



You Should Know that I Trust You....

Indigenous Youth Speak on Adoption and Cultural Planning

Prepared by: Dr. Jeannine Carriere

University of Victoria, School of Social Work

Background

In 2007, the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) Adoption Services management team provided funding to explore how the Cultural Planning Policy (Government of British Columbia, Ministry of Children and Family Development, 1996) has impacted the adoption of Aboriginal children into non Aboriginal families. The policy outlines a process by which adoption workers present a plan of action on behalf of an Aboriginal child that supports an exception to the practice of placing an Aboriginal child in an Aboriginal family. This plan, as presented to the Exceptions Committee, provides details in how the child's culture will be encouraged and maintained throughout the child's life.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) in collaboration with the University of Victoria Indigenous Child Welfare Research Network (ICWRN) have inspired this report. This research is part of a three phase project that began with Phase One: *You Should Know that I Trust You: Cultural Planning, Aboriginal Children and Adoption* (2007). In this phase non Indigenous adoptive parents of Indigenous children were interviewed to provide their insights on the MCFD Cultural Planning Policy.

Parents made several comments that can be found in the final report posted on the MCFD website at http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/adoption/pdf/cultural_planning_2007.pdf

One of the findings is that parents were frustrated by what seems to be an inconsistent approach to cultural planning with few resources attached to the requirements of this policy. This is described in *You Should Know that I Trust You: Cultural Planning, Aboriginal Children and Adoption*. (2007) as:

There was a broad discrepancy in the application of the cultural planning policy as described by these participants. Participant one and two spoke of positive experience with everyone working together and no trouble with the cultural planning process. Participant three said it took two years of court involvement while they tried to reach the birth family. Participant four adopted an Inuit child through a private agency and developed their own cultural plan, but stated that it felt like quite an informal process. This participant stated that “the government of BC needs to be more informed about Inuit children – we had to figure things out as we went.” Participant eight also adopted privately and received the cultural plan in the mail. They didn’t know what it was about and in their agency’s experience, it was the first adoption of an Aboriginal child. They reported to have done everything laid out in the plan “and never heard about it again.” According to Participant eight in their attempt to get assistance from MCFD they were told “it’s not our adoption so we don’t care.” Participant 10 was not obligated to abide to a cultural plan as her ex-partner was First Nations and it did not apply. Participant 12 was not sure if their child is Métis or not and has been struggling to pursue cultural planning although the child is in their home already. Four participants who adopted through a First Nation agency reported that their cultural plans were developed for them and were all the same plan. (p. 50)

Parents were also frustrated by the lack of training or educational support in knowing how to develop and maintain a cultural plan or connections to their child’s Indigenous community however “in spite of challenges, most families are willing to do what they can

to ensure their child's culture is maintained" in You Should Know that I Trust You: Cultural Planning, Aboriginal Children and Adoption. (2007, p.54)

In 2010, Phase Two was completed. In this phase adoption, guardianship and Roots workers were asked to comment on the Cultural Planning Policy through an online survey. Respondents agreed with adoptive parents that the cultural planning process is inconsistent and also remarked that cultural planning should begin with the child's first contact with the child welfare system. In terms of adoption one participant stated that best practices "would include meeting the child's cultural needs (as has been indicated by extensive research) in a clear and purposeful manner, such as prioritizing Indigenous adoptive parents to come forward for Indigenous children permanently in the care of the Ministry and could be facilitated through an Indigenous committee that would recommend adoption changes from the MCFD adoption website to adoption application forms to essential information points which must be communicated to each Indigenous person who inquires about adoption" In You Should Know that I Trust You: Cultural Planning, Aboriginal Children and Adoption.2007 p. 28). This report can also be found on the MCFD website:

http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/adoption/pdf/cultural_planning_phase_2.pdf

This current study is Phase Three in which Indigenous youth were interviewed to comment on their perceptions of the importance of birth family and community connections as part of their cultural plan. The recruitment for this Phase was challenging however there are eight young participants who were willing to share some of their thoughts and experiences with us about adoption, foster care and cultural planning. For this we are grateful. We are also grateful for the opportunities that the

overall research process has provided to Indigenous graduate students at the University of Victoria with experiences in developing literature reviews, interviewing participants and participation in the analysis and development of research reports. The Indigenous Child Welfare Research Network (ICWRN) at the University of Victoria has a pivotal role in mentoring Indigenous graduate students and three have been involved directly in these projects: Kim Grzybowski, Cree, Rachelle Dallaire, Metis and Jessie Metz, who is of African Canadian and Blackfoot descent. As their supervisor on these projects I am grateful for their wisdom, patience and devotion to Indigenous children and families.

Terminology

For the purposes of this report the terminology of Aboriginal and Indigenous will be used interchangeably to describe First Nation, Inuit and Metis peoples of Canada. For the most part I will attempt to use Indigenous as the main terminology which complicates the government pattern of using the term Aboriginal to define Indigenous peoples of Canada. In recent years the term 'Aboriginal and Metis' peoples has been used as well and I suggest that this is not acceptable since according to the Canadian constitution, Metis peoples are included in the definition of Aboriginal peoples.

Terminology and labels have been used in Canada to divide and categorize since the onset of colonization. We are peoples of this land however and hold strong to our nations. I resist those labels by using the word Indigenous as an inclusive and collective term that implies our rights as nations and acknowledges the rights of our children under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Indigenous Child.

THE RESEARCH TEAM

Principal Investigator

Dr. Jeannine Carriere is Métis and originally from the Red River area of southern Manitoba. She has been teaching social work since 1994 in Alberta and at the University Of Victoria School Of Social Work in the Indigenous Specialization since 2005. Her research interests include Aboriginal adoptions, identity issues, women and children affected by the sex trade and advancing Indigenous knowledges. Dr. Carriere has been a practitioner in Aboriginal child and family services for over twenty five years and has conducted several research projects and produced a number of publications, with the most recent (2010) being *Aski Awasis Children of the Earth: First Peoples Speaking on Adoption*. In 2008 Dr. Carriere received the Adoptions Activist Award from the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC).

Research Assistant

Kim Grzybowski has ancestry from the Peguis First Nation and is currently a Master of Social Work student at the University of Victoria. Kim's thesis is focused on cultural planning for Aboriginal children and adoption. Kim has several years of experience as a front line child protection worker for First Nation agencies in British Columbia and is currently a delegation trainer for the Caring for First Nation Children Society on Vancouver Island. Kim has also been instrumental in the development and training for the online adoption training offered by the Caring for First Nation Children Society.

LIMITATIONS

The writers wish to outline limitations early on in the report as part of the context for the recommendations that follow. The major limitation for Phase 3 was the length of time for recruitment. There were several approaches used in recruitment such as asking various agencies and adoption workers to refer youth to us. Finally in 2010 we had the opportunity to meet 6 youth from various locations in BC and we were pleased to interview two youth at a youth conference co-hosted by the Adoptive Families Association of BC in the fall of 2010. Due to a typical west coast winter storm only two participants came to the conference focus group but we were honored to hear their comments.

The youth interviewed for this research were sometimes shy, sometimes quiet and sometimes animated as youth sometimes are. Kim Grzybowski has a gift in working with young people and thanks to her we received some information for this study which may not be extensive in length but straight from the heart.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to acknowledge and thank the youth who shared their stories and ideas with us and the Adoptive Families Association of BC for their assistance in connecting us with youth who shared their wisdom with us at the youth conference in November, 2010. We also thank Anne Clayton, Director of Adoptions from MCFD for her patience and support for this work. As identified earlier the Indigenous Child Welfare Research Network was instrumental in 'housing' Phase Two and Three by providing administrative support of

graduate students and links to important events and other networks to promote this research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The information on Indigenous adoptions has been documented in a number of locations including social work and child welfare literature, autobiographies, films and various government reports. In the academic literature however, voices of Indigenous adoptees is rarely heard but in recent years their stories have been captured in a number of Indigenous student graduate theses and dissertations. Carriere, J., and Sinclair, R. (2009) state that “in the last few years, several theses, dissertations and articles have shed light on the experiences of Indigenous adults who were adopted into non Indigenous homes during the period” (p. 259). In this report I have tried to highlight some of these academic papers which blend well with the voices of our young participants who gave us their opinions for our study.

In Canada, Indigenous youth have gained some momentum in public forums to discuss various topics. Alfred, T., Pitawanakwat, B. and Price, J. (2007) engaged in a study that examined the attitudes of youth in Canada’s electoral system. They state that “Indigenous youth are seeking strategies to construct a personal identity that reconciles their indigeneity with their place in Canada, and the world” (p.13) and further that “Indigenous youth themselves are keenly aware of the situation’s roots and express an implicit understanding of the loss of land, cultural dislocation and official hostility that have historically been at the core of the Indigenous experience in Canada” In Alfred, T., Pitawanakwat, B. and Price, J. (2007) , p.13.

This sentiment is echoed on the UNICEF website that described the participation of Indigenous youth at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. One participant, Moni Sulemani from Baluchistan (2008) states that “despite cultural, geographic and language differences, the youths in the group had a great understanding of each other’s problems. They discovered that many of their struggles were similar – all involving the sense of discrimination based on identity, the marginalization of cultures and the feeling of oppression due to one’s heritage” (p.1)

These are inspirational comments from Indigenous youth at national and international opportunities for engagement. These youth describe an exciting era in our times in which they are resisting the historical onslaught on the identities of Indigenous peoples around the world. In British Columbia we have an opportunity in cultural planning for Indigenous adoptees to remain connected to their identities and cultural teachings through a policy on adoption that can make a difference in the lives of Indigenous children and youth. When we examine the past experiences of Indigenous adoptees we face a mirror of practice that reflects a history of adoption that should inform us with ideas and increase our caution.

Wagamese, R. (2009) is a journalist and poet who identifies as a survivor of the Sixties Scoop. In one of his many reports on Aboriginal adoptions he states that,

When I found my people again it got better. Every ceremony, every ritual, every phrase I learned in my language eased that wound and eventually it became easier, more graceful, to walk as an Indian person. I began to reclaim the history, culture, language, philosophy, and way of being that the Sixties Scoop had deprived me of (in Canadian Dimension 2009, p.12)

Daniels (2005) used an oral history approach in describing her experiences as a First Nation adoptee in her MSW thesis. Through a powerful dialogue with her birth mother and a cousin from her birth family, Daniels explores the world of Indigenous adoption with raw honesty through painful passages of conversations and stories. She states that adoption is a common issue and “so common it appears that the commonness and casualness of adoption, trauma as well as anger, and grief and loss issues related to adoption are not fully recognized respected or discussed” (p.12). Her discussions with her birth mother appear to leave Daniels with more unresolved issues around their relationship. Her birth mother clearly describes how she did not wish to be found and how much fear exists around the reunion with adopted children. Daniels hopes that her painful journey with this Master of Social Work (MSW) research has helped her own daughter to realize that “every life experience provides us with a lesson [and that] nothing lived and experienced is in vain” (p.146). This courageous statement leaves one to wonder why the wounds of adoption must continue to be so deep and how cultural planning practice can prevent it.

Nuttgens (2005) cites a number of Indigenous adoptees in his PhD research. He has since developed some useful resources such as a 2009 public power point presentation that focuses on the participants in his research that inform us on the impact of being adopted into a non Indigenous family. Being exposed to their Indigenous culture was a natural and helpful way of growing up described by one participant, Karen, as,

It was always a feeling of, this is where I am, this is where I came from, this is cool. Dad had a medicine man's hat in our house and we used to wear it around, a big buffalo thing, it was amazing. It was given to him by elders. But mom and dad have always had a connection with the Native community. I don't know if it was because they got me. I don't think so. I think they had that connection. I mean there was more of a connection when I came along. Um, but it's just always been around – the Native culture with us. Another participant, Autumm stated that "Our culture values independence and ambition and competence. And Aboriginal adoptees almost invariably personify those. And even if, I mean I've met a lot of adoptees whose lives are very dysfunctional, and yet personality-wise, characteristic-wise there's, the potential is just incredible. I mean, you know, articulateness, eloquence, intelligence, ambition, competition. And we have to, you know, because we have to be better to be considered okay – even if it's only in our head. But those are the things that we're taught in this, in this White middle-class Canadian culture. In:

http://auspace.athabascau.ca:8080/dspace/handle/2149/2123?mode=full&submit_simple>Show+full+item+record

Nuttgens' interviews captures the many sides of Indigenous peoples being adopted into non Indigenous families. There are positive and negative stories however if one can draw conclusions from Karen and Autumm's statements above, adoption of Indigenous children into non Indigenous families provide a complex experience that can be supported through openness and exposure to the adopted child's Indigenous culture.

In 2004, thirteen Indigenous participants shared their views with Marlene Swidrovich in her Master of Arts study on perceptions of positive experiences of being raised in non-Indigenous families. As can be expected, participants describe important aspects of their childhood such as feeling safe, secure, nurtured, loved and protected as well as financial security and opportunities for travel and education.

Swidrovich (2004) states that,

De-constructing the Sixties Scoop involved an examination of the environment which fostered its development and it also involved a critical evaluation of its flaws and weaknesses. By exposing the structural weaknesses, one of the results has been to create room in the discourse for the integration of the positive experiences presented in this study. Perhaps, even more importantly, through a de-construction of Sixties Scoop ideology and the subsequent re-integration of positive experiences, there can be some contribution to the de-politicization of First Nations child welfare discourse, which is required in order to begin confronting several of the obstacles that prevent the delivery of effective care and protection to First Nations children. (p.155).

