Caring Across the Boundaries: Promoting Access to Voluntary Sector Resources for First Nations Children and Families

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Dedication

To our ancestors whose wise teachings guide our ways of loving and caring for our Aboriginal children, their families, and Nations.

To non-Aboriginal peoples who commit to a vision of a relationship with Aboriginal peoples that ensures our respectful coexistence as distinct peoples having all of our respective rights and responsibilities recognized.
Abstract

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. As the voluntary sector (VS) provides a myriad of valuable support services to children and families in Canada, this national survey study explores the nature and extent of access to voluntary sector services by First Nations children, youth, and families resident on reserve. Research findings indicate that, although FNCFSA and the child, youth, and family serving voluntary sector organizations (VSO) share an interest in ensuring on reserve residents have access to these vital community supports, there is currently very little evidence that voluntary sector organizations are providing services to on reserve residents. Furthermore, voluntary sector funding provided to on reserve culturally based voluntary organizations is minimal. Recommendations to promote collaboration between FNCFSA and the voluntary sector, and for the development of culturally based voluntary organizations on reserve, are discussed.
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Introduction

I think it is very much about relationships and one of the barriers is that the relationships are not there. And partly that's because of funding, partly because of policy at the federal level; it's partly because of history. It's partly a matter of preference, that people are more comfortable with their own people...How do you build relationships? That's a big question because relationships have to be based on trust.

Voluntary Sector Interview Participant

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. As the voluntary sector (VS) provides a myriad of valuable support services to children and families in Canada, this national survey study explored the nature and extent of access to VS services by First Nations children, youth, and families resident on reserve. Echoing the findings of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Canada, 1996), we believe that a culturally based community development approach which promotes the respectful and distinct coexistence of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples is essential to redress the impacts of colonization. This can be achieved by recognizing Aboriginal Rights and Title, supporting First Nations governments and programs, and fostering the further development of culturally based VS supports for First Nations children, youth, families, and communities.

First Nations peoples residing on and off reserves continue to face significant social exclusion exemplified in First Nations overrepresentation for many socio-economic at risk markers. For example, Aboriginal children and youth experience high rates of suicides, infant mortality, abuse, unemployment, drop out rates, teen pregnancy, homelessness, poverty, and admission to foster care (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002). Social exclusion also sets in play a situation where Aboriginal peoples face significant barriers in accessing culturally based services that are essential to redress the expropriation, oppression, and racism
that continue to impact the lived experiences of Aboriginal children, youth, and families (Blackstock, 2003a).

FNCFSA report that on reserve social supports for children, youth, and families are very limited. These services are most often funded by the federal government and are typically based on population count instead of on the needs and aspirations of communities. There are few instances where provincial/territorial governments augment services available on reserve for children, youth, and families.

In the absence of adequate equivalents of provincial and municipal programs, or sustained investment from the corporate sector or philanthropic community, the Aboriginal community itself steps in to meet the needs of children and families. Civic engagement through volunteering and fundraising in-community is a large part of many Aboriginal cultures (Voluntary Sector Initiative, 2000). Communal helping is a tradition that sustained First Nations communities through millennia as communities embraced an interdependent system which called on each individual to contribute their gifts, knowledge, and skills to benefit community well being. This tradition of communal helping continues today as many communities continue to rely on one another to ensure quality of life within the context of their cultures. Unfortunately, as Blackstock (2003b) found, there is little evidence of financial support from VS funders for this type of culturally based helping. As a result of a gap in VS support, many First Nations community members rely on community based fundraising through methods such as fifty-fifty draws, raffles, and bake sales to meet basic needs such as wheelchairs, therapeutic services, and recreation. Although these efforts are valuable, when the community is already experiencing high rates of poverty, it is unrealistic to expect them to fill the void created by an absence of VS, provincial, and municipal services.

With limited federal government funds and community fundraising, a very inadequate pool of resources to support children, youth, and families on reserve
is realized. This resource pool must fund a whole myriad of services such as police and justice services; lands, resources, and environment programs; health services; community development projects; economic development; employment and education; recreation and quality of life programming; cultural programming; and social services including housing, social assistance, and child welfare. It is not difficult to imagine why children, youth, and families are struggling considering the impacts of colonization, the absence of equivalents for provincial and municipal supports, limited economic development, and, as will be demonstrated through this research, negligible VS supports.

Within this context of limited resources, FNCFSA were developed in the 1980s by First Nations in response to the critical need for culturally based child welfare services on reserve. There are now over one hundred such agencies located throughout Canada which are funded by the federal government and receive their jurisdictional authority from their respective provincial/territorial child welfare statutes. This places them in a precarious position, where one government holds the jurisdiction and the other funding with no obvious connection between the two. This can result in a disconnection between what the child welfare statutes require and what the federal government funds FNCFSA to do. As found in a national study conducted by the Assembly of First Nations and the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, one of the most critical funding gaps is in the range of services designed to ensure the safety and well being of children and youth at risk while remaining in their family homes (McDonald, Ladd, et. al., 2000). The provincial/territorial child welfare statutes require that this range of services, known as least disruptive measures, be exhausted before considering removal of the child from his/her home. This is a significant gap given the strong desire of FNCFSA to provide care for children and youth within their community context and to reduce the trend of Aboriginal children entering the child welfare system. The situation is critical with between 30% and 40% of all children in care in Canada being Aboriginal despite the fact that they compose only 5% of the child population. Department of Indian and Northern Affairs data indicates that
the number of children in care on reserve increased a staggering 71.5% between 1995 and 2001 (Blackstock, 2003b; McKenzie, 2002).

FNCFSA face high service demands, limited funds and resources, and the conundrum of having to bridge the federal government requirement to use provincial/territorial child welfare legislation which is foreign and often incompatible with First Nations traditional and customary forms of child care (McDonald, Ladd, et. al., 2000). FNCFSA are frequently called upon to meet a demanding and complex set of community needs as they are often the first, and only, culturally based agency on reserve resulting in additional stresses to the already limited financial and human resource structures. The need for additional culturally based supports for children, youth, and families on reserve to augment the efforts of the FNCFSA is obvious.

The success of culturally based services in meeting the needs of Aboriginal children is encouraging as demonstrated by the numerous examples of excellence in FNCFSA. Their dedication to the care of children within the context of their cultural community has resulted in an enriched lived experience for children and their families. The importance of a match between services and those who use the services is emphasized in research indicating that First Nations communities with FNCFSA have lower youth suicide rates (Chandler, 2002). Mainstream social work increasingly recognizes FNCFSA as achieving standards of excellence (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2003).

It is not possible, however, for FNCFSA to meet the needs of children, youth and families on their own – there must be further commitment from governments, the voluntary sector and the corporate sector. This engagement must be framed by a process of reconciliation that acknowledges lived experiences of colonization and supports First Nations as the best decision makers and caregivers of First Nations children and youth. This engagement must be mutually beneficial as
respectful relationships require a balancing of giving and receiving. The VS has much to learn and profit by forming relationships with First Nations peoples in Canada.

The Voluntary Sector Initiative Project undertaken by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada is intended to facilitate this process of relationship building by measuring the nature and extent of collaborations between the voluntary sector and First Nations child and family service agencies while informing positive relationship building. This research project includes three specific components: a) 3 surveys delivered to voluntary sector organizations and First Nations organizations; 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 follow and paint a frank picture of the landscape of collaboration currently in place.
First Nations Context – An Overview of Colonization

…maybe a lack of cultural knowledge of understanding. I mean, how many of us have been to a First Nations community…you know what you read in a paper, and that doesn't present you with a full complete picture. So you don't even know what goes on…to know how your organization can make a difference with that lack of exposure.

Voluntary Sector Interview Participant

For most Canadians, the story of Canada is one of finding new opportunity and hope in a land that was new to their ancestors. For First Nations communities, their connection with the land dates back to time immemorial and their history prior to colonization was rich and full of opportunity, gratitude, and hope. Unfortunately, as the newcomers found opportunity it came at a price, one paid by Aboriginal peoples. First Nations experiences throughout the development of Canada have been dominated by marginalization, assimilation, loss of life and land, and the active destruction of a way of life and of family.

The Canadian story of history is too often predominated by the voice, and defined truth, of the colonizers, and the concurrent marginalization of the voice, truth, and humanity of Aboriginal peoples. The histories of Aboriginal peoples are often trivialized or relegated to departments of Anthropology and History, consigning their stories to the past as historical anecdotes rather than reflections of active and living cultures. The histories of Aboriginal peoples exist within a living continuum of practices and traditions which extend into the lives of today's generation. Thus, in order for collaboration to be meaningful, there must exist a realization of the vitality and significance of the histories of Aboriginal peoples. A key element in realizing meaningful collaborations and partnerships lies in information, in the long history of Aboriginal peoples, and in framing the Aboriginal experience of colonization and assimilation in such a way as to give context to contemporary conditions and lives.
Aboriginal peoples have lived, survived, flourished, and raised children successfully since time immemorial as distinct cultures and linguistically diverse communities. Culture is not an activity; it is fundamental to who one is as an Aboriginal person, and how one locates and understands one's self in time and space, and within relationships with Mother Earth, each other, and one's spirituality. The richness of Aboriginal cultures can only be properly expressed by those who belong to each distinct community, and so, as authors we affirm the vital importance of culture to the well being of children and leave the expression of the diverse cultures to the communities themselves. The very continued existence of Aboriginal cultures and languages despite the ravages of colonization is testament to their strength and importance. For example, the child care philosophies that guided Aboriginal parents and communities in the past are based and founded on traditional teachings that remained true throughout the generations. Aboriginal peoples must be acknowledged as being in the best position to make decisions and care for Aboriginal children.

The vitality of Aboriginal peoples and cultures was dealt a hard blow as Europeans arrived in North American bringing with them new diseases, new weapons, and new values and beliefs based on individual rights and ownership. These new attitudes disregarded the existing effective political, social, economic, judicial, spiritual, and child caring systems of Aboriginal peoples and sought to eliminate them through the colonization and assimilation of First Nations peoples. The practices of Aboriginal people were viewed as deficient. Colonial powers and settlers presumed a greater ability, a greater knowledge, and a greater skill in raising Aboriginal children. The results have been devastating.

Originally, the colonial powers relied on good relationships with the Indians to help sustain themselves in the New World and form alliances against other colonial powers. This resulted in the Royal Proclamation of 1763 which set out the terms of British territorial settlement in the new territory of Canada. This Royal Proclamation set the framework for the original treaties and continues to
shape the interpretation of existing treaties and the negotiations of new ones (Blackstock, 2003b).

Canada did sign treaties in eastern Canada and the Prairies, but, as they approached British Columbia, they became increasingly restrictive making treaty settlement terms entirely unsustainable, and, thus, disagreeable to First Nations. It is important to note that First Nations with treaties often believe that their treaty terms have not been honoured by Canada and have sought differing forms of redress. Eventually, Canada abandoned its obligations to negotiate treaties as spelled out in the Royal Proclamation and moved forward with a focused policy of assimilation, as described by Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs in 1920:

Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian department. (Henderson, n.d.)

This new policy emphasized the eradication of the Indian question and Indian land ownership over fair treatment through treaty making. The Indian Act was amended making it illegal for First Nations people to hire legal counsel in treaty negotiations and to gather in groups to plan and protest. Also, ceremonies were banned and traditional forms of Aboriginal government were replaced by a foreign band council system. The movement of Indian peoples was limited by a reserve pass system, which provided South Africa with a model for its own apartheid policies. In fact, until 1960, the Indian Act defined a person as "an individual other than an Indian" (Blackstock, 2003b). As non-persons under the law, Aboriginal people were denied Canadian citizenship rights and benefits including the right to vote or own property.

Coupled with the legal maneuverings of the Canadian government in its attempts to eradicate Indians, was the physical reality and loss of life caused by disease and starvation. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples estimates the loss
of life of First Nations peoples in Canada from contact to present day to be 80% of the population (Canada, 1996). Such loss of life, skills, and knowledge left Aboriginal communities in cycles of grief. Yet, this devastation was just the beginning of the loss experienced by Aboriginal peoples. The colonizers, wanting to increase their efforts to assimilate the Indians, began to focus their policies and attentions on Indian children (Blackstock, 2003b).

Residential schools were first opened in the 1870s under the authority of the Indian Act and forced Aboriginal parents to send their children, aged five to fifteen, to government boarding schools operated by Christian churches. If parents would not give up their children willingly, the police were called in to help with their removal. The conditions in the schools were horrendous as children, already traumatized by being separated from their families and communities, were housed in poorly constructed and overcrowded schools. These conditions, coupled in many cases with child maltreatment by the staff, resulted in physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental safety issues for the children. They also resulted in the wild spread of tuberculosis and small pox resulting in death rates at the schools of up to 40% (Canada, 1996). In addition to the physical abuses suffered, children suffered psychological abuses as the schools taught the students that their cultures, traditions, and languages were things to be ashamed of and forgotten.

Residential schools also disrupted the flow of cultural knowledge and practices including cultural child caring knowledge. Generations of Aboriginal children grew up without parental role models, removed from family, and lacking the know how to care for their own children. Generations of Aboriginal adults lived in communities where there were no children aged 5 to 15 to love and care for as they were away at the schools.

As the residential school system began to wind down, it was replaced by a child welfare system characterized by cultural insensitivity and naivety. By the mid
1950s social workers, devoid of any cultural knowledge and perpetuating colonial policies, removed large numbers of Aboriginal children from their communities. It was not unusual for social workers to do mass removals from First Nations reserves. Ethnocentric child welfare practices based on Euro-western models did not take into account First Nations values, beliefs, responsibilities, and child care practices and continued to marginalize First Nations efforts to care for their own children despite the pervasive failure of mainstream approaches in the residential school system.

FNCFSA began to develop over the past 30 years in an effort to stem the tide of Aboriginal children being raised in non-Aboriginal communities and homes in order to affirm and restore community capacity to care for their own children and youth. Aboriginal control over child welfare is one step in the direction of self-determination.

The continuing reality for First Nations peoples is that the government of Canada still defines who is, and who is not, an Indian pursuant to the Indian Act, it legislates First Nations forms of governance, and regulates the provision of services to First Nations peoples through funding regimes or direct legislative powers. Socio-economic conditions for on reserve residents continue to lag behind that of other Canadians. (Blackstock, 2003b)

The reality of many children and their families resident on reserve is one of poor housing, overcrowding, poverty, lack of education, increased child mortality, and suicide. The federal government, through its Statement of Reconciliation (Canada, 1998), signaled its desire to end colonial policies, but progress in implementing the recommendations arising from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples has been very slow.

If the government is truly committed to the concept of reconciliation, and devoted to the recognition and meaningful support of First Nations self determination, then measures restoring balance and respect in relationships while redressing
the inequitable allocation of resources are called for. In recognizing and affirming First Nations self determination, the disempowerment of colonial interests is essential. Redistribution of power is necessary to ensure that the principles of equality, freedom, and respect are the lived reality for all peoples in Canada. Furthermore, the disempowerment of mechanisms that support social exclusion and colonization is critical. It will take broad based public engagement and commitment from all sectors of society, particularly the VS. It is imperative that the VS, as a leading invigilator of human rights and quality of life for all peoples in Canada, work respectfully with Aboriginal peoples to ensure that reconciliation becomes the lived experience of all Canadian children.
Literature Review

I think it is the responsibility, primarily, of the voluntary sector to make itself aware and make itself available and to make a space for Aboriginal leadership, to do more than take sensitivity training...to really make a space.

First Nations Interview Participant

Researchers rely on the knowledge gleaned by others to guide the development of their research hypothesis, methodology, and, ultimately, to provide context to their findings. As with all research projects, this project began with a comprehensive international literature review. The sparseness of relevant material made it difficult to compile a reading list. Approximately 170 hours were spent exhausting all avenues to identify published and unpublished literature relevant to the research question.

Sadly, and shockingly, there was only one resource that directly explored the collaboration between indigenous peoples and the VS as a means of enhancing the well being of children, youth, and families, and a very limited pool of resources on other types of indigenous/VS collaboration.

The existing literature on other types of partnerships between non-Aboriginal organizations and First Nations communities is extremely limited and peripheral to our research question. Economic development and environmental initiatives proved to be the most fruitful. The problem was that a lot of the literature was in the form of instructions and handbooks often from an economic development perspective. Key informants identified a program here or project there involving First Nations, Inuit, or Métis and the VS, but little was written about the relationships underlying the projects or an evaluation of the outcomes thereof.

Some of the richest literature explored the lived experience of Aboriginal peoples resident on reserve. The following works provide an overview of socio-economic living conditions and quality of life measures for persons living on and off

First Nations Interview Participant
reserves: Beavon and Cooke (2002); Canada (2003, 2000, 1995a, 1995b); Elias and Demas (2001); Hagey, Larocque, and McBride (1989); Lemchuk-Favel (1996); Stevens (2003); and Norris, Kerr, and Nault (1996). These documents provide the reader with fact based information to help him or her understand the circumstances of the contemporary lived experiences of Aboriginal children, youth, and families.

Beavon and Cooke's (2002) research applied the United Nations' International Human Development Index (HDI) to Registered Indians on reserve. The HDI has become the one of the most commonly used indices of well being. Canada has scored very high, including a first place finish, making Canada one of the best countries to live in. High life expectancy, per capita gross product, and level of education have helped boost Canada's HDI profile. Yet, this high level of human development is not shared by all of Canada. Beavon and Cooke, using the same variables as the HDI, have calculated that Registered Indians on reserve rank 78th out of the 174 countries on the list. This placement alongside Peru and Brazil is a telling one. Off reserve Registered Indians placed a little better at approximately the 34th position alongside Chile and Kuwait while Registered Indians on and off reserve averaged 48th position alongside Mexico. The difference between a first place finish and that of 78th position is one of life and death for many First Nations children and youth. This raises the question of whether the absence of the VS in providing on reserve services partially explains the significant differences in quality of life.

The Elias and Demas (2001) report commissioned by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the Manitoba First Nation Employment and Training Centres was conducted in order to provide information on Manitoba First Nations peoples with a disability. The survey examines the topics of disability and related causes, socio-economic issues, job training issues, health services issues, housing issues, and transportation issues. The findings include the need for community-based organizations which support independent living. The survey calls for more
research into the subject, development of preventative programs, and enhanced independent living services. The VS provides important services for persons with disabilities and it is logical that they can be of assistance in reaching out to persons with disabilities resident on reserve to ensure an equitable quality of life.

Hagey, Larocque, and McBride’s (1989) working paper provides an overview of what life is like for many First Nations families and juxtaposes it against that of the rest of Canada. Part one highlights the demographic trends in the Aboriginal population. A marked increase in population across all of Canada’s Status Indian and Inuit populations is observed. Part two outlines the social conditions experienced by Canada’s First Nations and Inuit peoples. These include health, family, living conditions, and social assistance subcategories. Part three examines the economic conditions of Status Indians and Inuit in Canada. Education, employment, and income are explored separately. Again, the differences articulated in this three part report are quite telling and their frank appraisal demonstrates the discriminatory nature of Canada’s programs and services.

Lemchuk-Favel’s (1996) report outlines the health care challenges faced by First Nations peoples on reserve and provides suggestions for remedial actions. Infant mortality rates, socio-economic conditions, and issues of clean water, are all accounted for. Many non-Aboriginal readers are unaware of the challenges and assets of on reserve life. The daily taken for granted luxuries expected by many Canadians as part of Canadian life are not the lived experiences of many First Nations families and communities. Through public education of the histories, cultures, strengths, needs, and self determined directions of Aboriginal peoples, the hope is that a better understanding of the need for services and support programs is achieved.

Chandler (2002) provides an example of how important it is to analyze data within the context of differing Aboriginal communities in his exploration of the
differential rates of suicide in First Nations in British Columbia. Dr. Chandler maintains that First Nations communities which have taken more steps toward self determination and self continuity (e.g., band schools, First Nations child and family service organizations, tribal police, health care) are those communities with dramatically lower youth suicide rates. He concludes that a strong sense of cultural heritage is a protective factor in terms of youth suicide rates. For Aboriginal children, identity formation is shaped by their relationship with their culture and community members. Concerned and concentrated efforts on the part of First Nations communities to preserve and affirm their own cultures and form their own culturally based organization are, as Chandler claims, some of the key factors in reducing youth suicide rates. This can be partially achieved through the development and support of culturally based VS programs targeted at children and youth which are designed to build up confidence and affirm cultural identity.

Hanselmann (2003) reviews the Urban Aboriginal Initiative which identifies key policy areas, explores policy options and alternatives, highlights practice ideas, and promotes dialogue about urban Aboriginal issues. This report shares the major findings of the initiative and contributes recommendations regarding public policy and urban Aboriginal peoples. The report concludes that there is a need for public policy which ensures that Aboriginal peoples do not fall through the cracks of jurisdictional and funding disputes between federal and provincial governments. Such a policy needs to include the urban Aboriginal community in design and implementation to be successful.

Absolon and Herbert (1997) explore community development and action in a First Nations context. They discuss the theories and practices of community action and development already in place and bring them into the First Nations perspective. The authors provide a new perspective on community development, one which incorporates First Nations ways of knowing and doing instead of working against them. Finding that current existing programs are inappropriate,
inadequate, racist, and under funded, they call for a change in point of view in the
development of programs and projects to one more culturally and historically
appropriate, thereby giving these programs and projects a solid foundation from
which real community action can emerge. The types of recommendations
provided by the authors are a great foundation for any partnership or
collaboration between First Nations communities and any other organization.

