
People, Politics, and Child Welfare
in British Columbia

Edited by Leslie T. Foster and Brian Wharf

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in British Columbia



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Foreword

Deryck Thomson

“Two parents can’t raise a child any more than one. You need a whole community – everybody – to raise a child.”

– Toni Morrison

“Children are the nation’s most precious asset” – so goes an oft-repeated adage. If it is true, why do we continue to allow one child in every five to live in poverty among us, even though a motion to eliminate child poverty by the year 2001 was approved unanimously sixteen years ago in Canada’s House of Commons?

This is, of course, a rhetorical question for which we already have the answers. Despite public posturing, political pronouncements, and governmental assurances, the care and protection of children hold a low priority on political agendas. This is particularly true if the children’s parents are poor, trapped in a socio-economic milieu that profoundly affects the care and nurture of about a million young members of this nation’s “most precious asset.”

Despite best efforts, families do break down. If there are not sufficient community resources available to help put them back together, the welfare of infants and children may be deemed at such risk that the state is required to intercede.

Just how effectively the British Columbia government has carried out its statutory obligations is a major theme of this book. As they record the government’s successes and failures, the authors provide a compelling account of child welfare in British Columbia and the evolution of its policies, programs, and practices since its inception in 1901, when the *Children’s Protection Act* was passed. The book pays a well-deserved tribute to the hard slogging of a small but feisty group of female pioneers who were appalled by the practice of warehousing infants and children in orphanages and

workhouses, rather than placing them in supervised foster homes for their care and protection.

From that early era to the present, the state's responsibility for child welfare has been the subject of sharp philosophical differences, political twists and turns, numerous legislative amendments, bureaucratic tinkering, and a continuing ambivalence about its role in relation to a mixed voluntary and government-funded community-based social services sector focused on preventing family breakdown.

One of the most egregious issues in child welfare, not only in British Columbia but throughout Canada, was the enforced separation of Aboriginal children from their parents and community during their learning years. These children were confined in residential schools funded by the federal government and operated by religious orders whose sole objective was to break all familial and cultural bonds and replace them with the norms and institutions of the predominant white society. Formal public apologies for this treatment have been issued by church and state, but the ill effects continue, the most blatant evident in the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children still being taken into government care. Only in recent years have Aboriginal communities won the legal right to assume responsibility for the welfare of their own children and the preservation of their cultural heritage. (Traditionally, Aboriginal people have used storytellers to preserve family and community histories, passing records orally from one generation to the next. One such story has been included in this book.)

The book was produced by a collective of seasoned observers and participants in the fray (an appropriate word for what follows), consisting of academics, former senior civil servants, First Nations academics and storytellers, and some "boots-on-the-ground" community social work practitioners. All share a common interest in the ongoing development of child welfare policies, programs, and practice within the province's distinctive urban, rural, and Aboriginal communities. Their thoughtful contributions are embedded in solid scholarship, research, and some street-smart experience acquired in the ongoing struggle for effective care and protection of children regardless of race, colour, or creed. What has emerged from this joint endeavour is an ongoing and fascinating saga involving people and personalities, power and politics. Its outcome continues to depend on the rest of us.

Interviews were conducted with former cabinet ministers (including a premier) responsible for enactment of old, and implementation of new, legislation under the aegis of Social Credit, New Democratic, and Liberal governments with notably diverse approaches to ensuring the welfare of children and families, each secure in the belief that its policies were in the best interests of all concerned. Consultations were sought with a variety of others, including former senior civil servants who had weathered the political and

media storms in carrying out policies; front-line staff members responsible for all the heavy lifting; and last, but by no means least, parents and their advocates with first-hand experience of the bureaucratic maze.

Among other things, the book focuses on several major issues that have arisen in the last three decades of the twentieth century and the first years of the new millennium. Five events in particular have had profound effects on child welfare in British Columbia. The first was the election of a New Democratic Party (NDP) government in 1972. The NDP premier, Dave Barrett, was a professional social worker, fully grounded in the social democratic principle of active partnership between government and governed. He lost no time in appointing an elected social work colleague to the human resources ministry, and this man, Norm Levi, moved with astonishing speed to clean the ministerial house from top to bottom – mandate, mission, administrative and line staff complement. Within a whirlwind first (and only) term of office, Levi integrated and decentralized a multiplicity of services to be administered under the new *Community Resources Act*, which devolved substantial responsibility for administration and delivery of social services to locally elected community resource boards. This experiment lasted only three years, which was not long enough to allow its potential to be realized. Along with his associates, Levi led a moribund ministry through a sea change unmatched by any previous reorganization, only to have it overturned a few years later by his Social Credit successor, who quickly reined in the community activists by returning control to the central bureaucracy.

Several years later, another swing of the political pendulum returned the NDP to power. Like her NDP predecessor, the new minister, Joan Smallwood, was determined to return democracy to the community marketplace, where decisions regarding social services should reside. In short order she had dispatched two panels of knowledgeable, experienced community participants to travel across the province, seeking proposals for strengthening and improving the child welfare enterprise. She would decide how to proceed based on the proposals and recommendations solicited from hundreds of citizens across the province, including First Nations constituencies. The vast majority recommended that ministry services be community-based, decentralized, and placed under citizen control. Community development was the tool by which these objectives would be achieved.

The speed and passion with which Smallwood approached the task disconcerted a cautious ministry bureaucracy. She was relieved of her cabinet post before she could fully implement her plans. The process stumbled, but carried on at a slower pace. Despite attempts to introduce outcome measurements and related corporate management techniques, there was only a slight variation in numbers of children coming into or moving out of ministry care.

The third event took place in 1992, but did not become public knowledge for quite some time. A five-and-a-half-year-old child had died in horrific circumstances while known to the ministry but not under the ministry's supervision. In 1994, the minister who replaced Smallwood, Joy MacPhail, ordered an independent inquiry, chaired by Justice Thomas Gove, to look into the child's death. After receiving the sworn testimony of 115 witnesses, the inquiry's final report was released in November 1995. The inquiry prefaced its 118 recommendations with the statement that care and protection of the child was to remain paramount in all future deliberations. Many of the recommendations centred on the need for preventive programs and services that were community-based and readily accessible with governance under direction of citizen boards and community councils. Throughout the province the report received widespread public and media attention, which reiterated the need for construction of community-based support services designed to prevent family breakdown and consequent government intervention.

The fourth event took place as the new century dawned. The political pendulum swung once again, this time bringing a Liberal government to power. Another visionary minister, Gordon Hogg, found himself caught in the middle of a growing dilemma: how to do more with less. The governance of programs and management was to be ceded to several appointed regional authorities, whose primary task was to reduce expenditures for children and family services by 30 percent. This directive left many currently proposed and badly needed preventive community initiatives wallowing in the dust. A midterm review restored some of the funding, but still fell far short of requirements.

And the fifth event, one that is still unfolding, relates to the multiplicity of reviews and recommendations following the murder of a young aboriginal child who was being cared for by a relative under a "kith and kin" agreement. In large measure the future of the child welfare enterprise in British Columbia will be determined by the outcome of government response to these reviews.

Child welfare remains a work in progress, with roads to be travelled and songs to be sung before poverty is replaced by health and well-being for all children. Having spent more than fifty years of my professional life on this fascinating journey, I hope you will join me on this journey after reading this book.

Preface

Child welfare is a tough area to work in and to write about. It is also tough for children and their families who end up in the system. It is an area, however, that does not appear to be important to the general public. After all, only 1 to 1.5 percent of British Columbia's children are in the care of the state during any particular year. But when something goes wrong, as it must – it is impossible to protect all of the children all of the time – there is a media furor and public outcry from whomever is the opposition political party at the time, focusing on problems with the system and demands for something new to be done or for someone's head to roll.

It has been difficult to finish this book. We started work on it in early 2004, and since then we have found it challenging to keep up with the almost continuous changes in the child welfare enterprise. For example, since early 2004 there have been numerous leadership changes in the province's child welfare ministry, with four different ministers responsible for child welfare (Tom Christensen replaced Stan Hagen in August 2006) and no fewer than four different deputy ministers or acting deputy ministers. Such is the instability of child welfare leadership and the rapidity of change.

As a result of these changes, we have provided updates for some of the later chapters in the book in an attempt to portray the emerging child welfare story in the province. The first complete draft was finished in October 2005, but since then there have been even more changes. In particular, there have been several reviews of the circumstances surrounding the murder of a young Aboriginal child who was in the child welfare system. One of those reports has not yet been released to the public, even though it is complete, because the Attorney General continues to review it to ensure the privacy of people involved was protected.

Since the beginning of September 2006, there have been several important child welfare-related events that we would like to mention, only because they represent unfinished business in the child welfare enterprise in British Columbia and illustrate the difficulties of completing the "story." At the

beginning of September, the number of Aboriginal children in care exceeded the number of non-Aboriginal children in care for the first time in the province's history, as predicted in Chapter 2. This trend continued into October.