She concludes that “In short, the highly politicized Sixties Scoop paradigm remains outdated and ineffective in terms of its ability to explain Indian child welfare issues in Canada, and its widespread influence has not only obscured the role of positive experiences in non-Aboriginal homes, it has also contributed to ineffective child welfare practices”.(p.156). This research provides some important messages around general adoptive parenting practices but fails to consider the racist reality of Canada’s colonial

history and its impact on Indigenous child welfare, including adoption. The funding for Indigenous agencies for example has an impact on the delivery of 'effective care' that Swidrovich describes. This is also complicated by provincial policies that are not always reflective of an Indigenous world view or life in Indigenous communities.

Arsenault, A. (2006) in her MSW thesis from the University of British Columbia also explored the experiences of eight Indigenous adult adoptees. Using a storytelling approach, she states that with "all of the storytellers, there was a need or want to go back home despite secrecy, not knowing, not being exposed to Aboriginal people, racism and abuse, they all reconnected with their birth family and embraced Aboriginal culture in some way" (p.143). In her conclusion Arsenault suggests that "culture should be a daily part of an Aboriginal child's life" (p.144) and consequently the practice and decision making about adoption that considers the best interests of the child should regard culture as an important part of the Aboriginal child and the adoption process" (p. 144). Arsenault makes further recommendations that include the importance of relationships with Elders, ceremony and ritual into practice with support services and opportunities for adoptees to share their stories.

Tara Turner (2010) a Metis PhD student explores Metis identity through the use of family history and story. Two of her participants are adoptees who share their views on their identity development through reconnection with family, Turner concludes that, "When bad things happen and they are separated from their families, we need to provide them (children) with safe, loving homes where they become who they were meant to be. They need access to each other, even if they cannot be all kept together, and they need

to have access to any family who can support and love them. They also need access to their culture and to their stories. Without access to their cultural stories, children cannot know how to pass on their culture when they become parents. Parenting is a fundamental way to transmit culture and we should guard the rights of children to have this as part of their future. Children rely on us to have an eagle view for them (p. 173).

Metis scholar Dr. Jacqueline Maurice developed her dissertation on child welfare in the 1960's and 1970's in which she examined her own case files as a child in care. She calls upon the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People's recommendations of 1996 as they relate to child welfare and asks us to consider whether or not these recommendations have been met and if not, why? . Maurice suggests more inclusion of the child within the process of foster care such as having a say in what home they go to, providing them with cultural education, including them in all decision making and connecting foster children from different foster homes to combat isolation and strengthen social skills .These suggestions translate into the world of adoption as well as foster care (Maurice, J. M., 2003).

Dr. Cathy Richardson (2009) strongly reminds us that “helping Metis people to recover what has been stolen in terms of their family stories, their cultural identity and their ancestral pride in the wake of white racism is an important aspect of Metis social work practice” (p.120). Richardson (2009) suggests that the pain and intergenerational trauma associated with these phenomena are the backdrop for the “conditions of adversity and cultural hatred that the Metis must develop their identity” (p. 121) and concludes that helping Metis people reconnect with their ancestral ties is important and

that “this means helping families to find and reconnect with those who have been taken, those lost in the foster care system, those taken to Europe by adoption, those lying in unmarked graves away from home” (p.123).

I have had the honor of discussing my own work in several publications so instead of regurgitating another version of my research, I will conclude with some remarks from a chapter that I co-wrote with Raven Sinclair in 2009 in *Walking This Path Together: Anti-Racist and Anti Oppressive Child Welfare Practice*. In this chapter we addressed cultural planning and conclude that,

With core changes in Indigenous transracial adoption ideology, policies and practices will take into consideration Indigenous cultural rights, and at personal levels where everyone involved in the adoption process considers addressing issues of identity and racism as a matter of course, we believe that the adoption milieu can be effectively adapted to meet the needs of Indigenous families, adoptive families and, most importantly, Indigenous children (p. 270).

In closing this review I invite you to consider the words of young participants who shared their views in the section on findings. We are currently addressing the needs of generations who followed the Sixties Scoop. Our wishes for intact identities and confidence in who they are as Indigenous children remains as the basic goal for all of us and is really at the center of an effective cultural planning policy.

In the next section I will discuss the methodology used in Phase Three of this research

.

METHODOLOGY

Interviews and focus group

For this research, the methods used were qualitative in-depth interviews with six participants and a focus group method that was attended by two participants. The eight participants were Indigenous youth from ages 13 to 19 and living in British Columbia. Two participants had lived in a number of foster homes and were hoping for adoption. Due to the questions asked (see Appendix A) and sample size, the researcher felt it was not necessary to expand on other demographics to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants.