Cornell and Kalt (1992a, 1992b, 1989) provide an extensive series on economic
development and American Indian reservations. Although these papers are
grounded in the U.S. context, Kalt confirmed that his U.S. observations and
results match those of the Canadian context at a 2001 policy conference in
Ottawa.

Cornell and Kalt (1992a), through an analysis of history, political structure,
economies, and culture, attempt to decode ‘why’ some Indian communities are
able to achieve sustainable socio-economic growth while others are still
struggling. They find that putting decision making power in the hands of the
Indians peoples is paramount in the development of successful economies and
social improvements. They further emphasize the need for cultural constructs
and institutions in Aboriginal communities which foster a sense of identity and
uniformity in a society. Cultural standards are a means of fostering success as
they test and weed out foreign notions which would not succeed in their
environment.

Elias (1995) and Stevenson and Hickey (1995) also examine economic
development issues. Elias uses case studies to showcase Aboriginal peoples’
initiatives in overcoming obstacles to self reliance. Stevenson and Hickey have
compiled an annotated bibliography related to empowering First Nations
communities in controlling their own economic fate. Both works are testaments
to Aboriginal achievement and ability to succeed through culturally appropriate
models if given the opportunity.
Reimer and Young (1994) explore economic development within a rural context, identifying varied programs and approaches which provide insight into what the VS can achieve if other examples and models are to be affirmed. Rural communities have much in common with reserves. Many First Nations reserves are in rural areas, often hundreds of kilometers away from urban service centres. Many of the VS service problems, such as lack of involvement and outreach, experienced by rural communities exist in the First Nations on reserve context. Therefore, it is possible that solutions found for rural communities can inform First Nations and vice versa.

Phil Fontaine (1998), current National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, provides a primer on modern racism in Canada as experienced by Aboriginal peoples. In *Modern racism in Canada*, he examines the concept of racism and discusses both overt and covert forms. Barriers to solutions are also identified. This short, ten page booklet provides the non-Aboriginal reader with a new point of view with regards to racism in Canada and questions the claim, by some, that it does not exist.

Bensen (2001) has compiled a collection of stories and poems from Aboriginal peoples across North America speaking about and to their experiences and issues after being adopted. This first hand account of lives affected by the past and present child welfare systems is powerful. Such a personal collection of works complements Durst's (2000) review of nine research projects funded by the government to explore social services issues and themes in Aboriginal communities. Allowing for personal and academic perspectives on the same topic synthesizes and connects research knowledge with lived experience. The issues explored by Durst could, in large part, be addressed through the recommendations provided in McDonald, Ladd, et. al.'s (2000) *First Nations and Family Service Joint National Policy Review* and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Canada, 1996).
The *First Nations and Family Service Joint National Policy Review* is a joint research project carried out by the Assembly of First Nations and the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to review the national federal government funding policies with respect to First Nation child and family services. Under the sponsorship of the *Agenda for Action for First Nations*, the review was undertaken as part of Canada's commitment to forming collaborations and partnerships with First Nations in order to better serve and meet the needs of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Of note in the data gathered is the challenge of sufficient and sustained funding for community capacity building. Community healing approaches and plans need to be supported politically and financially through positive policy development which has long term goals and importance. Of great import is the recommendation concerning the inadequacy of the present funding formula with respect to prevention programs. The funding conundrums faced by First Nations agencies fetters them in their ability to provide a range of culturally based services comparable to those provided to children and families off reserve (McDonald, Ladd, et. al., 2000).

The VS literature is rich in terms of structure, management, and accountability of the sector but not, as previously noted, in terms of its role with, and responsibility to, indigenous peoples. For example, Cameron, et al. (2002) explored the language of partnerships. This unpublished paper examines how language influences the success of partnerships within the VS. Language is an important factor in any relationship, especially when different cultures are involved and/or when power differentials are at play. Differences in language expression or interpretation can result in misunderstandings which lead to failed or ineffectual collaborations. Understanding the language of partnerships is an important step in creating partnerships. Open and honest communication relies on clarifying the meaning and values that shape our interpretation of language and process throughout the period of any relationship.
Kanter (1993) is a collaboration theorist who emphasizes that strong working relationships and partnerships rely on mutual understanding, respect for one another, and a balance of giving and receiving. The sharing of information, especially history, is a central component in the effective development and maintenance of well-formed collaborations. Paternalistic attitudes, which allow one party to define and address the needs of another, undermine partnerships by setting in play power imbalances. Egalitarian relationships work on foundations of self-awareness, sensitivity, communication, and consultation in cooperative decision making, as well as an overall understanding of where one's partner comes from within the context of their history. This article informs individuals or groups wishing to partner with First Nations communities and agencies that they will have to take it upon themselves to educate themselves about the issues and workings of on-reserve life. Too often in the past, it has been up to the Aboriginal communities and peoples to meet non-Aboriginal agencies more than half-way. To lay the entire burden of understanding on First Nations communities is to undermine the nature of true partnerships. The hope is that misunderstandings can be kept to a minimum if everyone does their part to learn the ways of the other and in maintaining open and honest communication.

Interactions between the roles of the government and the VS are explored by Rekart (1993). Similarly, the potential for partnerships between the VS and other sectors is examined by Callard, Deboisbriand, Jabaopurwala, Roy, Sylvester, Wagel, and Woodall (2001). The authors of this unpublished paper attempt to answer the following question: What key issues must be addressed by the VS in developing a proactive agenda for partnerships with other sectors? They provide insight, reflections, and concrete steps for VSO wishing to enter into partnerships with entities from another sector. Among their recommendations one finds a need for clearly articulated goals for partnerships which are compatible with mission statements, strategic objectives, and organizational structures. The VS should also be careful not to mimic corporate sector operations where it is contrary to the spirit of the VSO; they should stay true to their mandate.
Partnerships offer all parties a means of building up their programs, funding, and access to a greater variety of human resources.

Husbands, McKechnie, and Leslie (2001) provide the results from the *Scan of research on public attitudes towards the voluntary sector* conducted by the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy for the Voluntary Sector Initiative’s Joint Awareness Table. The Joint Awareness Table seeks to inform various audiences about the role the VS plays in maintaining Canada’s high quality of life and overall health. The Joint Awareness Table also seeks to increase engagement in community life by measuring current public awareness levels in order to develop engagement strategies. This report contains the findings from a scan of the existing public opinion research available across Canada, as well as the results from their research into organizations in the process of undertaking or intending to undertake public opinion research. The scan results show that there is a limited amount of research on public attitudes towards the VS in Canada. Canadians favourably view the work, importance, and contributions of the sector, but do not want VS services to substitute programs and services the government ought to deliver. Canadians also place a considerable amount of trust in VSO, while expressing concern about VSO solicitation, use, and management of donations and funds.

Hall, McKeown, and Roberts (2001) provide statistics from the National Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP). This report highlights key findings of the NSGVP and provides a quick look at the state of the VS and civic engagement in Canada. The statistics paint a picture of what the Canadian volunteer landscape looks like in the year 2000. The paper presents disaggregated donor and volunteer statistics by province. Relevant to this study, the NSGVP reveals that, although 7 out of 10 Canadians report engaging in some form of civic engagement, only 3 out of 10 report volunteering for an organization. This suggests that other forms of civic engagement outside of the traditional organizational constructs of the VS are not sufficiently recognized and
supported in Canada. This would include those traditional forms of volunteerism and civic engagement present in on reserve communities.

The concept of social inclusion is explored by Bach (2002) who advocates integrating the philosophy and practice of social inclusion that benefits children, particularly children with disabilities, into politics and public institutions. Bach sees social inclusion as a political claim, as an ideal for social institutions, but too often not the lived experience of marginalized peoples. Social inclusion can be a means of building solidarity by including it as part of the structure of state and civil society without assimilating social and cultural differences into a homogenized whole. A redefinition and rewriting of the rules of service access and benefit is called for. Resources and institutions need to question their own practices and weed out those which foster inequality through the placing of lesser value and status on certain segments of society.

Wotherspoon (2002) examines social inclusion and its relationship and place in Aboriginal education. He discusses the relationship between social inclusion/social exclusion and the public education system, paying particular attention to Aboriginal children. Discussions include an examination of the promotion of social inclusion relative to exclusion in recent education policies, as well as the practices and impacts such processes have on Aboriginal children and youth.

Lemont (1992) takes a look at American Indian constitutional and governmental reform concluding that social inclusion and racism are concepts one must understand in order to comprehend the lack of services and service access problems faced by Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Lemont suggests further exploration of the role VSO should play in indigenous community development.

Bird (1996) and Bird & Gandz (1991) provide a good overview of some of the ethical and moral considerations within business relationships. Bird’s concepts
of ethical blindness, ethical muteness, and ethical deafness as supports to immoral or unethical action are also applicable to the voluntary and public sectors. The ways in which people develop their own moral reasoning and judgment is explored along with ways of implementing moral decisions in a business or corporate environment. Ensuring that ethics are ingrained in organizational ways of knowing and doing through introducing “ethics as good conversation” is key to moral deliberation and action. An over reliance on codes of ethics or ethics officials is insufficient. The means of fostering social contexts and environments that encourage moral discussions, conversations, and interactions are explored. When attempting to puzzle out why the VS seems to be blind to the needs of on reserve peoples, such works are of importance. They help the reader to understand how reasoning works in relation to moral decisions.

These are the works of note uncovered through our literature review. The list is not all that lengthy but does provide an accurate picture of what can be found in a search of VS documents and Aboriginal experiences. Of all the articles, books, and reports reviewed in this literature review, only one reflects this project and all its aims. Cindy Blackstock’s unpublished paper entitled *Same country: Same lands; 78 countries away* (2003b) researches the same topic but within the provincial scope of British Columbia. Blackstock also found a limited amount of coverage, programs, and reports regarding engagement patterns between on reserve communities and the VS. This paper sparked the current research program in that it found extremely limited engagement between child, youth, and family serving VSO and First Nations child and family service programs serving residents on reserve. It seemed infeasible for the whole of Canada to be ignoring an entire population at risk. Blackstock sought to confirm her findings by expanding the research to include all provinces and territories. Her research methodology and surveys formed the foundation for the construction of our own. A few questions were modified to reflect a national perspective and to identify the role of the philanthropic community in supporting on reserve VS service access.
The survey constructed for government personnel is the only totally original survey created for this project. Blackstock's surveys and responses offered us a look at what questions worked and which did not. Because of this foundational work, a testing of the surveys was not needed. Her research was our test.

This similarity of limited findings between the current literature review and Blackstock's research is not comforting. The lack of material is telling in and of itself. Simultaneously, it reinforces the claim that such research is necessary. Although it is encouraging to know we have probably not missed any works of importance, it is troubling to learn that reserves are not being considered by the VS as potential sites for outreach and program development. On reserve communities have become the hot potato the federal and provincial governments have been tossing around for decades. While funding is being cut to support services throughout Canada, the VS frequently steps up to fill the void. This safety net does not exist for people on reserve. Reserves seem to have become a no-mans land where there is little infrastructure to support the community in the face of government spending adjustments and/or reallocations.
Methodology

…the government, whoever the government is, can't possibly know what all the needs are.

Government Interview Participant

As previously stated, this research project was heavily informed by a similar project undertaken by Cindy Blackstock (2003b) in British Columbia. The lack of pre-existing studies of comparable themes uncovered throughout the literature review, excluding the unpublished Blackstock work, meant that the research design would rely on project objectives and goals, as well as the Blackstock study.

A survey methodology augmented by key informant interviews was selected in order to maximize opportunities for participation and to ensure standardization of responses. Three surveys were constructed, each designed to reflect the individual targeted groups and their roles in VS activity and collaboration with FNCFSA.

The first self administered survey was designed to question VSO and workers serving children, youth, and families. Here, the questions reflected the need for information on organizational missions and mandates, demographic information regarding client base, number of reserves and FNCFSA within the service catchment area, as well as the number of times a FNCFSA contacted the organization and vice versa. Next, the organization’s knowledge of First Nations needs and FNCFSA was explored, along with their ideas of essential features of a successful working relationship. The organizations were then asked if they worked with a FNCFSA to provide services to on reserve clients in the past year. Those who answered yes were directed to a separate list of questions regarding the relationship(s), types of services exchanged, who initiated contact, relationship quality, and service suitability. The last section of the questionnaire
asked the organization to rank, in order of importance, the five main barriers in building relationships between FNCFSA and the VS.

The VS survey was distributed to 51 VSO which specialized in children, youth, and family care and services. The surveys, available in French and English, were distributed by mail and email to all the organizations, and were available to download and complete online, from the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada website. The VS survey is in Appendix A.

A second survey was constructed and distributed to all the FNCFSA in Canada. This survey asked questions regarding level of delegation, number of Status Indian children serviced, and number and distance of reserves to the service area. Questions regarding the traditional forms of volunteerism and voluntary activity on reserve were included along with questions regarding fundraising activities. Included were a few questions about the most significant issues facing children and youth on reserve and what role the VS can play in addressing these issues. As with the VS survey, the FNCFSA were asked if they worked with a VSO in providing services to on reserve communities in the past year. Those who answered yes were directed to a series of questions about the services provided, who initiated contact, and the relationship and service quality. The last section of the FNCFSA survey mirrored that of the VS and asked the FNCFSA to rank the most important barriers in building relationships with the VS.

The FNCFSA survey was distributed to 118 FNCFSA throughout Canada by mail, email, fax, and through an online form or downloadable PDF file. All surveys were available in both English and French. A copy of the FNCFSA survey can be found in Appendix B.

The third survey was constructed differently from the first two. The Blackstock (2003b) work greatly informed the construction of both the FNCFSA and VS surveys. The Blackstock study did not include a survey of federal government
employees with departmental ties to First Nations reserves and the well being of First Nations children, youth, and families. This survey was designed to uncover the nature and extent of government knowledge of First Nations; the needs of on reserve children, youth, and families; FNCFSA; and the VS. Questions posed asked respondents to rate their level of knowledge regarding VSO and their activities, and FNCFSA and their activities. Next, respondents were questioned about the benefits of collaboration between the VS and FNCFSA and how these benefits relate to their departments and goals. The role of government in supporting and promoting VS activity on reserve was also explored. Barriers to collaboration and government roles in solving some of these limiting factors were included, with special attention given to funding barriers.

The government survey was distributed by mail and email directly to 16 federal government employees in ministries and departments where the respondents work with First Nations communities and needs. The survey was also available online for downloading and completion through the online form. One federal department distributed the survey through an internal mailing list to its employees. Again, both English and French versions of the survey were available. A copy of the government survey can be found in Appendix C.

Confidentiality of responses was ensured through the presentation of all survey findings in aggregate form only.

In addition, and as a complement, to the surveys, were key informant interviews with persons from the VS, the First Nations community (including FNCFSA), and the federal government. These interviews provided the opportunity to delve more deeply into some of the barriers limiting collaboration and how they can be overcome, as well as to explore what form VS and FNCFSA collaborations should take. Confidentiality of responses was guaranteed. The semi-formal nature of the interviews allowed for a more conversational approach rather than a formal question and answer format.
Once the survey returns and interviews were completed, data analysis and the writing of the final report commenced. At the same time, competency based professional development curricula were being developed based on research findings to help facilitate collaboration between the VS and FNCFSA, including government and philanthropic foundations/organizations. The curricula and the proposed delivery thereof in regional workshops are discussed later in this report.
Survey Findings

But here [Canada] I don't think it's about the colour of your skin so much as about what you get because of who you are…It doesn't matter if you are Black, but hey, you're not getting anything I'm not getting. You know? That's what I feel like. It's interesting. It's not the colour of your skin; it's about what you might get that I won't get. It's a different kind of discrimination.

Voluntary Sector Interview Participant

As noted in the methodology section, the VS survey was distributed to 51 VSO of which 13 (25.5%) were completed and returned. Of the FNCFSA surveys, 118 were distributed and 15 (12.7%) were completed and returned. Only Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia have FNCFSA in their provinces. The following statistics represent return rates of total returns for each province: British Columbia (26.7% of total returns), Manitoba (20%), Ontario (20%), Quebec (20%), New Brunswick (6.7%), and Saskatchewan (6.7%). Figure 1 depicts the distribution of the returns according to province.

Figure 1. Location of FNCFSA who responded to the survey
Of the government surveys, 16 were distributed and 6 (37.5%) were returned. Of these returns, 3 (50%) were from Indian and Northern Affairs (INAC), 2 (33.3%) from Health Canada (HC), and 1 online return from an unknown department.

Of note, is the fact that our sample of VSO was not comprehensive. It reflected time and accessibility concerns and represented our drive to include organizations which reflected national child, youth, and family issues. The low response rates of all three surveys indicate that further examples of collaboration were not identified. Despite this limitation, the findings of this research project do correlate with the experiences of key informants and the Blackstock (2003b) study.
First Nations Child and Family Service Agency (FNCFSA) Survey

I think that in a lot of First Nations, you'll find a lot of people are voluntarily helping older people on the reserve, and also a lot of assisting families in need when situations arise, crisis situations. People will just informally start raising money, or just kind of providing meals, very informal. Along the lines of a communal type system from a long time ago, when people just assisted other families.

First Nations Interview Participant

Of the FNCFSA responses, 9 of 15 (60%) were fully delegated/fully mandated, 4 (26.7%) were pre-mandated, and 2 (13.3%) were partially delegated (Figure 2). Fully delegated/fully mandated agencies deliver a full range of child welfare services, while partially delegated agencies provide support services and child care resources, but not child protection services.

The population of Status Indian children living on reserve serviced by each agency varies and this has direct relevance to the amount of funds available to each agency for prevention services. The national funding formula provides this funding on the basis of the agency serving a child population that exceeds specific population thresholds. For example, an agency serving 251 Status Indian children receives only 25% of the possible level of operations funding, which includes prevention services; agencies serving 501, 801 and 1001 receive 50%, 75%, and 100% of operations funding respectively. Of the 15 responses, 3 (20%) had between 251 and 500 children, 3 (20%) between 501 and 800, 1 (6.7%) between 801 and 1000, and 8 (53.3%) had 1251 or more Status Indian children under their jurisdiction (Figure 3).

As depicted in Figure 4, many of these agencies are serving multiple communities, therefore introducing increased operational costs for travel and service provision. Seven agencies serve only 1 reserve (46.7%), 1 agency serves 4 reserves (6.7%), 2 serve 5 reserves (13.3%), 3 serve 7 reserves (20%)
and 2 serve 8 reserves (13.3%). Of note is that 46.7% of the agencies service 5 or more reserves.

Additionally, the communities are often quite distant to urban service centres as depicted in Figure 5. A total of 54 reserves were serviced by the 15 FNCFSA respondents; of these, only 11 (19.3%) were within 0 to 10 km, while 24 (42.1%) were within 71 or more km to an urban service centre.

In terms of traditional forms of volunteerism and civic engagement present in the communities served by respondent agencies, 4 (26.7%) mentioned ceremonial and traditional events as examples of volunteer activity while 3 (20%) acknowledged family and community events, and 2 (13.3%) of the respondents chose both sports and emergency services (Figure 6).

The most common answers in terms of volunteer activities on reserve included 3 (20%) each for sports and recreation; community programs and support; and traditional and ceremonial support, while 5 (33.3%) gave no answer (Figure 7).

Eight of the 15 (53.3%) FNCFSA state that they are incorporated, non-profit organizations. Others are governed directly through a tribal council or band council.

Key mechanisms for fundraising on reserve demonstrate a lack of long term funding plans with raffles selected by 10 respondents (66.7%) and bingos selected by 8 (53.3%) as the most frequent types of activities. Also included were different types of sales (bake, pizza, yard, garage, auctions, car washes, and breakfasts/dinners) selected by 8 (53.3%), social events (dances, casino nights, shows, tournaments, walkathons, and sports pools) selected by 4 (26.7%), and collections (bottle drives, door to door soliciting, loonie/toonie drives, toll booths) selected by 3 (20%). Only 2 respondents listed federal funds and 1 respondent listed philanthropic foundations (Figure 8).
Figure 2. Level of FNCFSA delegation

Figure 3. Population of serviced Status Indian children living on reserve
Figure 4. Number of reserves the FNCFSA services

Figure 5. Approximate distance of reserves to an urban service centre
Figure 6. Traditional forms of volunteerism present on reserve

- no answer
- none
- ceremonies/traditional events
- family/community events
- sports
- emergency services
- fundraising
- education

Figure 7. Volunteer activities present on reserve

- no answer
- sports and recreation
- community programs/support
- traditional and ceremonial
- educational
- youth centre
- clothing and food banks
Figure 8. Key mechanisms for fundraising on reserve

- Raffles: 60.00%
- Bingo: 50.00%
- Sales: 40.00%
- Events: 30.00%
- Collections: 20.00%
- Government: 10.00%
- Philanthropic foundations: 0.00%

Figure 9. How funds raised on reserve are used

- Sports and recreation: 70.00%
- Ceremonies and cultural events: 60.00%
- Youth groups: 50.00%
- Health and education: 40.00%
- Social services: 30.00%
- Community organizations/services: 20.00%

First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada
As to how funds were used in the communities, sports and recreation was the top answer with 9 (60%), with ceremonies and cultural events, and youth groups both selected by 4 respondents (26.7%). Health and education, and community organizations both came in with 3 each (20%), with social services trailing with 2 (13.3%) (Figure 9).