On 20 September 2006, the Child and Youth Officer and the Provincial Health Officer released a special joint report, "Health and Well-Being of Children in Care in British Columbia: Report 1 on Health Services Utilization and Mortality." To no one's surprise, the health of children in continuing care, where the government is the sole guardian, is substantially poorer than that of children not in care. Children in continuing care experienced similar common health problems to those not in care, but at rates 1.2 to 1.4 times those of the general child population. In addition, nearly 65 percent of children in continuing care suffered from mental disorders, a rate over four times that of the general child and youth population. The report also noted higher rates of pregnancy among female youth in continuous care, higher rates for intentional and unintentional injuries and poisonings, and higher death rates. For those who leave care, the dismal picture does not end, as the poorer health status persists. Clearly, while government care might be safer in some instances than being in the care of one's family, the prospects for children in state care are not bright.

The attempt to appoint a new Representative for Children and Youth has run into political wrangling between the government and opposition, with each blaming the other for delays in meeting to interview and hire the representative. This is in spite of a plea by Ted Hughes, the author of a major review on child welfare released in April 2006, to depoliticize child welfare. Hughes was also the person who recommended that the Representative position be created, in his report on the child welfare system. Hughes, who had remained silent since delivering his report, publicly admonished the politicians on 2 October, suggesting that they get "on with it." As reporter Les Leyne noted in his column of 3 October 2006, in the *Victoria Times Colonist*, "Hughes said bluntly the month-long delay in picking someone for the new representative for children and youth post that he recommended is 'unacceptable'" (p. A.10).

A recent coroner's report on the murder of another child in care has kept the media spotlight on the child welfare enterprise, although the death occurred five years ago. The story of child welfare in British Columbia continues to evolve.

Leslie T. Foster and Brian Wharf
October 2006

Note to readers: Although most chapters focus on a particular policy, practice, or individual, the antecedents to events are often the same for different chapters. Thus readers will encounter some duplication of material that chapter authors deemed necessary for telling a complete and coherent story.

Acknowledgments

Our thanks go to the many politicians, public servants, and child protection workers who helped shape child welfare policy and practice over the past half century, particularly those who consented to share their views, sometimes with the authors of more than one chapter. We also want to thank the authors, who spent many hours interviewing, discussing, drafting, and redrafting their contributions. We acknowledge the work of Jean Wilson of UBC Press, who supported this project from its beginning, and of Anna Eberhard Friedlander, who helped guide us through the final stages to publication. Thanks also go to the external reviewers of the first draft of the manuscript for their thoughtful comments, and to the UBC Press staff who assisted in the editorial process.

As we developed this book, we received financial support from the Ministry of Children and Family Development and the Ministry of Health. In addition, the two ministries gave us unlimited access to annual and other reports as well as to historical and contemporary data and information, which are presented in several of the chapters and also in the appendices at the end of the book. Special mention should be made of the assistance provided to us by Brian McKee, who took many of the rough figures, tables, and maps and made them presentable and also helped enormously in the final preparation of the manuscript. Colleagues at the University of Victoria in the Human and Social Development Faculty and the International Institute of Child Rights and Development also gave us support.

We pay tribute to our families. Les was helped in many ways, too many to mention, by his wife, Mary Virtue, and also by the patience and encouragement of his children, Noelle, Stefan, Christopher, and Dylan. As always, Brian's chapters benefited from the incisive comments provided by his wife, Marilyn Callahan.

Last, but far from least, we pay tribute to the resilience of the children and families who survived the abuse of poverty over many decades. However,

those who survived the assaults on their cultures, communities, and families carried out by the many colonization initiatives introduced by the federal government and supported in part by the province are perhaps the real heroes in this book.

Abbreviations

BA(CYC)	Bachelor of Arts in Child and Youth Care degree
BCGEU	British Columbia Government Employees Union
BSW	Bachelor of Social Work degree
CAS	Children's Aid Society
CELDIC	Commission on Emotional and Learning Disorders in Children
CFCSA	<i>Child, Family and Community Service Act</i>
CHHRC	Community health and human resource centre
CIC	Children in care of the state
CRB	Community resource board
HSDA	Health service delivery area
IA	Income assistance
JAMC	Joint Aboriginal Management Committee
MCFD	Ministry of Children and Family Development
MOU	Memorandum of understanding
MSS	Ministry of Social Services
MSW	Master of Social Work degree
NDP	New Democratic Party
OACAS	Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies
ORAM	Ontario risk-assessment model
UBCIC	Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs
VRB	Vancouver Resource Board

Introduction:

People, Politics, and Child Welfare

Brian Wharf

The story of the evolution of services for abused and neglected children in British Columbia has been told only in a scattered and incomplete fashion: in scholarly articles (see, among others, Armitage, 1998; Sullivan, 1998), judicial inquiries and reviews (Gove, 1995; Hughes, 2006; Royal Commission on Family and Children's Law, 1975), reports from government (*Making Changes* [Community Panel, 1992] and *Liberating Our Children, Liberating Our Nations* [Aboriginal Committee of the Community Panel 1992]), and chapters in books (Callahan, 1987; Cruickshank, 1987). Each of these reviews has chronicled a particular time or event in the history of child welfare services. This book marks the first attempt to tell the story from its beginnings to mid-2006.

The first objective of the book is to provide a historical description of the development of services, but it is not the only objective. Other aims, described in more detail below, are to explore the philosophies and ideologies that have guided the development of policy and practice in child welfare; consider whether large bureaucratic organizations, such as provincial ministries of child welfare, can accept and implement innovations; and inquire into the impact of the many organizational changes that have occurred in the ministry responsible for child welfare in British Columbia.

Philosophies and Ideologies in Child Welfare

As mentioned, the second objective of the book is to look at the number of conflicting philosophical positions and ideologies that have swirled around policy and practice in child welfare. The first such conflict is articulated by the concept of public issues and private troubles (Mills, 1959). Public issues are those such as poverty, an inadequate supply of low-cost housing, and high levels of unemployment. Individuals experience these public issues in a very direct way but are largely powerless to change them. To be sure, some individuals, by dint of hard work, perseverance, and resiliency, are able to cope with and overcome public issues. Nevertheless, these issues remain as

a continuing feature of Canadian society, and their eradication requires intervention by the state.

Private troubles refer to personal matters such as marital breakdown or emotional and mental health problems. Although they may be affected by public issues, private troubles are, to some extent, amenable to resolution by individual effort. The welfare of children is an example of an area influenced by the combined effect of public issues and the private troubles of parents. Yet even though public issues can have an impact on families, they have remained in the background, and the attention of policy-makers has been focused primarily on private troubles. Thus, despite the significant growth of programs and services and the many changes that have been made, the child welfare enterprise remains anchored in the position that the welfare of children is the responsibility of parents and that the appropriate role of the state is to intervene only when parents neglect and abuse their children. The philosophy holds, further, that state intervention should occur as a last resort when the resources of parents, relatives, friends, and voluntary organizations have been exhausted. In the social welfare literature, this philosophical position focused on private troubles is known as "residualism." The essence of this position has been captured in the words of a historian: "The prejudices of the dominant belief system have regularly encouraged many Canadian child savers, whether private philanthropists, professional social workers or reform-minded citizens, to be blind to collective injuries whether they be of gender, race or class. Not surprisingly, such myopia favours techniques such as casework, but also psychologizing of all sorts that pathologize the individual. In contrast, community development approaches that require a panoramic perspective on children in distress, struggle against a normative vision of the world that resists institutional change" (Strong-Boag, 2002, p. 35).

A second conflict has arisen between policy-makers who favour providing support to families versus those who hold that the priority in child welfare is to protect children. Viewed from an objective perspective, it seems foolish to set these positions in opposition to each other. Rather, as many scholars and practitioners have argued (see, for example, Cameron, 2003; Peters, Peters, Laurendeau, Chamberland, and Peirson, 2001; and Chapters 3, 6, and 9 in this book), both are necessary and support each other. However, proponents of the two positions have had difficulty reconciling their views because of a significant difference in the assumptions that lie behind the positions. Proponents of the support position have argued that all families, not just those who neglect or abuse their children, require programs such as daycare and other support services (Cameron and Vanderwoerd, 1997; Wharf, 2002). They view such services as social utilities (Kahn and Kamerman, 1975) that are as necessary in today's society as public health and education and, therefore, should be available on a universal basis.

The advocates of the protection argument hold that most families manage well and that resources should be targeted to those experiencing difficulties in raising children. The differences are further heightened by the availability of resources. Obviously, developing universal programs for all children is an expensive proposition, an expense not incurred when only the vulnerable few are targeted. In rebuttal, advocates of universality argue that targeting inevitably stigmatizes users, and in doing so it adds to their feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness.

It is important to note at the outset that the contributors to this book hold the view that despite the many changes that have occurred in policies and practices, the enterprise of child welfare remains anchored in a paradigm of saving the child from abusive and neglectful parents. The child-saving paradigm is philosophically consistent with residualism and with a Western/white view of families and children. Numerous research studies have documented that neglect and abuse occur in large part because parents do not have sufficient resources to care for their children (Kitchen et al., 1991; Pelton, 1994; Peters et al., 2001; Ross and Roberts, 1999). Contributors to this book hold that universality and a commitment to cultural values are appropriate and helpful philosophies.