Participants were sent an Information Letter (Appendix B) and Consent Forms (Appendix C) were reviewed and signed prior to each interview and focus group discussion. The interviews and focus group was recorded on audio and the tapes are being kept in a locked cabinet at the University of Victoria. A transcriber was contracted with to do the transcription of tapes. This transcriber has done extensive work for various research projects at the University of Victoria and has signed an oath of confidentiality. Transcripts were reviewed with participants and a gift certificate was provided to each participant as a gesture of thanks for their insights. This research was approved by the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board.

Analysis

The transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis which is a systematic review of research materials, in which themes emerge as they are repeated in various transcripts. A thematic analysis involves the systematic review of raw data or research materials and is described by Fereday, J. and Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006) as a process of data analysis that “demonstrates how overarching themes are supported by excerpts from the raw data to ensure that data interpretation remains directly linked to the words of the participants [therefore becoming an] iterative and reflexive process” (pp. 3-4).

FINDINGS

There were eight questions asked of participants (Appendix A). The insights provided by the youth in this study can be categorized under four themes as follows.

1. Stability

A number of participants discussed how it was important to them to be adopted and know they did not have to move again. Participant 1 stated that, “**I would never have to be moved again and I felt like I was at home.**” Participant 2 discussed how the security of her adoptive home was comforting as sometimes her birth family “**would turn and then we end up for adoption or in foster care again.**” Two participants were not adopted and described this as a lost opportunity for stability, as described in this section: “**I was never adopted. My brothers were but they did not want to adopt me.**”

“I was never given the opportunity to be adopted. I have been in foster care since I was three or four years old.” Another participant describes the process of how they became more comfortable in their adoptive home, and how having parental stability is important **“... I knew that they were always not my real parents but I just never found out that... ahhh, I don’t know I called them grandma and grandpa and then I started calling them mom and dad, but I don’t know why I started to call them that.”**

2. Recovering identity

The recovering of identity is situated in the recovering of culture as described by one participant as: **“I think it is very important and necessary for me to be connected.”**

Another participant stated: **“I also feel that it is important for me to have the connection to my culture. It’s who we are.”** One of the younger participant stated that **“I would like to know a little more about where I come from.”** Not everyone agreed on this point however as there was one participant who did not wish to identify as an Aboriginal person. He stated: **“Well I won’t... I didn’t want to be like, the poster child though... the whole talking about Aboriginal stuff...Cause it’s not... it’s not at all a big issue. In fact the part that I’m Native isn’t a big issue at all.”**

Another participant discussed the importance of connection to culture but that it is not just an MCFD responsibility:

I think that they need to help youth keep connections no matter what. The bands need help as well.”

3. Connection to birth family

The connection to birth family was consistently viewed as important from seven out of eight participants. One participant described regular visits with her birth family as **“people invite us up there so we go sometimes. Uhm, we meet... like our cousins, and our ahhh... uncles and stuff.”** Another commented on how this fills a gap in her life:

“Cause your... and all throughout your whole life you never meet them, you’re always kinda in the back of your head you’re wondering....Like where you really came from I guess....And once you actually go see where they live and everything, and I guess it kinda fills that gap.”

The discovery of mutual characteristics and interests was validating to some of the participants. Participant 4 stated that, **“we do things the same way. Like we, well we’re all really dramatic... And yeah, we all like think the same and have kinda like, I don’t know, we all don’t really trust people.”** Both young people who were in foster homes had remained connected to their birth family and felt it was important. One stated, **“I don’t know if there was a plan but my foster parents always kept us connected.”**

4. Cultural Planning

The question on cultural planning stimulated some various opinions on how this should be administered by MCFD and in their families and communities. One participant said it would be good for the kids in adoptive homes and foster homes **“to see their family, their brothers and sisters, their moms and dads if they wanted to.”** Another

participant didn't think it should be pushed on anyone and said **“cause we were raised with white people and so we are not interested in any of that.”** In the focus group one participant stated that **“I think that the ministry needs to learn more about the ways of our elders. It may help them understand more about who we are and what we need. I personally have learned so much from the elders.”** The other participant stated that **“I agree, I think that the ministry needs more education in order to understand the culture.”** One participant discussed the significance of ceremony with her adoption in that **“everyone was there...that was big and they put a blanket around us...and took pictures.**

Three participants stated that listening to the youth is a critical component for cultural planning. One stated, **“Listen to the youth and don't put us all in the same car.”**

