so and so's place is safe, then it is safe. I know it is safe because they are not going to leave their kids or put their kids in a situation where it might be harmful. They don't do that.

My colleagues will say, “Well how can you trust them?” I have had that, you know, “How can you trust them?” and then there have been other communities where I have been in where the band social worker was known as a substance abuser and had tremendous issues. Well I couldn’t go to her and ask her who was safe because she had her own problems but I could find out from the community who was a person to talk to, who could get me that information....by going to different events, by being involved in dinners and stuff like that, by building relationships...people would come and talk to me or I could go and talk to them [to find out if someone is safe].

Team leader qualities and education.

Site #1 Team Leader commented on what qualities are helpful for team leaders and what type of education may be helpful to assist them to work in an Aboriginal context:

Then also I think there needs to be an education of the people that are supervising those individuals as to how they may be able to support....we should be going to all of our Aboriginal employees and asking what can this Ministry do to help support you in continuing to work within MCFD? How can we help people understand what you need? Then that should be taken to, in my opinion, taken to the supervisors of Aboriginal employees and they need to chew that through. And the supervisors need to be supported by their managers too, because I think there are some supervisors that are caught in the middle kind of thing and they don’t know how to do it but if the managers are encouraging them too....Like I was just shocked that some people weren’t able to go to these tables [Aboriginal Employee Support Network] because their supervisors weren’t supporting them or their managers weren’t supporting their supervisors to do it. When I have four people on my team, when the four of them were gone the rest of us were here left trying to do the work but nobody was resentful of that. They were supportive because they understood that is what was important to these individuals and they need to be supported because we are in very challenging jobs.

He talks about the team leader’s responsibility to help team members to understand the different approach required by working in the community:

I don’t know how many people really understand, because then again it is a lack of understanding of history, of the connection to the culture and in just the way we in the non-Aboriginal world may operate as opposed to the way that people operate in the Aboriginal world and you only gain that through building relationship through trust, through participating, through listening and learning and I think a large part of it is listening to what the Elders have to say and we are not quick to listen. We are quick to speak.

The many teachings and being able to pick up on some of the subtleties only comes with time and experience. We are all very busy and I don’t know if managers, they used to have like two weeks of cultural awareness that you used to go down. It was pretty good training actually. They went through a number of exercises but how much do we have now? I don’t think we have hardly anything. Now they are talking about rolling out

packages and stuff again but I will believe it when I see it, especially when we are under this fiscal restraint stuff. That is just the tip of the iceberg, too.

I often share when I go to various team leader meetings or stuff or things like that, I am just at the tip of the iceberg of understanding and they say, “Well what do you mean? You have been working with the Aboriginal community for 25 years,” Yeah, that’s right but every time or every opportunity I get a chance to go to some sort of workshop or something on residential school I will go because I will learn something new every time I go or I will have some of my learning confirmed by the stories that are shared at that workshop. I think sometimes people become, and at a management level I have seen this happen. They think they know it all because they have been to a couple of workshops or they have been to a couple of functions and they are very knowledgeable. Well they are not. I mean I am not knowledgeable. I am learning every day and I understand that. I will never be at a place where I know it all.

Team leader experiences of support from management/executive leadership.

The two team leaders talk about organizational support for their approaches. Site #1

Team Leader frames it as being left alone to do the work:

Okay, I think over the years I have developed a reputation of being very focused on supporting and working with the Aboriginal community and have been respected in my work in that there is not a lot of issues that arise in my area that reach a higher management level because of the way that we practice. I don’t know if I—I think that there has been an acceptance and an understanding of the work that we do as a team that it doesn’t really become an issue for management.

I don’t know if I have really been supported. I guess I have been supported in the fact that the kind of let me do my own thing but that is not really support. I did have a manager who I felt was a very good mentor and I learned lots from. . . . He was one that he did not have a real good understanding but he had a heart and a willingness to learn and the Aboriginal community respected that. When there was a dinner he would be the first one up to the table rather than waiting for the Elders to get their food and then go up later, but he learned that and he had a willingness to learn.

I don’t think, I mean when I look over the years lately my work because I always had a pretty good understanding of child protection and the way I practice from a strength-based kind of approach, I was just respected for the work I did. I don’t think I got a lot of support; it is just that the work got done; it got done in a good way. My team members were happy and the community was happy. The kids and families that we were serving were happy so there wasn’t, you know...

He speaks of the challenge he has trying to utilize extended family placements:

Now we don’t get a lot of recognition for that. In fact, I heard through the grapevine that management at a higher level was unhappy with the fact that we had so many extended family programs and we don’t have a lot. I mean I think we have about 12, and it was a strain on the budget and I just got livid when I heard that because these kids, if they

weren't where they were would be in care and some of these kids have extremely challenging behaviours and would be in level type two or level type three homes.

Site #2 Team Leader talks about "flying under the radar" to avoid the repercussions of what may happen if someone within Ministry management decides to focus on her team:

I always try to fly under the radar and so I have kind of kept my team there in lots of ways too because I would always have this negative view point that if there is too much of a spotlight or focus on you than your errors are going to show up and your flaws and then those will be what is focused on because the Ministry really likes to do that. So although we are really nice and I am very proud of it that [her team/office] is being talked about provincially even, it is also a really hard thing for me to deal with because I am waiting for the, "oh, so that is where you are screwing up," or "Well yes, sure you can do it that way because you are not following the rules," or there is going to be something that...

She also says that recent rising caseloads are making it difficult for her team to practice in an Aboriginal-appropriate way:

We were, as a team, falling back to that presumption in lots of different places. Work load pressures other stressors and things, you fall back to what you know, right? And that is not a good position to fall back to, but we were. It is much easier within the Ministry to just think we know best and demand that everyone else get in line with our plans. Thinking inside the box, and not being creative is rewarded and it is almost a punishment to work differently because it takes more time and energy to be creative and collaborative.

It was a lot easier when our case loads were lower for sure....they feel like they are too pushed and they don't have that time to really meet their families, to participate in community events and to be visible the way that they have been in the past. And they're feeling that they...I mean if something has to come off the table, it is going to be; do you attend Aboriginal Day? Do you help set up? Do you attend events in the community? Or, do you do your paperwork? Paperwork is going to win in most cases but we also have done this practice differently long enough to recognize that although those things, the nice things that people outside of our team go, "oh, it must be nice. Wow, it must be nice to play all day." They think that that is what we are doing by being out in the community—just playing around. But, really we are saving ourselves a lot of time down the road because we've got relationships which give us better information.

Her approach to bringing issues to management, and potentially solving them in a way that works for her team, involves a lot of preparation and follow-through:

I think anytime that I want to have a problem addressed I have to have a really good argument for it and understand the problem before I will take it forward anywhere else. So that is a matter of finding out with the team, what is really going on for you? What is that really about? Because it is not always what presents that actually is the underlying

problem. One example, smudging in the office for a ceremonial activity came up as an issue. It has come up in lots of other Ministry offices. Smudging just doesn't happen, it is not allowed in other offices and people don't question that because they think it is a WCB standard—you can't do it. But that is not true.

We can smudge in Ministry offices, there just has to be proper ventilation and proper set up of systems. We could have just gone with; oh you can't do it anymore and that is the way it is. We could just tell the people that wanted to, and the community that wanted to do it that it is no longer permitted and we would just say WCB requires it—like other offices did. That would be the easy way out. Well, except that is not true. So, it is a matter of going through and figuring out; well what do we have to do to comply?

And how do we have to educate our staff because this became a divided staff issue. Some of the strongest Aboriginal staff that have been there since the start of the team, this crushed them. It finally was their breaking point in some way and it really pitted some non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal staff against each other. It was kind of ugly for a bit. There was a lot of, you know, information, inflammatory stuff, going back and forth about why this was or wasn't a race thing or it is a race thing. It was not very pleasant. But getting the actual factual information about it (smudging and the WCB rules) and then getting the resources, arguing that case in point. We needed to have proper Hepa filters purchased. We needed the money to be able to do that. It was an OHS concern if we didn't do it. So there were challenges to make it happen. So it has not been an issue since but we had to develop policy around that and just address the issue from a nonjudgmental, factual kind of place. But it went ugly first before we were able to get there and it filtered out to the community too right?

I don't know if we are really doing things that differently or not but when you go back to what you were originally—where you started—it really is uncomfortable and awkward sometimes. And, I realized that wow, this really doesn't fit anymore for us. We don't work like this anymore. But it doesn't mean...like we are still working for the same employer. We are still working under the same rules, the same budget structure and everything else but we do our job a lot differently. Some days are rather ethically and morally challenging with really good people. I mean these are wonderful people. They are my colleagues and sometimes we don't know what we do to each other without any intention to hurt or undercut each other's work. I know I am guilty of the same stuff because my understanding is different.

The fact that the director of Aboriginal service change position went unfilled in the region for over a year is a point of contention for both team leaders:

Well, that is another example of the polite indifference that happens. Numerous résumés came in, applications from all over the community, and it has been months now. So, what is the message that is going out? Just talking with our director of practice, “Well what is happening with that?” “Oh, well everybody is so busy.” Well, all are excuses for why things don't happen, legitimately and otherwise, absolutely fine but my question was: what have we done as a ministry to communicate back to the community and the applicants that we value their efforts to join us and we want them to join us? (Site #2 Team Leader)

Site #1 Team Leader also comments on this and is concerned (he was interviewed in January 2013) that the Aboriginal agenda has lost its impetus.

I mean when [the former deputy minister circa 2010 when the study began] was here she did have a strong emphasis on serving the Aboriginal community. Hopefully one of her objectives was to help return the responsibility to Aboriginal communities but it kind of fell by the way side and it has lost impetus. I think that the new deputy minister has been brought here to clean house in some respects, particularly around the financial aspects of bringing this ministry to be more accountable. And there used to be the pillar, the Aboriginal service delivery was a pillar, but I don't see that it still is. We went without a deputy of Aboriginal service change for 15 months. Well [the former DASC] wasn't supported, didn't feel supported.

So, you know, I think people want to support—I mean, I hope that people want to support Aboriginal people in serving and working in the Ministry, but I really think there does need to be more exploration and further education to how to help support those people. I would be more than willing to share my experiences and knowledge over the years to make that happen because we still have over 50% of the kids in care of Aboriginal decent.

There is, from what I understand . . . going to be an emphasis on trying to educate everybody to work with the Aboriginal community which I think is good but I think there is an absolute different way and I really feel the Ministry is moving in a more same like fashion to serve all people and there isn't a particular emphasis placed on serving the Aboriginal community or recognizing that we need to serve the Aboriginal community in a different way, recognizing that we need to support our Aboriginal employees in a different way. I don't think the Ministry is moving in that direction at all. That is part of the reason why I am getting out. I mean, it is not the only reason but it is part of the reason.

Specialized Aboriginal stream.

This reference to needing a specialized Aboriginal stream is one that both team leaders support. In terms of the potential for Ministry employees to work effectively with Aboriginal people, Site #1 Team Leader says:

I think there are some people that do, then I think there are probably a lot more that don't because I think if you are working with the Aboriginal community, and I said this before, you are learning every day and your learning never stops and that is something that an Elder taught me one time, the day that you think you know it all is the day that you are in trouble. I talked to a medicine person and he is being mentored by another medicine person and he is telling me, like he has been mentored for the last six years and he says, "My mentor has so, so, so much more knowledge than I do and I am just scratching the surface." And I said, "Wow! Six years you have been taught by this individual, when to pick medicine and what works where and all this kind of stuff," and he says, "Yes." He

said “Also that that person will not share with me until they feel that they are comfortable in sharing it.” So there is kind of...now, that is not going to happen in our organization but I think, you know, there is room for growth and understanding and I believe that we have to practice in a different way. I really feel that the practice is shifting more like we are going to treat everybody the same. I think that is wrong.

Like now there is no longer, as far as I know, Aboriginal CSMs and I think the Aboriginal CSMs, when they had Aboriginal teams and they were engaged, because one thing I have learned from the Aboriginal community is they don't want to deal with 17 different people on 17 service delivery areas. They want one person they can go to or they want one person they can trust or build a relationship with that they can talk to. I think—I really believe that working with the Aboriginal community is different and unique and the non-Aboriginal service managers, they have all kinds of other challenges that they need to address and then when you add on—again, do you have people that are wanting, that their hearts are to serve the Aboriginal community or is it just another add-on team and another function that they have to perform and do they have the ability to build relationship and trust? No way. They are too busy doing other things.

Community service managers are way too overburdened anyways with all the program areas and you just add the Aboriginal service to them, it is just one more burden, one more area that they are not really going to have the time or the energy to be able to work effectively. That is my opinion.

Site #2 Team Leader believes the region's previous attempt to create an Aboriginal practice stream was the correct direction but that it was never properly resourced:

The Ministry is very challenging that way and for our staff, especially for Aboriginal staff, that lip service that is not backed up by actual action is really difficult sometimes I think. It is hard. It is really hard. I will talk about [the DASC position] that position in particular because she was truly a leader. Our Ministry had goals in having her there in that position and people all said nice fluffy things about how wonderful she was and how great it was to have her on the team but they were all just words ... without giving her staff, without giving her a budget, without making her work load reasonable.....it was ludicrous and insulting in the way that we actually treated her as a Ministry.

They said all the most wonderful things in the world and carried on...there were a number of meetings that she never got invited to that were integral to Aboriginal practice. She never knew about them. Management structure meetings, I would know about them and she wouldn't know about them. Plus she had an entire region and there was one of her and she had one consultant and she is so generous and kind. . . . You know, she left. She had many other priorities and returned to her community to work and what an opportunity it was for her and wanted to bring some balance to her life . . . so the story was that she left for personal reasons.

She was in the best position to actually make a difference within our Ministry if she had just been given some of the resources to do it.

Ineffective Worksite #3

Site #3 is composed of several multiservice teams—two of which are Aboriginal-specific teams (child protection and child and youth mental health)—that deliver integrated services (child protection, family support, guardianship, resources, mental health, and youth justice services) to Aboriginal children, youth, and families in a small town with a census population of approximately 3,800 people, of whom approximately 500 self-report as being of Aboriginal descent (Statistics Canada, 2006). This worksite also provides services to a number of First Nations communities with a combined population of approximately 6,000 people (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013).

Aboriginal participants.

Two Aboriginal employees from this worksite participated in the study; both describe it as a very uncomfortable and unsupportive environment to work in.

Unable to work in own community.

One participant, who works in her own community, provided a written response to the interview. She describes her experience in this work setting as difficult, given her association in her community, because colleagues, including her team leader, believe she has a conflict of interest working with community members who are known to her. A very broad definition in this MCFD office of her kinship associations means that she is often restricted by other workers from information she says she needs to do her job.

However, because I am from the [local] reserve and know that most of our clients are from the reserve, I have run into some problems. I have constantly had to prove myself to new workers and argue with others as to why I need certain information to do my job. This has been a conflict, and sometimes aspects of my job has to be given to my team leader to perform as it is [viewed as a] conflict of interest.

She says that her First Nations identity is detrimental for her in the office and she feels “shunned” by her colleagues:

I do not think my cultural identity fits with MCFD. If it did, I think MCFD would realize I am an asset rather than a burden. I know the people from the surrounding reserves, and rather than gain knowledge from me, the workers tend to shun me.

Determination to provide better service to her community.

In spite of the poor work and collegial environment this same participant sees great value for local Aboriginal people, from her community and others, of having a First Nations person in the Ministry:

I have not worked for MCFD before, and had not given it much thought until I was approached. I feel my roles and responsibilities as an Indigenous employee is important. I know my position is valuable to the Indigenous children, youth, and families from the surrounding reserves. I have had Indigenous peoples voice their relief in knowing there is an Indigenous person working within MCFD, and this increases their comfort level. Indigenous peoples are more apt to call when they have questions or would like to become an MCFD approved resource.

Personal determination accounts for her ability to continue to work in what is an unfavourable, and even hostile, work setting:

I am personally motivated to work because I am a driven person, and like to problem solve. This job has taught me how to be a conversationalist and learn that I am important to the job and MCFD as a whole.

I find MCFD to be stifling; but if they are open to change and looking outside the box, they could find that Indigenous employees are important to reaching out to the Indigenous population. MCFD needs people who have a bird's eye view of the Indigenous world. As I said before, I would love to give information where it is needed, but if co-workers treat me as a burden, then this does nothing to strengthen the inter-office relationships that are integral to doing a good job.

Outsiders.

The other participant from this office also works in her own community, but no longer for the Ministry. She too describes a very challenging and difficult setting in which to work; despite having a very supportive team leader, the child welfare team was not open to working collaboratively with the First Nations and Aboriginal communities. She spoke at length about confronting these behaviours with little effect.

Aboriginal practice approach not supported.

The first participant says “from what I have witnessed, MCFD is not involved in Aboriginal approaches” as she refers to an incident where the community attempted to engage workers from the office with a system involved family through a traditional approach.

The other participant mentioned above also refers to the same situation and said though the Ministry is given an Aboriginal approach “for free” they still won’t follow through respectfully. Once this participant’s supportive team leader left, she felt a quiet, covert undermining, which pervaded her work environment, “you couldn’t always name them, couldn’t always. . .but you know when you walk in a room and everybody goes quiet, it’s kind of obvious...so I was having to take care of myself after that (convincing and politicking).”

Culture of power and hierarchy.

The power and hierarchy dynamic in the office, with a new team leader who was unable to stand up to the other team leader, resulted with this participant feeling like she was being constantly undermined.

Having to...to justify that I actually knew something about something, you know? So that the dumb Indian starting coming into play basically.

She eventually felt a need to conform to mainstream language and practice in order to be included and viewed as legitimate. She describes how the power structure and hierarchy within the office contributed to a lack of momentum for the work she was committed to and “slowed me down immensely.”

Polite indifference.

Mentioned in another section of the results was this same participant’s attempt to introduce an Elder into the practice of the office. This initiative was politely ignored.

Unsafe and toxic work environment.

The child protection colleagues who would seek this participant out for better cultural understandings were very cautious; the participant says: “There were a couple of them, but it had to be pretty quiet. It wasn’t safe for them to collaborate with me.”