Nowhere has the child-saving paradigm been practised with more pernicious effects than in Aboriginal communities, where First Nations children were “saved” from environments that Western, middle-class social workers and judges saw as inappropriate for the care and proper upbringing of children. The disastrous consequences of child welfare’s wholly mistaken efforts to protect First Nations children have long been known to First Nations families, but they received national attention with the publication of *Native Children and the Child Welfare System* (Johnston, 1983). Johnston characterized the era in which literally thousands of First Nations children were taken from their parents as the “Sixties Scoop.” Subsequent chapters tell of the struggles of First Nations communities to cope with the effects of this scoop and, more recently, to gain control of child welfare services and provide them in culturally appropriate ways.

Innovations in Child Welfare

Despite the dominance of the Western/white view of the world and of the philosophy of residualism, there have been attempts to develop programs to prevent problems from arising. Such preventive thrusts have typically taken the form of programs to support families and develop the capacity of communities. One significant change occurred during the 1970s with the establishment of community resource boards (CRB) based on the principles of citizen participation, integration, and decentralization of services (Clague, Dill, Seebaran, and Wharf, 1984). The CRB experience is examined in some detail in Chapter 3, and the Ministry of Children and Family Development’s

attempt to implement a community development program is described in Chapter 6. Other more recent examples include the development of First Nations community control of child welfare. Despite innumerable jurisdictional difficulties, excellent examples of a holistic and community-wide approach have emerged in some First Nations communities (see, for example, Brown, Haddock, and Kovach, 2002; McKenzie, 2002).

The third objective of the book is to identify these efforts and inquire into their outcomes. Since innovations interrupt the established ways of doing things, can they be implemented and continued in a large bureaucracy like the Ministry of Children and Family Development, which is, by definition, bound by rules and regulations? What does it take for innovations to stick and to continue not merely as cosmetic additions to an array of individually oriented services but as genuine efforts to address the lack of resources that face parents?

The fourth objective is to examine the many organizational changes that have occurred. For example, the ministry changed its name on numerous occasions, reorganized the boundaries of its regional and local offices, relinquished responsibility for income assistance, added programs in the area of juvenile justice and mental health, and introduced new service protocols such as risk assessment. All changes were made with the stated intent of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of services. A number of chapters examine whether these organizational reforms have yielded any lasting benefits.

It will be readily apparent that this list of objectives is daunting. Certainly not all are applicable to all chapters, but some will be extremely pertinent to a number of chapters. For example, Chapter 4 describes the residual philosophy that held sway in the 1980s, and spirited arguments for community approaches to child welfare are featured in a number of chapters. When these objectives are considered together, they constitute a detailed inquiry into the troubled and dispute-ridden nature of child welfare.

Adding to the troubles of the child welfare system is the opportunity that mistreatment of children gives the media to bring examples to the attention of the general public. Indeed, the public has a right to know, but the problem occurs when the media tell the stories in lurid prose, criticizing parents and social workers in no uncertain terms. An example is provided by the *Vancouver Sun's* coverage of the 1994-95 Gove Inquiry:

After examining literally thousands of pages of transcripts and hundreds of articles we have come to a simple conclusion. The very first article written about the case ... set the tone for all that followed. The story told in the press is one of an evil mother who cared more for herself, her boyfriends and her seedy life-style than for her child. According to this account, many social workers knew about the mother's wholly inadequate care but did

nothing about it. The press stories maintain that social workers behaved in this fashion because they are simple minded and easily duped by a deceitful mother. (Callahan and Callahan, 1997, pp. 42-43)

This kind of coverage is not unexpected when tragedies occur in child welfare. Blaming individuals, be they parents or social workers or foster parents, makes for dramatic reading and grabs the attention of the general public. Like policy-makers, reporters and editors find it easy to focus on private troubles and ignore public issues. By doing so, the media make a huge contribution to maintaining and reinforcing the residual approach.

It should be noted that the day-to-day work of child welfare staff and the many instances of effective assistance to families go unnoticed and unrecorded in the media. However, not all reporters are blind to societal factors. British journalist Melanie Phillips admitted as much when she wrote: "But in crucifying them [social workers] we deflect attention from the real villains. A society which systematically beats up, tortures, buggers and murders children is a deeply sick society. A society which does all of these things and then sets up social workers to take the blame, turning the notion of doing good into the deepest insult, is even more vile, we leave social workers struggling to make a better society than we deserve" (1995, p. 17).

Sources of Information

Information for this book has been collected in a variety of ways. As noted earlier, there are a number of books, articles, and monographs that chronicle a particular era or a unique experience, and these have provided useful information. Annual reports and other documents from the Ministry of Children and Family Development and its predecessor organizations have provided data on changes in personnel and in the structure of the ministry and on the number of children in care. Chapter 2 relies heavily on these sources. In addition, contributors have conducted interviews with individuals who have made a distinct contribution to the evolution of services. The names of these individuals, along with their positions, are noted at the end of each chapter.

At the outset, the editors and contributors agreed that it would not be appropriate to use a detailed interview guide for all interviews. Rather, they decided that contributors would seek information on the following matters:

- the influence of philosophical positions (public issues/private troubles, universal/residual, and support/protection) during the era under review
- changes in legislation and policy, in the structure and organization of the ministry, and in the number of children in care
- changes in the day-to-day practice of child welfare workers
- relationships and changes vis-à-vis the voluntary sector.

Authors were also encouraged to elicit information about, and comment on, unique and important events that occurred in the era under review.

It should be noted that contributors did not disclose their philosophical positions during interviews unless specifically requested to do so. (They did reveal them at the end of the interview.) The intent was not to engage in a debate about philosophies, but to identify the philosophy of those being interviewed and to determine the extent to which their views shaped their work.

We recognize that philosophical positions are difficult to change. They are rooted in values, and, as Nicholas Lemann has pointed out, “it is not what we know, but what we believe in that matters” (2002, p. 99). Values and beliefs are formed in childhood and reinforced by experiences and relationships in adulthood. They represent deeply held convictions about the division of responsibility between individuals, families, and the state, and although some individuals are able to alter their philosophies in response to experience and new information, many cling to early established positions throughout their lives.

People in the Book

We have chosen to tell the story by identifying particular eras in child welfare. All these eras contain a notable event or development, and in each a particular individual or group assumed a leadership role. By tying the story to some dynamic and charismatic figures, the book personalizes and dramatizes the evolution of child welfare services. Thus, chapters profile politicians, senior civil servants, leaders in First Nations’ communities, and practitioners.

With two notable exceptions, the chapters do not conspicuously feature the voices of practitioners and, particularly, parents and children who use child welfare services. The exceptions are Chapters 5 and 8. Chapter 5 describes the often-disastrous experiences of First Nations families and children with the Eurocentric child welfare system. Chapter 8 captures the views of both parents and practitioners regarding the use of risk-assessment instruments.

However, some recent literature in child welfare has recorded the opinions of both practitioners and service users, and we rely on this literature to represent their views (see Callahan, Hooper, and Wharf, 1998; Callahan and Lumb, 1995; de Montigny, 1995; Diorio, 1992; Grant, 1998; Mayer and Timms, 1970; Swift, 1995; Weller and Wharf, 2002). When asked, service users present a devastating critique of the child welfare enterprise. They report that all too often the programs and services offered are inappropriate and inadequate. Not only are the public issues of poverty, substandard housing, and unsafe neighbourhoods almost entirely ignored, but the programs aimed at private issues are also inappropriate.

Child welfare staff are typically so harried and preoccupied with investigations and paperwork that they have little time to provide support and counselling. Their response is to refer clients to voluntary agencies that provide short-term programs such as parent education, anger management, and budget preparation. Although they are well-intentioned, such referrals mean that clients are spun like tops between the staff of a number of agencies when what they need is a constant, reassuring, friendly, and practical person in their lives. It is also typical that clients are referred to such programs because they exist and have to be used, not because they are always, or even usually, configured to meet the needs of clients. The remark of a client in one research project summed up the frustration of many: "What I need is a bus pass, what I get is a referral to a parenting program that I do not need and can't get to anyway" (Callahan et al., 1998, p. 13).

As noted earlier in this introduction, many contributors find it difficult to escape the dismal view that little of substance has changed in the efforts to protect children from abuse and neglect. To be sure, the state has greatly expanded the number and range of services it offers to children and families; it has introduced such measures as risk assessment, which are designed to bring certainty to the job of investigation; and it has initiated a dizzying array of organizational and managerial changes. But despite these efforts, the pessimism remains.

We hope that this volume will provide a historical perspective on and analysis of efforts to make change and the results when the public issues of racism, poverty, housing, and employment in these reforms are ignored. Without heeding these lessons, are we doomed to focus our efforts on developing more and more different and ultimately ineffective ways of dealing with personal troubles?