Only 3 of 15 (20%) responding agencies said they received funding from foundations or federal/provincial funds targeted for the VS. Of those that did not receive such funds (80% or 12 of 15), only 1 FNCFSA applied for funds and was denied. When asked what barriers exist with regards to the application for funds targeted for/or from the VS, 6 (40%) of the respondents did not answer the question, 2 (13.3%) said no barriers existed, and 2 (13.3%) said such avenues were never considered as their agency does not have contact with VSO. Three of 15 (20%) referred to funding problems and concerns such as agencies not fitting into funding criteria, the lack of matching funds, and the competition between agencies for funds as limiting factors. Two (13.3%) list lack of time and knowledge as barriers, while 1 respondent mentioned the complexity of the application and reporting process.

When asked the number of times in the past year a VS, non-profit society or organization contacted the agency to discuss how they might provide services to on reserve clients, 8 (53.3%) said none, 6 (40%) said 1 to 2 times, and 1 (6.7%) gave no answer (Figure 10).

In addition, when the FNCFSA were asked the number of times in the past year they contacted a VSO, 7 (46.7%) replied none, 1 (6.7%) gave no answer, 4 (26.7%) replied 1 to 2 times, 1 (6.7%) replied 3 to 5 times, and 2 (13.3%) replied 6 to 10 times (Figure 11).

Each agency was asked to select the 5 most significant issues facing children and youth in the on reserve communities serviced. Of the 15 responses by
FNCFSA, 1 (6.7%) did not complete this section. Of the 14 who did reply, the most popular answer with 12 (85.7%) was parental substance abuse, closely followed by neglect with 10 (71.4%) and poverty and family violence both with 9 (64.3%). Child/youth substance abuse was chosen by 8 (57.1%), mental health issues and low rates of educational success each selected by 6 (42.9%), and the preservation of cultural identity by 5 (35.7%). The least selected issues facing children and youth on reserve according to the agencies polled were physical abuse and sexual abuse each with 3 (21.4%), racism with 2 (14.3%), and youth suicide with 1 (7.1%). Physical illness or disability was selected by none of the respondents as a significant issue (Figure 12).

Of these identified needs and issues, when asked if the VS can play a role in assisting communities in meeting these needs, 13 of the respondents (86.7%) saw an identifiable role for the VS.

These roles included education initiatives and advocacy, including public awareness, and prevention and support services, both with 6 respondents (46.2%), with parenting and youth initiatives, and health/healing initiatives both with 4 (30.8%), and community development with 3 (23.1%) (Figure 13).

When asked, if addressed, what needs in the communities serviced would make the most significant improvements to the safety and well being of children and youth, the most frequent answers were, with 7 (46.7%), parenting and youth programs, and, with 6 (40%), health and education. Community and capacity development with 4 (26.7%), substance abuse initiatives and programs with 3 (20%), policing with 3 (20%), and prevention and support services with 3 (20%) were the other most frequent answers (Figure 14).
Figure 10. Number of times in the past year a VSO has contacted a FNCFSA

Figure 11. Number of times in the past year a FNCFSA contacted a VSO
Figure 12. Most significant issues facing children and youth on reserve

Figure 13. Roles of VS in assisting communities meet their needs
Figure 14. Needs if addressed would make the most significant improvements to the safety and well-being of children and youth

Figure 15. Needs of FNCFSA in order to build collaborations with VSO
When asked what essential features a successful working relationship between FNCFSA and the VS would require, the agencies gave varied answers.

- 13.3% (2 of 15) gave no answer
- 33.3% (5 of 15) said clear understandings of each others' ways of knowing and doing
- 33.3% (5 of 15) said open communication and honesty
- 26.7% (4 of 15) want the partnership to be community driven and based
- 26.7% (4 of 15) demand a respect for First Nations cultures and languages
- 20% (3 of 15) require a clear understanding of each others philosophies and goals

Each agency was then asked if they had worked with a VSO within the past year. Eleven of 15 responding agencies (73.3%) said no. The 4 agencies (26.7%) which did reply yes to working with a VSO in the past year were then asked to elaborate on the relationships. One agency gave 3 examples, 1 listed 2 relationships, and 2 agencies gave 1 example each. Of these 7 examples, 3 were clothing or food bank related, 2 were crisis/grief assistance related, and 2 were health related. In each case, contact was initiated by the FNCFSA or a First Nations on reserve worker.

The quality of the relationships between the VSO and the FNCFSA were described as good in 6 of the 7 examples (85.7%) and fair in 1 example (14.3%). Similarly, the quality of services provided were described as good in 4 of the 7 examples (57.1%) and fair in 3 of the 7 examples (42.9%).

All respondents were asked to rank in order of importance the 5 main barriers to the building of relationships between FNCFSA and the VS. The answers, in order of importance related to survey answers are:
- 1 - FNCFSA lack information on the services provided by Voluntary Sector Organizations
  
  46.7% (7 of 15) of the respondents chose this as the #1 barrier

- 2 - Voluntary sector organizations lack knowledge of the needs of First Nations children, families, and communities

  33.3% (5 of 15) of the respondents chose this as the #1 barrier

- 3 - Voluntary sector organizations lack knowledge of FNCFSA

  13.3% (2 of 15) of the respondents chose this as the #1 barrier

  40% (6 of 15) of the respondents chose this as the #3 barrier

- 4 - Voluntary sector organizations lack cultural knowledge to provide services

  20% (3 of 15) of the respondents chose this as the #2 barrier

  46.7% (7 of 15) of the respondents chose this as the #7 barrier

- 5 - Distance between voluntary sector organizations and reserve communities

  53.3% (8 of 15) of the respondents chose this as the #5 barrier

  20% (3 of 15) of the respondents did not chose this as a barrier

- 6 - Lack of time to form relationships with voluntary sector organizations

  26.7% (4 of 15) of the respondents chose this as the #5 barrier

  26.7% (4 of 15) of the respondents did not choose this as a barrier

When asked what each agency feels would assist them in building effective and respectful relationships with VSO to meet community needs, another set of varied answers took shape. Information, research, and awareness about VS activities and services was listed by 6 (40%) of the responding agencies. Meet and greet forums where networking and the opportunity to connect and share information was listed by 4 (26.7%) of the agencies. Time was listed by 3 (20%), along with the need for the VSO to initiate contact and reach out to FNCFSA (Figure 15).

These survey results will be further discussed later in the report.
Voluntary Sector (VS) Survey

The role of the sector applies to citizens, all Canadian citizens. I don’t see a difference. However, I do think that the voluntary sector should look after the needs of the most vulnerable and the most in need. So, if we can say, and I think we can say, that there are certain groups that are the most in need, then I think that the voluntary sector should look at them first.

Voluntary Sector Interview Participant

As stated earlier, a total of 13 VS surveys were returned from 51 distributed (25.5%). All 13 (100%) of these organizations 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. When asked to describe their client base 6 (46.2%) of the respondent VSO list children, youth, and families as their main client base. The other VSO break down into groupings of other VSO who deal with children, youth, and families; health care providers; or family support practitioners with 3 each (23.1%) (Figure 16).

Figure 16. VSO client base

The VSO were also asked the number of First Nations reserves within their respective service catchment areas. Nine of the 13 (69.2%) do not know, did
not answer the question, or do not find the question applicable. Only 3 (23.1%) selected the choice of 31 or more, and 1 (7.7%) chose 3 to 5 reserves (Figure 17).

Similarly, when asked how many FNCFSA were located within their catchment areas, 8 (61.5%) did not know, did not answer the question, or did not find the question applicable. Only 4 (30.8%) selected 11 or more, and 1 (7.7%) selected 3 to 5 (Figure 18).

Each VSO was asked how many times this past year a FNCFSA located on First Nations reserves contacted their agency to discuss how they might provide services to on reserve clients, only 1 (7.7%) respondent had such an experience and selected 3 to 5 times. The other 12 (92.3%) had no such experience, did not answer the question, or did not find it applicable (Figure 19).

Also, when asked how many times this past year their agency contacted a FNCFSA to discuss how they might provide services to on reserve clients, only 2 (15.4%) listed 1 to 2 such connections (Figure 20).

In terms of funding targeted for services for First Nations clients or communities, only 2 (15.4%) of the VSO received such funding, and in each case, it was provided by the federal government.

All of the VSO were asked whether their agency was aware of the needs of First Nations children, youth, and families residing on reserve as it relates to their own organizational missions and mandates. Ten (76.9%) replied somewhat, and 3 (23.1%) replied no. When asked to elaborate, 4 (30.8%) recited a statistic or related knowledge about issues but offered no programs to deal with them, 2 (15.4%) related knowledge about research being done in this area, and 2 (15.4%) stated that programs on reserve are underway.
Figure 17. Number of First Nations reserves in service catchment area

Figure 18. Number of FNCFSA in service catchment area
Figure 19. Number of times this past year a FNCFSA contacted the VSO

Figure 20. Number of times this past year the VSO contacted a FNCFSA
Of these needs, 10 (76.9%) of the respondent VSO see the VS assisting communities in meeting them, while 3 (23.1%) did not answer the question. Of the 10 (76.9%) who did, the most notable roles included education and resource at 3 (30%), support service delivery at 1 (10%), and research project establishment at 1 (10%).