She attributes the power dynamics and tone in the office to the formation of a group of employees who had been in the office for a very long time and had developed a cynical approach, overly reliant on holding power, in response to the very difficult work they do.

Of her decision to leave the Ministry at the time, this participant says:

...they did ask me to stay and I said “No, I just don’t want to. I’m not. No. I’m tired.” And I let them know that, no it’s not my best interest. I had let them know that I don’t feel supported. I let them know that “you may think that I’m just being difficult right now, but watch. Watch and be aware and be careful.” And now he is starting to understand. I’m gone.

Her conclusion was that her worksite was a highly unhealthy work environment that she could not remain in.

Not too many people last very long in [Site #3] and the ones that last are the ones that are really toxic. So they’re holding the fort, right? . . .

System violent by nature; lack of support for frontline employees.

This participant shared a very interesting observation and explanation of the unhealthy behaviour of the core group of employees in Site #3:

I think of the people that have gotten really condescending in their behaviours towards community members and I think, do they truly believe that they are actually trying to teach them something? I wonder. Do they? You know. The only hope that I have is that they really, truly believe that and hopefully that they’re not really that uncaring. It’s hard to have compassion for them. Yet to not have compassion for them would mean that I ventured into that same place. So it becomes my responsibility.

Ineffective Worksite #4

Site #4 is composed of seven teams that deliver various services (child protection, family support, guardianship, resources) to Aboriginal children, youth, and families within a small city with a census population of approximately 83,000 people, of whom approximately 9,000 self-report as being of Aboriginal descent (Statistics Canada, 2006). This worksite also provides services to several First Nations communities (one a very remote community) with a combined population of approximately 1,200 people (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013). There are two delegated Aboriginal agencies in this site area to which the Ministry has transferred a number of children who are in continuing care (CCO).

Aboriginal participants.

Two participants, who worked on different teams but in this same site area, describe the environment as challenging and unsupportive to work with Aboriginal children and families. Both of these participants worked in their own communities and left the Ministry by the time of this interview. They had each worked for the Ministry for three years.

Aboriginal practice approach not supported.

One participant worked on two teams in this worksite in different roles. When she worked as a child protection worker with remote First Nations communities, she spoke about becoming aware of a practice among her colleagues that meant that once children had been brought into care it meant that everything had already been done to keep the child in the home. She was surprised to learn that once a child was in care, most workers and team leaders were working toward permanent custody and eventual adoption for the child.

I would say it is the norm, but there are people in here that do practice differently, like myself and others. There are other people in there that do the practice differently, but the majority do say, “if we are at removal then we have tried everything.” . . . I have seen

where some social workers, once they think once the parents screw up, that's done. They don't have those rights anymore.

After working in the guardianship office for a period of time, she observed:

So some of these kids hadn't seen a social worker in six months to a year and it was brief. Some of these kids were scared of the social workers. They would throw up as soon as they would see a social worker coming with a briefcase. They had siblings in the same community in care for years and they would never visit each other once. They don't even know who they are. We had kids that transitioned out of care here with no plans in place whatsoever.

She says the legal requirement to consult with the First Nations community is more often not used for good practice purposes but just superficial engagement where workers can say they attempted to contact the community.

...all the bands get are a faxed copy of the court docs and no phone call.....so that they could put it on their court doc and say "I faxed them" and so if they don't show up in court they can say "I've done my due diligence." I am like "okay, not good enough. Not good enough." ...I will fax and I will phone and I will be consulting before I even remove kids.

Unsafe and toxic work environment / experience of being an outsider.

The other Site #4 participant mentioned above that it is a constant struggle for any Aboriginal social worker to work in the office "because of the attitudes in there." She describes the office as having a reputation among workers in the Ministry and being referred to as "the black hole."

The other participant also describes her experience in Site #4 as very difficult and challenging and spoke of feeling very much an outsider on the team being told in a team meeting that she had "a quarter of the skills" of other workers.

Determination to provide better service to her community.

In spite of this environment, the other participant mentioned above continued to work hard with Aboriginal children and families saying "I just did the work...I had confidence. . . I always believed that kids should be with their family if at all possible or stay within their family

units or within their extended family or in their communities.” But the environment became one she could no longer ignore and she eventually left the ministry.

Unable to work in own community.

After caring for a relative’s child and (improperly) being made the subject of a supervision order while she worked for the Ministry, the other participant requested to be taken off the team she had been on because it served her home communities. The role tension she was experiencing became so intense that she needed to do so to continue working in the ministry. Even after moving to another team to decrease her role tension she found the environment unacceptable and chose to leave the ministry.

Lack of support.

This same participant describes how she felt leading up to the decision to leave her position at the Ministry saying “it was like we were all falling off.” As other Aboriginal colleagues left or distanced themselves because of the ministry environment her experience of support was badly impacted and “you have to make a choice, right? And so I left.”

Culture of power and hierarchy.

The same participant worries about what will happen for the families that she was working with before she recently left:

Risk based. You’ve got to be in there, you’ve got to be doing this. You wouldn’t want to leave because you are going to want to see what would happen to your families after you left. I still struggle with that now. I hear what is happening with the families that I left and it is out of my hands right? Because the worker that they now have is so not culturally— doesn’t take that into consideration at all. Or does not view families in our system them same way, or value the connection to culture, and kinship.

Summary

Effective worksites tend to have more Aboriginal staff; many were attracted by the strong reputation of the worksites themselves. In both of the effective worksites, the physical surroundings are non-institutional and deliberately presented in a manner that is welcoming and reflective of the Aboriginal communities they serve. Overwhelmingly, Aboriginal participants describe these teams as supporting Aboriginal staff and practice approaches while actively recruiting Aboriginal staff. The teams avoid removing children and focus on reconnecting children in care to their communities. Their practice is focused on Aboriginal community collaboration and building trust through strong team leadership. The teams are described as cohesive and supportive of Aboriginal employees and colleagues tend to support each other and share the same practice values and beliefs. Both teams have a reputation in the community as providing relevant services.

In the two effective worksites, Aboriginal participants also describe their team leaders as non-Aboriginal allies with many years of experience working in Aboriginal communities, with a strong understanding of the history and impacts of colonization, a commitment to building trust and relationships with the Aboriginal community, who enthusiastically support Aboriginal practice approaches.

These team leaders describe supporting Aboriginal employees to seek out formal and informal mentorship and support. They recognize the challenging insider/outsider role of Aboriginal staff and value the Aboriginal staff on their teams and therefore steadfastly encourage Aboriginal staff to focus on their health and well-being in the Ministry. Both team leaders spoke extensively regarding the importance of transforming Ministry practice to better serve Aboriginal people and communities.

The team leaders in the effective worksites described their specific approach to building and supporting their teams. This involves the inclusion of members of the Aboriginal community in the recruitment of their staff and results in strong, cohesive, Aboriginal-practice-focused teams. One team has co-located both Aboriginal agency and MCFD staff to integrate services more seamlessly and to better serve the community. Both team leaders spoke about the vital team focus on strong relationships, trust, and accountability to the Aboriginal community. Having built strong Aboriginal-practice-focused teams, both team leaders spoke about being able to attract Aboriginal staff, from inside and outside the Ministry, who are attracted by the team's reputation.

Some of the results or outcomes the leaders of these effective teams positively reveal are higher team morale, community support and acceptance of the team, lower removal rates of Aboriginal children, and higher numbers of extended family and/or community placements. Both team leaders consider the specialized stream of regional Aboriginal management that paralleled the development of their two teams as mostly responsible for the ability and openness they found to facilitate implementation of many of the practices they describe as being supportive of Aboriginal employees. They still feel compelled to keep a low, and often covert, profile because they often believe their approaches are not ones that are generally supported in the Ministry. Both expressed dismay and concern regarding the reorganization of the Ministry that has since dismantled the specialized Aboriginal management stream in their region. They are somewhat critical that the environment and focus has once again shifted and that the Aboriginal agenda may lose traction. One of the team leaders feels that the attempt to create an Aboriginal stream of practice in the region was the correct direction, but that it was never properly resourced.

Aboriginal participants from the two ineffective worksites describe very different workplace situations. Environments are described as uncomfortable and unsupportive. The participants are unable to work in their communities because of lack of support from their Ministry team leaders and colleagues. One participant was actually told she was in a potential conflict of interest position and was therefore prevented from working with any community member known to her.

Participants in the ineffective worksites also describe themselves as outsiders in both the Ministry and their communities. They describe their worksites as lacking team leader support and say there is prevalence for low collegial collaboration and poor support for Aboriginal perspectives and practice approaches. The culture in the worksites is critically characterized by a focus on power and hierarchy and a polite indifference to Aboriginal people and communities. These described “unsafe” and “toxic” workplaces are believed to have been shaped through a Ministry system that is “violent” by nature, where frontline employees, whether they are Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, are not supported in the difficult and often traumatic work for which they are responsible.

Part 4: Analysis

Chapter 11. Discussion

In this chapter, descriptive data from the results sections are presented and discussed in relation to existing literature (Chapter 2) and connected to the specific practices and experiences of Aboriginal professionals, the organizational diversity literature and contextual organizational information (presented in Chapter 3). This chapter is divided into a number of areas for further analysis and discussion.

Exploration of Aboriginal employees' unique identity, values, motivation, and practice approaches in relation to the diverse interests of the Aboriginal communities they serve presents an opportunity to gain valuable insight into what Aboriginal practice approaches look like. Ministry Aboriginal professionals provide a genuinely unique perspective and contribution in the Ministry through their understanding of key historical issues and experiences. What they reveal strongly supports and advances concepts in representative bureaucracy theory that suggest diverse employees share enough of a collective cultural value base and orientation to represent the interests of their affiliated diverse cultural group. The discussion further demonstrates what participants see as the necessary changes and shifts of longstanding and entrenched child welfare practice to effectively indigenize practice approaches with the overarching goal of reversing the ongoing and pervasive overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the care of the system.

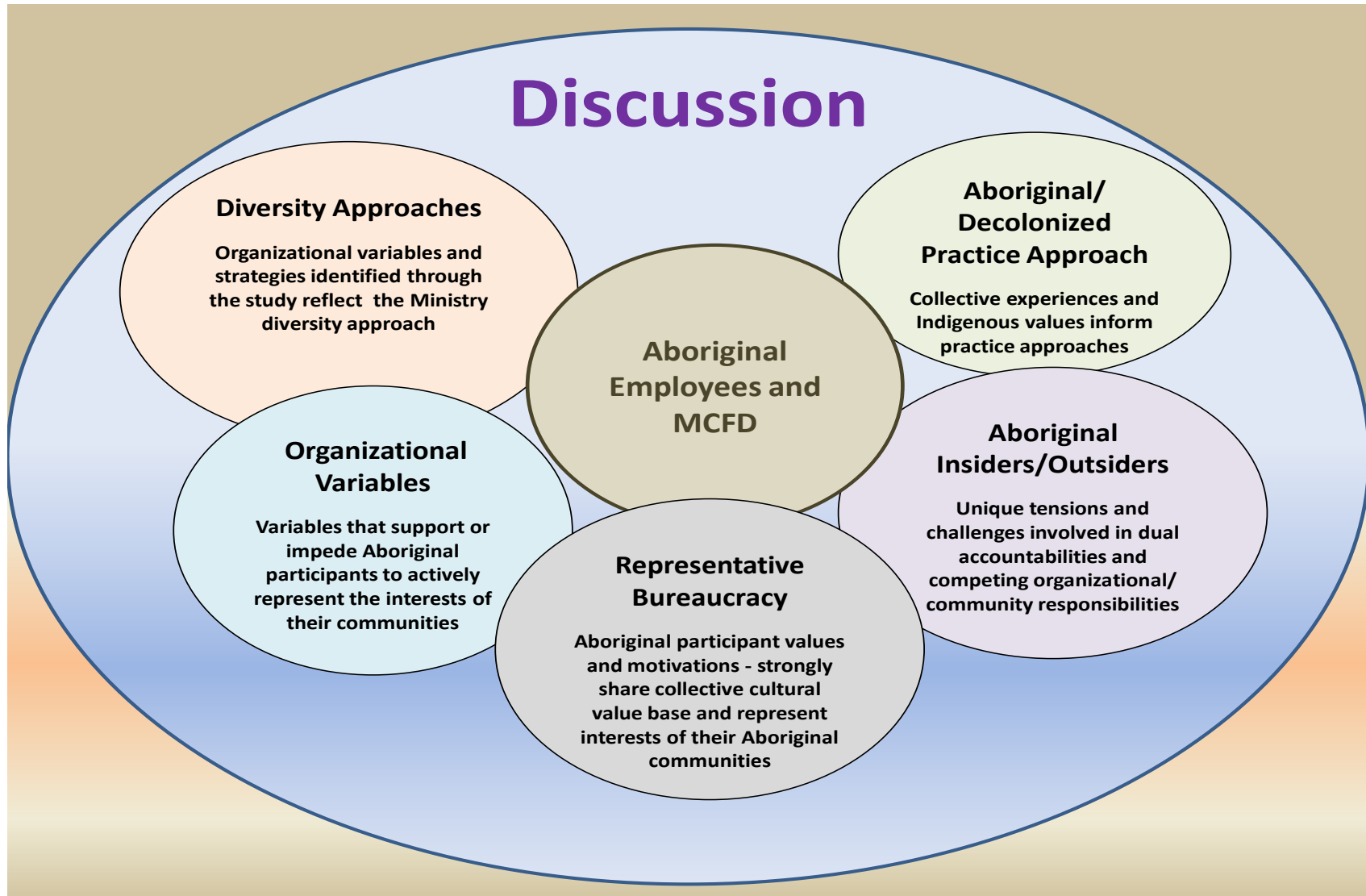
The impact of the organizational environment, structure, context, and strategies on Aboriginal employee practice approach, effectiveness, satisfaction, and retention in the organization and how effectively they are supported to actively represent the interests of Aboriginal communities is then explored. Descriptions and analysis of the experiences of Aboriginal employees who attempt to practice in a culturally congruent and innovative way within the Ministry provide further insight into the type of organizational approaches and change

strategies that may enable improved practice. This section also discusses the unique tensions, challenges, and dual accountabilities that Aboriginal employees experience with competing organizational and cultural/community responsibilities (creating the dialectic of the insider/outsider experience). Closely related to this is how well the organization demonstrates awareness and support for the difficult role that Aboriginal employees have working in MCFD.

The Ministry organizational structure, internal environment, and strategies are also analyzed within the larger historical and contemporary context the Ministry has found itself operating within in the past 30 years in relation to various organizational diversity approaches such as managing diversity and the more progressive critical and social equity approaches. The rhetoric found in Ministry strategic planning and initiatives, often constructed as responses to the external political environment where the Aboriginal community has demanded increased autonomy and service improvement, are demonstrated to be poorly linked to successive Ministry Aboriginal strategic initiative implementation and outcomes.

The visual map in Figure 11.1 provides an overview of the discussion.

Figure 11.1 Discussion overview.



Identity, Values, Motivation, and Practice of MCFD Aboriginal Employees

In this section the identity, values and beliefs, motivation and practice of Aboriginal employees are examined based on the study's findings and the existing literature in the area. A unique Indigenous approach to practice was described by participants as considerably different from existing or prescribed Ministry approaches—often resulting in ongoing participant struggles to find the necessary time, priority, and support for their efforts.

Identity.

Diverse First Nations, Métis, and Aboriginal identities, focused on cultural and community connection and reconnection.

Aboriginal participant identity in this study is as varied as the spectrum of experience that accounts for the diversity of First Nations, Métis and Aboriginal people across Canada. Some participants were raised within First Nation communities. And some were separated from their Aboriginal communities through adoption of a parent, the breakdown of parental relationships or multi-generational concerted attempts by families to suppress Aboriginal identity. Morrissette, McKenzie, and Morrissette (1993) and Weaver and White (1997) propose that each Aboriginal individual's experiences and position along an Aboriginal cultural continuum is highly varied, as is the degree to which they have experienced assimilation into the dominant culture. Similar to Walmsley's (2005) finding, many of the participants in this study have direct experience of mainstream child welfare through their own families or within their communities as children and/or adults. Despite their highly varied identities, all participants assert they actively maintain or are attempting to reconnect to their communities. They often seek the same cultural understanding and connection they feel is integral to their identity formation and by extension to those of Aboriginal children and youth they work with on behalf of the Ministry.

An important finding of this study is that the very few Aboriginal employee participants who describe high levels of satisfaction and role congruence in their positions all work directly or closely with their own communities. They describe seeking and receiving support in their work from their communities and the Ministry.

Values, beliefs, and motivation.

Personal identification and sense of responsibility to the community demonstrated through a value-driven commitment to transforming and decolonizing practice.

It would be difficult to speak about study participants' values and beliefs without addressing their motivation for working in a government child welfare organization. The personal and professional roles are fluid because of their own experiences with child welfare and the subsequent personal identification working with the Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities they serve. Walmsley (2005) also found that most Aboriginal participants in his study had experiences with the system through their families and communities before becoming child protection workers and describe an "intentional" approach to choosing the profession. The non-Aboriginal participants in Walmsley's study, who worked with Aboriginal people, described their choice of the profession as "accidental" and more based on the availability of work. Similar to the representation in feminist literature of the "personal being political," the Aboriginal professionals in this and Walmsley's study seem to be intentionally confronting often oppressive personal experiences on a daily basis in a professional—and what can easily become a political—context.

The values driving practice are overwhelmingly those which seek the restoration of the Aboriginal community's ability to support children and families without outside system intervention. A highly invested understanding of socio-historical forces, the processes of

colonization and how these have impacted the fabric of Aboriginal families through numerous social failures, drives a non-expert orientation that values collective well-being through community engagement, holism, respect for cultural diversity, and using relationship, connection, collaboration and modelling as the basis to support Aboriginal families and communities to reassert traditional ways of caring for their children. While the participants' specific values and beliefs vary in relationship to their experiences, they are highly consistent with representations of an Indigenous world view (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002; L. Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2011). Aboriginal participants are motivated and interested in changing, transforming and decolonizing practice through the application of Indigenous values and beliefs in their practice and throughout the organization.

This intentional drive for change in and transformation of the existing child welfare structure was a consistent finding across all participants in the study. Energizing their drive is a sense of social responsibility to their own communities and to Aboriginal people, as a whole and unified group, impacted by oppression and attempts at cultural annihilation. Their views express a sense of collective responsibility for Aboriginal people to become involved, even if this means through the dominant structure of a provincial child welfare agency, and to be leading change from within. This finding supports Bennett and Zubrzycki's (2003) findings where Aboriginal participants pursued professions in social work to change what they perceived as the inability of the system to effectively serve their communities. The findings also support Reid's (2005) study of First Nations women working in delegated Aboriginal agencies who describe their motivation as being able to address "historical injustice and intergenerational impacts of colonization" and to see improvements and positive change for First Nations and Aboriginal children, families and communities. They describe their work less as a career than as a commitment to the future of

their community and their grandchildren.

Other motivating factors for Aboriginal participants working with MCFD are related to the specific changes that participants would like to see and also reflects their values and beliefs: keeping children connected to their families and communities, keeping children out of care, and empowering the community to resume control for the care of their children, both formally and informally. The end goal for many is Aboriginal community control of child welfare service. In the meantime they strongly recognize their responsibility for leading required change within existing structures.

The high degree to which Aboriginal participants identify with the collective goals of their communities prepares them to effectively represent community interests. This supports literature on representative bureaucracy that asserts diverse employees retain pre-occupational socialization experiences, integrate and identify with values of their diverse group, and can represent their interests in the bureaucracy (Krislov, 1974; Krislov & Rosenbloom, 1981). This is precisely why effectively recruiting and retaining Aboriginal people is vital to effective organizational change—they reflect Indigenous values and beliefs and have a vested interest in driving necessary change to better serve Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities.

Aboriginal employee participants enter MCFD with a demonstrated awareness that the current structure does not reflect their values. This is consistent with Walmsley's (2005) study findings that Aboriginal practitioners identified the most significant pressure on their practice as the inconsistency of mainstream Ministry policies and practices with the "values, traditions, and practices of the community" (p. 59). Conversely, non-Aboriginal practitioners in his study identified more of a rigid Ministry hierarchical organizational structure, along with legislative and external oversight driven accountability, as generating fear their actions will be publicly

scrutinized (p. 59). Participants in this study, who had already left MCFD, similarly cited the inability to continue working within the Ministry after it became clear to them their values are not reflected in the culture, policies and practices of MCFD. Many participants, still employed with the Ministry, grapple with the same value incongruence, and describe struggling to remain. The inability to shift the culture, structure, policies and practice of the Ministry toward an Indigenous expression of values, beliefs and approach strongly indicates the absence of an effective organizational diversity approach—the result is that Aboriginal employees have been driven out. Whatever change is achieved during the time of their employment is not enough to retain Aboriginal employees.

The value-driven motivation of Aboriginal participants supports initial researcher assertions that Aboriginal employees seem less motivated to remain in an organization that does not reflect their values and beliefs. This may be juxtaposed to non-Aboriginal counterparts who potentially remain motivated by conventional organizational incentives like wage increments, benefits, career advancement and personal development aligning with larger organizational goals. In fairness, there likely are non-Aboriginal workers motivated from a value base given their own experiences of the social system. However, the majority come from dominant group, middle class backgrounds, where their experiences would not likely be directly impacted by poverty, racism or widespread system intervention (Walmsley, 2005). These findings strongly suggest that an organization like MCFD, which serves a disproportionately high number of Aboriginal people, should have an effective organizational diversity approach which targets, recruits, supports and retains Aboriginal professionals who can represent and advocate for community interests and well-being.

Practice approaches.***Indigenous value-based practice approaches focused on community empowerment and partnership.***

Aboriginal participants in the study describe their practice approach as flowing from Indigenous values which: encourage strong focus on community relationships, empowerment and partnership; individual relationships, respect and trust; holistic and strength-based approaches; cultural knowledge and teachings; and reliance on extended family for support and care giving. Participants have strongly consistent values, beliefs and demonstrate high levels of congruence when describing their practice approaches. Given this strong connection between practice approach and values this study supports and highlights the assertion that Aboriginal professionals directly represent the interests of their communities. The practice themes that emerge collectively from the participants in this study have significant potential to inform effective organizational approaches that may result in more effective practice with Aboriginal people in MCFD. To develop and implement effective practice goals, Aboriginal employees must not merely be included but effectively engaged to optimize utilization of their unique knowledge and expertise in Aboriginal community engagement and traditional approaches. Ideally, this may inform and drive an overall organizational shift towards improved outcomes for Aboriginal children, youth, families, and communities and is essential to decolonizing practice approaches.

Community engagement and practice—critical to protecting and supporting children. Participating as a respectful and engaged community member to develop relationship and trust requires time and reprioritization of task and activities.

Participants acknowledge that critical to their practice is seeking first to understand the complexity of the unique community, familial and social structures, history and cultural teachings of each community. This approach requires patience and time, and more effectively proceeds through participating and contributing to informal activities like community events (feasts, ceremony, recreation, etc.). Mutual learning develops primarily by respecting and engaging community protocols and appropriate people (such as leaders, Elders, etc.) in the community. Often this kind of Aboriginal practice approach by participants appears to their MCFD colleagues as informal, resource intensive (with respect to staff hours), unnecessary or even recreational. Regardless, participants stress the criticality of developing relationships and trust in the community as part of effective support and practice.

Child protection workers in the study found an additional need to deliberately distance themselves from the authority inherent in their role and meet with community members and leaders outside of specific practice situations first before being empowered to effectively work within their professional role in the community. Participant focus on embedding and integrating community and traditional decision making approaches in their practice further acknowledges and empowers the existing strengths of the community to care for their children and families.

The struggle for most participants is finding the time to engage the community in these various ways while gaining acceptance within MCFD that this is a legitimate activity to lay foundation for appropriate, meaningful practice. Once the relationship has been established, the participants in this study stress the need to maintain decision making authority derived from the

legislation, (or in the case of managers managing contracts or protocol arrangements), while working collaboratively and seeking to empower people in the community. Most participants describe this practice approach as one of the primary fundamental differences between their practice and that of Ministry non-Aboriginal colleagues. They also spoke of the challenges they face with team leaders and managers who don't necessarily value or understand the need to spend time building relationships and trust in the community.

A few participants, particularly those represented in worksites #1 and #2 in the case study section (see Chapter 10), believe they are supported to practice in a congruent way. They describe colleagues and team leaders as having the same practice values and approach. Their team leaders are supportive and count time building relationships and trust in the community as an important piece of their work day. They also encourage flexibility around how these staff organize and prioritize their work so they can attend events—and spend more time in the community to engage more broadly than with tasks only associated with specific cases.

Walmsley (2005) found a similar difference with how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal child protection workers relate to and see the Aboriginal communities they are working with. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants in this study described Aboriginal communities variously as victim, adversary, participant, partner, and as protector. However, the representation of the community as protector was most often expressed by Aboriginal participants. They viewed the community as the very entity that plays the largest and most important role in protecting children. The difference between Walmsley's results and the findings from this study is that these participants expand the idea of the community as protector to include the importance of human service workers developing strong connections through relationship and trust building to specifically identify existing protective factors (like extended family, cultural mentors, and other

informal and formal community supports) which may be available to support children and families who require MCFD services.

Relationship, respect, and trust—acknowledging oppressive system involvement, collaboration and avoiding authoritative and child centred approaches are critical to removing barriers to practice.

Understanding the history of children's services in Aboriginal communities means many participants in the study recognized significant barriers they as professionals must attempt to overcome with Aboriginal people to engage in a trusting and therapeutic relationship. They demonstrate their respect for the people they work with by acknowledging from the outset that an Aboriginal person, given the oppressive nature of past government interventions, may be fearful, anxious or angry with the prospect of involvement. To empathically acknowledge the meaning that system intervention has for Aboriginal people is critical to building rapport and trust.

An effective relationship was described as the process of being open to meet immediate needs while demonstrating utility to families, rather than just conducting an assessment exploring safety or mental health needs. This often involves helping families address their most basic needs around food, shelter, medical care, transportation. As one participant observed, arriving at a dirty home and lecturing the parent on the condition is not going to help build trust or result in meaningful change. However, helping them clean it up demonstrates authentic concern, collaborative intent and a commitment to seeing the parent receives the immediate support they require to ensure their children are safe and basic needs met. It is an exercise in trust building and levelling the inherent power differences in the relationship. The approach is nonthreatening, respectful and seeks to enable the individual to feel valued and trusted enough to

realistically frame concerns without the professional repetitively defining and labelling their issues.

Relationship and trust are also built and maintained through exploring strengths and supports of the family, extended family and community. Even if a more intrusive intervention is the outcome, the trust built will help maintain the relationship and allow the professional to continue to work with the family. The insight required to develop trusting and respectful relationships in the Aboriginal community is something that most Aboriginal professionals embody given their own history and experiences with government services. These approaches toward building respectful relationships, along with the value in immediate identification of another Aboriginal person, can positively influence parent or family engagement in meaningful discussions and necessary changes that need to occur. For this reason many Aboriginal participants stress the importance of having Aboriginal professionals working with Aboriginal families. They underline that developing relationships with individuals and community takes time and patience but struggle with the various demands of their positions to find sufficient time. In terms of priority, as with building relationships with community, they do not feel Ministry colleagues or managers value such relationship building activity.

Implementation of the new Ministry CAPP practice approach was viewed by many participants as formalizing support for their practice approach, but they were uncertain whether it would be fully articulated, implemented and supported in practice. Indeed, the CAPP framework has since been dropped by the Ministry in favour of a new practice approach reflecting elements of a relationship-based approach to practice. However, it seems that a very different culture surrounding practice has evolved in the Ministry based on a highly individual approach to child-centred assessment, response and documentation of risk (for child protection) and of mental

health diagnosis and assessment (for mental health).

Extended family as support/caregivers—preventing children from entering foster care situations that remove them from their family and community.

The importance of the extended family as supports for Aboriginal service recipients cannot be understated. For example, seeking informal community-based supports (most often the extended family) to capably provide either direct support to the family or (in situations where the child's safety means they need to be cared for outside the home) as alternate caregivers. The alternative is the foster care system where non-Aboriginal caregivers are unfortunately still the norm. The need to develop community relationships and engage extended family widens the circle of supportive involvement. However, it also brings a level of complexity to practice that quite often, given the widespread impact of colonial impacts such as poverty and substance abuse, surfaces past and present challenges for family members. Assessment and ability to plan for contingencies for developing individual capacity to support the family often come into play and become an important aspect of directing appropriate professional focus on the family and child. This finding supports Walmsley's (2005) study where Aboriginal participants were more likely to identify the community as a protector of children where collective approaches to child safety and well-being are clearly the responsibility of the community.

Theory guiding practice—holistic Indigenous strength-based approaches, decolonizing approaches, cultural attachment, Signs of Safety.

The study participants describe their practice as based on holistic Indigenous and strength-based approaches. Prevention and support for Aboriginal families and the focus on strength-based approaches, (some citing the Signs of Safety model), were described by many of

the participants as essential for individual, family and community renewal. They rarely refer to any other specific social work or psycho-social theories to describe their approach.

Reference was made to colonization theory and decolonization practices. Several participants challenge risk assessment approaches and attachment theory as culturally biased, but primarily speak of identifying community and individual strengths in a generic, broad way. As mentioned previously several participants spoke of the need for all practitioners to understand the impact that a child welfare professional has on Aboriginal people given the colonial history and potential use of the system to oppress. This form of practice insight developed through an appreciation of colonization or colonial theory is suggested as critical for acknowledging the fear and anger Aboriginal people experience when they become involved with the system. Open acknowledgement by the practitioner of past system impacts is believed essential for helping validate these feelings and move on to develop trust. Walmsley (2005) also notes that Aboriginal practitioners describe the need to understand the legacy of residential and child welfare systems and approach practice with Aboriginal people and communities emphasizing and acknowledging the fear and panic present when approached by and through the system.

Some study participants argued that the premise of attachment theory is culturally biased because it fails to account that cultural attachment for Aboriginal children may be equally important as their attachment to a single caregiver. Other participants spoke about the Ministry risk assessment model as further exhibiting cultural bias because Aboriginal people, due to colonization, collectively exhibit many of the risk indicators present in these tools. This may account for the tension participants often describe with their colleagues and superior's tendency to centre practice on child safety and risk approaches, attachment theory, permanency planning and adoption. They feel the high level of past involvement of Aboriginal families in the system,

coupled with impacts of colonization, ensures Aboriginal children are consistently evaluated by risk assessment tools to be considered at higher risk of child maltreatment than other children—resulting in ongoing higher rates of removal. They see attachment theory being used to advocate for and justify long term placements of Aboriginal children with non-Aboriginal caregivers with less consideration for supporting ongoing cultural and extended family connection. Walmsley (2005) found some elements of psychological, sociological and political theory guiding both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal child protection worker practice, however he found Aboriginal practitioners describing colonization and attachment theory as informing how they work with Aboriginal people.

Indigenous world view—holistic practice and collective well-being.

Most often the participants in this study described their practice as holistically based in their own Indigenous cultural world view with focus on individual physical, social, spiritual and cognitive needs. Collective well-being was often described in conflict with western societal (and MCFD) focus on liberalism and individual rights—as demonstrated above in the argument regarding attachment theory superseding the need for collective and cultural attachments. Child protection participants in the study describe a constant tension with other Ministry workers who take a strong child safety or child-centred stance. They believe the failure of these workers to see individual and family strengths results in unnecessary removals, movement of Aboriginal children to non-Aboriginal care and a resulting disconnection from family and community.

Traditional knowledge—engaging cultural mentors and knowledgeable community mentors to ground practice and encourage reconnection of children and families to traditional knowledge.

Along with a strong emphasis on an Indigenous world view, participants focus on integrating the strengths of the community by available cultural knowledge and mentorship into their own learning and practice, and by directly connecting children and families back to the strengths of their cultural communities. This may involve reconnecting children and families to their communities through informal and formal activities and mentorship to strengthen individual and family capacity and identity.

The practice approaches described by participants strongly link to what Morrissette et al. (2003) describe as assisting clients to develop their Indigenous world view, developing consciousness regarding the impacts of colonization, and utilizing cultural knowledge and traditions to support identity, collective consciousness and empowerment. Weaver and White (1997) similarly describe Indigenous world view and values as the cornerstone of a practice approach for developing services that acknowledge historical trauma and grief as the starting point for individuals and families to address current concerns.

Conclusion: Identity, values, beliefs, motivation, and practice.

With no formal (Ministry-endorsed) practice framework, the participants in the study attempt daily to operate within available time and limited resources to model the practice described above. They focus on supporting the ongoing development of strong individual and community relationships while consciously attempting to avoid more intrusive intervention in favour of those that simultaneously keep the child safe (or through other services like mental

health or youth justice – ensure the child has required support) by engaging and involving community and extended family to provide supports to strengthen the family.

These practice approach descriptions point to the inherent complexity of involving large numbers of individuals, extended family, community, informal and formal supports, cultural knowledge and ceremony, traditional planning approaches, distant communities, in a larger organizational context where formal resources are limited. It requires a high degree of ongoing professional support, engagement and commitment. What becomes critical is having enough time, clinical and organizational support for practitioners to work through the complexities to find solutions with the family and community leading to fewer children entering government care. It means reprioritizing activities and expectations in the professional practice environment.

The next section is concerned with discussing and analyzing how Aboriginal participants are impacted in terms of the current MCFD organizational environment and formal structure where they attempt to implement their vision and practice.

Organizational Environment, Structure, and Context

The effectiveness of Aboriginal employees, as they attempt to achieve improved Aboriginal individual and community outcomes through the approaches outlined in the previous section, is impacted by the internal organizational environment of the Ministry. The internal organizational environment is necessarily impacted by several external factors and influences. The literature reviewed earlier indicates the environment and structure of an organization impacts its effectiveness through diverse, often dispiriting, employee experiences and low retention, influenced by perceptions of organizational fit through social identification, belonging, opportunity, support, job satisfaction, commitment, fairness and inclusion. The effect of dual accountabilities that study participants experience through the dialectic of their insider/outsider

role is a unique variable not explored in previous studies but one carefully described in this study. High levels of tension resulting from dual accountabilities are found to further negatively impact participant's sense of support, belonging, motivation and commitment, fairness and job satisfaction.

Ministry organizational structure, planning and policy/program implementation strategies also impact participant effectiveness and retention with respect to how meaningfully and effectively support Aboriginal employee practice and promote an effective Aboriginal change agenda—one that enables Aboriginal employee participants to support Aboriginal service recipients to achieve better outcomes.

Organizational environment and experiences of Aboriginal employees.

Participants described the physical and social environment of the Ministry several ways. In essence, they saw the unique culture of MCFD from their personal perspectives. They also explained how they see this reflected in the physical and social constructions of the organization, through its collective membership and experiences. The values and beliefs of all organizational members, however shaped, expressed or suppressed, define the environment for the Aboriginal participants of the study and impact their satisfaction with the organization and their perceptions of its effectiveness. Several organizational diversity studies, as previously referenced, have demonstrated that diverse worker effectiveness in organizations depends on variables such as perceptions of organizational fit, social support, identification and belonging, opportunity, job satisfaction, commitment, fairness and inclusion. The main aspects of organizational culture and environment that study participants expressed as impacting their ability to achieve their goals and achieve a sense of satisfaction with the organization involve perceptions and experiences of racism, mainstream practice norms and risk aversion, tokenism, poor organizational fit, low

support, low cultural competence, colleague change fatigue and an institutional physical environment.

Participants also describe the unique tensions that Aboriginal employees often experience with competing organizational and cultural/community responsibilities—creating the dialectic of the insider/outsider experience where dual accountabilities can cause tension—and how, if at all, the organization demonstrates awareness and support for them in this regard. The degree of tension experienced seems highly correlated to a low sense of belonging and satisfaction within the organization. All of these variables combine to address the degree to which the organization presently supports and may expect to retain Aboriginal employees.

Discrimination and racism—organizational avoidance of internal culture reflecting broad societal assumptions and beliefs.

Perhaps the most striking and persistent theme concerning the organizational environment is the degree to which participants share experiences of discrimination and racism in their work environments. Covert and overt examples of discrimination and racism were provided by a large number of participants. Several explained covert acts of racism as the unconscious furthering of broader negative societal assumptions, beliefs and values about Aboriginal people and communities. These mostly covert, and sometimes overt, acts of racism and intolerance were described as occurring on a fairly consistent and predictable basis within their teams and work environments. Colleague fatigue with accounts and descriptions of experiences of historical oppression and the subsequent personal and social damage that Aboriginal service recipients often manifest appears most often to be the focus of discriminatory and racist statements. Participants also described behaviour in relation to larger community and reconciliation events where non-Aboriginal colleagues are expected to attend but express

skepticism and negativity about ongoing impacts of colonization and what effect they should have on community and individual resiliency and ability to “move on.”

It is worth reiterating the many direct examples of discrimination and racism in the workplace: one participant describes non-Aboriginal colleagues talking about clients “playing the residential school card”; another participant, an Aboriginal recruit through a specialized recruitment project in one region, describes being told that she and other Aboriginal workers only have a “quarter of the skills” of their non-Aboriginal colleagues; another participant overheard colleagues in her office openly talk and laugh about how they humiliated a respected chief from her community; and another Aboriginal recruit was improperly made the subject of a supervision order (when she agreed to provide a kith and kin placement for a relative child) as she began her career with the Ministry as a delegated child welfare worker alongside her “worker”. Or recall these situations: an Elder is introduced to an MCFD setting only to be ignored and un-utilized by the non-Aboriginal workers in the office; a group of Aboriginal staff who have formed a mentorship and support network were accused of receiving preferential treatment and on the same day asked to leave the Ministry Aboriginal office to smudge outside and around the corner; and the administrative staff that explain to an Aboriginal manager that Aboriginal people just aren’t capable of looking after children.

Many participants observe the extent to which such experiences of discrimination and racism appears to be ignored and tolerated within the organization. Consider the participant who overheard colleagues laughing about their treatment of a chief from her community reporting the situation to management who did not effectively address the situation—instead she became “blackballed” and called a “rat” and subsequently quit her job. A manager says that when she consulted the manager of an administrative staff, who said that Aboriginal people are incapable

of providing care for their own children, she was told “that’s just her.” This participant also shared a situation where no action was taken in response to a “racist rant” contained in a letter written by a non-Aboriginal team leader. Her observation is that racism toward Aboriginal people is “the last sort of acceptable form of racism” in Canadian society and by extension is unconsciously internalized in the culture of MCFD through ingrained norms and belief systems.

Another Aboriginal manager participant says that, while it is “still not a very comfortable conversation”, compared to just a few years ago Ministry staff are starting to talk about racism. For this reason he says it is imperative that the organization develop a formal and clear response to discrimination and racism. In the end, this manager asserts that perpetuating inappropriate Ministry practice in Aboriginal communities is also a form of racism.

The role of racism and discrimination revealed by participants from the four different sites in the case study chapter was quite revealing. Where participants report feeling supported in two of the sites, they describe congruence, similar expressed beliefs and values and a high degree of practice support from their non-Aboriginal colleagues and team leaders. In the other two sites, where three of four participants resigned from positions, descriptions of racism, discrimination and intolerance were the most extreme of those provided by any of the participants in the study. Even more concerning for the participants was how the acts and words of their colleagues had serious and profoundly personal impacts because these Aboriginal employees worked in their own communities – the comments were directed at their own people, including family, extended family and community. Not surprisingly, these participants experienced low satisfaction and poor organizational fit.

Practice environment—reflects mainstream practice norms, low cultural competence, vicarious worker trauma, worker change fatigue, and limited resources.

Participants spoke of their views of mainstream practice norms of the Ministry that reflect a policy driven, low risk, child safety focused approach to work with children and families, and Aboriginal children and families in particular. Levels of First Nations and Aboriginal cultural competence in the Ministry were described by many participants, including executive level managers, as very low. Also described was a tendency for staff working with Aboriginal people and communities to intellectualize planning and practice rather than internalizing what it means to work in an Aboriginal context. Several participants spoke of their frustration and concern with the implementation of the Aboriginal conceptual framework as a process that many colleagues pay lip service to, as an organizational objective, but lack the insight, experience or motivation to implement in a meaningful way. Some participants underlined the serious concern of such a approach because it can lead to Ministry practice and community intervention that simply placates Aboriginal people. For example, avoiding important issues or decreasing potential conflict in communities by providing support and funding with little concern for improved outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.

Another dominant view of participants are the negative views of Ministry workers towards the capacity of Aboriginal families and communities to care for their own children, resulting in practice that errs on the side of safety, and thereby leading to the removal of more children. This apparent ongoing legacy of a child-centred, risk-based approach driven by the Gove Inquiry and 1990s era of reform in the Ministry has been articulated in various analyses of BC children's service system (Armitage & Murray, 2007; Callahan & Swift, 2007; Hern & Cossom, 2007; Walmsley, 2005). Walmsley (2005) describes how MCFD practitioners

experiencing multiple pressures can result in a policy-driven approach with an “orientation towards child protection practice that is cautious, low-risk, thorough, fully documented, and rule-oriented.” Practice approaches concerned with child-centred and risk-based practice assessment are largely inconsistent with the practice values and approaches of the Aboriginal study participants.

Several participants noted that an environment reinforcing mainstream practice norms results in frequent child removals and the nature of the work becomes inherently traumatic for children, families and workers. These participants spoke of a lack of acknowledgement and support for Ministry frontline staff in relation to the vicarious trauma they experience and encounter in their work. Ongoing work-related trauma impacts worker approach because they tend to simplify the situations they respond to. This makes the service recipients, according to one participant, “terrible, horrible, awful, no good human beings, to justify” worker actions that err on the side of safety and removal of children. This circular tendency, coupled with a lack of access to appropriate resources to support vulnerable families, encourages low risk, policy driven/justified approaches.

Participants also point to relentless and rhetorical Ministry “transformative” practice and policy change initiatives, which have characterized Ministry planning for the past twenty years. These were frequently met with cynicism by frontline staff given that these approaches are developed and implementation attempted amid an environment where existing unacknowledged challenges and limited resources prevail for necessary work with children and families. The result is limited frontline support for any new initiatives including Aboriginal practice initiatives.

This study establishes that MCFD Aboriginal participant commitment and motivation for working with Aboriginal people is based on Indigenous values, beliefs and practices intended to

keep Aboriginal children connected to their families and communities. The negative impact on Aboriginal participant ability to implement their objectives and these critical inconsistencies between their practice and Ministry mainstream approaches should not be underestimated.

Participants from the first two sites in the case study (who report the ability to achieve their objectives and experience high work satisfaction in their immediate team environments), reported that they too were impacted by inadequate resources, ongoing change initiatives and the prevalence of attitudes in the Ministry that conflict with their practice approach. However, they indicated that this was somewhat mitigated by close professional and collegial relationships with co-workers and team leaders who share their practice values and approaches. The participants from the latter two sites (reporting poor organizational fit or low satisfaction) reveal concerning and significant value differences between their own practice norms and approaches from those of their colleagues and team leaders.

Physical environment—sterile, institutional, unfriendly, and inhospitable settings.

Another significant impact for participants impacting their sense of organizational belonging and fit is the physical environment of Ministry offices. Viewing these settings from the perspective of marginalized Aboriginal service recipients, they acknowledge the significant power differential between the system and clients. Participants see the institutional, boundary separation (like thick Plexiglas barriers between administration and waiting rooms) and the sterile and unwelcoming environments of government offices as completely uninviting, intimidating and unaccommodating for Aboriginal people. Offices are often characterized by poor and uncomfortable meeting rooms, stark waiting rooms and unfriendly reception. Plexiglas barriers signify to some participants the need for Ministry staff to protect themselves from potentially unpredictable or violent clients. They maintain that if people receiving services were

treated more respectfully and fairly there would not need to be, except on very rare occasions, concern for physical safety. The “energy” of one office is referred to by one participant as being quiet and suffocating “non-Aboriginal like.”

Ministry offices were contrasted to delegated Aboriginal agency offices that many participants are familiar with. For example, one participant says “you walk in, you (and) go right past reception—you’re into a great big family area. You grab a coffee...sit down...somebody’s teaching crafts in one corner...somebody’s working with the kids here...they have all the stuff that they need to do the traditions.” The team leaders of the two supported and high satisfaction case study sites describe in detail how they have worked to make the physical settings of their Ministry offices open and welcoming for Aboriginal families and community. Neither have physical barriers and both offices reflect the tone of the community with paintings, murals and portraits completed by local Aboriginal children and community members. They also have large and comfortable meeting places or kitchens where visitors to the office are openly welcomed. Attempting to remove both real and symbolic environmental barriers while providing hospitality compatible with Aboriginal cultural norms is an important part of an overall integrated, collaborative approach that these team leaders and their teams have provided to improve their relationships and increase respect and trust with Aboriginal children, families and communities.

Tokenism—symbolic representation, roles without influence, lack of voice.

Troubling experiences of Aboriginal people used in a token way in the Ministry were shared by participants. The existence of one Aboriginal manager or executive in each of the regions – without control over any regional resources, expected to implement the Aboriginal conceptual framework and to respond to the multiple interests of Ministry staff, Aboriginal communities and delegated agencies – was seen as highly inadequate and largely symbolic.

Participants provided multiple examples, including: a deputy minister appointment of several Aboriginal people to top executive positions within the Ministry while removing from them any real authority or influence; Aboriginal staff, managers and executive sitting on committees or working groups to provide feedback consistently disregarded but a “box ticked off” to say the “Aboriginal perspective” was included; being held up as Aboriginal people in the Ministry when it is advantageous but not seeing key Aboriginal practice initiatives supported; simply being used to help non-Aboriginal staff gain access to Aboriginal communities; and creating Aboriginal teams and initiatives without sufficient or appropriate human or financial resources. Ironically, one participant uses what he sees as tokenism, like being asked to open high profile meetings with a prayer or drumming, as an opportunity to share with a captive Ministry audience knowledge of his culture and traditions that he feels need to be better understood and respected by the Ministry. These findings are consistent with Bennett and Zubrzycki’s (2003) study where participants identified being tokenized in their organizations and saw the employment of Aboriginal people as symbolic—wanting to employ someone who happens to be Aboriginal rather than employing an Aboriginal person for who they are and what they can contribute.

Dual accountabilities—insider/outsider in both community and Ministry.

Aboriginal participants describe dual accountabilities they experience as Aboriginal community members combined with responsibilities in their professional role in the Ministry. Descriptions of role tension, limited role congruence by few, lack of belonging or fit, feeling unvalued and unheard, or even tokenized in the organization help to articulate the impact of participant experiences of the unique dual accountabilities and what become invariably insider and outsider roles in both the community and the Ministry. The insider/outsider aspect to the role of Aboriginal employees inside the Ministry is unique and complex, and one that participants

must uniquely grapple with impacting their personal and professional lives. The luxury of leaving work at the end of the day rarely exists. The intensity of the experience and the impact this has on participant retention in the organization is important to understand. Participants report that the existence and complexity of the insider/outsider dialectic for Aboriginal employees is largely unacknowledged by Ministry colleagues or management.

Participants describe their experiences of being insiders and outsiders, often alternatively and simultaneously in the community and the Ministry. As community insiders who are also Ministry professionals, there exists an opportunity, as theoretically presented in the concepts of representative bureaucracy, to advance and respond to interests of the Aboriginal people and communities they represent. This speaks to the huge sense of responsibility and accountability to community that many participants say motivates them as professionals to drive necessary change for Aboriginal people in the Ministry. The pressure to pursue goals and outcomes that represent the aspirations of the community is both the motivation that propels participants into the Ministry and what becomes an enormous source of stress when they feel unable to achieve them.

The eventual realization of many study participants, who are either contemplating or have already left the Ministry, is that they are largely unable to achieve these collective goals within the structure of the Ministry. This leads to feelings they have become community outsiders for letting the community down and appearing to have become co-opted into an unresponsive and oppressive system. Even participants who report feeling supported in their teams, like one of those profiled in an effective case study site, discusses the suspicion she feels some community professionals have of her and how they will refer to her as MCFD, reinforcing to her that she is being viewed at that moment as an outsider within her own community. This stigma of being branded as a Ministry worker is experienced to varying degrees by Aboriginal participants. This

finding supports Bennett and Zubrzycki's (2003) findings where some participants felt their communities were wary and suspicious of them because of the complicity of the profession with oppressive practices toward Aboriginal communities.

The insider aspect of the community role for Aboriginal participants is the different expectations and experiences they experience as professionals in their own communities. Participants who work in their own communities, or alternately have become a part of the Aboriginal community they work in, are considerably more closely associated to people in the community who may be involved with the Ministry. Given the focus on relationship and trust that participants emphasize with their practice, and the dual role they play as a community member, they often field reports or requests for service from the community outside of work hours, at the grocery store, school or in another community capacity. The lack of down time is evident. Community expectations of Aboriginal workers are high and (given Ministry constraints and barriers) participants often feel they are unable to perform in ways that are adequate and appropriate. This complex blending of community and professional responsibilities is often described as highly intense and stressful to manage. Participants in Bennett and Zubrzycki's (2003) study also commented on the challenge to maintain personal and professional boundaries and to avoid dual relationships commenting on how unrealistic this is given the reality of living and working in a small community where personal and professional identities coexist.

Another aspect of the insider/outsider dialectic is the degree to which participants, as they describe in the previous section, do not feel that their values, beliefs and approaches are reflected in the Ministry, and how this lack of fit leaves them feeling they are Ministry outsiders. One participant shared being one of three Aboriginal people among 40 employees, where there were other Aboriginal workers who would not identify themselves for fear of how they would be

treated. This participant felt she had to mask or hide her passion about keeping children out of care, for fear of being isolated and blocked. In another extreme example a newly hired child protection worker spent her first year in the Ministry on another worker's caseload, inappropriately designated as requiring court ordered supervision to provide safe care to a relative child, essentially designated as a client, reinforcing to her that her status as an Aboriginal person meant that she was automatically considered a risk to a child despite having completed the security and background checks qualifying her as a delegated child protection worker.

Aboriginal study participants also spoke about dual accountabilities in terms of the tension created in their Ministry role when barriers caused by bureaucratic decision making, inflexible policy, limited resources or rigid risk averse practice norms prevent them from practicing in a culturally congruent way. There are other situations where participants describe being tokenized within the Ministry to either demonstrate political correctness in approach or manage politically sensitive issues with Aboriginal or First Nations communities.

These findings support Walmsley's (2005) conclusion that Aboriginal Ministry practitioners are "required to cross cultural boundaries" to practice child welfare. He argued this creates a practice approach characterized by daily negotiation of the different expectations and approaches between the two very different worlds and "as one world is juxtaposed with the other on an ongoing basis, and as the practitioner's understanding of both increases, the limitations, tensions, and contradictions between them become evident" (p. 127) . In another 2005 study conducted with six BC First Nations delegated Aboriginal agency female workers, the participants described experiencing dual accountability between responsibilities they have as community members and as child welfare professionals within an Aboriginal community (Reid, 2005). A major theme in Reid's study was the inherent contradiction between expectations that

child welfare practices be decolonized and the reality of practicing within the legislation and policy of the provincial government. The participants describe this relationship as one where the continued colonial relationship remains focused on power and control of Aboriginal people, both as professionals and as service recipients, through provincial authority leading to an inability to decolonize practice approaches and often viewed in their communities as “perpetrators of colonialism” (p. 30).

The complex insider/outsider role with inherent issues around dual accountabilities is uniquely stressful and challenging for Aboriginal professionals in the Ministry. It is a defining and central feature in the role of Aboriginal professionals working for MCFD. The contradictions in practice arising from dual accountabilities in the various insider and outsider roles that they play also appear to become clearer or more acute as Aboriginal professionals gain more experience in their positions with the Ministry. Even where participants clearly describe being supported in their immediate environment and team to engage in decolonizing practices with Aboriginal people and communities, the larger overlay of Ministry oversight through mainstream attitudes, legislation, policy, procedural and structural approaches remains a constant and defining factor.

Conclusion: Organizational environment.

Implications for Aboriginal employee satisfaction and retention.

The major variable corresponding to participant level of satisfaction and retention with the Ministry environment is the degree to which participant values, beliefs and practices are supported and reflected in the work place. Indigenous values inform the expectations, motivations and goals of MCFD Aboriginal participants. A large and concerning number of participants concurrently report feelings of isolation, lack of belonging, role tension, and low

workplace satisfaction. Interviews with participants indicate this results because of specific issues within and directly related to the Ministry environment, such as: low overall cultural competence of Ministry staff, racism, policy driven mainstream practice norms characterized by negative views of the capacity of Aboriginal families, colleague practice and change fatigue, institutionalized physical workplace settings, an overall lack of support for an Indigenous practice perspective from colleagues and team leaders, and experiences of tokenism and community placation. All these issues contribute to and exacerbate the inherent contradictions and dual accountabilities Aboriginal employees experience as community and Ministry insiders and outsiders.

While overall participant satisfaction was reported as low, there are exceptions. Four frontline participants, specifically in the case study section that revealed higher levels of satisfaction and organizational fit, described being a part of highly supported teams where Aboriginal practice values and norms were shared. Social and physical constructs in these team environments were deliberately and consciously altered through the leadership of individual team leaders, as supported by a specialized Aboriginal management stream, to be more reflective and respectful of Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities. Both workplace settings are Aboriginal-specific teams where a specialization of practice has attracted non-Aboriginal Ministry staff who are experienced with and committed to Aboriginal approaches to practice and as such become allies with Aboriginal staff.