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1

Rethinking Child Welfare Reform in British Columbia, 1900-60

Marilyn Callahan and Christopher Walmsley

The history of child welfare in Canada and elsewhere has often been recounted as a largely unsuccessful endeavour undertaken by well-meaning middle- and upper-class women intent on teaching the poor the values of “proper white society” and integrating them into the mainstream (Noble, 1980; Struthers, 1987a, 1987b). According to this account, social workers were the paid agents of the state, using the principal strategy of removing children from their homes and placing them in contexts that would socialize them to the dominant middle-class values of Euro-Canadian society. Although we do not dismantle this account, in this chapter we reflect upon the thinking and actions of early social workers who actually raised a number of questions about the “middle-class values” they were supposed to support. While they challenged orthodoxy about women’s economic dependence, championed a broad vision of child welfare beyond removing children from their homes, and created for themselves a new profession with more freedoms than other women’s professions, they did not confront some of the most egregious policies concerning children that took hold during this period: the development of residential schools and, later, the placement of Aboriginal children in foster care. We explore some of the reasons for this. Our examination focuses on British Columbia, but a similar story might be told of other Canadian provinces and settler societies.

The Legacy of Early Child Welfare Reforms

When construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway began in the early 1880s, British Columbia was home to 49,459 people and had a population mix of 52 percent Aboriginal, 35 percent European, and 9 percent Asian. After the railway’s completion in 1886, a population explosion brought settlers from Ontario, the Maritimes, and Great Britain, and by 1901, BC’s population had increased to 178,657, of which 72 percent were European, 11 percent Asian, and only 16 percent Aboriginal. By 1911, the Aboriginal population

had declined to 5 percent of the total (20,174) and remained under 5 percent for most of the twentieth century (Barman, 1991). The reduction in the Aboriginal proportion of the population was the result of death from disease and social upheaval brought by white settlers and the explosion in the numbers of immigrants overall. In the 1890s, Vancouver began to dominate Victoria as the centre of British Columbia's economic life, and by 1901 its population was greater than Victoria's for the first time (*ibid.*).

A range of charitable organizations emerged in British Columbia in the late nineteenth century, the result of prodigious community organizing that was largely carried out by women. Child welfare activities in the province began in earnest in 1892, when several women raised funds for the development of the Alexandra Orphanage in Vancouver (see Appendix 1):

The Alexandra Orphanage can justly claim to be Vancouver's earliest institution devoted exclusively to children ... Before that time, whenever a child was found orphaned and friendless, such women as the late Mrs. Haskett, Mrs. T.H. Morrison, Mrs. Foxley, and Mrs. J.J. Southcott, would come forward and find a home for it, even if it had to be paid for out of their own pockets ... Realizing that in a fast-growing community such contingencies were likely to re-occur, these women with Mrs. James Macaulay, Mrs. F.T. Schooley, Mrs. H. Mutrie and others decided to establish a home for the purpose. They rented a house on the corner of Homer and Dunsmuir Streets, which was formally opened on Thanksgiving Day of that year, with Miss Bowes as matron ... Within a year the number of children had increased to nineteen necessitating larger premises which were found on Hornby Street. (Nelson, 1934, p. 14)

Given the inadequacy of such voluntary efforts, women continued to organize. On 20 March 1901, the local Council of Women of Vancouver successfully petitioned the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia to pass a child welfare act because "all the efforts to care for neglected, orphaned or abandoned children are greatly hindered and in many cases wholly prevented owing to the absence of any law in this Province regulating such work. This want has been very much felt, not only by the various Philanthropic and Charitable Societies, but by the Police Officials as well" (Annual Report, Vancouver Children's Aid Society, 1902). Soon afterwards, the government passed the *Children's Protection Act*, which provided for state guardianship of orphaned or neglected children and for the incorporation of children's aid societies to care for these children.

The Vancouver Children's Aid Society, with its motto "We Protect the Little Ones," was incorporated in the same year. Although the first board of directors was composed solely of men, an active women's committee carried

out the day-to-day work of the society and soon after took over its leadership. The first annual report, in 1901, stated that the work of the society far surpassed expectations; twenty-nine children were committed to care “by force of the evil conditions existing in the City.” In the 1902 annual report, Mrs. T.E. Atkins, an early director, described the purpose of the society: “The Children’s Aid Society stands first and last for the rights of children. It is authorized to investigate all cases of neglect, destitution and cruelty to ameliorate and better home surroundings when practicable, and when hopeless to remove the children from an environment of uncleanness and vice; only when every effort in the home fails is the matter brought to the courts for adjudication.”

The Council of Women stimulated the development of another charity movement, the Friendly Aid Society, “to assist families in distress.” It began in Victoria in 1895 and Vancouver in 1896. Friendly visitors, women from the council, “investigated each family case, reporting to the Health Department the conditions and need they found” (Nelson, 1934, p. 16). This friendly visitor tradition was picked up later by family service and child welfare agencies.

Another significant child welfare plank in British Columbia, emanating from the actions of pioneer women, was the mothers’ pension. Such women’s groups as the National Council of Women (the national organization of the local Councils of Women), the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, the Women’s Institutes, the Canadian Club, the Daughters of the Empire, the University Women’s Club, and the Equal Franchise Association, among others, petitioned the Legislative Assembly in 1918 for a mothers’ allowance. The premier of the time, John Oliver, “in eulogizing the delegation, said it was the most businesslike and representative delegation that had ever appeared before the government” (*First Annual Reports of the Superintendent of Neglected Children and Mothers’ Pensions*, 1920, p. 8). The *Mothers’ Pension Act* was passed on 17 April 1920 and proclaimed on 1 July, following similar legislation in Manitoba (1916), Saskatchewan (1917), and Alberta (1919). According to the 1920 report of the Superintendent of Neglected Children and Mothers’ Pensions, “it was a great boon to many of the mothers to receive the pension ... They were enabled in many cases to take their children out of the orphanages, rent little homes or rooms, purchase furniture, and provide for the winter clothing and fuel” (p. 9).

Initially, six temporary investigators were appointed to determine the need of each case under the *Mothers’ Pension Act*, which was administered by the Superintendent of Neglected Children. These investigators were all women and came to be known as the “mothers’ pensions visitors,” “friendly home visitors,” “welfare visitors,” or merely “the visitors.”

Early child welfare efforts included some attention to juvenile justice, although the distinction between those who entered children’s aid services

and those sent to reformatories seemed largely related to age and race. A juvenile reformatory opened in British Columbia in 1890. With the construction of a new facility at Point Grey in 1905, it became known as the Boys' Industrial School, serving boys nine to nineteen years. The first superintendent, David Donaldson, a Vancouver men's clothier, was also a member of the board of directors of the Vancouver Children's Aid Society. Under his leadership, the school aimed to be self-supporting, with the boys producing most of their own food, uniforms, shoes, furniture, and firewood. The most common reason for committal was "incurability," which meant the child was beyond the control of parents or guardians, although neglected children and the rare child convicted of murder were also committed. From 1916 onwards, the school was plagued with unsanitary conditions, deteriorating facilities, and unfilled staff positions. By 1919, interest in juvenile justice shifted to the establishment of juvenile courts, which were viewed as capable of giving more individual attention to the needs of boys (Matters, 1980).

The Provincial Industrial Home for Girls opened in Vancouver on Cassiar Street in 1914 "to provide custody and detention with a view to the education, industrial training and moral reclamation of females under the age of sixteen" (Matters, 1984, p. 268). Between 1914 and 1937 there were 600 admissions for reasons primarily related to incurability and morals offenses (88 percent), with only a few related to actual crimes. The home's matron advocated strenuously for a proper trade school for the girls in her care, but for the most part it prepared the girls only for domestic service. As Matters (1984) notes, committal to the home provided girls with a "way out" of their existing life by providing them with medical and physical care, some education, and work placement. At the same time, it robbed families of a teenage daughter's wages, as well as her home management and childcare contributions. In many cases it moved girls from one form of exploitation to another.

There are important legacies from these early developments that influenced subsequent child welfare policy and practice. While the development of orphanages and correctional facilities was featured during this early period, it is clear that proponents of these services recognized that child welfare was defined more broadly than institutional care. They worked earnestly to advance the case for preventive and family-based services, recognizing that most of the children in their care were not actually orphans but children from working-class families who required short-term substitute care to help them hold their families together in the long term (Purvey, 1991). For instance, most children at the Alexandra Orphanage were placed there during a critical stage of the family life cycle, such as death, illness, unemployment, or desertion, with most children staying a year or two before being reunited with their parents.

Orphanages were complemented by foster care. The Protestant Orphans Home was originally created in 1873 by Methodist, Anglican, and Presbyterian church leaders in Victoria “to give care, secular education and practical training and Christian education to the children” in its charge (Storey, Worobetz, and Kennedy, 1999, p. 52). However, by the early twentieth century, about half of the sixty children in its care were placed in foster homes.

