

Caring across the boundaries

Promoting access to voluntary sector resources for First Nations children and families

Samantha Nadjiwan

First Nations child and family service agencies (FNCFSA) in Canada have expressed concern about the lack of culturally-based quality of life and prevention services available to children, youth, and families resident on reserve to redress the significant impacts of colonization. The **Voluntary Sector Initiative Project** undertaken by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada (FNCFCS) is intended to measure the nature and extent of existing collaborations between the voluntary sector (VS) and FNCFSA while facilitating positive relationship-building. This research project includes three specific components: a) three surveys delivered to voluntary sector organizations, First Nations organizations and government employees; b) several key informant interviews; and c) the development of a set of curricula and professional development tools designed to foster a climate of collaboration among organizations. The results of the surveys and interviews paint a frank picture of the landscape of collaboration currently in place.

Survey results

Profile of FNCFSA

- 53.3% of FNCFSA service 1250 or more Status Indian children living on reserve.
- 42.1% of the reserves serviced by FNCFSA are 70 km or more away from an urban centre.

- 66.7% of key fundraising mechanism on reserve to help fund programs and services are raffles; 53.3% are bingos.
- 53.5% of FNCFSA surveyed are incorporated, non-profit organizations.





- The most significant issues facing children and youth on reserve are:
 - 85.7% – parental substance abuse;
 - 71.4% – neglect;
 - 64.3% – poverty;
 - 64.3% – family violence; and
 - 57.1% – child or youth substance abuse.
- If addressed, the community needs which could make the most significant improvements to the safety and well-being of children and youth are:
 - 46.7% – parenting and youth programming; and
 - 40% – health and education programming.

FNCFSA and VS organizations

- 100% of the VS organizations surveyed list their mission and mandate as improving the quality of child care services and/or improving/promoting health and well being of children, youth, and their families through mentoring, education, research, and/or advocacy.
- 80% of the FNCFSA surveyed have not received any funding from VS foundations, or federal/provincial funds targeted for the VS.
- 86.7% of the FNCFSA surveyed see the VS playing a role in assisting communities in meeting their needs.
- 73.3% of the FNCFSA surveyed have not worked with any VS organizations in providing services on reserve in the past year, 100% of any contact with VS organizations was initiated by the First Nations.
- 100% of the VS organizations surveyed have not worked with a FNCFSA to provide services to on reserve clients in the past year.
- 69.2% of the VS organizations surveyed don't know, didn't answer, or did not find the question applicable when asked how many First Nations reserves are in their catchment area.
- 76.9% of the VS organizations surveyed responded that they are somewhat aware of the needs of First Nations children, youth, and families on reserve as it relates to their organizational mission or

- mandate, but not one could give any details to this effect.
- 76.9% of the VS organizations surveyed see a role for the voluntary sector in assisting on reserve communities in meeting the needs of on reserve communities, especially in areas such as education and resource, support service delivery, and research.
- The essential features of a successful working relationship between FNCFSA and the VS, according to First Nations respondents include:
 - 33.3% – a clear understanding of each others ways of knowing and doing;
 - 33.3% – open and honest communication;
 - 26.7% – community-based and community-driven programming; and
 - 26.7% – respect for First Nations cultures, languages, etc.
- The essential features of a successful working relationship between FNCFSA and the VS, according to VS respondents include:
 - 46.2% – a commitment to common goals;
 - 46.2% – open and honest communication;
 - 30.8% – a clear understanding of respective roles and responsibilities; and
 - 30.8% – respect for each others ways of knowing and doing.
- According to the FNCFSA surveyed, the main barriers to relationship building between FNCFSA and the VS are:
 - FNCFSA lack information on the services provided by the VS;
 - VS lacks knowledge of the needs of First Nations children, families, and communities;
 - VS lacks knowledge of FNCFSA; and

- VS lacks cultural knowledge to provide appropriate services.
- According to the VS organizations surveyed, the main barriers to relationship building between FNCFSA and the VS are:
 - VS lacks knowledge of FNCFSA;
 - distance between VS organizations and reserve communities;
 - VS lacks cultural knowledge to provide appropriate services; and
 - VS lacks knowledge of the needs of First Nations children, families, and communities.


*The Voluntary Sector
lacks knowledge
of the needs of
First Nations
children, families,
and communities*


Government perspectives

- 83.3% of the government workers surveyed believe prevention services to First Nations communities would greatly benefit from collaborations between FNCFSA and the VS.
- 100% of the government workers surveyed believe VS services can support government goals and services to First Nations reserves.
- 50% of government workers surveyed do not believe the government has a role in supporting VS organizations servicing on reserve clients.
- 50% of the government workers surveyed consider FNCFSA as part of the voluntary sector.

- 66.7% of the government workers surveyed believe current levels of financial support/funding for VS activities on reserve targeted to children, youth, and families are too low or insufficient.

In mainstream society, it is government coupled with a strong VS and corporate sector who mobilize to ensure a high quality of life for all residents of Canada. This study notes that, unlike their non-Aboriginal counterparts, however, First Nations children, youth, and families have almost no access to the 90 billion dollars of revenue that supports the VS. This lack of access to VS resources coupled with an absence of municipal and provincial services means that, despite the greater needs of children and youth living in on reserve communities, there are fewer support structures in place to aid them than for other Canadians.

The conversion of this research into practical community-based professional development will support First Nations communities, the VS, philanthropists and governments in working towards the development of an Aboriginal voluntary sector building on traditional forms of volunteerism and civic engagement while also dealing with present-day concerns. As this study illustrates, there is great potential for the development of collaborations between the VS and First Nations communities. The will is there on both sides and hopefully this project, and the efforts of FNCFSA and VS organizations, will help provide the means. We all owe it to the children and youth to try, and to succeed.

The final report, as well as a 16-page summary, of *Caring Across the Boundaries* is available at www.fncfcs.com.

Samantha Nadjiwan is Voluntary Sector Initiative Project Coordinator for the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada.