

ABORIGINAL CHILD & FAMILY PRACTICE STANDARDS REDESIGN

STEERING COMMITTEE

PROJECT UPDATE #1

January 2012

Introduction to the Project

The overall aim of the redesign project is to improve outcomes for First Nations, Aboriginal and Métis children, families and communities. The primary goal is to develop new Aboriginal Child and Family Services practice standards based on traditional Indigenous ways of caring, while also meeting legislative requirements.

Stories and legends have informed how Indigenous families in British Columbia live their lives. In traditional times before residential schools and public schools became a way of guiding children, stories held the knowledge needed to prepare children and guide all family members along their life paths.

Stories speak about the connections Indigenous people have to the land, the animals, water, past and future generations. The following quote comes from traditional knowledge gathered from Stó:lō Elders and the foundational wisdom that everything is connected. An Elder best described this knowledge in the following way:

She put her hand on her chest and she said "Shweli is inside us here." She put her hand in front of her and she said "Shweli is in your parents." She raised her hand higher and said "then, your grandparents, your great-grandparents, it is in your great great grandparents. It is in the rocks, it's in the trees, it's in the grass, it's in the ground. Shweli is everywhere". (Be Of Good Mind, 2007)

It is within the context of this foundation and worldview that specific teachings on family responsibility and proper conduct have their biggest impact. Stories can cultivate resilience and strengthen intergenerational and cultural connection.

In all communities visited during creation of these practice standards, Elders and community members spoke about the traditional roles, responsibilities, and knowledge of family and community and the importance of starting from a traditional place when helping families and their children.

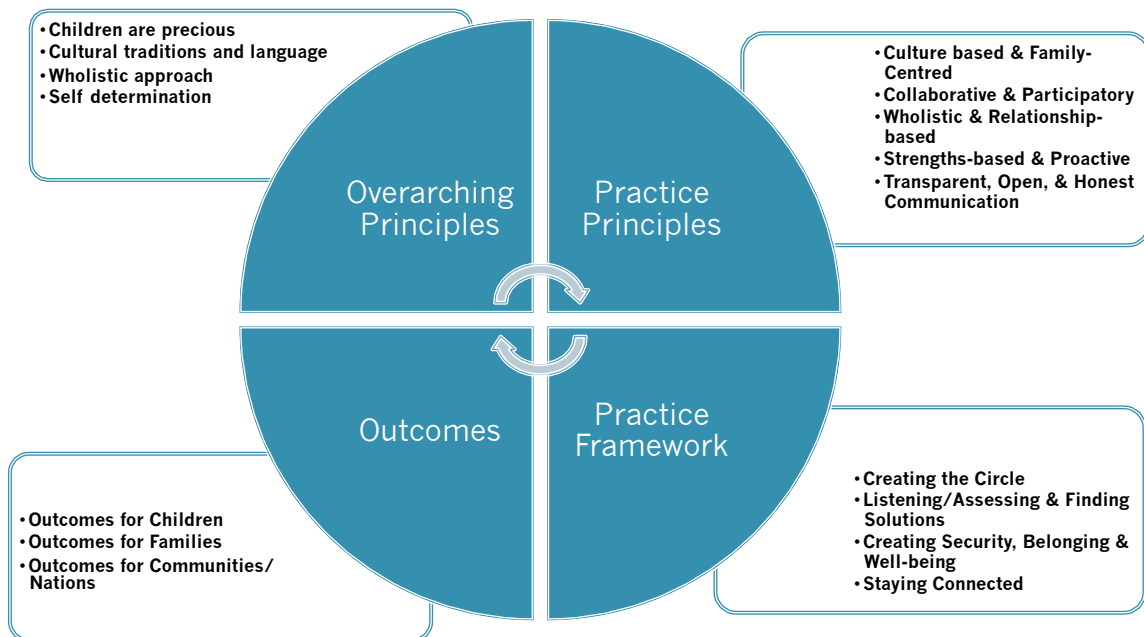
Four quadrants of the Conceptual Framework

The standards express the foundation for providing child and family services and the minimum expectations for practice by Delegated Aboriginal Agency social workers and for meeting the legislative requirements as specified in the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*. In this sense they also act as an important quality assurance tool and a template against which families, communities, practitioners, and managers can measure practice.

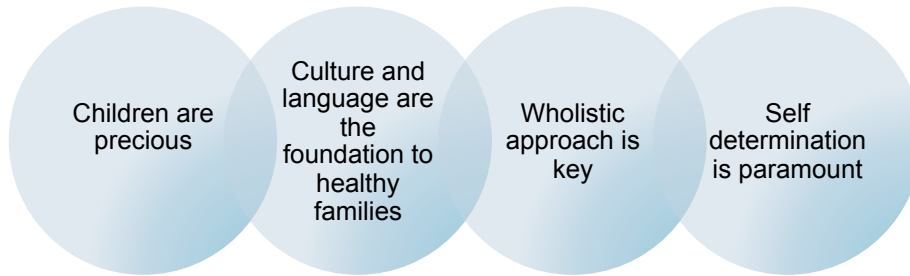
The result has been creation of a practice framework made up of: **overarching principles** to guide the practice standards; **principles for practice** to guide social work practice; **a practice framework** based on these principles; and **outcomes** for children, families, and communities. The interconnections between these four major elements are presented as the *Practice Standards Redesign Project's Conceptual Framework* found below and on the CFNCS web site.

The proposed practice framework and practice standards are based on an affirmation that children benefit when family, professionals, and community work together to address issues of child safety and maltreatment. This too is congruent with the message from Aboriginal communities: that the interconnection between children, families, and community - working together - must be at the root of child and family services practice.

Finally, Aboriginal culture in BC is diverse and complex. Many Delegated Aboriginal Agencies are actively seeking ways to incorporate traditional decision-making structures and processes into practice and to make their practice more congruent with their Nations' and communities' values and traditions. Thus, the standards are designed to be at a 'high enough' level to allow for inclusion of local practices and protocols.



Overarching Principles



Children are precious

They are our sacred link between our past and our future; because of this, each person has a responsibility for the well-being and safety of children, and children are entitled to be safe from harm. In addition, extended family, Elders, and community members share responsibility for nurturing and caring for children, and, when families need help, extended family or community members step in to care for and/or teach the child.

Cultural traditions and language are the foundation to healthy individuals, families, nations and communities

Through traditional teachings, language, ceremony, spirituality, and practice of the traditional economy (e.g., hunting, fishing and harvesting), a sense of belonging, identity and continuation of Aboriginal traditions and knowledge is instilled.

A wholistic approach is key to healthy children, families, and communities

All living things and the environment are interconnected and interdependent. A wholistic approach to wellness considers the broader perspective of individual, family, community, and nation. It considers the past and future, as well as people in the context of their surroundings (cultural social, economic, political realities). It considers the root causes to families that are not functioning well.

Self-determination is paramount

Aboriginal peoples have primary responsibility for Aboriginal child welfare and the well-being of Aboriginal children and families.

Principles for Practice

Culturally safe & Family-Centred

Each family is recognized as being unique; families are in the best position to say what they need and what will work for them, and the culture and traditions of the family are honoured and respected. Social workers are aware of their own culture, which may or may not be the same as that of the families with whom they work, the culture of their agency and/or discipline, and the culture of the community in which they work. Social workers working with families are appreciative of power imbalances, institutional discrimination, impacts of colonization, and the cultural resources of families and communities.

Collaborative & Participatory

Family and professionals working together in partnership; actively seeking the involvement and voice of family, children and youth in decision-making.

Wholistic & Relationship-based

Paying attention to the person's spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental well being; working in ways that foster and honour relationships e.g. between the person

and their family, support people, and community, and that recognize that personal growth and well-being is promoted through caring, trusting relationships.

Strengths-Based & Proactive

Paying attention to what is working well in the family; striving to provide upstream supports to families in order to prevent crisis or harm.

Transparent, Open, Honest

Open communication, common understanding, and ensuring shared access to information.



The practice framework will be the focus of Project Update #2.

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