Another suggested to **“Listen to children and youth, they have lots to say about what they need and want.”** A third participant reminds us that cultural planning should be child centered **“When it's not requested then don't... then just leave them alone.”**

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS IN CONTEXT OF PHASE 1 AND 2

Phase One and Two included a broad discussion with recommendations based on participant input and the relevant literature. Within Phase Three there are findings that are similar and can be correlated with some of the discussion from the two earlier phases of this research project, and in particular the following points:

Phase One

MCFD and Aboriginal agencies need to coordinate to provide cultural outreach to non-Aboriginal adoptive families on a more personal basis than what currently exists. This should be delivered through face to face services and use models such as Family Group Conferencing to facilitate a process of relationship building, negotiation and establish mutual commitments with the child's birth family and/or community members and the adoptive family" (You Should Know that I Trust You: Cultural Planning, Aboriginal Children and Adoption ,2007,p.62).

Phase Two

"Through this phase and phase one we have heard from adoptive parents, Indigenous and non-Indigenous practitioners that there is a need for increased connection between workers, families and communities" (You Should Know that I Trust You: Cultural Planning, Aboriginal Children and Adoption, 2010, p.36).

In Phase Three, the youth reminded us of similar points to the above by making statements that encourages cultural planning within the context of family and community. The young people involved in this study spoke from a place of security within their two families and did not wish to compromise these relationships. As was said by many of them, they are content in their adoptive homes but want the link to their birth family, community and cultural teachings. Only one participant was not so keen on that connection and he did not share much detail within the interview as to why he held such strong opinions, only that he had them. The two participants who were not adopted made it clear that they would have liked to be adopted and that cultural planning should be encouraged in the foster care system as well as adoption.

The literature that was selected for Phase Three featured voices of Indigenous adoptees and those affected by adoption such as birth family members. It is clear from the three literature reviews and all those we spoke to within the three phases of this research, that cultural planning is necessary in policy and practice in planning for Indigenous children and youth in the child welfare system. In adoption it is a critical component of recruitment and training of adoptive families. In foster care, cultural planning should begin at intake. As was stated in the Phase Two report, 2010, “Cultural planning starts at the time a child comes into care, not at the time of adoption” (p.27).

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM YOUTH VOICES

The following recommendations were developed through examination of the literature review and youth voices within Phase Three.

1. Information on birth family and community is critical in cultural planning for Indigenous youth, however this information should be maintained for the young person with transition services to assist in reunions and maintaining connections.
2. Cultural activities are a necessary part of the adoption process for everyone involved and could be a valuable means to center the child's Indigenous culture and maintain the important relationships that can be severed through adoption.
3. For those who live a distance from birth families it is necessary for visits to be consistent and accomplished through creative ways such as email and Skype.
4. The connections with Indigenous communities, agencies and Elders are the building blocks for a cultural plan.
5. There are many opportunities to learn about culture and if direct connection with the child's birth family or community cannot be achieved in the short term, the cultural plan should, at minimum, outline what resources and supports are available in the child's community where they reside.
6. Young people have the capacity to participate in their own planning and that includes cultural planning.

CONCLUSION

I appreciate the simplicity of what the young people we interviewed said to us. As adults we sometimes look for complex solutions to a simple issue. From reviewing the transcripts of these eight youth, I can see their innocence, their need for connection and the love for their families. In Phase one and two we included the *Extended Family Tree of Adoption* (Appendix D). I ask you to reflect on this concept again before you leave

this report. Can you hear the voices of the young people we interviewed when you look at this tree? This may be a simple message but one that is deeply reflective of the longing hearts of our children. All my relations.

REFERENCES

Alfred, T., Pitawanakwat, B. & Price, J. (2007). *The meaning of political participation for indigenous youth charting the course for youth civic and political participation*. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks.

Arsenault, A. (2006). *The life cycle experiences of adoption through Aboriginal adult's stories*. Unpublished Thesis. Vancouver: University of British Columbia.

Carriere, J., Sinclair, R. Considerations for Cultural Planning and Aboriginal Adoptions. In Eds. Strega, S., Carriere, J., *Walking This Path Together: Anti Racist and Anti Oppressive Child Welfare Practice*. Winnipeg. Fernwood Publishing.

Daniels, L. (2005). *Grannies, Aunties, Mothers and Daughters, All Skeletons Are Out: A Story of Truth and Healing*. Unpublished MSW Thesis. Victoria: University of Victoria.

Nuttgens, R. (2009). *Stories of Aboriginal Children Raised in NonAboriginal Families*. Power Point Presentation. Athabasca University. <http://hdl.handle.net/2149/2123> retrieved April 8th, 2011.