Two other participants who indicated higher levels of satisfaction in the workplace report having the support of their First Nations communities and are actively involved in the implementation of Aboriginal programming. These settings provided a high level of support for a collaborative approach, an environment where dual accountabilities can be reduced, and unique

challenges acknowledged, but most importantly—the significant value that Aboriginal professionals bring to the work. Further exploration of the organizational variables that have been found to be supportive in particular work settings for Aboriginal employees in MCFD, and how they can form the foundation for a more effective organizational diversity approach, will be addressed in the last section of the discussion.

Organizational Structure

Participants described several aspects of Ministry organizational structure and processes as incompatible with their efforts to achieve socially fair and equitable outcomes for First Nations and Aboriginal service recipients: hierarchical leadership, governance and decision-making processes; low communication across leadership/management and frontline organizational levels; low management support and understanding of the Aboriginal agenda; ongoing change initiatives never meaningfully implemented; rhetorical strategic planning; disengaged policy development processes; inadequate training/mentorship/and supervision; inadequate or misdirected resources; poor recruitment approaches; high caseloads and administrative requirements that preclude Indigenous practice approaches; and an interest-based environment (unions/work standards/ethics) that discourage Indigenous practices. These aspects of organizational structure and process represent the compatibility or “goodness of fit” between Aboriginal employee and the organization’s formal and demonstrated practices and goals.

Hierarchy.

Decision-making, communication, low organizational support, culture of fear, power and control, rhetorical strategic planning that results in little actual support for Aboriginal agenda.

Participants in the study consistently describe a hierarchical, bureaucratic, rigid, reactive and controlled structure, that exhibits consistent internal mainstream cultural values, low communication and support, and which, by its very nature, resistance to change initiatives. The hierarchy of the Ministry dictates a span of control and clear lines of reporting that participants report results in a silo approach where employees are discouraged from engaging directly with other operational areas of the Ministry (like policy, quality assurance, finance, management or leadership). Participants expressed a clear value and cultural difference between this organizational orientation and the communication and decision making patterns they are accustomed to in Indigenous settings. While ultimate decision making often resides with one individual in an Aboriginal community, open discussion, transparency and inclusion characterizes an approach where any community member is welcome to share their views and contribute to discussion and processes leading up to a decision being made.

Participants who had worked in what they describe as healthy and well performing Aboriginal organizations share their experiences of flat management structures that lack a competitive “jockeying” for position, characterized by a supportive environment where collective responsibility and support prevail. This stands in contrast to the Ministry setting where the hierarchy determines which voices are heard. Many participants see a competitive tendency amongst organizational members seeking advancement in the Ministry who are most often successful when they seek safe solutions, avoid responsibility and reflect conformity with

internal dominant cultural values. An Aboriginal manager participant comments on slow organizational response and decision making resulting from the reactive and fear-based culture. This type of organizational behaviour circularly reinforces the hierarchical tendency of the bureaucracy resulting in shallow assessments, responses and decision making—discouraging creativity, difference and change. Conflict is avoided and communication is poor. The only acceptable approach is through formal reporting structures that discourage open and safe discussion.

Organizational silo approaches with respect to Ministry functions and programs seem to further disrupt communication and result in poor sharing and fragmented information filtering down to Aboriginal employees and Aboriginal stakeholders. Missed are organizational learning opportunities where feedback and input from the service delivery level helps to inform improvements to service policy, processes and ultimately service outcomes. MCFD child protection participants in Walmsley's 2005 study expressed a sense of "fear and paranoia that pervades the MCFD atmosphere" and that "there is always somebody who has power over somebody else in the system" (p. 67). Participants in his study also referred to a clear management exercise of power over practitioners possibly flowing from changes that have occurred since the mid-1990s to dramatically increase the amount of oversight and scrutiny the Ministry experiences with respect to keeping children safe.

This concern and tendency to err on the side of safety probably reinforces the internal culture of the organization, to do so not only in terms of practice decisions but in a number of areas and decisions that it faces. The result creates a Ministry management culture preoccupied with seeking safe solutions and avoiding conflict when issues arise, while simultaneously voicing support for change initiatives that often require courage, creativity and some degree of

risk taking. The apparent contradiction and inconsistency between the rhetoric and actions of the Ministry becomes apparent to organizational members as well as external stakeholders. Repeated calls for transformative change throughout the past 20 to 30 years with limited improvements in the area of Aboriginal services means organizational credibility is at stake.

Study participants also refer to the ongoing inability of the Ministry to effectively implement change initiatives prior to moving onto new ones and how this impacts the overall quality of service delivery. Disconnect between leadership driven strategic planning initiatives and the realities of everyday practice and the various change initiatives concerning Aboriginal services was noted by study participants. One example is the current implementation of the Aboriginal conceptual framework while other Aboriginal focused initiatives (like Roots and the Aboriginal Child and Youth Mental Health Plan) are wound down or scaled back across the regions. Another participant provided the example of a region that had previously implemented a parallel Aboriginal stream of service, characterized by an Aboriginal management structure and Aboriginal service teams, now reverting to a generalized management structure with only one Aboriginal executive. There is a contradiction between what the Ministry communicates and what the Ministry demonstrates with respect to the current Aboriginal agenda.

Participants identified the contradictory lack of actual or demonstrated support from Ministry management and leadership for the Aboriginal change agenda during a time when the rhetoric and strategic plans of the Ministry indicate a strong commitment to change. Many participants view this simply as an ongoing lip service approach to the Aboriginal change agenda. As one participant says, there is an unwillingness to “move past the concept of ideals and ideas” and to listen to “the very people that can tell them how to put those things into

practice, because we are doing it, they don't want to hear from us." The many examples that participants provided include:

- Inadequate staffing approaches at the frontline resulting in high caseloads.
- High staff turnover.
- Consistent and ongoing failures at the management level to make changes to policy and financial procedures that enable workers to access Elders.
- Lack of policy or support for Indigenous rights of passage and ceremony for children/youth and other more appropriate supports for Aboriginal families that are served by the Ministry.
- The impact of legislated time frames for Aboriginal children in care; persistent focus on the administrative aspects of practice.
- Use of culturally biased risk assessment tools and brief intervention approaches rather than on relationship and trust building approaches involved in Aboriginal practice approaches.
- Implementation of practice initiatives (e.g., attachment and permanency theories) in a way that can be harmful to Aboriginal children that further contradict an Indigenous world view.
- Shifts away from investment in specialized Aboriginal streams of service to more efficient generalized approaches.
- The ongoing and overall reluctance to commit adequate and equitable financial and human resources to Ministry Aboriginal service.

Aboriginal participant managers referred to apparent conceptual support for the Aboriginal agenda, but saw the organization struggling on a structural and operational level to reorganize Ministry roles, functions, policy and financial processes necessary to support change in practice. The recent reorganization of regional management structures intended to support the Aboriginal agenda resulted in just one Aboriginal executive position in each region that lacks operational authority or discretion. One Aboriginal management participant spoke of the unmanageability in this role where regional executives and community service managers defer most "Aboriginal" situations. These include support and implementation of the Aboriginal

agenda, implementing reconciliation activities, supporting individual case level matters, complaints, community related issues, delegated Aboriginal agency matters, and politically volatile situations in a context where the manager has limited authority and discretion while providing ongoing support and information to Ministry staff that lack experience and cultural competency.

An interview with a leader in the provincial office illustrates the degree to which top leadership or executive in the Ministry appear unaware of what happens at the frontline and what the barriers to implementing Aboriginal change may be. This participant struggled to understand throughout the interview what the issues or barriers for Aboriginal employees may be. This supports the assertion by many Aboriginal participants in the study that a disconnection exists between rhetorical and real support between regional and provincial Ministry leadership, where strategic policy is developed, and at the frontline where workers face multiple organizational barriers to implementing it.

Team leaders.

Aboriginal practice approach, community experience, knowledge, quality and support are mitigating factors in an unsupportive organizational structure.

What seems crucially important, in terms of how well frontline participants feel able to enact an Indigenous practice approach, is the degree to which they feel supported by team leaders. Those who report feeling unsupported are also participants that have either left the Ministry or are contemplating leaving. Those who report higher levels of team leader support also report a high degree of satisfaction in their role and an ability to achieve some of their goals through their practice. The quality and support of team leaders with respect to Aboriginal

community and practice approaches can substantially mitigate the impact of what participants report to be a largely unsupportive organizational structure.

Unsupported participants describe having team leaders with little interest or experience working in an Aboriginal community -- they believe such leaders were promoted because of high compliance to the existing structure, policy and practice norms of the Ministry. Either because of a lack of understanding, or having assumed “top-heavy” power and control approaches, these team leaders were also described as largely unsupportive of Aboriginal approaches to practice. These findings support those of Bennett and Zubrzycki (2003) where participants describe non-Aboriginal superiors as mostly inadequate—lacking cultural knowledge and understanding of potential conflicts with professional practice approaches.

Some participants reveal working “covertly” in the community, like one worker who knew she would not be supported because with her team leader “everything comes down to timelines, getting your paperwork done, and prioritizing court over relationships....I would never tell my team leader about the relationships I do have. I’m so terrified because sometimes as a non-Aboriginal team leader (with) Christian values....it can do a lot of damage.” She also struggles with his expert approach to providing correct answers where “there’s no openness, I think he really does think that his job is to correct us, to manage us, to teach us about a better way of working.” What she says she needs in a team leader is someone to talk openly about the difficult situations she faces in practice every day; someone who can help her work flexibly and support alternative less intrusive responses.

A number of participants describe supportive team leaders they had in previous work settings or elsewhere in the Ministry. Characteristics include extensive experience working in Aboriginal communities; shared consistent values, beliefs and practice approaches with

Aboriginal participants; and thorough understanding of the ongoing impacts of colonization and the oppressive practices within mainstream child protection systems. There is less emphasis on power and control in the supervisory relationship and participants are encouraged to engage relevant practices with Aboriginal people. Collaborative and reflexive approaches characterize the team leader employee relationship. Encouraging professionals to consider practice situations from different perspectives, as well as understanding the unique role that Aboriginal employees occupy in the Ministry with respect to their work with Aboriginal people, is how these team leaders appear to engage employees on both a professional and personal level—resulting in more overall support and practice success.

The correlation between participants who report having supportive team leaders and feel satisfied in their roles—able to achieve Aboriginal practice goals within the Ministry—is extremely high. This appears indicative that team leader support is possibly the most critical organizational variable for Aboriginal employees in the Ministry, even in an environment where other variables like structure, policy, practice and internal values are described as unsupportive. Given the huge influence team leaders have interpreting legislation and policy for frontline decision making—well documented in the organizational literature as “street level bureaucracy”—this is not a surprising result in the study (Lipsky, 1980). This finding is also consistent with several organizational studies which find active representation—the degree to which a public servant is expected or able to advocate for diverse group interests—increases when higher levels of discretion or autonomy exist in decision making. It further supports assertions that professional skill and discretion in human services is critically important and should only be informed by policy, procedure and external assessment tools—not driven by it (Callahan & Swift, 2007). Overall, this finding supports the quality and commitment of team

leader approaches to Aboriginal practice support and supervision is critical to the success of Aboriginal employees in MCFD.

Recruitment and retention.

Poor perception of the Ministry in Aboriginal communities, incompatible recruitment approaches, lack of training, mentorship, and advancement opportunities.

Participants describe many barriers for Aboriginal people coming to work for the Ministry. The poor reputation and stigma that working for the Ministry has for Aboriginal people, given the obvious negative impact of the historical context of children's services within Aboriginal communities, is described by several participants as another significant Ministry recruitment barrier. Many former Aboriginal Ministry workers bring their difficult and negative Ministry work experiences back to their families and communities. The reputation of the Ministry as a poor employer travels quickly through communities and reinforces the negative feelings for the Ministry already held by Aboriginal people. This becomes an issue of perception that the Ministry must necessarily overcome as a plausible employer for Aboriginal people.

To attract Aboriginal people, the Ministry must engage them in recruitment processes that are less culturally prohibitive. Current processes, including interviews involving large panels of Ministry staff, poor Aboriginal community representation and behavioural interview and evaluative processes are reported by Aboriginal participants as highly ineffective. For example, behavioural interview questions require applicants to speak at length and in detail about their strengths, providing examples of how they have achieved success in a particular area. Several participants revealed this often crosses cultural norms which dictate that First Nations and Aboriginal people must not be self-promoting. Many spoke of how surprised they were with the interview process, with up to nine people in a formal setting, where they were expected to speak

clearly and repeatedly of their strengths while engaging in little to no eye contact, and without any encouragement or social convention in the interview.

The subjectivity of responses in interviews was also discussed. One participant, who failed her first panel interview, despite since having been identified by her team leader as one of the strongest members on her team, pointed out that there are multiple possible responses to questions. In several areas she had provided a response that, although possibly appropriate, was not one of the possible “point” answers that members of the panel had developed as an acceptable response. The potential for cultural bias when non-Aboriginal people with differing practice norms are developing practice questions and possible responses also appears high.

Another potential barrier to recruitment that repeatedly arose is the inability of the government to offer positions to applicants outside the Ministry or government. When the Aboriginal child welfare service teams were being developed, many participants in this study – including two regional organizational leaders that were interviewed – indicated that there was no possibility to recruit Aboriginal professionals because the teams were developed with existing staff, the majority of which who came to work on Aboriginal teams, sometimes unwillingly, were non-Aboriginal. Additionally a hiring freeze, over the year prior to this study being conducted, but which remains in place to date across the BC provincial government, placed restrictions on posting any vacant positions outside the Ministry.

One exception that several Aboriginal Child and Youth Mental Health (ACYMH) support workers and two of the Ministry regional organizational leaders discussed was the implementation of the ACYMH teams. The teams were developed in addition to the existing mental health teams, so Aboriginal professionals could be recruited from the community. Aboriginal professionals were successfully recruited to these teams in fairly good numbers (three

of the participants in this study were support workers) and were able to establish some strong initial teams. But, as the ACYMH teams grew through the transfer of workers from mainstream mental health teams, the participants say the Aboriginal practice culture and tone that had initially been successfully created (including improved practices) in the teams were increasingly replaced with MCFD practice culture and traditional mainstream mental health approaches.

Participants also spoke about a lack of Ministry training and mentorship opportunities critical to increasing knowledge, skills and advancement opportunities. As Aboriginal employees they believe that Ministry leadership assumes they want to remain (or that they should remain) in the Aboriginal serving stream. Given the lack of any discernible or corollary Aboriginal management stream for Aboriginal services, this essentially means they will remain on frontline Ministry teams serving Aboriginal people directly. At the time of the interviews, (within the Ministry leadership structure) there were no Aboriginal specific management positions other than the Directors of Aboriginal Service Change (with limited or no authority or operational influence), four directors and one assistant deputy minister for Aboriginal services in the provincial office. There are a small number of Aboriginal team leaders and community service managers more directly involved in frontline practice. In addition to the small number of potential management positions that Aboriginal employees might aspire to, other participants refer to a tendency, once aware of how difficult it is to achieve collective goals as frontline staff, to avoid advancement in the Ministry as it may appear to their communities as a move to become more co-opted into the mainstream of the Ministry.

An Aboriginal manager recruited from outside the Ministry says that her effectiveness is curtailed because of the lack of support and training she received in her new role given that her non-Aboriginal leadership counterparts have “grown up” in the Ministry and have the contextual

and bureaucratic knowledge necessary to succeed while she struggles to understand the vernacular and “insider” based approach to accomplishing her expected role and responsibilities successfully. This is a very specific example of how disadvantaged an Aboriginal professional recruited from outside the Ministry, due to the reluctance of current Aboriginal employees to move up, may be as an outsider among those who have spent their entire career in the Ministry accumulating valuable system knowledge assisting them to be successful for competing and obtaining limited resources in a well established bureaucratic environment. New Aboriginal professionals who enter as managers or leaders in the Ministry, according to this participant, require increased support, mentorship and training to be able to function effectively.

The Ministry strategic plan—Strong, Safe and Supported—indicates a commitment to supporting improved recruitment and training approaches for Aboriginal employees. The strategic plan reveals that, between January 2006 and March 2008, the number of Aboriginal MCFD staff doubled from 119 to 239. This can be attributed to the implementation of the Aboriginal Child and Youth Mental Health Teams where external recruitment of Aboriginal professionals occurred at the same time. Ministry recruitment and training strategies indicate increases within the strategic plan due to a regional child welfare recruitment pilot project.

The Aboriginal conceptual framework outlines the Ministry will align human resources and staff roles within the Ministry to ensure better support for Aboriginal children, youth and families. A researcher request in 2010 for the numbers of Aboriginal staff from the MCFD executive director responsible for human resource could not be provided as he indicated that no such numbers are or have been kept in the past. He was uncertain how the numbers stated in the Strong, Safe and Supported plan were obtained. It was confirmed that other than the pilot project in the north region, the Ministry has never developed any specific recruitment or new training

strategies for Ministry Aboriginal employees. Given the commitment of the Aboriginal conceptual framework, he indicated that his branch was now developing a human resource strategy with respect to Aboriginal employees. In 2013, the Ministry still did not have a specific recruitment, training or retention approach although there is ongoing work to develop Aboriginal competency training for all Ministry staff. The current strategic plan indicates the Ministry intends to “provide a supportive environment for Aboriginal MCFD staff, and pursue strong emphasis in cultural competency for non-Aboriginal staff, foster parents and service providers.”

Aboriginal child welfare recruitment pilot project.

Potential learning.

The Aboriginal child welfare worker recruitment pilot project ran three cohorts of recruitment from 2007 to 2009 in one MCFD region. This partnership between MCFD, northern delegated Aboriginal agencies, and the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) was described by a number of study participants - four recruits and two managers, one a project lead. The goal for the project was to increase the number of Aboriginal child welfare workers in the particular MCFD region by designing an alternative and culturally appropriate recruitment and training approach. All of the recruits were required to have a BSW degree but not necessarily a child welfare specialization component. Targeted recruitment through Aboriginal university programs and newspapers in western Canada resulted in approximately ten candidates in each cohort year. The interview process was modified to a more conversational format. Training occurred in a regional centre through this partnership with UNBC over one year where recruits would be in their employment site for a period of time and then be gone for short periods of time to engage in training and mentorship with other colleagues. No specific evaluation or project summary was available to indicate the number of overall recruits and what number were retained

in the region. However a manager from the region indicates that prior to the program she had no Aboriginal employees in her sub-region and there are now ten as a result.