The essential features of a successful working relationship between VSO and FNCFSA in addressing community needs of on reserve residents are as follows:

- 46.2% (6 of 13) refer to commitment to common goals
- 46.2% (6 of 13) of the respondents refer to good communication and open and honest dialogues
- 30.8% (4 of 13) refer to a clear understanding of respective roles and responsibilities
- 30.8% (4 of 13) refer to respect for each others ways of knowing and doing
- 15.4% (2 of 13) refer to shared responsibilities
- 15.4% (2 of 13) refer to a willingness to learn and try new ways of knowing and doing
- 7.7% (1 of 13) each referred to an invitation from FNCFSA, adapting VS programs to meet First Nations community needs, good strong First Nations leadership, patience, understanding of each others values and philosophies, and sharing of information and resources

When asked if the VSO worked with a FNCFSA to provide services to on reserve clients in the past year, 6 (46.2%) replied no, 5 (38.5%) did not know, and 2 (15.4%) replied yes. When asked to describe and elaborate on such collaborative work, it was discovered that while the programs were aimed at the First Nations community, neither VSO worked with a FNCFSA. Therefore, all 13 responding VSO (100%) surveyed have not worked with a FNCFSA to provide services to on reserve clients in the past year.
As with the FNCFSA survey, each VSO was asked to rank in order of importance the 5 main barriers to building relationships between FNCFSA and the VS. Only 10 (76.9%) of the respondents completed this section. The results are as follows:

- **1 - Voluntary sector organizations lack knowledge of FNCFSA**
  40% (4 of 10) of the respondents chose this as the #1 barrier

- **2 - Distance between voluntary sector organizations and reserve communities**
  40% (4 of 10) of the respondents chose this as the #1 barrier

- **3 - Voluntary sector organizations lack cultural knowledge to provide services**
  20% (2 of 10) of the respondents chose this as the #1 barrier
  30% (3 of 10) of the respondents chose this as the #2 barrier

- **4 - Voluntary sector organizations lack knowledge of the needs of First Nations children, families, and communities**
  40% (4 of 10) of the respondents chose this as the #2 barrier
  30% (3 of 10) of the respondents chose this as the #3 barrier

- **5 - Lack of time to form relationships with FNCFSA**
  20% (2 of 10) of the respondents chose this as the #2 barrier
  40% (4 of 10) of the respondents did not choose this as a barrier

- **6 - FNCFSA lack information on the services provided by voluntary sector organizations**
  20% (2 of 10) of the respondents chose this as the #2 barrier
  50% (5 of 10) of the respondents did not choose this as a barrier

- **7 - FNCFSA has resources to respond to client need on-reserve**
  30% (3 of 10) of the respondents chose this as the #5 barrier
  70% (7 of 10) of the respondents did not choose this as a barrier

- 30% (3 of 10) of the respondents to this section chose the Other category as their top barrier, their write in selections are:
  - shared willingness to overcome barriers and work productively together
  - need to be asked first/never been approached
  - resources, financial and personnel wise

Each organization was also asked to list what they felt would assist them in building reflective and respectful relationships with FNCFSA to meet community needs.
needs. Six (46.2%) of the VSO listed a better understanding or knowledge of FNCFSA, their roles and responsibilities, and the needs of First Nations on reserve communities; 3 (23.1%) listed the opportunity to network and connect with FNCFSA; 3 (23.1%) listed time; 2 (15.4%) listed funding; and 2 (15.4%) listed the necessity for an invitation by the FNCFSA to the VS (Figure 21).

Figure 21. Needs in order to build collaborations with FNCFSA

These survey results will be further discussed later in the report.
Government Survey

I really think that an established voluntary sector organization can offer itself as a tool to the on reserve community. And then the on reserve community has to decide whether or not they want to use the tool, whether that fits for them, how they’re going to use it and maybe the on reserve community needs some training on how to best take advantage of whatever that voluntary sector organization has to offer. Ultimately the voluntary sector organization is only the tool to the reserve community. It has to be the reserve community making the decision about how they want to use that in their community.

Government Interview Participant

The survey of government workers was much smaller in scale than the FNCFSA or VS surveys. Only 6 returns were recorded out of 16 distributed.

The government workers were asked to rate their level of knowledge regarding VSO and their activities with 4 (66.7%) rating their respective level at fair, and 2 (33.3%) selecting good. When asked to rate their levels of knowledge concerning FNCFSA and their activities, 2 (33.3%) selected fair, 1 (16.7%) selected good, and 3 (50%) selected excellent.

When asked to list the benefits of collaboration between VSO and FNCFSA, 5 (83.3%) refer to prevention and preventative services as benefiting from collaborations and the building of community capacity, 2 (33.3%) refer to the pooling of resources and knowledge and raising awareness, and 1 (16.7%) referred to VSO services as filling the void made through government cutbacks to FNCFSA.

All 6 respondents (100%) feel VSO services can support government and departmental goals and services when asked how these benefits relate to their respective governmental departments and goals. Two (33.3%) also refer to funding and jurisdictional difficulties in on versus off reserve service delivery of programs and how VSO can fill the void.
A unified lack of knowledge becomes evident in the awareness to the question of what roles the government plays in supporting VSO servicing on reserve clients. Three (50%) did not find the question applicable or found it outside government mandate or authority, 1 (16.7%) did no know, 1 (16.7%) said the role was very limited but gave no examples. Only 1 of the 6 respondents (16.7%) referred to the government encouraging FNCFSA to seek out VS resources and provide advocacy (Figure 22).

Similarly, when asked what role the government plays in promoting collaboration between VSO and FNCFSA, 2 (33.3%) gave no answer, 1 (16.7%) said it was outside government mandate, 2 (33.3%) referred to support and advocacy roles, and 1 (16.7%) referred to promoting services on reserve (Figure 23).

The replies to the question of listing some of the barriers limiting collaboration between VSO and FNCFSA are as follows: 2 (33.3%) referred to lack of First Nations VSO leadership; 2 (33.3%) referred to lack of cultural knowledge; 1 (16.7%) referred to fear of the unknown; 1 (16.7%) referred to lack of awareness; 1 (16.7%) referred to assumptions about government funding of all on reserve activities and services; and 1 (16.7%) referred to advocacy (Figure 24).

When asked how each respondent or his or her government department could help solve some of the problems and issues limiting collaboration between VSO and FNCFSA, 3 (50%) provided no answer, 2 (33.3%) referred to advising VSO of FNCFSA and the needs on reserve, and 1 (16.7%) referred to working with VS in planning and jointly funding initiatives.
Figure 22. Role of government in supporting VSO on reserve

- not applicable
- don’t know
- limited role
- encourage FNCFSA to seek out VS resources and provide advocacy

Figure 23. Role of government in promoting collaboration between VSO and FNCFSA

- no answer
- support and advocacy
- outside mandate
- promote services
Figure 24. Barriers to collaboration between VSO and FNCFSA

- assumptions about on reserve funding
- lack of awareness
- fear of the unknown
- lack of cultural knowledge
- lack of FN VS leadership

Figure 25. Skills/knowledge/commitment required by government to promote and support VS involvement on reserve

- concerns about government mandate and authority
- need for cost/benefit analysis of VSO on reserve
- lack of community knowledge, development and drive
Each respondent was asked if he or she considered FNCFSA part of the VS, 3 of 6 (50%) said yes, 3 (50%) said no. When asked if they were aware of any funding barriers limiting FNCFSA from accessing funds intended for the VS, 3 (50%) said they were not aware of any, while 3 (50%) referred to jurisdictional issues, such as provincial versus federal government responsibility of on reserve community needs. When asked their impressions of current levels of financial support/funding for VS activities on reserve targeted to children, youth, and families, 2 (33.3%) respondents did not know, while 4 (66.7%) said the funding was low or insufficient.

Finally, when asked what skills or knowledge or commitment the respondents, or their governmental departments, would require in order to promote and support VS involvement on reserve, 3 (50%) respondents referred to lack of community knowledge, development and drive, 2 (33.3%) referred to concerns about government and departmental mandate and authority in this area, and 2 (33.3%) referred to the need for a cost/benefit analysis of VSO services to First Nations communities (Figure 25).

These survey results, along with those of the FNCFSA and VS surveys, are further discussed in the following survey findings analysis and discussion section of this final report.
Discussion of Survey Findings

...that very basic level of just building relationships, of literally picking up the phone, but first you have to create that level of awareness within your organization...there needs to be some kind of catalyst; sometimes you got to hunt it out; you can find it. You can always find a reason.

Voluntary Sector Interview Participant

We begin by acknowledging the VSO and FNCFSA who participated in this research project. Their assistance not only contributes to a frank and open dialogue on the current access of First Nations children, youth, and families to VS supports, their suggestions inform a way forward based on mutual respect, understanding, and commitment. In the spirit of providing a foundation for a way forward that ensures the well being of First Nations children, youth, and families, this section of the report reviews the principal findings providing recommendations for future action.

There are four key findings of this research project: 1) that there is very little evidence of collaboration between the voluntary sector and First Nations child and family service programs; 2) there is very little support for culturally based voluntary sector resources on reserve; 3) First Nations children and families face disproportionate risk for a myriad of challenges and have fewer resources available to mitigate those risks than are available to other Canadians; and 4) voluntary sector organizations and First Nations child and family service agencies are keen to collaborate to ensure that First Nations families can benefit from culturally appropriate voluntary sector resources.

Lack of Collaboration between the VS and FNCFSA

The lack of interaction between the VS and FNCFSA is rather distressing considering the resources available to the VS coupled with the challenges facing
most children, youth, and families in accessing culturally appropriate support and prevention services.

There were 10 key themes which emerged from the research findings that were identified as barriers to collaboration:

- 1 - lack of information/understanding of Aboriginal peoples
- 2 - lack of information/understanding of the voluntary sector
- 3 - a tendency to wait for an invitation before engaging
- 4 - lack of time
- 5 - lack of opportunity to meet and network
- 6 - distance between voluntary sector organizations and on reserve communities
- 7 - lack of government involvement in fostering awareness and collaboration
- 8 - lack of funds
- 9 - assumption that all on reserve community needs are taken care of by the federal government
- 10 - fear of the unknown

All of the surveyed VSO have mission and mandate statements which reflect the desire to improve the quality of child care services and promote the health and well being of children, youth, and families through a variety of activities, including advocacy, education, and research. First Nations children are part of the greater mosaic of the youth in Canada, but there is very little evidence of VS outreach to children and youth on reserve. The fact that none of the VSO surveyed could describe what the relevance of their mission statements were to the needs of First Nations children, youth, and families is concerning and partially explains the profound absence of the sector in providing services on reserve. As this
government survey respondent notes, the lack of understanding of Canadians in general about Aboriginal peoples is pervasive and has consequences:

...there’s a poor understanding of what a First Nations person is, what is on reserve and what is off reserve, who are urban Indians, who looks after them, who delivers services. Everyone has sort of assumed that the on reserve people are getting all these services from the government which leaves them falling through the cracks.

Government Interview Participant

None of the surveyed VSO worked with a FNCFSA to provide services to on reserve clients in the past year. Only two organizations indicated that they have contacted a FNCFSA about service delivery on reserve in the past year, each selecting 1 to 2 times as their answer, and only 1 reported having been contacted by a FNCFSA. However, this contact needs to be contextualized as the 2 organizations who reached out also reported receiving federal funding targeted for services to First Nations clients and communities. This raises the question if this outreach would have occurred in the absence of a defined funding agreement.