Maurice, J. M. (2003). *De-spiriting Aboriginal children: Aboriginal children during the 1960s and 1970s child welfare era*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Toronto, Toronto, ON.

Rabiee, F. (2004). Focus-group interview and data analysis. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*. 63, 655–660 DOI:10.1079

Richardson, C. (2009). *Metis Experiences of Social Work Practices*. Eds Strega, S., Carriere, J. *Walking This Path Together: Anti Racist and Anti Oppressive Child Welfare Practice*. Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.

Sulemani, M. (2008) Reporting on the Indigenous Youth Caucus for the UN seventh session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Retrieved April 11th, http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/index_44282.html?q=printme

Swidrovich, M. (2004). Positive Experiences of First Nation Children in Non Aboriginal Foster or Adoptive Care: Deconstructing the “Sixties Scoop”. Unpublished MA in Native Studies. Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan.

Turner, T. (2010). Re Searching Metis Identity: My Metis Family Story. Unpublished PhD in Psychology dissertation. Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan.

Wagamese, R. (2009). *THE SIXTIES SCOOP, THE PRIMAL WOUND AND HOME*. Canadian Dimension. Winnipeg: Sep/Oct 2009. Vol. 43, Iss. 5; pg. 12, 2 pgsAbstract (Summary)

Appendix A

c.3 Interview Guide for Aboriginal Youth

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself?
2. How old were you when you knew you were adopted?
3. How did you learn about your birth family and community?
4. Have you met members of your birth family and have regular contact with them?
5. How was your adoptive family involved with your birth family and community?
6. Was there a plan to help you learn about your family and community?
7. Do you have any suggestions about cultural plans for Aboriginal children and youth?
8. Do you have any other comments for this interview?

Appendix B

Information for Youth

Jeannine Carriere, PhD
Associate Professor,
School of Social Work
University of Victoria
PO Box 1700 STN CSC
Victoria, BC
V8W-2Y2

INFORMATION LETTER FOR YOUTH

Hello and thanks again for helping us with this project and as promised, we are sending you more information about this research. As you know this project will look at the cultural planning process for Aboriginal children who are adopted by non-Aboriginal families in British Columbia. The Ministry of Children and Family Development Cultural Planning Policy was developed in 1996 and now that the policy has been in place for 10 years, the Ministry thought it was necessary to see how this process has been working for everyone involved: Aboriginal youth, Aboriginal community members, non-Aboriginal adoptive families.

You have already talked to Kim from the research team. The research team recognizes that it is important for participants to know how their ideas will be used. First the interviews will set up at a place where it is easy for you to talk. If your parents have been informed about the study then they will be encouraged to call Kim for further information. Your name will not be used for the research-only Kim will know your real name. Kim may ask you for a nickname that will be attached to your interview so we can use some of your story. A tape recorder will be used during the interview to help Kim remember all the important points and she may take some notes during the interview.

Once the research team has the tapes transcribed you can look at what you said and approve or change things. With your permission, Kim will be mailing the transcripts to you and asking you to call her or email her within two weeks to let her know if you have any changes in them. If she does not hear from you then it will be taken as a sign that you are OK with the transcripts. If you agree with the transcripts then your information will be used as part of a report. No-one's names will be shared with the Ministry of Children and Family Development and the interview tapes and transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet at the university. Once the research is complete, the tapes and transcripts will be destroyed after a period of six months.

Before the interview begins, you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you are being interviewed by phone the interview will not take place until Kim has your consent that can be mailed back or faxed to her.

We hope that the project is clear. Kim will be contacting you in the near future to see if you have further questions and to set up an interview with you. Thanks very much for your time and help with this research.

Jeannine Carriere

University of Victoria, School of Social Work

P.O.Box 1700 STN CSC

Victoria, BC

V8W-2W2

Phone during office hours: 250-721-6452

Fax: 250-721-6228

Email: carriere@uvic.ca

Kim Grzybowski

5932 Jaynes Rd.

Duncan, BC

V9L-4W8

Phone: 250-701-4222

ggrzybow@telus.net

Appendix C

Consent Letter

Title: Strengthening Cultural Plans for Aboriginal Children and Adoption

Researcher: Jeannine Carriere
Associate Professor, School of Social Work
University of Victoria
Victoria, B.C.
Phone: 250-721-6452
Email: carriere@uvic.ca

This study has received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria. If you have any concerns you can reach them at 250-472-4545 or email them at ethics@uvic.ca

Participant Consent

Please circle your answers:

Do you understand that you have been asked to participate in a research study about cultural planning and Aboriginal adoption? Yes No