Study participants who were project recruits recount being recruited by Ministry managers and project leads who assured them that Ministry Aboriginal practice and approach was becoming progressive and there would be a high degree of support from the Regional management team. One participant says: “I went through this program thinking that the Ministry is changing.” Unfortunately, the reality for recruits when they were assigned to various child welfare teams across the region was in fact a low level of colleague and team leader support for a different practice approach. Many recruits describe being the only Aboriginal employee on significantly challenged teams, reflecting some of the more negative aspects of Ministry organizational culture. This included settings where racism and discrimination, mainstream practice norms (characterized by the tendency to remove Aboriginal children and pursue provincial permanent guardianship), change fatigue, vicarious traumatization, low cultural competence, and overall lack of support for Aboriginal practice prevailed.

Only one recruit describes receiving limited support; the others did not. There was initial support from the project leads for recruits struggling in largely unwelcoming worksites. However as the training component of the project wound down, recruits say the project leads began distancing themselves. Soon they were essentially redirected back to their team leaders and managers for support at their worksites. Another issue that emerged was the negative perception participants experienced by their Ministry colleagues that they were receiving preferential treatments. This resulted when they were placed into permanent positions while employees who had been working as auxiliary staff, some for several years, felt these positions should have been theirs. The recruits say the tone and feeling within the teams they were placed was intolerant and

has changed very little. Two of the four recruits in the study left the Ministry in favour of working for delegated Aboriginal agencies. The other two were considering leaving the Ministry.

The project co-lead and a manager, from a sub-region where recruits were placed, both acknowledged a number of issues with implementation and said that, if they were to repeat the project, they would make several changes. The co-lead describes having “to sell” the project to frontline team leaders and managers to locate placements for the recruits. Both acknowledge that the aggressive recruitment approach, stressing Ministry practice was changing when this didn’t necessarily mirror the reality of the frontline situation, did not prepare recruits well enough for the nature of the work within team settings. As a result, many recruits struggled substantially. In at least one situation formal human resource processes were utilized by team leaders and managers, resulting in termination. The sub-region manager suggests strengthening the screening and recruitment process, better preparation of recruits regarding the reality and tensions of the professional role with respect to dual accountabilities, better preparation of staff and team leaders at potential recruit worksites, improved ongoing worksite support for recruits, and designing training that does not remove recruits from the worksite for prolonged periods (thereby preventing them from fitting in to the team). Addressing racism and discrimination in team settings also would be necessary.

Restrictive hiring policies concerning the creation of Aboriginal service teams, combined with the lack of formal Ministry recruiting policy and approach for Aboriginal employees (with the exception of the northern pilot project which ended in 2009), means the Ministry has not had much success attracting and recruiting Aboriginal professionals. Consideration of Ministry wide exemptions to current recruitment and hiring policies for Aboriginal employees, which would allow for recruitment outside the Ministry and government, may be considered. The valuable

learning that occurred with respect to the Aboriginal social worker recruitment project potentially informs a Ministry-wide Aboriginal employee recruitment and retention approach. Improving the Aboriginal community perception of the Ministry as an employer, where Aboriginal professionals are supported to realize collective goals while finding opportunity for meaningful advancement, can only be addressed through many other aspects of this research concerned with the satisfaction and retention of Aboriginal employees.

Conclusion—Organizational Structure.

Discussion of the specific structures, processes, policy and culture in MCFD and the impact on study participants as a diverse group, who share consistent goals and aspirations with their Aboriginal communities, indicates the highly structured bureaucratic nature of the organization, combined with an internal culture that largely reflects dominant societal attitudes, has met with limited success in supporting Aboriginal employees and Aboriginal practice approaches. Lack of support is exacerbated by gaps in leadership approach, strategic planning and the actual service delivery mechanisms for Aboriginal people. Rudimentary approaches to recruitment and the nonexistence of any formal approaches to retain Aboriginal employees—as evidenced through a lack of recognition of the unique challenges facing Aboriginal employees and lack of opportunity to contribute to Aboriginal service improvements within the Ministry—mean the MCFD diversity approach remains situated in the more status quo Employment Equity and Managing Diversity orientations to organizational diversity.

Kernaghan (1978) characterizes Employment Equity approaches as primarily focused on recruitment strategies, administrative structures redesigned to reduce obstacles to entry and advancement, and education and training to prepare diverse group members for advancement. Employee training initiatives are targeted on increasing competency and conformity levels of

diverse employees to advance to more senior and executive levels in government. Valuing of Aboriginal knowledge and the potential contribution that it could have is not acknowledged. Although an argument exists that MCFD essentially fails to minimally provide specific training or preparation to new Aboriginal employees so they can be successful in the existing mainstream structure and orientation of the organization.

Managing diversity approaches are motivated by the managerial trend to make a case for increased diversity as a way to promote creativity, decrease tension and increase organizational performance (R. Thomas, 1990). Past and current Ministry strategy to deliver Aboriginal cultural competency training is an example of a managing diversity approach seeking to decrease conflict and stress and enhance productivity primarily through employee awareness programs promoted by organizational leadership to develop empathy and understanding of difference—it seeks to effect individual attitudinal change by examining diverse orientations (Agocs & Burr, 1996).

The Ministry's approach, when one considers the difficulty it has had implementing any of its Aboriginal strategic planning and change initiatives, remains reflective of an Employment Equity and Managing Diversity approach. There is indication through Ministry strategic plans like the Aboriginal conceptual framework, Pillar 4 within Strong, Safe and Supported and some of the initial work that was achieved through reconciliation efforts that the Ministry appears to be considering social equity approaches to organizational diversity. The findings in the study, however, indicate that this is limited to rhetorical consideration within a strategic frame which has not been operationalized. Again the inability to successfully implement these strategic plans through necessary organizational change means the Ministry, while looking toward a more progressive diversity orientation, has failed yet to engage one.

The result is an organizational culture and structure that is an unsupportive environment for Aboriginal professionals and service recipients seeking to achieve goals associated with the more progressive organizational diversity approaches (like multicultural organizational development, multicultural human service organization theory, or social equity diversity approaches). While the goals of Ministry strategic Aboriginal planning seem compatible with an approach where a higher quality and quantity of services are provided to those who need them most, converting these ideas into the practice environment has not been successful (Rice, 2005; Frederickson, 1990).

The findings also support existing organizational studies that find diverse employee levels of organizational satisfaction and commitment are influenced by their perceptions of organizational fit, identification, belonging, opportunity, support, job satisfaction, commitment, fairness and inclusion. Specific studies that find exclusion in the workplace affects motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and retention provide insight into the struggle of many participants in this study. Study participants clearly describe experiencing exclusion in the work place through a lack of formal support and acknowledgement of the Indigenous values and beliefs that motivate their practice and the inherent challenges they endure as community and Ministry insiders and outsiders. Not surprisingly, the participants who reported the highest levels of exclusion and subsequent low satisfaction levels are also the participants who have already left or are actively contemplating leaving their positions with the Ministry. The few who report high levels of satisfaction and support are not considering leaving the Ministry but are actively strategizing approaches (sometimes covert and in spite of Ministry mainstream norms) in their professional settings.

With respect to Aboriginal employee dual accountabilities to community and organization, (as impacted by a large number of organizational variables), this study represents a contribution to the literature. That is, diverse employees clearly describe how their ability to manage dual accountabilities—and the ability of the organization to support Aboriginal practice approaches—become determining factors in the level of diverse employee satisfaction, organizational fit and retention. This finding further supports social equity organizational diversity approaches like Nagda and Gutierrez's (2000) multicultural human service organization approach (MHSO) and social equity public administration approaches advanced by Rice (2005) and Frederickson (1990). MHSO contends that internal and external organizational diversity practices need to be tightly coupled in a learning organization that can continually reflect on creating, supporting, nurturing and sustaining communities within and between the organization, the diverse community and society. Social equity approaches advanced in the public administration literature contend that government organizations have a moral obligation to provide equitable services—of higher quality and quantity—that address social fairness for service delivery outcomes. Tensions that Aboriginal employees experience through their dual accountability to the Aboriginal community and to MCFD may be decreased and managed through MHSO or social equity approaches to organizational diversity with the dual outcome of retention of Aboriginal employees and improved outcomes for Aboriginal service recipients.

In the next section the identifiable Aboriginal service improvement strategies, and the actual impacts that they have on Aboriginal employees and the quality of Aboriginal service delivery in the Ministry, are described within an organizational context that for six years, from 2002 until 2008, was characterized by ongoing Ministry and community planning to transfer services to Aboriginal regional authorities.

Organizational Context and Service Improvement Strategies (2002–2010)

In addition to the internal organizational environment and structure, Ministry organizational responses to the external social, political and economic environment had significant impacts on Aboriginal employees and service recipients. The distinct external social, economic and political environment within which MCFD has been embedded over the past several decades is characterized by the growth and involvement of the Aboriginal service and advocacy sector in determining how children's services should be delivered to Aboriginal children, families and communities. During the same period of time the rise in New Public Management approaches in public sector organizations like MCFD has constrained the fiscal environment and growth of service delivery functions, rather than pursue service delivery approaches that focus on the quality of program outcomes (Foster, 2007). In this section, I argue that this has inhibited the organizational capacity in a manner largely unsupportive of organizational diversity approaches that benefit Aboriginal employees or service recipients.

In a 2002 New Public Management environment, the Tsawwassen Accord provided an excellent opportunity for the Ministry to remove itself from what may, from a managerial perspective, represent a phenomenally problematic area of service delivery for all Canadian provincial child welfare systems serving large numbers of First Nations and Aboriginal people. Over a six year period the Ministry strategically worked toward creation of a crown corporation structure for Regional Aboriginal Authorities that was intended to provide separate and parallel children's services but under the MCFD umbrella. This was a low-risk devolution scenario implemented in a way where government could retain a degree of discretion and control through legislation, remove itself from direct responsibility and any accompanying acrimony for the quality of services provided, while containing costs through the transfer of defined budgets.

Analysis of the service improvement strategies that MCFD engaged in between 2002 and 2008 indicates that the strategic orientation of the Ministry to transfer services to Regional Aboriginal Authorities meant a shift away from internal Aboriginal service delivery improvements to investing in planning processes and structures for the eventual devolution or transfer of services. Given that the Ministry anticipated being out of the business of serving Aboriginal children entirely it would have been counter-intuitive, and likely deemed unnecessary, to engage and invest in internal Aboriginal service improvements. Over the six year period from 2002–2008 considerable energy and resources were focused on the development of Regional Aboriginal Authorities in anticipation of an eventual transfer of services.

Study participants are aware of the various approaches MCFD has taken toward devolving services to Aboriginal communities as well as the recently failed Regional Aboriginal Authority legislation in 2008. Some participants are somewhat aware of the shift, at the time this study was undertaken, toward First Nations “Nation to Nation” initiatives intended to explore self-determining models of First Nations jurisdiction. Many commented on the effect of the six year period, which involved extensive planning for regional Aboriginal authorities, where strained relationships developed due to perceptions of Ministry non-Aboriginal employees that the devolution of services would mean that they would lose their jobs through a transfer of services to Aboriginal Authorities.

Regional Aboriginal service disentanglement processes.

Contrasting two different approaches and positive implications for a specialized and equitable approach.

Many participants were also involved in regional processes of disentangling Ministry Aboriginal human and financial resources for the anticipated transfer of services. Participants

from different regions and the provincial office commented on their perception that disentanglement processes consistently resulted in under-resourcing of Aboriginal services as the Ministry mainstream management element, anticipating the loss of these services, competed to retain a larger share of resources for mainstream services. With the organizational advantage, as discussed in the previous section, resting with seasoned and long time managers within MCFD, several participants say Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Ministry staff and community members that advocated for fair and equitable resources for disentangled Aboriginal services, were unsuccessful.

An Aboriginal manager, who for several years was primarily involved in regional disentanglement processes, recounts with considerable frustration how fellow MCFD managers protected what they saw as mainstream resources despite regional and provincial Ministry leadership voicing support for a fair process. She describes experiencing reluctance at all levels of regional management to be transparent and share relevant Ministry information that existed to guide the process. She identifies what failed to be acknowledged through the process of disentanglement of Aboriginal Ministry resources was an understanding and adequate response to two persistent issues or differences in Aboriginal service provision. The first is that First Nations and Aboriginal people underutilize existing Ministry contracted family prevention/support, early intervention, special needs and mental health services due to geographical barriers, low trust, and low availability of culturally appropriate services. A tendency of many Ministry counterparts, with whom she was negotiating the disentanglement of resources with, was to suggest disentangling the overall amount of contracted resources based on the existing usage rather than on an examination of the potential number of Aboriginal people that would use services if they were appropriate and available. The result according to this

participant, and supported by study participants from other regions, is an underfunded Aboriginal contracted sector of support services.

The other issue is the huge overrepresentation of First Nations and Aboriginal children and youth in the Ministry's child welfare and youth justice streams. With respect to this she saw a tendency of Ministry counterpart managers to attempt to under-represent these numbers, by encouraging mainstream Ministry teams to leave inactive files of non-Aboriginal service recipients open to inflate non-Aboriginal caseloads. Her management counterparts also would not acknowledge or make allowance for increased Ministry human resources to lower caseloads for staff working with Aboriginal service recipients given the complexity of issues that Aboriginal people face due to colonization, the considerably larger family, extended family and community systems involved, and the increased amount of travel involved when people live in remote and isolated communities. In the end, she contends that she was one person, a relatively new and unsupported Ministry manager, up against a large number of seasoned regional managers, attempting to advocate for fair and equitable resources. Requests for executive support were rebuffed and she was redirected back to her regional colleagues to reach a consensus on the disentanglement approach. She worries that while she tried to negotiate the best arrangement she could, given the difficult and even impossible situation she found herself in, the result was unequal resources—let alone equitable resources for Aboriginal and First Nations service recipients.

After this manager left the disentanglement project, agreements that were made in the region for the overall funding envelope for Aboriginal contracted service providers were reduced. The caseload sizes of the Aboriginal service teams in the region remain higher than that of the other Ministry teams in spite of a commitment to reassess it. The manager reports that any

ambitions that she or the team leaders of the Aboriginal service teams had to practice in a more culturally appropriate manner are gone due to high caseloads, the fallout of change in an under-resourced environment, the negative culture effect caused by the transfer of largely non-Aboriginal staff to the teams, and ongoing Ministry demands for accountability and compliance with changing policy and information systems.

Aboriginal participants and team leaders from another region (as described in the case study section of the results) where supportive Aboriginal practice and teams are identified, describe their disentanglement process, which occurred prior to the one described by the manager above, as being somewhat more successful. They describe the disentanglement of the human resources of the Ministry Aboriginal service teams occurring in a more equitable manner. They were able to include Aboriginal and First Nations community members on interview panels to screen existing Ministry workers interested in joining the Aboriginal service teams.

Team leaders and participants describe the formation of teams where shared practice values and community practice approaches with First Nations and Aboriginal communities are prevalent. Adequate physical resources by way of office space were provided and both team leaders took what opportunities they had to redesign existing Ministry approaches to office space and focused on creating comfortable and inviting spaces for Aboriginal and First Nations service recipients. Team leaders, though non-Aboriginal, have many years of Aboriginal practice and community experience, have excellent understanding of the impacts of child welfare and residential school systems on Aboriginal people and communities and are described as extremely supportive of participants' value-based approaches for working within First Nations and Aboriginal communities. The finding that team leader support for Aboriginal professionals is one

of the most critical factors in overall employee level of satisfaction and degree of organizational fit is again stressed in this study as quite relevant in the organization.

Participants also describe a specialized Aboriginal regional management structure that accompanied the disentanglement process. A director and deputy director of Aboriginal practice, Aboriginal service managers and practice consultants formed a corollary management stream to the main regional management stream and supported the newly formed Aboriginal service teams. One of the progressive initiatives, in addition to supporting the development of the two effective worksites described in this study, that this Aboriginal management stream successfully implemented in the region was an Aboriginal support network for Aboriginal employees. However, the case study participants noted that this corollary or specialized management stream created to support Aboriginal services was eliminated in the early part of 2010 in favour of a generalized management structure, the Aboriginal support network, the Aboriginal service teams and Aboriginal services in general in the region are eroding. The Aboriginal support network has been inactive in the region since 2011.

The one remaining Aboriginal manager from this region also identifies the impact of the loss of this structure and resulting difficulty faced responding to high demands for assistance with frontline practice matters, complaints, community relations, Delegated Aboriginal agency matters, organizing reconciliation events, promoting management initiatives, responding to sensitive political situations and the implementation of the Aboriginal conceptual framework in the region. Reversion to a generalized stream of management means Aboriginal services are no longer prioritized as the central focus with a dedicated management stream but are relegated once again to being dealt with by managers with overall responsibility for all services.

The impact is felt by the Aboriginal participants and team leaders in this region who interpret this as lower priority for Aboriginal services—despite organizational rhetoric communicated through the Aboriginal conceptual framework and other current strategic planning that emphasize Aboriginal service competency and support as a priority for all Ministry employees. Demonstrated low levels of organizational cultural competence mean that generalized responsibility for Aboriginal services results in managers who have responsibility but are unsuitable to respond appropriately to Aboriginal practice and organizational matters. There is significant evidence in this study that organizational specialization versus generalization has proven more successful in this region.

Aboriginal service improvement initiatives.

Limited implementation success.

Study participants describe the *Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Conceptual Framework for Ministry Staff* (Aboriginal conceptual framework) and the new practice approach Child and Family Support, Assessment, Planning, and Practice (CAPP) with limited optimism for what impact they would have on the Ministry Aboriginal practice environment. Participants spoke about the contradictions between these strategic initiatives and the organizational structure and practice environment in which they are being introduced. Implementation of both strategies without removing barriers within the practice and organizational structure and environment that participants describe is viewed by many as insufficient for real change.