One of the primary barriers cited by the VS respondents was their lack of knowledge of First Nations and the needs of children, youth, and families relevant to their mission statements. In terms of knowledge of reserves, only 4 VSO knew how many First Nations reserves were within their cachement areas, and only 5 knew how many FNCFSA were located within the same cachement area. As to the needs of First Nations children, youth, and families related to the mission and mandate of each organization, not one VSO claimed to be fully aware of such needs but 76.9% clearly see a role for the VS in assisting on reserve communities in meeting their needs through education, support service delivery, and research as expressed by the following VS respondent:

I do think that the organizations at a national level have a role to play both ways. Both ways. So one way, in terms of working with other agencies that are working at the community level and
providing information or expertise. Getting a better understanding of what’s going on at a community level and relating that back to our memberships. So, for instance, we may not be delivering program and services, but our members are…going to First Nation communities and working there. Well, how could our discussions with other organizations inform the work that they do at a front line practitioner level? So making that connection, we have a role to play there. We also have a role to play at an advocacy level. So getting a better understanding of what’s going on in the community, what’s needed, and how that relates to public policy…where you can bring those concerns forward to federal government, for instance, and help as advocate, that’s what we’re suppose do, is give voice to people who don't have a voice.

Voluntary Sector Interview Participant

There is a disconnection between the lack of involvement of the VS and its self identified role of working with First Nations to meet community needs. Our research results citing the lack of awareness of the diverse cultures, histories, and lived experiences of Aboriginal peoples appear to reinforce this lack of engagement.

For example, many of the VSO selected 'do not know', or wrote in 'not applicable' to some of the questions regarding the needs of First Nations children, youth, and families or the range of services available on reserve to meet those needs. These respondents claimed that since they were not direct service providers the questions regarding needs on reserve and the identification of First Nations within their cachement areas did not apply. It is not clear why a national office of a VSO would not see the needs of children, youth, and families on reserve, or the locations of First Nations in their respective cachement areas, as relevant to their organization. Particularly, as one of the primary functions of national offices is to ensure the adherence to mission statements, organizational values such as principles of equality, non-discrimination, and social inclusion, and to provide policy support to chapter organizations on how to improve service administration and delivery. It is likely that respondents indicating that these issues were non-applicable did not have the information, or opportunity for reflection, required to connect the vital leadership role that national offices have with the lack of VS
services on reserve. With the necessary information, national offices of VSO can play key leadership roles in developing awareness and capacity among chapter organizations on how to respectively collaborate with First Nations communities to ensure children, youth, and families can benefit from the resources of the VS. Lack of information on the VS was also cited by First Nations respondents as a key barrier to collaboration as articulated by this respondent:

I have found that First Nations service delivery organizations, even operating in the city, don't tend to use the voluntary sector institutions to the extent that the non-Native child and family delivery organizations do. There does not seem to be a culture, or a facility, as it relates to First Nations delivery organizations, wherever they are, to support, utilize or develop typical voluntary sector organizations.

First Nations Interview Participant

Many FNCFSA indicated a real need for culturally appropriate services to ensure a higher quality of life for First Nations children, youth, and their families. They also acknowledge, that under current funding regimes, they do not have an adequate range of services to meet this need. There is a definite desire to identify other sources of support but this is sometimes difficult considering the high work loads and limited resources for fundraising and collaboration in many FNCFSA. Of the FNCFSA surveyed, 46.7% serviced 5 or more reserves and 42.1% of the reserves serviced were 70 km or more distance from an urban service centre. Over 50% of the agencies have Status Indian child populations exceeding 1250.

...because of time, that's a very basic issue, they're in crisis mode and they're not spending as much time on capacity development or program development because they're busy in dealing with the day to day demands. Also, as I mentioned, they're not sure they would qualify to receive that assistance from the voluntary sector being on reserve. And maybe they are not aware that they can or the rules around that or regulations.

First Nations Interview Participant
With such high numbers of children in care, such high numbers of reserves being served, and such large distances to cover, funding concerns are of great importance in trying to meet the needs of everyone. Funding opportunities on reserve are dependent on federal government funding formulas which limit opportunities to fundraise. Some agencies report that current funding allotments are reduced if they bring in other forms of funding. VS resources should not be viewed as an alternative to government support but an augmentation of the range of supports that governments can provide. If there are agreements that would reduce the already limited funds provided by the federal government should communities receive VS program dollars, they need to be revised in order to ensure that, like other residents of Canada, on reserve residents can benefit from VS services in addition to programs provided by the government.

I think a lot of the grants come from government. There is an age old jurisdictional issue, right. The provincial government grants are not really available on reserve, because it is a reserve. And the federal government is responsible for that. There is often, in a grant application, a restriction. Reserve communities are not even eligible to apply for certain kinds of funding from the province, and definitely not from the municipality.

Government Interview Participant

FNCFSA are extremely dedicated to ensuring the well being of their community members and report trying to augment current child and family support resources through small community based fundraising mechanisms such as raffles, bingos, bake sales, spaghetti dinners, and 50/50 draws. These funds go to support recreation programs and cultural events, youth groups, support groups, and community projects. FNCFSA report being incorporated as non-profit organizations in 53% of the cases, however, few report receiving any significant support from VS funders. In fact, only 1 FNCFSA listed philanthropic foundations as funding sources, and only 2 claimed to receive funding from foundations or federal/provincial funds targeted for the VS. Reasons given for not applying for funds targeted for/from the VS include lack of knowledge about what is available and limited time and resources to put towards the search for funds.
Of the FNCFSA surveyed, only 4 claimed to have worked with a VSO in providing services to on reserve communities in the past year. Such services were time limited projects such as grief counseling after a suicide in the community, and all 4 experiences were initiated by the First Nations community either through the FNCFSA or First Nations health care providers on reserve. Despite this lack of collaboration and exchange of services, 86.7% of the FNCFSA see the VS as playing a role in working respectfully with communities in meeting their needs such as education, advocacy, prevention and support services. These are all the types of activities performed and provided by all of the VSO surveyed. Collaboration is part of the answer but as indicated below this must be accompanied by targeted support for the development of culturally based on reserve services:

I think there is a lack of education but I don't think non-Aboriginal people are especially welcome on reserve. I think that there is a desire from the reserve community to run their own programming and that message has sort of been loud and clear, from missionary and church based programming right through any other kind of voluntary sector activity.

Government Interview Participant

The needs the FNCFSA highlighted as key concerns for children, youth, and families on reserve are parental and child substance abuse, neglect, poverty, and family violence. These are the issues which they believe could most benefit from VS assistance. The types of services they would like to see addressing these needs are parenting and youth programs, and health and education initiatives. Again, activities provided by the VSO surveyed.

Both the VS and the FNCFSA were asked to rank many of the reasons given for the lack of VS participation in FNCFSA services. It is very interesting to compare the results of both groups. A larger picture becomes apparent, one consisting mainly of ignorance and lack of information. The number one reasons given by the VS was lack of knowledge of FNCFSA, the same reason was third for the
FNCFSA surveyed. The number one reason given by the FNCFSA was lack of information on VSO services. This was the sixth reason from the VS perspective. It seems each side believes the other side is more knowledgeable about the other's services, issues, needs, and backgrounds when the opposite is true.

The disparity of answers continues with the number two ranked answers. The VS sees distance to reserve communities as the second barrier while it is the fifth for the FNCFSA. The FNCFSA see lack of VS knowledge about the needs of First Nations children, families, and communities as their second barrier. This is the fourth for the VS. The difference between the ranking of the distance between VSO and reserve communities is a telling one. The VS sees distance as a barrier meaning service access is restricted to those residing proximal to the VSO as reflected by this respondent:

Distance was one for very many because the majority of the population of Canada is urban and the majority of the reserves are quite far from urban areas and so just distance alone becomes a major barrier. And then the respect for self-determination, self-governance, so needing to have an invitation before going, I think, is a barrier. I think the other thing is that on reserve the situations are much more political.

Voluntary Sector Interview Participant

This respondent’s presumption that First Nations in urban areas would receive greater levels of support seems reasonable. However, what is interesting is that, consistent with the findings of the Blackstock (2003b) work, FNCFSA located in major urban centers actually experienced the least amount of VS support and collaboration while their counterparts in rural setting reporting the highest degree of support.

It therefore appears that geographic distance is not the issue, but one of mental distance between on and off reserve Canada.
I think the reserve is a barrier, the reserve line. People...non-Aboriginal people, which is the traditional voluntary sector, is predominantly Caucasian...and I think that they wouldn't typically go into a reserve community for any reason.

Government Interview Participant

The VS and FNCFSA were asked to describe the features of a successful working relationship. Again, a comparison of the answers given by the two groups is telling, this time not in its disparity, but in the similarity of answers and concerns. Respect for each others' ways of knowing and doing and the need for open communication were universally cited as important parts of a collaboration. Mutually consistent goals and responsibilities would provide focus and clarity to the newly emerging relationships. This seems to be more important to the VS, which does not want to seem patronizing and truly wants to complement Aboriginal ways of providing services. The earnestness of the VS is not in question; what is in question is the roles they will play. This will differ depending on each situation's circumstances, which is why flexibility and openness to new ideas is essential.

As supports for relationship building, both parties would like to better understand the needs and services of the other and felt more opportunities to network with each other would be valuable. The following participant’s feedback reflects many of the suggestions provided:

I would hope that they could take many forms, but certainly initially to be able to build that trust, our organizations need to be able to come forward and say, we're here to learn, and we’re here to be a catalyst, and we're here to do what we can do, and we’re here to learn from you, and we’re here to hear what it is that we can do, as opposed to, okay, here we’ve got our proposal, now could you sign on? That's not going to contribute to building any trust.

Voluntary Sector Interview Participant
The role of government in the development and maintenance of structures and collaborations between the VS and FNCFSA is unclear according to the survey returns from government workers. There is agreement that the resources allocated to on reserve communities are insufficient to cover the needs and that preventative services particularly suffer from government cost cutting measures. There is also agreement that the VS can help fill the void left by such cutbacks and enhance the range of services and supports available to children, youth, and families on reserve. What is unclear is the ways in which government can aid the VS and FNCFSA in working together to help meet community needs. A key and pragmatic course of action would be for governments, a major funder of the VS and FNCFSA, to affirm a plan of action which would help promote, support, and maintain the mechanisms for successful relationship building between the VS and FNCFSA, and the development of culturally based VS supports on reserve.

The following passage from a VS interview participant affirms the important role of government in ensuring every resident of Canada has equal opportunity:

> It's not about money. I think it's about looking long term as to how can you bring these people to the levels [of support] of the other. There's a lot of investment...I don't see it as charity. I think that's the role of the government to look after the well being of the people, period, that's it.

Voluntary Sector Interview Participant

Similar to the responses of the VS and FNCFSA, government respondents identified the following barriers to collaboration:

- Lack of knowledge
- Fear of the unknown
- Incompatibility of structures

Government respondents echoed the responses of other participants indicating that the following key factors were critical for respectful collaboration between FNCFSA and the VS:
➢ Cultural understanding and knowledge
➢ Clearly defined roles and responsibilities
➢ Outreach by the voluntary sector

Government respondents most frequently identified lack of knowledge or awareness as limiting VS and FNCFSA collaboration. Respondents indicated that VS organizations and FNCFSA share a lack of awareness of their mandates, roles and ways of working which hampers clear identification of what they can do to help one another. For the VS, lack of information on First Nations history, including the impacts of colonization, and issues facing First Nations communities as a result of this history, perpetuates stereotypes and other types of misinformation about Aboriginal governments, organizations, and peoples. As one respondent identified, a predominant stereotype is the belief that First Nations peoples are the preferred beneficiaries of the benefits of Canada in receiving funds that outstrip those provided to other Canadians:

The idea I think most people have is, oh, they get so much and they do nothing.