Unfortunately, early government and municipal funding for child welfare was earmarked only for the institutional care of children (Angus, 1951). Government funding policies were influential in shaping the direction of child welfare services from the beginning of their formal development.

From the outset, the services developed along segregated lines according to class, race, religion, and “characteristics of children.” For instance, the Protestant Orphans Home in Victoria initially admitted only Protestant children aged two to ten who were homeless. It excluded “delinquents,” “defectives,” and those “with serious social problems” (Storey et al., 1999, p. 51). Although it broadened its admission criteria in the 1920s, it refused children of Asian origin or Roman Catholics (Storey et al., 1999). There is sparse evidence of other minority cultures’ participation in child welfare services. A sample of 303 children in the care of the Vancouver Children’s Aid Society between 1901 and 1930 revealed only four children of Asian or African heritage (Adamoski, 2002). Of the 154 families in the sample, only ten were families of Aboriginal heritage, and most were interracial families, with a Caucasian father and a Native mother. Adamoski (1988) argues that during this period the Vancouver CAS “sought in practice if not in policy to avoid involvement with Native families” (p. 317). Aboriginal youth appear to have been sent to the Boys’ Industrial School (Matters, 1980). We take up the subject of Aboriginal youth in later sections of this chapter.

Child welfare was a new field in which women’s social and political action provided the leadership for change. Working outside the home, with little formal political influence and modest experience in public affairs and without the right to vote, women moved from the position of caring for indigent children on a voluntary basis to caring for children in orphanages funded by donations and then to pressing for legislation that provided government funding for the care of children and a pension for their mothers. At the same time, these women created paid employment for themselves. These were considerable achievements that required insights into the relationships between income and child welfare and that challenged some of the moral considerations and patriarchal values that were highly influential at the time.

A Crossroad: The BC Child Welfare Survey

From its inception, the Vancouver Children’s Aid Society (CAS) was beset by overcrowded conditions, underfunding, the risk of fire, and public criticism of its work. In 1927, amid “charges of graft, perjury, falsifying of accounts

and general scandalous conditions” against the Vancouver CAS, the BC Child Welfare Survey was initiated (Adamoski, 1988, p. 30). Conducted by Charlotte Whitton (of the Canadian Council on Child Welfare), the survey analyzed the services of fourteen BC child welfare agencies and was funded by four Vancouver service clubs (Adamoski, 1988; Whitton, 1927).

The survey, similar to those conducted later in other provinces, consisted of measuring public opinion for change, scrutinizing carefully the credentials and practice of the social workers of the day, and giving wide publicity to the results. Through the process, Whitton focused on endorsing preventive work with families and replacing “the casual appointee indiscriminately chosen from any trade or calling” with a skilled expert who possessed the “analytical attitude of a trained mind” (Rooke and Schnell, 1981, p. 495).

Barbara Finlayson, later a staff member of the Family Services Society in Vancouver describes the events leading up to and following the survey:

You have heard of the three wise women from the east. Again we come to Charlotte Whitton and the unestimatable contribution that she made to Canada and social work development in the surveys for which the Canadian Council was responsible throughout this period, the 1920s and the 1930s. To mention one of them only, a survey of child welfare in B.C. Four able people from Toronto came here and were really digging. They came because of the wisdom of one of the board members of the Children’s Aid Society in Vancouver who at a time when they had collected money and were planning for a bigger and better institution for the children, the increasing number of children that needed protection. They had the money, they had the architect’s plan, were purring in anticipation when this board member said, “I think we shouldn’t spend a cent until we have the opinion of the Canadian Welfare Council,” and so Charlotte arranged for these four workers from Toronto to come

Mr. R.E. Mills, Director of the C.A.S. of Toronto, was in charge. Margaret Main from the Neighbourhood Workers Association, she was the secretary throughout. Miss Leila O’Gorman came from the Roman Catholic Family Agency and Miss Vera Moberly from the Infant’s Home in Toronto, she had a family understanding ... The able report that came back to the board of the C.A.S. in Vancouver stunned them. But as a result, fortunately, the institution didn’t get built and the three wise women came from the East. Two of them, Miss Laura Holland and Miss Zella Collins, to bring about a change in the plan of care for children, a change from institutions to foster homes living with real families. The third member, Miss Mary MacPhedran came a year later ... to start a family service agency, as the report indicated, that was needed hopefully to give services to families before the child was neglected and so those three became known as the “three wise women from the East” and they were all extremely able. (Hill, 1990, pp. 21-22)

Although the survey was widely praised, it was not without its critics. Mary MacPhedran, Zella Collins, and Laura Holland, who were appointed by Charlotte Whitton to lead the reform and professionalize BC child welfare services, all came from Ontario. Mrs. T. Morward-Clark derided these young women who had never set foot on BC soil before, but who had the audacity to criticize the “wild and woolly west” (Rooke and Schnell, 1981, p. 496).

A future staff member of the Vancouver Children’s Aid Society was twenty-seven-year-old Katherine Whitman, who was working in downtown Toronto as a family services worker when she accepted an invitation to join Laura Holland and Zella Collins in Vancouver. Many years later, she recalled her first winter on the coast:

Miss Holland and Miss Collins were wonderful people to work for. We were sort of in it together. I don’t know how Miss Holland managed it. Miss Collins was laid up with bronchitis that first winter, it was a very bad winter anyway, rained continually and the doctor told her she’d have to give it up all together unless she kept right indoors, which confined her to office work. She went over all these old dusty records, opening them up, they were long legal forms and folded over the way lawyers forms are ... and you couldn’t pull out a folder and open it, you had to pick out one of these things tied with tape and undo it, and mice had been in them and dusty and dirty, some had been there for years. This was only 1927 but after all the Society had been operating since, well, before 1900.

The plan was that children were to be placed in foster homes. They were all in a big institution out on Wall Street and there were close on two hundred children in the big building. I think another smaller building that had the babies in it. And I think the large building had already been condemned as not safe from the fire standpoint and the idea was to get them placed in foster homes as soon as possible ... The first thing to do really was not to look for foster homes, not right away, but to look up lost wards ... I don’t know how many children [were] legally under care of the Children’s Aid Society, well you know five or six hundred anyway ... and a good many had been placed in private homes and were still under sixteen years of age which was the legal age and the Society was legally responsible for those children. (Hill, 1990, pp. 7-15)

The survey was crucially important to the development of child welfare in British Columbia for a number of reasons. It provided the impetus for the reform of child welfare services in the province, but its influence was restricted to the fourteen childcare institutions that were the focus of the survey, all orphanages supported by religious, secular, or women’s organizations. It did not consider correctional facilities for children, institutions for

the mentally challenged or disabled, or the Indian residential schools. It had the effect of solidifying the field of child welfare in British Columbia as one focused on individual children and their parents. It also enshrined the focus on parents as the source of child maltreatment and established the two often-conflicting purposes of child welfare: supporting parents to care for their children and removing children from families where the parents failed to measure up. Funding policies were set up, and the children's aid societies, now funded by the provincial government, were charged primarily with investigating complaints and caring for children. The new Vancouver Family Services, with a focus on strengthening families, was funded by voluntary monies. The survey took a Eurocentric and urban-centred view of child welfare, and its effect was to confirm separate and unequal child welfare services in British Columbia. At the same time, however, the survey advanced the development of social work as a profession and solidified professional roles for women for services previously provided on a volunteer basis. The survey, the first of its kind in Canada, provided the impetus for surveys in eight other provinces between 1927 and 1949 (Adamoski, 1988) and thus had far-reaching effects beyond British Columbia.

Residential Schools and Institutional Care for Aboriginal Children

Charlotte Whitton and others involved in the survey paid little attention to Aboriginal children and families, in part because Canada was a nation divided along racial and class lines. The Depression, following shortly after the survey, placed many Canadians in dire poverty. Writing of that time, the historian Desmond Morton (2005) states that "our ancestors took poverty for granted and accepted the selfish cruelty that usually accompanies deprivation. In the struggle to live, most Canadians could only be looked after by 'their own kind.' Outsiders, be they immigrants or people of a different faith or ethnicity, seldom met generosity; exclusion, contempt and fear were the rule. We should not be astonished to find these qualities in so-called 'Third-World countries.' Before 1945, that was our state too" (p. 46).

Another reason Aboriginal peoples were left out of the survey was because they were defined as a federal responsibility under the *British North America Act*. All services to Status Indians were provided under the *Indian Act*, a set of laws that embodied separate and unequal social relations between Aboriginal peoples and the European population in Canada. This legislation provided for the construction and operation of residential schools, funded by the federal government but operated by the Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Methodist Churches. Residential school construction in British Columbia began a decade after the introduction of residential schools in other provinces, and about a decade and a half after the *Indian Act* was passed, but it occurred concurrently with the Canadian government's consolidation of reserves throughout the province. It also paralleled the great

influx of white settlers to the province, which took place following the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1886.