Many participants were only minimally aware of the Aboriginal conceptual framework and described it as too rhetorical, with no articulation of how its ambitious and expansive vision would be resourced or supported, to be useful. Other participants had more optimism with

respect to the overall impact of the practice values within CAPP that are described as supportive of an Aboriginal practice approach that focuses on relationship, continuity and trust.

In terms of the Touchstones of Hope and reconciliation efforts the Ministry is implementing in the one region, frontline participants had a different experience of these sessions than participant managers in the region who feel they contribute to improved relationships between the Ministry and First Nations and Aboriginal communities. Frontline participants described colleagues as closed and lacking sincerity in their participation in reconciliation sessions. Again participants are identifying contradictions between Ministry strategic efforts toward reconciliation and the reality of the practice environment where Ministry staff insight and openness may not exist at a level necessary for meaningful participation and reconciliation.

Conclusion: Aboriginal Service Improvement Strategies (2002–2010).

Given the eventual failure of Ministry and community efforts to see the introduction of legislation to enable the Aboriginal regional authorities in 2008, less focus and effort to disentangle Aboriginal services resulted. Under pressure from First Nations groups for a new strategy involving expanded First Nations authority and control of services, the Ministry, under the leadership of then Deputy Minister Lesley du Toit, and in spite of there being no federal or provincial government framework in place to support child welfare jurisdiction outside of treaty, made bold statements signalling consideration of First Nations and Aboriginal inherent jurisdiction over children's services (Government of British Columbia, 2011).

The departure of Lesley du Toit and replacement with Stephen Brown as deputy minister in 2011 resulted in de-emphasis of the Aboriginal conceptual framework and CAPP and the development of a new strategic Aboriginal service plan introduced in 2012 emphasizing renewed priority on internal MCFD and delegated Aboriginal agency service improvements (Government

of British Columbia, 2012). While reconciliation events continued throughout 2011, fewer occurred the following year with a reduced dedicated budget. Under Stephen Brown's leadership, responsibility for the exploration of alternative child welfare jurisdictional arrangements with First Nations and Aboriginal people of BC was transferred to the BC Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation (MARR). Since this change, the Ministry has had no immediate specific strategy with respect to the transfer of services to Aboriginal communities (although there has been some ongoing funding to Aboriginal communities to build community capacity), other than through delegation-enabling agreements with First Nations, Aboriginal, and Métis agencies (Government of British Columbia, 2012).

The current strategic plan for Aboriginal services focuses largely on improvements in existing Aboriginal service delivery through Ministry teams and delegated Aboriginal agencies. This study and analysis of the performance of MCFD's organizational diversity approach is timely and can help inform strategies the organization may want to consider to improve Aboriginal services and outcomes within the Ministry and delegated Aboriginal agencies.

Summary

Aboriginal participants consistently describe a value-based motivation and orientation to practice that is characterized by individual and collective Indigenous experiences, world view and sense of responsibility to change how services impact children, families and communities. This finding supports and builds on the representative bureaucracy literature that diverse employees retain pre-occupational socialization experiences and represent diverse group interests within the workplace bureaucracy (Krislov, 1974; Krislov & Rosenbloom, 1981). How participants describe their experiences, satisfaction and retention within the organization is consistent with other studies that evaluate organizational performance based on how the

organizational environment and structure impacts diverse employee experiences, satisfaction, inclusion and retention. The large number of study participants, that have either left the organization or consider leaving, describe experiences characterized by discrimination and racism, low organizational cultural competency, practice norm/value differences of colleagues, social isolation and exclusion. They also describe low structural and management support, tokenism and placation, lack of fairness and opportunities for advancement, significant role tension and unsupported and traumatized colleagues impacted by ongoing change fatigue.

The case study results provide an opportunity to contrast unsatisfactory participant experiences with participants who report high levels of satisfaction in their positions within the Ministry. Participants who report high levels of support from colleagues and team leaders in their worksite provide valuable information about potential aspects of the organizational environment and structure that can support MCFD Aboriginal employees and improve Aboriginal practice. These sites are characterized by specialized Aboriginal service teams supported by a specialized regional Aboriginal service management stream; are led by team leaders with extensive Aboriginal practice and community experience who work closely with the community; reflect Indigenous practice values, norms and processes, and operate from culturally appropriate and respectful physical office locations.

These worksites also benefit from more equitable access to (and flexibility in how they use) resources for Aboriginal services. The degree to which Aboriginal participants in these worksites describe feeling empowered to practice in a way that supports Indigenous values, approaches and improved outcomes supports findings of a number of studies that have explored how the active representation of diverse employees is increased as their degree of discretion and autonomy increases and when they feel their employer expects and supports their actions (Dolan,

2000; Meier & Nigro, 1976; Selden, 1997; Sowa & Selden, 2003). Higher levels of Aboriginal employee satisfaction, coupled with the degree to which they feel empowered to practice in a way that is beneficial for Aboriginal people and communities may ultimately translate to better organizational and community outcomes.

Overall, while there are pockets of good practice in the Ministry, these examples are the exception. Such pockets of good practice exist almost in spite of the larger organization; elsewhere, the Ministry environment and structures are unsupportive of effective Aboriginal practice approaches. This reality drives Aboriginal and First Nation community advocacy and demands for jurisdiction—not just control over services. In the interim, as the Ministry and delegated Aboriginal agencies deliver services, the reality of Ministry oversight and control of Aboriginal practice means that local team environments may be mitigated through strong team leadership and advocacy, but the prevalence of a largely unsupportive organizational structure and environment has a negative impact on Aboriginal professionals and practice.

This reality results in Aboriginal professionals within the Ministry negotiating on a daily basis the inherent dual accountabilities and tensions in their community and professional roles. The next chapter provides concluding thoughts about key findings of the study and implications for MCFD and other similar organizations, for the social work profession, for Aboriginal social workers, training and education efforts and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 12. Conclusion

Government child welfare involvement with Aboriginal communities in Canada has had significant and tragic consequences. These impacts are felt every day by Aboriginal people across this country. Extensive documentation and literature address the systemic abuse and oppression that resulted with intergenerational trauma, the ongoing overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and families within child welfare systems, and the concurrent underrepresentation of prevention and support services that could help to address and ameliorate ongoing impacts. Government child welfare agencies across Canada struggle to find adequate policy, practice, and resources to better serve Aboriginal people, they also pursue the inclusion of Aboriginal social workers as part of this strategy. The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the effectiveness of this effort and how it ultimately impacts the effectiveness of Aboriginal professionals and the services provided to Aboriginal children and families.

Key Findings

The key findings in this research provide valuable information regarding the orientation, world view, motivation, identity, vision, practice approach and dual accountabilities of Aboriginal employees. Additionally, these findings help develop an understanding of how the unique orientation and circumstances that bring Aboriginal employees to work for MCFD and the subsequent interface with the organizational environment, culture, structure and context where there appears to be a poor fit between Aboriginal employees and the organization. The end result is underutilization and frequent loss of what are extremely valuable, and possibly key resources required for an organizational strategy to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities.

Aboriginal professionals who participated in the study come from highly diverse and varied backgrounds from each another, yet appear to share a collective, value-based orientation and motivation to work in MCFD to improve service provision to Aboriginal children and families. They clearly believe that the services provided by MCFD need to change. They are intrinsically driven to seek better outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities. It is critically important that Aboriginal professionals are able to work within their full potential in MCFD to attain this value-based orientation to improving services for Aboriginal children, youth family and communities. A collective belief and orientation regarding reenergizing community values and restoring capacity within Aboriginal communities is evident. The ultimate goal for these participants is to support the community to regain responsibility for Aboriginal children—ending the need for government system intervention.

In the interim, Aboriginal participants in this study describe practice approaches that can be implemented within the Ministry which they feel better contribute to serving the interests of Aboriginal children and families. They attempt to implement their approaches in a highly complex internal and external organizational context (that appears for a number of reasons to drive MCFD) by embracing a highly bureaucratic organizational approach characterized by a command and control structure, low communication, and a low-risk orientation that results in reluctance to move forward and take decisive action. What is really required to serve the interests of Aboriginal children and families is an organizational systemic shift in areas like policy and practice development and implementation, strategic planning, resource allocation, structure, communication and decision making, support and inclusion and internal cultural competency.

Another important finding of this research is the degree to which Aboriginal participants report being impacted in their roles by a dual accountability where they are responsible both to

their communities to seek the systemic change they believe necessary to move forward and to the Ministry as their employer. The dichotomous quality of their experiences as both insiders and outsiders, and often in their communities and inside the Ministry, often leads to many Aboriginal participants struggling to feel they are contributing in a way they believe has value. This means experiencing an uneasy fit in dual and competing roles.

Implication of the Findings for the Literature

The above findings are relevant and contribute to several different areas of literature, including Aboriginal practice approaches in children's services, dual accountability and insider/outsider experiences of Aboriginal professionals, passive and active forms of representation, and studies that describe organizational variables that detract or contribute to diverse worker effectiveness. The findings also contribute to organizational diversity literature, including studies on managing diversity and social equity diversity approaches.

Aboriginal practice approach.

Aboriginal participants in this study strongly and collectively describe a practice approach that is an extension of Indigenous values: it encourages a strong focus on community relationships; acknowledges the impacts of colonization; emphasizes empowerment and partnership with individuals and communities; encompasses relationship, respect and trust, holistic and strength-based approaches, cultural knowledge and teachings; and a strong reliance on extended family and community for support and care giving. This research finding strengthens literature that similarly focuses on many of these variables (Morrisette et al., 1993; Red Horse et al., 1978; Walmsley, 2005; Weaver & White, 1997). This study also broadens the literature by contrasting Aboriginal approaches with dominant practices of MCFD. It demonstrates how the incompatibility between the two approaches causes Aboriginal

practitioners to struggle to implement their practices amidst this mainstream children's services organization.

Dual accountability and the experience of being both an insider and an outsider.

Aboriginal participants describe tensions inherent in the dual accountabilities they face in their responsibilities as a member of an Aboriginal community along with their professional role in the Ministry. Descriptions of role tension, being tokenized, difficulties achieving a sense of belonging, and of feeling valued or heard within the organization, all help to articulate the impact these dual accountabilities have on participants' resulting feelings of being both insiders and outsiders in the community and within the Ministry. These findings build on existing British Columbia focused literature that articulates how the ongoing application of provincial legislation and the systemic influence of MCFD on practice approaches in delegated Aboriginal agencies have the effect of creating dual accountabilities for social workers in those settings (Reid, 2005; Walmsley, 2005).

The participants in this study were MCFD workers, but they experienced many of the same tensions described by Reid (2005) and Walmsley (2005). Perhaps the most important aspect of this finding is that participants also describe low awareness and support by MCFD colleagues and management for this unique and difficult orientation (dual accountability) that they face every day in their work. The significance of this finding for organizations like MCFD reveals the importance of acknowledging and closely attending to Aboriginal professionals' dual accountabilities. Such acknowledgment may also assist MCFD as an entity to understand its collective accountability (on behalf of government) to the Aboriginal community, especially given some of the colonial impacts that government is responsible for. That is, to provide better

outcomes for Aboriginal children and families while supporting and acknowledging the important contributions of Aboriginal professionals in this process.

Representing group interests and engaging in active forms of representation.

Literature concerned with the theory of representative bureaucracy examines whether diverse group members from historically disadvantaged groups have different values from those of fellow diverse group members resulting from altered socialization processes where social and educational aspirations and experiences differ (Kernaghan, 1978). This literature contends that diverse group members may share values more similar to those they work with than to their demographically similar diverse group members. This study's findings indicate that Aboriginal participants who work for MCFD strongly share collective group values with diverse group members and the communities they feel they represent—expressing a strong commitment to achieving stronger individual and group outcomes. While these findings cannot be generalized to all diverse individuals or employees, they suggest representation may depend on the nature of the relationship between the diverse group and the organization. The ongoing problematic nature of the historical and current relationship of Aboriginal people with child welfare organizations means that these Aboriginal participants have clear loyalties and values that drive their motivation within the organization to achieve the interests of diverse group members—in this case, Aboriginal children, families, and communities.

The findings have implications for another area of the representative bureaucracy literature, which concerns the degree to which diverse employees—where they are found to represent the interests of their communities—can actively represent those interests and concerns by influencing processes and outcomes of the organization (Krislov, 1974; Krislov & Rosenbloom, 1981; Sowa & Selden, 2003; Thompson, 1976). Overall, this study indicates that

most Aboriginal participants are not able to actively represent group interests due to an unsupportive MCFD organizational culture and structure. Another important study finding is that an apparent correlation exists between supportive Aboriginal service teams—characterized by team leaders with experience and knowledge of Aboriginal communities and practice—and Aboriginal participants who reported increased effectiveness and empowerment to practice and achieve goals compatible with community interests. On these teams, Aboriginal participants describe having a higher degree of autonomy and ability to make decisions with the support of their team leaders and colleagues. These findings support and contribute to studies from the 1990s reporting that successful active representation depends on administrative discretion, individual attitudes, organizational socialization and administrative actions (Dolan, 2000; Meier & Nigro, 1976; Selden, 1997; Sowa & Selden, 2003).

Organizational variables that contribute to/detract from diverse worker effectiveness.

Another significant contribution to the literature this study makes concerns the major variable corresponding to participant effectiveness (retention rates and reported ability to practice consistently within Indigenous belief and value system) and the degree to which participants' values, beliefs and practices are supported and reflected in the workplace. A large number of participants reported feelings of isolation, lack of belonging, role tension and low workplace satisfaction. The issues they cite for this lack of fit are low cultural competence of Ministry staff, racism, policy-driven mainstream practice norms characterized by negative views of the capacity of Aboriginal families, overall feelings of change fatigue in MCFD, institutionalized physical workplace settings and an overall lack of support for Indigenous practice perspectives. These issues contribute to and exacerbate the experiences of dual

accountabilities. The end result reported by many participants is an ongoing struggle to remain with the Ministry because they experience decreased effectiveness. Indeed, many participants had left the Ministry, were planning to leave, or were struggling to remain.

These findings support existing organizational studies which find that diverse employee levels of organizational satisfaction and commitment are influenced by their perceptions of organizational fit, identification, belonging, opportunity, support, job satisfaction, commitment, fairness and inclusion (Chrobot-Mason, 2004; Ensher et al., 2001; Findler et al., 2007; Foley et al., 2005; Friedman & Holtom, 2002; Ibarra, 1995; Jones & Schaubroeck, 2004; Lawler, 1994; Mor Barak et al., 2003; Mor Barak & Levin, 2001; R. Smith, 2002). Studies that find that exclusion in the workplace affects motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and retention provide insight into the struggle of participants in this study. Participants in this study describe experiencing exclusion through a lack of support and acknowledgement of the Indigenous values and beliefs that motivate their practice and the inherent challenges they face as community and Ministry insiders and outsiders.

Organizational diversity approach.

This study's overall finding is that MCFD's specific structures, processes, policies and culture had very limited success supporting Aboriginal employees and Aboriginal practice approaches. Rudimentary recruitment approaches and the lack of formal approaches to retain Aboriginal employees—as evidenced through little if any recognition of the unique challenges facing Aboriginal employees and the lack of opportunity for Aboriginal employees to contribute to Aboriginal service improvements within the Ministry—suggests that the MCFD diversity approach remains situated in status quo employment equity and managing diversity orientations to organizational diversity.

The result is an organizational culture and Ministry structure and environment currently unsupportive of Aboriginal professionals and service recipients, where goals of any of the more progressive organizational diversity approaches (like multicultural organizational development (MCOB), multicultural human service organization (MCHSO) theory or social equity diversity approaches) can be achieved. A significant issue appears to be that, while the goals of Ministry strategic Aboriginal planning (e.g., Strong, Safe, and Supported and the Aboriginal conceptual framework) seem compatible with an ideal (i.e., higher quality and quantity of services provided to those who need them most), the implementation of these ideas into the practice environment has not been successful (Frederickson, 1990; Rice, 2005).

Implications and Recommendations That Emerge From the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain better understanding of how organizational norms, approaches, structures and aspects of MCFD culture fit with Aboriginal professionals' cultural and community orientation, roles, responsibilities and expectations for providing effective services to Aboriginal children and families. The findings suggest implications for MCFD that may be relevant for other government children's service organizations that serve Aboriginal people and communities, for the social work profession, and, in particular, for Aboriginal social workers who work with their own or other Aboriginal communities.

Implications for MCFD and other government children's services organizations.

The overall results of the study indicate that MCFD's diversity orientation is not reflective of progressive social equity diversity approaches but relies on status quo approaches characterized by employment equity and managing diversity orientations. There are many complex variables and issues inherent in what also is a complex organizational environment. Solutions are neither simple nor obvious. For any organization to embrace social equity diversity

approaches, a significant commitment is made toward a radical change management orientation to challenge dominant attitudes, values and beliefs which pervade not only the organization but society in general. Some may question whether government organizations are in a strategic position to adopt social equity diversity approaches given their highly bureaucratic, rigid, structured environment and approaches. However, incremental approaches to organizational change may be challenged by proponents of social equity diversity approaches who believe that efforts must be founded on significant shifts in the values, beliefs and attitudes shaping the organizational culture.

Despite these considerations, strategies described as working well to support Aboriginal employees in the Ministry, alongside some possible organizational design strategies that surfaced throughout this study, provide potential and timely direction for MCFD direct organizational action to address better support and outcomes for Aboriginal professionals and the Aboriginal children, youth and communities they serve. Although best implemented alongside a social equity organizational diversity approach, these strategies, even if implemented singularly, may provide some immediate benefit for Aboriginal employees and practice within the Ministry.

Perhaps the most important finding is the significance placed on a stream of specialized Aboriginal practice (which includes dedicated directors, managers, team leaders and Aboriginal teams of staff) that emerges in one particular region where strategies and approaches are given priority to support Aboriginal employees to provide relevant practice in Aboriginal communities. Increased attention to the development and implementation of this organizational structural approach alone may help increase the number of Aboriginal service providers within MCFD, improve their effectiveness, improve the quality of the work environment where they choose to remain, and lead to better services and outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.