Have you received and read an Information letter about the research? Yes No

Do you understand the risks and benefits in taking part in the research? Yes No

Have you had a chance to ask questions and talk about the research? Yes No

Do you understand that you can leave the research at any time? Yes No

Has the researcher explained how personal information will be handled? Yes No

Do you know what the information you give will be used for? Yes No

Have you been advised that you will receive a summary of final results? Yes No

The research was explained to me by: _____

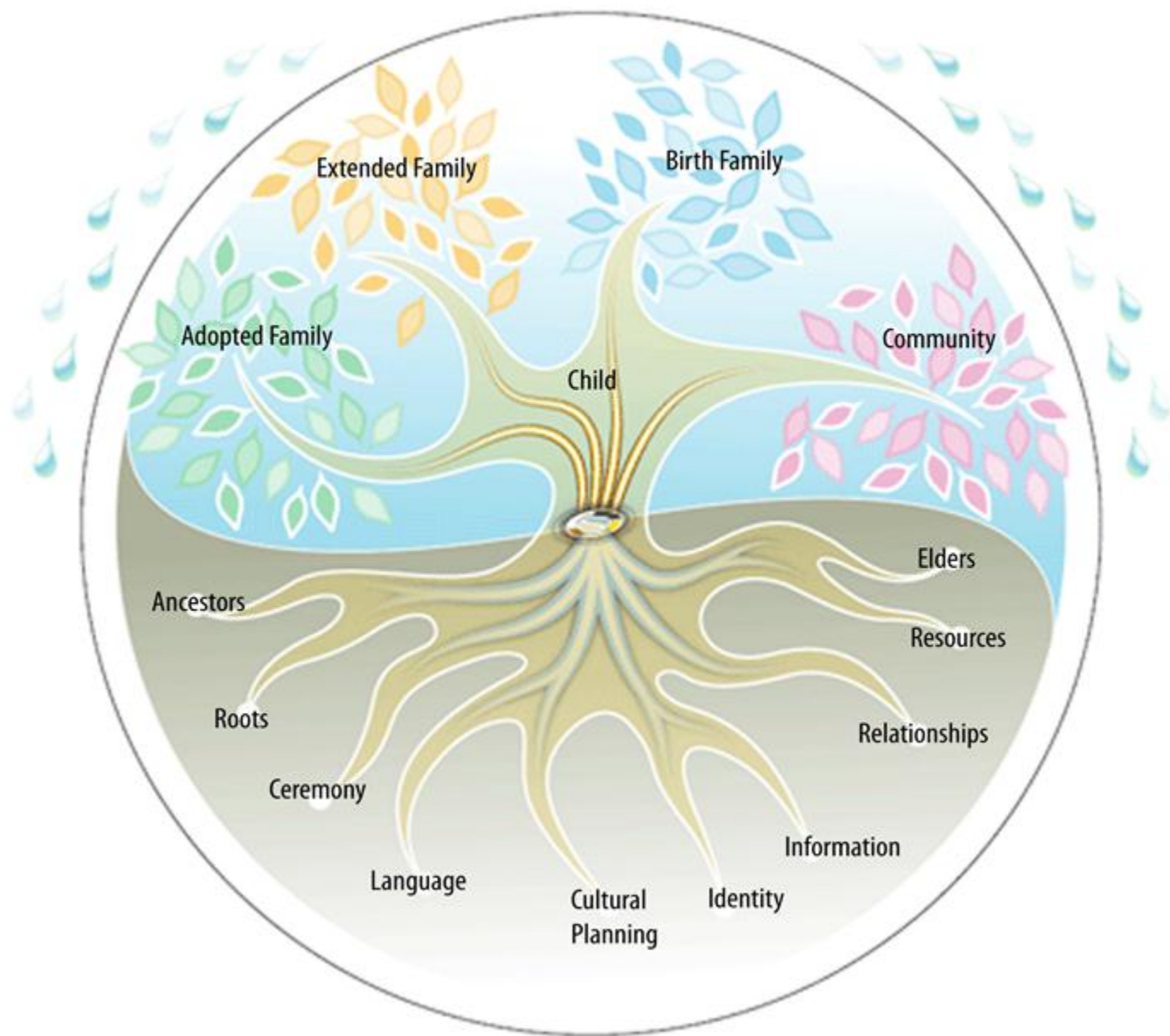
I agree to take part in the research and I understand what the research is about

Signature of Research Participant

Printed Name

Appendix D

CONCEPTUAL MODEL: The Extended Family Tree of Adoption



Adapted with permission from the Canadian Council on Learning First Nation Holistic Learning Model (2007).