In British Columbia, St. Mary's Mission was the first to operate a residential school, which opened in 1863 with forty-two boys from the Sto:lo people in the lower Fraser Valley. The Sisters of St. Ann were recruited in 1868 to run a girls' residential school, and about thirty girls were enrolled. In the 1880s, the boarding school received only minimal government funds, but when the Canadian government initiated its residential school program in British Columbia in the 1890s, St. Mary's was quick to respond to the offer of government assistance (Gresko, 1986). When the Canadian government offered funding to the churches, eight schools were built between 1888 and 1893, and a further six between 1900 and 1910. Altogether, at least twenty-two schools operated in BC; the last, St. Mary's, closed in 1984 (see Table 1.1 and www.turtleisland.org).

The aim of the residential school policy was to erase Aboriginal identity by separating generations of children from their families, suppressing their Aboriginal languages, and re-socializing them according to the norms of non-Aboriginal society (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996a, chap. 10). The deputy superintendent general of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott, told the House of Commons in 1920 that the department's object was "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, that is the whole object of this Bill" (Haig-Brown, 1988, p. 27).

For most of the twentieth century, until the late 1980s, the residential schools operated outside the consciousness of the Euro-Canadian public. There was only one public inquiry that considered conditions in a residential school in British Columbia. That was a coroner's inquest into the death of eight-year-old Duncan Sticks, who had run away from the Williams Lake

Table 1.1

Indian residential schools in British Columbia

School	Years of operation	School	Years of operation
St. Mary's	1863-1984	Kitimat	1893-1941
Coqualeetza	1888-1941	Christie	1900-83
Kamloops	1890-1978	St. George's	1901-78
Kootenay	1890-1970	Squamish	1902-60
Kuper Island	1890-1975	Ahousaht	1904-39
Port Simpson	1890-1948	Sechelt	1905-78
Alberni	1891-1973	Lejac	1910-76
Cariboo	1891-1981	Alert Bay	1929-74

Source: York, G. (1998), *The dispossessed: Life and death in Native Canada* (Toronto: Little, Brown).

Residential School in 1902 and had been found dead the next day (Furniss, 1995). The schools were all located in rural British Columbia, miles away from centres of government, media, higher education, and social reform.

In the 1950s, the schools began to be phased out as Aboriginal children were integrated into provincial schools, but many schools continued to function as a child welfare resource or as a residence for children who lived in remote communities and attended provincial schools in larger centres. In these cases, the schools operated until the 1970s or 1980s.

Thus, while institutionalization was being derided for Euro-Canadian children by the social reformers involved in the 1927 BC Child Welfare Survey, it was being entrenched for Aboriginal children. Child welfare in British Columbia has been greatly shaped by the legacy of the residential schools. They had a genocidal effect on Aboriginal peoples as they eliminated language, religion, history, family ties, and knowledge of community traditions across the many distinct languages and nations found in British Columbia (Fournier and Crey, 1997; Furniss, 1995; Haig-Brown, 1988; MacDonald, 1993; Miller, 1996; York, 1990). In testimony to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Chief Cinderina Williams of the Spallumcheen Band summarized the effects of the residential school in her community:

Later when these children returned home, they were aliens. They did not speak their own language, so they could not communicate with anyone other than their own counterparts. Some looked down on their families because of their lack of English, their lifestyle, and some were just plain hostile. They had formed no bonds with their families, and some couldn't survive without the regimentation they had become so accustomed to ... Perhaps the greatest tragedy of this background was the unemotional upbringing they had. Not being brought up in a loving, caring, sharing, nurturing environment, they did not have these skills as they are not inbred but learned through observation, participation, and interaction. Consequently, when these children became parents, and most did at an early age, they had no parenting skills. (1996b, chap. 2, p. 35)

The residential schools played a significant role in constructing the "Indian" stereotype held by the Euro-Canadian population as they eliminated differences between various Aboriginal cultures and collapsed this diversity to one homogenous "other." Most of the European population in British Columbia had little day-to-day contact with Aboriginal people, but all felt they knew enough to employ stereotypes in daily discourse within their community.

In addition to residential schools, the colonizing policies and practices of the Canadian government (the *Indian Act*, the creation of reserves, and the lack of political, legal, and economic rights for Aboriginal people)

contributed to the decimation of British Columbia's Aboriginal people. At the same time, the rapid liberalization of provincial liquor laws in the 1950s and the repeal of century-old liquor laws that discriminated against Aboriginal people created rapid change for Aboriginal communities. Thus, when the provincial government began to take responsibility for Aboriginal child welfare after changes to the federal *Indian Act* in 1951, Aboriginal communities were greatly weakened; the values they held related to family, community, and children were virtually unrecognized; and child welfare policy and practices based on British Canadian values were well entrenched. The removal of Aboriginal children that occurred over the next decade and continues today was the result of this history.

Child Welfare Policy and Practice, 1930-60

The 1930s were a time of significant social policy change in British Columbia. The 1933 election of T.D. Pattullo's Liberal government on a "New Deal" platform began a transformation of health and welfare services. The province appointed its first Director of Social Welfare, Harry Cassidy, in 1934, and in 1935, "a welfare field service was set up to bring together within one division all of the department's skilled social workers, whose services could then be used over a larger geographic territory or by more than one division of the health and welfare branch" (Irving, 1987). This development led to a schism between those who sought the adventures of rural British Columbia and those who remained in urban areas, one that remains today. As Isobel Harvey, the Superintendent of Neglected Children, described it, "in the City of Vancouver, where there are numbers of social workers, practically all doing specialized jobs, I doubt whether nine people out of ten could enlighten you as to the difference between a family agency and a children's agency, and which you should consult in a given instance ... In the district, however, the welfare visitor is social work, and social work is what the welfare visitor does" (1937, p. 40).

University of BC School of Social Work graduates and others began to find employment in this expanded provincial service and in the children's aid societies and family service agencies in the larger urban areas. This raises the question: How did these new social workers take up the issues of inequalities built into the child welfare system from its early history?

Accounts of the provincial social workers in rural areas of British Columbia provide rare and interesting insights into the aims of these workers during this period. Without doubt, they found their work adventuresome and unpredictable. This was particularly the case for young, middle-class women, who would be a rare sight in many provincial outposts, logging camps, institutions, and urban slums. The sense of being an unusual, courageous woman who escaped the more predictable life of wife and mother is suggested in

their accounts. Anne Angus describes mothers' pension visitors as "well motivated, hard working, but young and strong willed. As I've grown older I have often thought we were like a team of wild young horses" (1965, p. 227). Isobel Harvey recalls one such adventure:

I wonder how many of us would come back cheerfully at the end of the day after having driven one hundred miles over a bad road, walked ten miles, three of them down a railway track and the rest in the bush – walked a boom of logs and crossed the Fraser River twice in a dugout canoe with half a foot of water in it. Our youngest visitor did just that on her second week in the field. The only reason I heard about it was because she was apologizing for having a hotel bill instead of returning to headquarters. She was quite tired and felt she could not start back after dark over thirty miles of bad road. (1937, p. 32)

Barbara Finlayson, a worker at the Family Services Association of Vancouver, describes a different sense of adventure and creativity in social work practice at the time: innovations such as homemakers for families where the mother was absent, the placement of family service workers in the Settlement Houses to bring some family counselling, and the introduction of group work,

sometimes with a parent and child together, or a group of two parents and children, or groups not for a particular family but for groups made up of maybe mothers of several families that are meeting the same kind of problems or a group of people that have just been divorced, or a pre-marital group of young people ... and so on ... there was a person put in charge of that work, Mary Rupp, who had been on the staff of the School of Social Work and was a member of the Family Services staff at that time, took over and she gathered a staff of social workers who mostly had been in the agency on the staff but had resigned because of having children. Their children were older and they gave part-time to this group work. (Hill, 1990, p. 17)

The work was enormously varied in both urban and rural practice. Women spoke about the wide diversity of cases and programs in their charge, the expectation that they would and could create needed resources, the varied work settings, and the fascinating travel. Bessie Snider, who began her career in social work in northern BC, recalls the diverse nature of the work:

We were providing a generalized service which we pioneered in B.C. and of which I am still very proud. ... [A]bout a third of our caseload would be mothers on Mother's allowance [\$35 for a mother and child] and then

about 10% of our load ... would be single people on relief. They got nine dollars a month and the next classification were those that were unemployable ... the Destitute, Poor and Sick [\$20 per adult person] and ... then we did all the families where the breadwinner or main person in the family had T.B. T.B. was still rampant then and we, though we were not nurses, had to go at certain intervals and pick up the sputum cups and get them back to head office here ... To be on Mother's Allowance, you had to have three years residence in the province. You had to be a British citizen. You had to produce your marriage certificate and your divorce papers, if you were divorced. A single mother, an unmarried single mother, that is, would not be eligible for Mother's Allowance, but she probably would be eligible, if she was unable to work, for Destitute, Poor and Sick Allowance ... And then we did all the social work histories for the provincial mental hospital and we would have to go and interview the family of the patient and get the social history. And we had a good number of unmarried parents and we visited them and helped them make the decision about whether or not they would keep their baby, or ... have it placed for adoption, and then in Salmon Arm, I had a good number of children in foster homes. Then we had also another category, juvenile delinquents, because we would have to make the arrangements if the boys or girls (principally they were boys) who'd be coming down to the Boys' Industrial School in Vancouver ... (ibid., pp. 8-10)