An organizational structural approach to creating a specialized stream of Aboriginal practice also provides a potentially effective structure that not only promotes several retention strategies but also an environment where employees report higher levels of satisfaction, support and an increased ability to work with a practice approach that creates and develops vision for how Aboriginal people are best served. One key component described both inside and outside the specialized Aboriginal streams is the involvement and support of team leaders who have extensive Aboriginal practice and community interest and experience. When recruiting or promoting staff to team leader positions there should be increased focus and attention placed on their experience and effectiveness in working with Aboriginal communities. The link between implementing value-based Aboriginal practice approaches also appears dependent on ensuring dedicated and equitable funds accessible to and controlled by Aboriginal teams or worksites. Creating separate and equitable Aboriginal management streams would support this strategy.

Another critical strategy is for MCFD to develop a direct and formalized organizational approach to challenge the high level of organizational and systemic racism reported in the study. The ability to practice within a value-based approach motivates Aboriginal participants to work in MCFD, and the presence or absence of support to do so is a critical factor in their decision to remain with the organization. MCFD's ability to support value based approaches may be limited given lower levels of Aboriginal cultural competency. Therefore, targeting staff who have higher Aboriginal cultural competence for a specialized Aboriginal stream, as a shorter term strategy to improve Aboriginal services and outcomes, could exist alongside a longer term strategy of indigenizing the entire organization.

Several other possible recruitment and retention strategies (currently viewed as underdeveloped or entirely non-existent in the organization) may also support Aboriginal

employees to remain with the organization to improve practices and outcomes for Aboriginal people. One would be a deliberate focus on providing meaningful engagement and mentorship of Aboriginal employees, possibly through the creation of Aboriginal employee support networks, utilizing mentorship models, and through inclusive leadership and decision-making approaches. Engagement for Aboriginal employees may also include the intentional, meaningful and effective inclusion of Aboriginal employees in, first, the development and implementation of Aboriginal policy and practice development and, second, providing increased and relevant training and learning opportunities that lead to advancement and leadership opportunities in the Ministry.

Realizing the potential of adopting and promoting these types of strategies by MCFD and similar government child-serving organizations will, as stated in both this and the previous chapter, depend highly on the chosen diversity approach, because the latter will determine the depth and degree of culture shift within the organization.

Implications for the social work profession.

The results of this study have several implications for the social work profession. The strategies outlined in the previous section may be relevant to social work practitioners who work in child-serving government organizations serving significant numbers of Aboriginal children, families and communities. The study provides rich information and strategies for non-Aboriginal social workers to support Aboriginal social work colleagues while they pursue more equitable practice goals and face unique, challenging circumstances characterized by dual accountabilities. It also provides practice approach strategies for working within Aboriginal communities.

While the organization may be responsible to set the tone and create an environment supporting the goals of Aboriginal professionals, it is non-Aboriginal colleagues who will either

embrace change through honest and open engagement of difficult and uncomfortable issues—including racism, power, control—and the imposition of dominant values and beliefs on their practice by the Ministry. The principles described in reconciliation processes like Touchstones of Hope may only be effective when members of dominant organizations like MCFD, which are historically responsible for oppression, are able to move beyond fear, denial, and guilt to acknowledge the real and ongoing damage experienced by Aboriginal children, families and communities and honestly open themselves to other perspectives. This would include a more inclusive, reflexive and responsive approach to practice with Aboriginal people. Professionals working with significantly impacted populations should understand the historical experiences that led to their current realities and firmly acknowledge the structural issues they face daily. In essence, I am describing anti-oppressive, culturally competent, reflexive practice.

Educational programs for social workers and other human service professionals who work with Aboriginal people must firmly establish specific coursework and, perhaps more importantly, embed anti-oppressive, cultural competency, and reflexivity approaches into all academic learning. Professionals entering the field must have the opportunity not just to study but to internalize values and beliefs that will enable them to practice from an anti-oppressive and informed standpoint.

Implications for Aboriginal social workers.

This study validates the significantly valuable and critical contributions of Aboriginal social workers to shifting the practice within MCFD and similar child-serving organizations. It further increases awareness of the need to broaden and increase the influence of Aboriginal professionals in child-serving organizations to improve strategies and approaches for improving outcomes for Aboriginal people.

The study also highlights the incredible challenges that Aboriginal social workers face working in historically oppressive systems to effect change. Their experiences as community and organizational insiders and outsiders create dual accountabilities which mean that differentiation between the professional and private aspects of their lives becomes extremely blurred. The toll these dual accountabilities take on personal health and well-being can become very significant.

All of these findings indicate that Aboriginal social workers may require specialized considerations where Aboriginal educational specializations exist in social work, child and youth care, youth justice and/or counselling programs. The need to explore issues involving dual accountabilities, the insider/outsider role, and personal health and wellness may be critical aspects for Aboriginal students preparing to work in the field.

I hope this study will help improve approaches adopted by organizations like MCFD so that the goals of Aboriginal professionals to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children, youth families and communities can be more fully and effectively realized.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several possibilities for future research arising from this study. The study's findings are exploratory: continued research is required to generalize findings more broadly to other government children's service agencies that serve large numbers of Aboriginal children. The first recommendation therefore would be to conduct similar studies in other jurisdictions to determine whether the themes that emerged in this study are relevant for Aboriginal employees in other organizations and jurisdictions.

Several opportunities exist to build on the findings of this research. While the study began to explore organizational factors and variables contributing to supporting Aboriginal professionals serving Aboriginal children and families more effectively, a more extensive and in-

depth exploration of effective situations and factors could provide greater understanding and more potential strategies for organizations like MCFD. This study also points to a need to explore factors or variables (both organizational and nonorganizational) that may contribute to increasing non-Aboriginal social work professionals' strength and ability to become more effective allies to Aboriginal social workers.

Summary

This ethnographic study establishes that Aboriginal participants represent the interests of diverse group members — their involvement and influence in services is critically important. The study also reveals the dichotomous professional and private roles of Aboriginal participants that result in dual accountabilities to their communities and to the profession and organization. The tension this dual accountability often creates can become a critical factor in their ability to remain in organizations like MCFD. The study also establishes that the Ministry does not sufficiently recognize the potential and vitally important contributions Aboriginal professionals can make to children's services positively impacting Aboriginal children and families. The Ministry also doesn't appear to recognize the unique challenges facing Aboriginal professionals in their attempts to influence the practice and outcomes of the Ministry, nor does it support or promote them to do this effectively.

Conversely, Aboriginal employees nevertheless describe some situations in the Ministry where they feel well supported to pursue their goals to improve services to Aboriginal children and families. These situations, while limited, illustrate that several factors contribute to higher levels of Aboriginal professional effectiveness in the Ministry. These factors include specialized, equitably resourced, Aboriginal-specific teams where leaders have extensive experience and knowledge working with Aboriginal communities. In addition, they understand and support the

goals of Aboriginal staff and increase their autonomy to enable them to influence practice. This research provides considerations and implications for several different areas of literature, for Aboriginal child-serving organizations, for the social work profession and education, for social work professionals, including Aboriginal social workers and for future research.

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Appendix A. Individual Interviews—Possible Questions

Following is a list of possible questions, that arise from the general research question and sub-questions, which may be used within the Individual interviews. However, it is important to realize that as an ethnographic study has a phenomenological base, and the approach to collecting research data is inductive, this means that questions may be determined by and through the research process itself and therefore are impossible to include at this preliminary point to data collection.

Questions:

1. Can you tell me about your background? Where are you from? How did you come to work at MCFD?
2. Can you describe your work setting at MCFD? What are your roles and responsibilities in MCFD? Have you had prior work experience at MCFD or with other organizations?
3. How do these roles and responsibilities challenge or allow you to fulfill your interests as an Aboriginal employee? Does your position meet your needs or allow you meet your aspirations?
4. What motivates you to do this work?
5. How do you see your current role and responsibilities fitting with those of MCFD?
6. How do you see your current role and responsibilities fitting with Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities that you work with?
7. How do you see your cultural identity and responsibilities fitting with your professional and organizational role and responsibilities within this work setting? How do your team leaders, managers, or directors support you in this?

8. Can you describe the MCFD workplace for Aboriginal employees? If you were able what specific changes within the organization might you make?
9. Is MCFD involved in Aboriginal or Aboriginal approaches to better serve Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities? At this specific location? Do you see these approaches as effective? Do they assist you to be effective in your role? Why or why not? What alternative approaches would you suggest—please describe them?
10. In what ways do MCFD organizational variables (would provide some definition and possible examples regarding conceptualized organizational variables—leadership, structure, problem-solving/decision-making, support, etc.) increase or reduce your effectiveness in providing effective service to Aboriginal peoples? How?

Appendix B. Focus Group Format

Following is the intended approach or format for the Focus Groups. However, it is important to realize that as an ethnographic study has a phenomenological base, and the approach to collecting research data is inductive, this means that questions and information shared by the researcher may be determined by and through the research process itself and therefore are impossible to include at this preliminary point to data collection.

Introductions: (15 minutes) Researcher will introduce herself and briefly outline what the format for the focus group will be. Focus group participants introduce themselves, identify their Aboriginal or First Nation community affiliation, identify their positions and length of service within MCFD, and which First Nation communities they work with.

Information Sharing by the researcher (15 minutes): A brief presentation of the study, including the rationale, researcher stance and epistemology, summary of literature and context, the research questions, methodology and research design, and the opportunity for participant collaboration.

- How do MCFD organizational norms, approaches, and aspects of culture fit with Aboriginal workers' cultural and community orientation, roles, responsibilities and expectations in providing effective service to Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities?
- How do differing roles, positions and locations of Aboriginal staff within MCFD affect how their roles and responsibilities align with the aims of MCFD? With the aims of the Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities they serve?

- How do Aboriginal MCFD employees experience and respond to what may be competing organizational and cultural/community responsibilities? Are these tensions recognized by MCFD and staff supported in any way?
- How do Aboriginal MCFD employees view organizational variables contributing to reduced or increased role-effectiveness in providing effective service to Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities?
- What organizational approaches are the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) taking specific to serving Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities? How are these approaches impacted by internal and external influences?
- How do Aboriginal MCFD employees view the effectiveness of MCFD organizational approaches specific to serving Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities? Are there alternative approaches that can be identified?

Focus group participants may be instrumental in refining the research questions through clarification of concepts and issues. A more grand tour approach to eliciting feedback through these questions allows previously unconsidered variables to be raised by the participants.

Appendix C. MCFD Leader of Aboriginal Service Interviews—Possible Questions

Following is a list of possible questions, that arise from the general research question and sub-questions, which may be used within the organizational contact interviews. However, it is important to realize that as an ethnographic study has a phenomenological base, and the approach to collecting research data is inductive, this means that questions may be determined by and through the research process itself and therefore are impossible to include at this preliminary point to data collection.

Questions:

1. What is your position within MCFD? In particular how do you work for or in response to the interests of Aboriginal employees or Aboriginal peoples that the organization serves?
2. How would you describe the current work setting at MCFD for Aboriginal employees?
3. How many Aboriginal staff work for MCFD and what are their respective positions and locations?
4. What strategies have been used to recruit and retain Aboriginal employees?
5. Are there any particular locations or work settings that stand out as successfully or unsuccessfully supporting Aboriginal employees in your region or in the province?
6. What is unique for Aboriginal employees in this region or provincial office?
7. Does MCFD have an official workplace statement or policy for Aboriginal employees (or diversity statement)?
8. How do MCFD organizational variables (will provide some definition and possible examples regarding conceptualized organizational variables—leadership, structure, problem-solving/decision-making, support, etc.) support Aboriginal employees to

increase their effectiveness in providing services to Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities?

9. Can you describe constraints on change to any of these organizational variables as a result of the internal or external environment?
10. Does MCFD recognize the dual nature of the roles and responsibilities for Aboriginal employees who are challenged to maintain their cultural and community orientation while fulfilling the professional role of a social worker?
11. Can you describe how MCFD supports Aboriginal employees with this?
12. Can you identify Aboriginal or Aboriginal approaches within MCFD intended to better Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities?
13. Can you describe any constraints to change MCFD is attempting to make in regard to an Aboriginal approach by the internal or external environment?
14. What specific issues/changes in relation to the fit between the organization and Aboriginal employees does the organization intend to address in the next five years?
15. What specific issues/changes in relation to outcomes for Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities does MCFD intend to address in the next five years?
16. Are these two focus areas viewed separately or collectively?

Appendix D. Letter to Potential Participants

February 26, 2010

To all possible participants in a study proposed by Jane Rousseau:

Re: MCFD organizational approaches to support increased internal Aboriginal diversity and improved Aboriginal outcomes.

Jane Rousseau is working to complete a dissertation research project intended to learn more about how MCFD can use organizational approaches to support increased internal Aboriginal diversity (support First Nations and Aboriginal employees) to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities.

I am interested in having you participate in this research study. The dissertation research study is being performed as a requirement to complete my doctoral program in the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria.

The purpose of the pilot study is to learn more about MCFD First Nations and Aboriginal employee experiences within the organization and how these contribute to their perceptions of effectiveness in providing improved services and outcomes to Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities. Focus will be placed both on variables that support First Nations and Aboriginal employee effectiveness as well as specific current Aboriginal approaches being utilized within MCFD. Criteria for evaluating outcomes will be based on concepts of procedural fairness, access to services, quality of services, and equity for Aboriginal children, families and communities.

The pilot study may involve participant observation, focus groups and in-depth individual interviews with strategically selected groups of Aboriginal employees (15-25 individuals in 4-5 work sites) within MCFD. Participants do not have to take part in all three approaches but can

choose which they would like to participate in. I will also be examining organizational data, and having discussion with key informants within the organization to gain in-depth information on MCFD Aboriginal approaches. A possibility also exists that discussions or interviews may extend to First Nations or Aboriginal community workers or board members where a particular situation means their perspective may add value to the study.

The study will be undertaken using a qualitative ethnographic approach and inviting the participation and input of participants in any and all aspects of the research where possible. If you choose to participate you may possibly be asked to be the subject of observation in the workplace, involved in a focus group, and/or to participate in an interview in person, with the researcher—where several open-ended questions (devised from focus groups and existing literature) will be asked of you.

You are encouraged, although there is no expectation, to actively participate in the study by providing feedback on the research questions and research design prior to and/or during your involvement as a participant in the study. Should you choose to, you would also be encouraged and supported, to become involved in data analysis and dissemination aspects of the research process. You may also choose to withdraw from participating at any time—and withdraw your permission to use your data at any time.

A copy of a letter of consent to participate is also being included for your review. Should you wish to review the research study proposal an electronic copy is available by request.

Jane Rousseau is available to answer any questions you may have regarding the research study at 250-298-6494 or janerousseau@shaw.ca

Appendix E. Participant Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA
OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT, RESEARCH
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Participant Consent Form Template

MCFD Organizational Approaches to Support Increased Internal Aboriginal Diversity and Improved Aboriginal Outcomes

You are being invited to participate in a pilot study entitled *MCFD organizational approaches to support increased internal Aboriginal diversity and improved Aboriginal outcomes*, being conducted by Jane Rousseau. Jane Rousseau is a doctoral student in Public Administration, the Faculty of Human and Social Development, at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by telephone at 250-298-6494 or email: janerousseau@shaw.ca. The researcher acknowledges that she may be known to participants in this study.

As a doctoral student, Jane Rousseau is required to conduct and complete dissertation research as part of the requirements for a PhD in Public Administration. It is being conducted under the supervision of the Director of the School of Public Administration Dr. Evert Lindquist. You may contact my supervisor at the University of Victoria at evert@uvic.ca

The purpose of this dissertation research project is to assist me as a student to conduct an exploratory research study that reflects an ethical and strategic orientation toward conducting and reflecting on all aspects of a research study.

Research of this type is important given the need for provincial child welfare organizations to provide culturally relevant, effective and accountable services and outcomes for Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities.

You are being asked to participate in this study because of your position as a First Nations or Aboriginal employee which provides you an informed perspective on the pilot research topic.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation may involve one, some or all of the following: being observed in the workplace, participating in a focus group, participating in an in-depth interview that will involve the use of several open-ended questions.

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time required to participate in the interview and to decide whether to participate in the study. The benefit may be that the matters discussed may be mutually interesting and provide an opportunity to reflect on your role. It is anticipated that participants will be involved as a personal choice independent of any particular employer or community.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

A benefit of this research will be that you may help others, both First Nations and non-Aboriginal child welfare providers, to come to understand the difficult and often contradictory role that you face as a First Nations or Aboriginal employee in a provincial child welfare system. Another potential benefit of this research is the potential for organizational learning within MCFD to improve internal organizational

structures and approaches to better support improved services and outcomes for Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities. .

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study you may indicate at the time if you wish for the data provided to be included in the study or not.

The researcher may wish to use the data gathered from interviews for future research studies.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by the researcher who will not record any individual names or identifying information about a person, community or organization in electronic or paper research notes. Pseudonyms may be used. Consent forms will be kept separate from all data and stored safely in a locked filing cabinet by the researcher, and destroyed two years after the project is completed. In papers and presentations, students will also not name persons or organizations.

I will provide electronic copies of the results of this research study to all participants so that they may see how their contributions helped to shape the research project.

Dr. Evert Lindquist will keep a copy of the dissertation research proposal for two years. The researcher will destroy audio-tapes (if used) within six months of completing the dissertation research project, and earlier if requested by the participant. Electronic and paper records of the research project will be destroyed by the researcher within two years, unless the researcher wishes to use the data for future research. If this is the intention the researcher will return to the participant and request their consent in writing at that time. Data would then be kept for seven years.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways:

- 1) discussion between the researcher, co-researchers (should any participants decide to become co-researchers) and participants if they so indicate;
- 2) the findings will be shared with participants as outlined above if desired;
- 3) they will be submitted to the researcher's dissertation committee as a requirement for completion of a doctoral degree.
- 4) possible publication in an academic or professional journal.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher and/or Dr. Evert Lindquist, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4362).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
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A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.