Voluntary Sector Interview Participant

As this study demonstrates, although the federal government does fund some programs on reserve, there continues to be significant gaps in what is funded on and off reserve. Current levels of federal funding are inadequate to redress the impacts of colonization and ensure the safety and well being of children and their families. The danger of stereotypes is that we often believe they are true without checking the facts. In this case, a VSO that believed this stereotype may not see any need to reach out to First Nations communities. First Nations organizations are making the most of the limited funds to ensure that children and youth grow up with pride, dignity, and opportunity, but additional support is needed.
Lack of Knowledge

Some key informants felt that the pervasive lack of knowledge of Aboriginal peoples and history among the VS stemmed from a sense of national guilt, from not wanting to know about the abuses of Aboriginal peoples by Canadian governments and peoples, and from a desire not to upset entrenched national values of equality, multi-culturalism, inclusion, and freedom. Those who are aware often find themselves asking important questions such as: Is colonization really over? Why do we have a race based Indian Act? Why is there such pervasive inequity, especially for First Nations children and youth? Why were we not taught our national history so we did not repeat the mistakes of the past?

It might mean a shift in perspectives and this shift demands courage in order to explore personal and professional beliefs that are discriminatory. Questioning the status quo is never easy, especially when the status quo paints a distressing reality for Aboriginal children and families as one begins to question who benefits from the continued discrimination and what are one's individual and organizational roles in moving to a better place.

Knowledge is key; education and awareness are key elements in the creation of respectful relationships that provide opportunities for ensuring every child in Canada can benefit from VS supports which are consistent with their culture and context. Once aware of the needs of Aboriginal children, and the amazing efforts of Aboriginal peoples to care for them, despite the lack of resources, an opportunity is created to embrace the concept that reconciliation means a personal and organizational responsibility for learning, respecting, and reaching out. Ultimately, everyone needs to work together for a better world for all children. As some of the wise Elders would say to the VS informant below, self government is about the respectful sustained coexistence of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. It is about the type of relationship we want our Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal grandchildren to have:
…the barrier is actually more not wanting to step on toes, that the search for self-governance and self-determination is so strong, and that message has been gotten out there so well, that it presents a barrier for people who don't have personal relationships about approaching the issue, the situation.

Voluntary Sector Interview Participant

Fear of the Unknown

When one lacks information and knowledge, it is very frightening to enter a new space, to face the potential of doing or saying something wrong or incorrect, of showing ignorance, of making mistakes, as expressed by the following informant:

I think fear. I was going to say racism, but that doesn't say anything too much, but some kind of fear about not even knowing how to behave…I don't know how to behave, I'm afraid that I'll do something that will embarrass me…You can't worry about being embarrassed when you're trying to learn…middle class or mainstream people aren't used to feeling uncomfortable. Really. And they probably exaggerate in their minds that they won't know what to do.

Government Interview Participant

In embracing the responsibility for self education, in simply sharing the desire to be culturally respectful and in welcoming the guidance of the community in guiding one on this, one can overcome this fear of the unknown and begin to feel comfortable enough to form a relationship where giving and receiving are balanced and new concepts and ways of being can be shared. This would include taking the initiative to reach out and build respectful relationships, to not wait for an event but to just reach out, listen, learn and share.

Incompatibility of Structures

In learning the answers, one learns where the similarities and differences lie between systems and structures, in this case between the First Nations
community and mainstream Canada, and to a lesser extent the differences between on and off reserve life for Aboriginal peoples. These spaces, their structures, how they work, their rules, and their philosophies all lie in different histories and cultures and call for learning at both an aggregate and community level. First Nations concepts of voluntarism, VS resources, and the concordant role of these services in ensuring the well being of children and families on reserve differ significantly from those of mainstream Canadians. They reflect different world views, the holistic, interdependent communal base of First Nations peoples, and the individual rights framework of Euro-western societies.

On reserve voluntarism usually takes the form of traditional, informal helping strategies which are part of communal living. These include respect for, and assistance provided to, Elders and the unasked for aid given to families and children in times of need or when required. On reserve activities such as sports and recreation programs and cultural events such as pow wows require volunteers in order to take place.

Another difference is in funding strategies. As stated earlier in this report, on reserve funding of voluntary activities take the form of local, small mechanisms such as raffles and bingos. There are not significant connections between the philanthropic community and First Nations.

**Cultural Understanding and Knowledge**

Forging a new form of collaboration that is respectful of cultural differences involves being aware of and open to changes of procedure and practice, of being adventurous and creative in helping to find solutions. It also requires a commitment to stick with it because ensuring a happy and healthy generation of Aboriginal children raised in the context of their families, communities and cultures is in everyone’s best interests. As this government informant notes, forming new relationships can be a bit unnerving but is not something to be afraid
of; in fact, it might just bring something new, cherished, and special to one’s own ways of knowing and being:

I just think they need to invite them in to their reserve community. And maybe themselves, they need to reach out and go to some off reserve events, and do some training...And then invite them back. There needs to be this sort of mutual reaching out; it can't be one sided. And I think people who have never been on a reserve community are scared to go on reserve. There needs to be a way to help folks understand that it's not scary; it's just a little different.

Government Interview Participant

Outreach by the Voluntary Sector

Taking the next step in reaching out is critical to ensuring the gaps in services identified in this paper are remedied. It will take cooperative action between the VS and First Nations to develop means of affirming community responsibility and desire to care for their own children in the context of their culture. All of the barriers of collaboration identified in this research project can be overcome. As this informant notes, it means reaching out and reaching back:

I guess it's kind of a shared responsibility, but the voluntary sector, because they know what they have to offer, and they know what funding they have, that they should actively contact agencies and get their information out there...It just takes a phone call or a letter. I think that a lot of agencies are not aware that they can even approach the voluntary sector, or that there's any kind of funding restrictions or limitations for providing that service on reserve. So I think that they're getting the money, that they have a mandate, that they should make that first move. Also agencies can be proactive too and seek them out.

First Nations Interview Participant

Again, the only way to accomplish this is to talk, share information, overcome stereotypes, and not assume that First Nations communities do not need or want help, or want to do it all on their own. Our survey results are as much an invitation to redress the inequality as they are a reminder that reconciliation is a
collective responsibility, including one for the VS. This informant reflects the invitation of First Nations to work respectfully with the VS and the important benefits for children that can be realized at a community level, together:

I see the voluntary sector as the only sustainable mechanism in our society to, really at the end of the day, have a rational role in supporting individuals within families, within communities. I don't believe governments' commitments are sustainable. They vary, they don't appreciate local level response voluntary sectors. For the most part, is establishing at the community level…there are national level organizations, there are regional organizations, but they wouldn't exist if it wasn't for the work that's done with people at the community level.

First Nations Interview Participant

If self education is the first step then reaching out is the second. There is a need on behalf of both groups to do some outreach, to be proactive, to make themselves visible, to pick up the phone or write a letter. The way to combat lack of information, and overcome this pervasive fear of the unknown, is to take the first step, to make the first move and to not allow ignorance to continue to be an excuse for inaction.
Conclusion

I think it's the fact that they don't see the problem. People are not aware. If you're not aware of things, there is very little you can do... if you don't know about it then you don't think there is a problem. So I think that awareness is a big problem. And I think that's a problem of interest. Because if you are not aware of problems then you don't have an interest in things. It's not something that people discuss. It's a choice of being inclusive. Everything has to be inclusive.

Voluntary Sector Interview Participant

The fundamental assets of every Aboriginal child and youth are the traditional values, cultures, beliefs, and ways of his or her peoples. This strength and knowledge has sustained First Nations peoples throughout generations of focused colonial and assimilation processes. As noted in repeated studies, including the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Canada, 1996), the impacts of colonization are multi-dimensional and multi-generational and thus responses must be comprehensive and holistic. These responses must meet the needs of all children, youth, and families. 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, First Nations children, youth, and families have almost no access to the 90 billion dollars of revenue that supports the VS (Blackstock, 2003b). The lack of access to VS resources coupled with the absence of municipal and provincial services means that, despite the greater needs of children and youth living in on reserve communities, there are less support structures in place to aid them than for other Canadians.

Both First Nations and the VS share a mutual desire to ensure accessibility of First Nations to VS services. Awareness is a key factor to make this happen as many VSO continue to be unaware of how their own mandates relate to the experience of children, youth, and families living on reserve. Many First Nations also express an interest in learning more about the VS.
Both the VS and First Nations communities agree that collaboration could aid on
reserve communities, as long as partnerships and collaborations are respectful,
open, honest, and clearly planned and developed. Furthermore, collaborations
must affirm the principle that First Nations are in the best position to make the
best decisions for First Nations children, youth, and families. Non-Aboriginal
organizations can play a key role in supporting the visions for children and
families as developed by First Nations communities, but this will require a
concerned effort to move away from the current atmosphere of non-engagement.
This means overcoming the reluctance to step forward and be the first to reach
out while keeping an open mind and open lines of communication.

As the VS and FNCFSA both expressed a need to learn more about the other
and be given the opportunity and space to interact, connect, and network, the
FNCFCS is developing curricula to help address issues of awareness and
education in these areas. The curricula will be delivered in modular form,
allowing for the program to be sensitive to the varying levels of knowledge of
participants. Modules for government and philanthropic foundations are also
planned, each educating them on their possible roles as facilitators and funders
of collaboration between First Nations and the VS, and how to support these
collaborations.

The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada will then deliver this
curricula in 6 regional gatherings designed to facilitate and foster relationships
between First Nations and VS child, youth, and family organizations in order to
better meet the needs of children, youth, and families at a community level.

The conversion of this research into practical community based professional
development supports First Nations communities, the VS, philanthropists and
governments in working towards the development of an Aboriginal voluntary
sector which builds 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 VSO, will help provide the means. We all owe it to the children and youth to try, and to succeed.
References


Appendix A

First Nations Child and Family Service Agency
Collaboration with the Voluntary Sector Survey
Voluntary Sector (VS)

A copy of this survey will be made available upon request.
Appendix B

First Nations Child and Family Service Agency
Collaboration with the Voluntary Sector Survey
First Nations Child and Family Service Agency (FNCFSA)

A copy of this survey will be made available upon request.
Appendix C

First Nations Child and Family Service Agency
Collaboration with the Voluntary Sector Survey
Government

A copy of this survey will be made available upon request.