Theresa Kofman, who worked at the Vancouver Children's Aid Society, recalled that,

right from the beginning [I worked in] ... child protection but the Child Protection Division included many things ... we did some adoptions although we weren't the adoption department but it would occur. Work with unmarried mothers, a fair amount of that ... But those areas would be definitely part of your daily work. I was an apprehending officer which meant I would have to go out at all hours of the day or night to pick up children which we often did ... I worked very closely with the court worker and we had a great many court cases that we shared ... Child abuse has been highlighted so much today it rather amazes me in one way ... We had it less often ... this wasn't our major emphasis in those days, our major emphasis was general neglect. (ibid., pp. 29-30)

The women felt hugely independent in making decisions. There were few regulations, and they had the confidence to challenge and change those that did not serve them or their clients. The major programs that these women administered – child welfare, mothers' pension, and social assistance –

provided a great deal of discretion for the individual social worker. Little (1993) has identified the difference between the male and female welfare systems during this period. Welfare systems mainly used by men were those associated with the workplace, such as worker's compensation and pension plans. They were mostly contributory programs with little stigma and with firm rules governing entitlements. In contrast, welfare systems directed at women, such as mothers' pensions, child welfare, and, later, social assistance programs, were highly discretionary and gave the largely female staff administering them a great deal of room for decision making.

Above all, the few accounts of practice during this time emphasize the optimism that social workers felt about their endeavours and the potential of these services to create major social changes. Like Charlotte Whitton, these women believed that sufficient numbers of well-trained social workers could lead to vast improvements for clients and communities. Bessie Snider states that "[I] went out feeling that ... I was going to cure the ills of the community. There would not be any more social problems" (Hill, 1990, p. 11). Each individual social worker was a vehicle for change and devoted all her energies and resources to the task.

The notion that each individual had a remarkable capacity to create change appears ingenuous, even arrogant, in retrospect, particularly since the enormous task of changing structural inequalities is the focus of much social work education today. However, what is often forgotten is that at this time many social reformers were optimistic about the prospects of social change and the promises of the emerging welfare state to bring about such changes. This optimism was supported by the numerous accomplishments of these years. A tribute to Laura Holland on the occasion of her retirement captures some of these remarkable changes:

In four years, the agency was changed over completely from institution to foster home care. The old buildings were replaced with a small receiving home in a new building which housed many of the private agencies also ... In the new position [deputy superintendent of child welfare, 1931] ... the list of things she accomplished includes cleaning up of the "adoption rackets," the commercial baby homes and maternity homes; the growth of preventive work everywhere in the province; increased help for unmarried mothers. She administered the acts as their own provisions required, with fear or favour for none ... Miss Holland concludes: "Nothing comes from one person. It's the combined effort of many that works miracles." (*Victoria Times*, 21 January 1946, p. 7)

These women also stood up for their beliefs. At the time of Amy Leigh's retirement from the provincial government, Martha Moscrop writes that

Miss Leigh was a strong advocate for the indigent when she worked as a welfare worker in Vancouver's City Relief Department during the early years of the Depression and left because of her treatment:

Her male colleagues of those days, among them elected personages, could say in 1958 that their contempt for her advocacy of the luckless little people had changed slowly to respect, even though they were not prepared to acknowledge it then. Her administrators of those times were deaf to her arguments, blinded by the numbers who needed bread, adamant in their belief that hard, even punishing, treatment would soon clean up the economic mess ... Some say, thinking to find fault with her, that she is aggressive, that her weakness is her strength. To this her staff reply, "Had she not been strong, had she not been aggressive on our behalf, we would not be what we are today." (1958, p. 122)

Rural social workers were in a position to observe the conditions experienced by many Aboriginal families. Child welfare was not their responsibility, but they did have charge of other programs that could be useful to Aboriginal families. Bessie Snider recounts one effort to extend financial support:

[While working in Prince Rupert as a child welfare worker,] I did an interesting little piece of research of my own. I was able to get an Indian family on one of the islands down the Skeena River on Mother's Allowance and I had to fight very hard with our supervisors who received our reports at head office to make this happen ... You see, you got more on Mother's Allowance for awhile. And I was so pleased ... Her husband had been a fisherman and had drowned ... When I would visit her, and I would have to go with the Indian agent on his boat to visit this family, I had said to the mother, you know, we do have some of our Mother's Allowances recipients ... keep a record of what it costs for them to buy certain items. And I had to explain to mothers when I was asking them [to do] this ... how it would be helpful if I had this information so that I could get it back to our office to get the allowance revised.

So I said to this mother in the presence of her teenage boy, who would be about twelve, no more, "We have a column for miscellaneous. If you can't remember everything and anything that you do have to spend money on, you put it in the miscellaneous." So the little boy said to me "How do you spell miscellaneous," and I spelled it out for him. Well, when I came back the next time, they had this beautifully outlined in a scribbler and the boy had done this and he was so pleased about this. Of course, I heard in the course of time about my McLeod family down the Skeena River, how she was occasionally in the beer parlour you know, and I thought, "So what, so

what!" that was one of the things I didn't record in my report down to head office as they would have felt that she was spending her money foolishly ... but they never saw these books that the mothers were keeping, though I would send down reports telling them how inadequate the allowance was.

[After leaving direct practice, Ms. Snider became the research director in senior administration in Victoria.] One thing was interesting [during this time]. I was a member of the federal-provincial committee on Indians and I was the chief representative of our department, and Shirley Arnold who was the head social worker for the federal department of Indian Affairs and the co-chairman and we had one of our district supervisors on the committee. We had a couple of Indian agents on that committee ...

We met once a month, and it took us ten years to get a similar amount of social assistance to Indian peoples as to non-Indians. We went all over the province, we talked to municipal people and so on and so on. We talked to our regional administrator and finally we convinced them that these people were people, Indian children were like our children and they could not subsist on the amount of Indian relief. And for sure, Shirley Arnold, who's still living and a very great friend of mine, would concede that was the one thing that we did, probably the only thing we did, after ten years of meeting. (Hill, 1990, pp. 9-29)

This era ended with the resignation of several prominent women in child welfare, in particular Ruby McKay, who resigned from the position of Superintendent of Child Welfare in 1960. Her reason for resigning might ring true today:

I reached my decision for one reason and one reason alone. It was no longer possible in the face of the government's restrictive policies to fulfill the responsibilities of Superintendent of Child Welfare. The job simply couldn't be done without more staff and money ... Despite many personal pleas for help, the government did nothing ... A few dedicated workers carrying on the program of child welfare have been so overloaded that necessary child care and adoptions could not be kept up. A staff twice the size would not be enough.

No recognition was being given to the extra heavy workloads resulting from the growing unemployment situation ... In addition, resources needed for the care of children were not forthcoming. Seriously disturbed children, urgently needing treatment in a properly controlled setting, presented heart-breaking problems to staff who could offer only foster home care ... Families applying to adopt a child had to wait months and in some instances years before a worker could even acknowledge their applications. And yet daily, children who desperately needed the security of adoption were having to be placed in paid temporary foster homes.

Overtime had become the rule for staff because of the workers' dedication to their jobs and their earnest desire as far as humanly possible to meet the needs of children ... [C]hild welfare services can only be as good as communities want them to be and my purpose in making this statement is to say to the people of B.C. that they must communicate their wishes to the government and through their local representative in the legislature so that the standard of service they desire for children is maintained. (*Victoria Times*, 6 January 1961, p. 1)

Concerns about resources for child welfare had been expressed a year earlier by Dave Barrett, a member of the Legislative Assembly and later premier of British Columbia, who decried the diminishing number of trained social workers employed by government and the rapidly increasing caseloads.

Contributions and Contradictions

The practice of social workers during this era is marked by a number of features, but none is more pervasive than their deep commitment to reform as they brought professional services to families and children and attempted to get to the root of problems rather than bandaging them up. They understood "getting to the root of the problem" in child welfare as replacing voluntary efforts with social programs such as child welfare, juvenile justice, and counselling to people living anywhere in British Columbia.

In this period, community work did not focus on developing community strengths to respond effectively to family and children's needs. Instead, social workers viewed community work as gaining commitment from government to extend programs to communities and convincing community elites and professionals of the value of the social programs and services on offer. They also thought that community work involved removing "problematic" people, such as delinquents, those with mental and physical disabilities, and the infirm, from communities to centralized resources in the Greater Vancouver area. Today, this view of "helping" can be criticized, but the idea that material resources and social programs could help families who were struggling is still valid.

As social workers espoused the power of government programs to create change, Aboriginal peoples were experiencing the devastation caused by government programs. Wholesale destruction of their communities and their culture was occurring as a stated objective of government. When provinces took over responsibility for Aboriginal child welfare in the late 1950s and early 1960s, social workers assumed the tasks of working with Aboriginal peoples without any understanding of their cultural traditions to build upon. They also took on these responsibilities at a time when resources for child welfare were diminishing and government programs were dedicated to individuals and their families but not to community development. By this

time, Aboriginal traditions of community members caring for children within the context of communal life had been severely damaged by both the residential schools and child welfare removals.

Social workers lobbied for changes to the *Indian Act* in their 1947 submission to a Senate and House of Commons committee charged with reviewing the act. In their joint brief, submitted with the Canadian Welfare Council, they argued that Aboriginal peoples were unfairly treated because they were not offered child welfare services comparable to those available to other Canadians. The brief also condemned the practice of putting neglected children in residential schools, and

concluded that the best way to improve this situation was to extend the services of provincial departments of health, welfare and education to the residents of reserves. It recommended against the development of a federally operated service system parallel to those of the provinces ... The extension of provincial child welfare and other social service programs seemed to be a logical way to overcome some of the problems facing the residents of reserves. The recommendation was obviously made with the best of intentions but little attention was paid to the effect that extending provincial services would have on Indian families and communities. Nor did there appear to be any concern that provincial services might not be compatible with the needs of Indian communities. (Johnston, 1983, p. 3)

When the changes that social workers championed became law, the results were damaging. From the mid-1950s until the early 1970s, large numbers of Aboriginal children entered the child welfare system for the first time. In 1955, only 29 Indian children were in the care of the BC Superintendent of Child Welfare. By 1960, this number had risen to 849, and in 1964 to 1,446. In a period of ten years, Aboriginal children went from making up less than 1 percent of the total number of children in care in British Columbia to comprising about 32 percent (Stanbury, 1975). This period was later described as the “Sixties Scoop” (Johnston, 1983), and it set a trend that continues today.

Resistance

Although statistics show the increasing numbers of Aboriginal children in care during this period, there is little systematic analysis of the thinking and practice of social workers, nor of the views of Aboriginal leaders, elders, and parents. However, a small but powerful literature on this period is emerging (Furniss, 1995; Herbert, 1994). Robina Thomas tells the stories of Aboriginal peoples, their reflections on the residential school at Kuper Island, and the devastating impact of separation on children and their families (Thomas, 1998). Bridget Moran’s book *A Little Rebellion* (1992) documents

her torments as a social worker in Prince George during the 1950s and 1960s, working mostly with Aboriginal families, but without the resources to help them rebuild. From these accounts and our own memories, stories of resistance emerge.

Social workers generally met with deep suspicion and hostility in Aboriginal communities. As a young social worker in Prince George during the 1960s, one author of this chapter remembers well her own discomfort on entering the nearby reserves and the pervasive feeling that people were doing what they could to avoid co-operation. Often their efforts paid off, and she left without seeing the family in question or learning anything about their whereabouts. She also remembers her job in the summer of 1966 at the Catholic Children's Aid Society in Vancouver, where she was to locate parents of children in care and assess the possibility of returning children home. Many of the parents she tried to find were Aboriginal, and her supervisor argued valiantly for their reconciliation with their children. One mother wept uncontrollably when she learned that her children, apprehended at birth, were living only a few miles away from her Capilano Reserve. The children were returned to her later that year.

An Aboriginal woman, now a child protection social worker, describes her father protecting her from state intervention:

My parents ended up separating so my dad raised me on his own. Being a single parent, I guess the Ministry decided that it wouldn't be a good thing for a single man to raise a daughter so, um, my dad told me this one story actually where a social worker came up to check on the situation, decided that a single parent man couldn't raise a daughter, and said "Well, we have to take her out of the home." My dad, I guess, became somewhat threatening and I was sure [he was] somewhat verbally reprimanding – whatever word you want to use and said you're not taking her and she said "Well, I'll be back up with the RCMP, Mr. –," and he said "Well you go right ahead. My shotgun will be waiting for you." And I guess the social worker never came back. (Walmsley, 2001, p. 141)

This story, both a description of a defensive strategy and an account of success, demonstrates the strength and power of a father determined to raise his daughter autonomously without state regulation or control. The social worker describes a childhood experience, but one wonders what significance this story might have to an Aboriginal community's understanding of the practice of state child protection.

Rethinking Reform and Reformers

Child welfare for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children developed in two separate worlds informed by widely different values. For Euro-Canadians,

prominent members of the community promoted the early development of family support, income maintenance, and family care (foster) services rather than institutionalized services. Services grew unevenly, but there was steady progress toward more humane and family-based services. For Aboriginal children throughout the province, there was an early commitment to institutionalized care, and there were no champions to challenge this policy outside the Aboriginal community. Later, when the provincial government took over child welfare services, this removal of children from families continued.

In this chapter we have argued that social work pioneers were impressive women. Although predominately Euro-Canadian women, they were in but not always “of” their times. They thought creatively and independently. They challenged some entrenched views prevalent at the time and argued for public funds to support individuals in need. They also lobbied for people who were largely excluded in a classist and racist society, and challenged views about gender and mothers’ roles. They insisted that women required their own source of funds to support their families. Their own careers did not fit the script set for middle-class women, as they were educated, independent, and dedicated to a career that often eschewed marriage and children. They created a new profession for women that was less restrictive, more independent, and more flexible than the professions of nursing and teaching, the only others available to them at the time.

How was it that these women did not take up the cause of Aboriginal children from the beginning? We have proposed several interlocking reasons. First, the development of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal child welfare services was complicated by the original division of powers between the federal and provincial government. Early women championing the development of child welfare were intent on achieving provincial government responsibility for services previously offered by volunteers and ensuring that these services were evenly available throughout the province. Tackling the federal government policies, had they thought about them, would have diverted from this task. But they didn’t give the federal policies much thought. When formal child welfare services were first established at the beginning of the twentieth century, most Aboriginal peoples lived in remote areas of the province and had been severely diminished in numbers. The impetus for child welfare reform came mainly from women in the urban centres of Vancouver and Victoria. At that time a largely British population, which was either intolerant of or indifferent to the different cultural groups that shared the province, dominated British Columbia. This society lived in a separate world from the Aboriginal communities of the province, and its gaze barely extended beyond “people like us.”

Another reason was the importance of funding formulas in shaping child welfare policy and practice that existed from the beginnings of child welfare

and continues today. Initially, government funding was only available for institutional services. A quarter century passed before it was available for non-Aboriginal children in foster care. Statutory funding for group and community work was then, and is now, almost non-existent for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal child welfare. Yet our history underscores the vital importance of these approaches. It was from community work that the early pioneers gained the support to develop formal services. Later, social workers counted on the support of community members to gain general acceptance for their services. Group work encourages self-help and non-blaming practices. It is tempting to speculate what might have happened if, when the province took over Aboriginal child welfare from the federal government, it focused upon rebuilding groups and communities rather than removing children.

However, the transfer of responsibility for Aboriginal child welfare to the provinces took place without preparation. A great off-loading occurred. Child welfare workers were not recruited from Aboriginal communities, members of these communities were not consulted about what should replace residential schools, and the province and its social workers were expected to pick up the pieces with no extra resources to do so. By this time, a model of child welfare entrenched in individual pathology and individual approaches, evident as a thread throughout our history, had thoroughly taken hold.

Yet it was social workers' own understanding of equality that contributed significantly to their inability to champion the cause of Aboriginal children and families. Social workers argued for the provincial takeover of Aboriginal child welfare, believing strongly that social justice would occur if everyone received the same kind and quality of service. This view did not quickly disappear as a result of the Aboriginal experience with child welfare services; in fact, it remains today. Yet equal does not have to mean identical or "the same"; it could mean equal recognition of differing cultural values and traditions with respect to the welfare of children, appreciating rather than denying diversity. The ongoing challenge for child welfare, then as now, is to recognize difference while achieving equality. Requiring Aboriginal peoples to develop services that mirror our own, a current policy in child welfare, is one example of the injustice of "sameness" repeating itself.

This chapter opened with the remark that the history of child welfare often describes it as an endeavour that oppressed those it was supposed to assist. There is some truth to this account, but it is incomplete. It ignores how early social workers challenged some of the prevalent assumptions about class, gender, and parenting, and how they transformed the volunteer work of women into fully paid professional employment. This chapter highlights the importance of not discarding our past but, rather, understanding the actions of social work pioneers within the context of their times and gaining

appreciation for their accomplishments. Such analysis can also help social workers face their guilt and anger about the Euro-Canadian past of their profession and some of the injustices it perpetrated. It can ensure that we do not continue to repeat the mistakes of our history. The philosopher Conor Cruise O'Brien offers sage advice:

We need to dig up that buried guilt of ours and ascertain its extent and its limits. We need to find how much there is that we can do something about, and how much that we can do nothing to remove. Then we need to get on with doing what we can do and get on also with living with conscious acceptance of that degree of guilt which is inseparable from our condition as the kind of people we are, in the kind of world we happen to live in. (1994, p. 145)

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