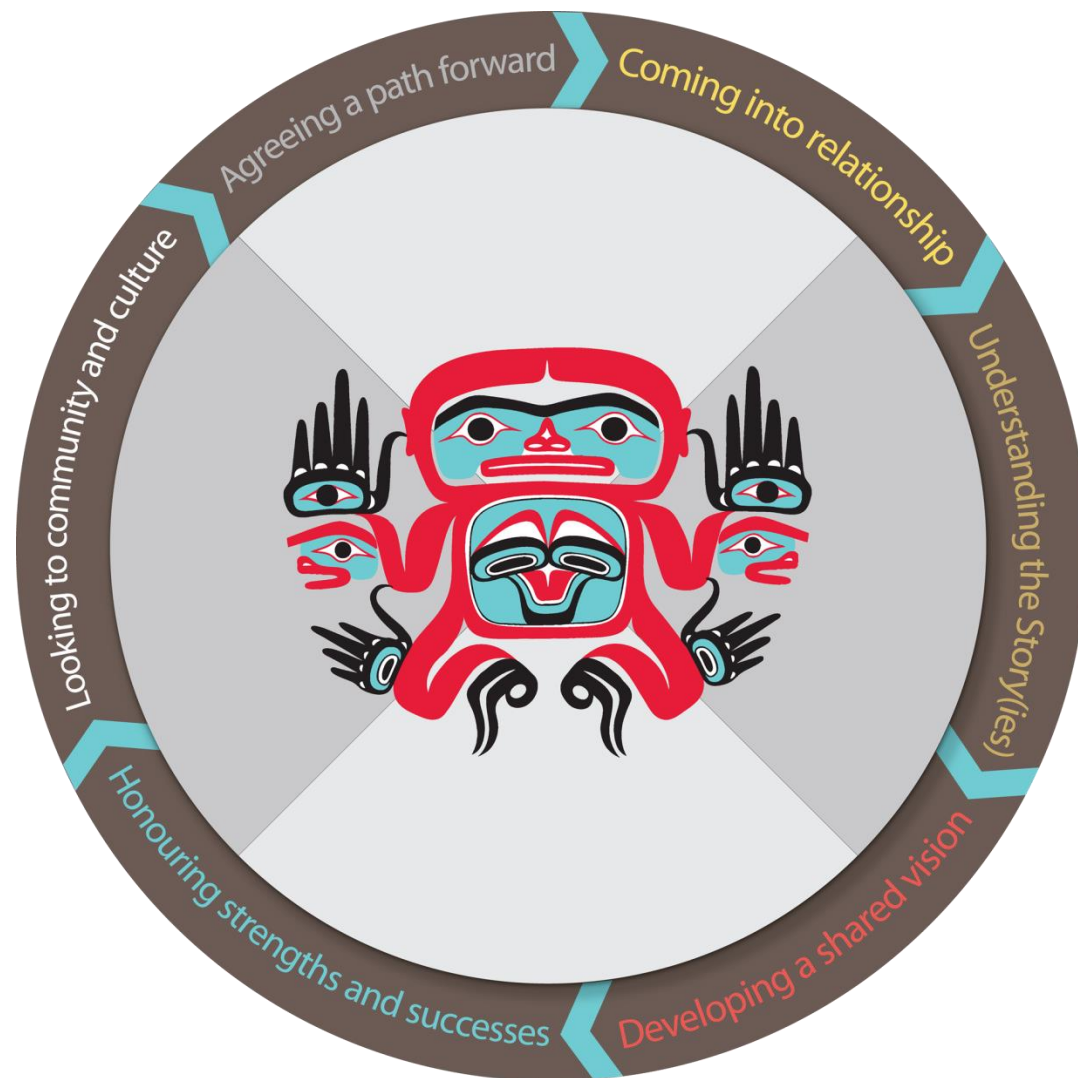


# *Inclusive Foster Care: How Do We Do It?*



*A guide on how to approach Inclusive Foster Care. For those in a child's circle, including social workers, foster caregivers, and the child's parents and extended family.*

## Contents:

- ◆ *What is Inclusive Foster Care?*
- ◆ *The Restorative Practice Process & Inclusive Foster Care*
- ◆ *Tips for Foster Caregivers*
- ◆ *Tips for Social Workers*
- ◆ *Suggestions for Visits*
- ◆ *Message from a Foster Caregiver*
- ◆ *Additional Resources*

## *Inclusive Foster Care*

*is about keeping children safe, connected and loved. It was identified as a step to begin transforming the foster care system to include the on-going participation of parents and extended family in caring for their children. It is about forming relationships which develop and change, as parents and foster caregivers work together to care for the child. It is an intense relationship, demanding co-operation to resolve differences and to work in true partnership. **The focus is the best interest of the child; the goal is preserving the family ties.** It is a partnership where parents and foster caregivers teach and support each other to care for the child....XXXNATION*

*Inclusive Foster Care is practiced to ensure that foster caregivers and workers keep children connected to their **family, community and culture.***

- ◆ ***It builds on the strengths of Indigenous families and communities.***
- ◆ ***It protects the kinship ties and cultural identity that are essential to children's well-being.***
- ◆ ***All involved in and affected by the delivery of Inclusive Foster Care services are full partners.***
- ◆ ***Everyone is kept safe from harm and the threat of harm.***



*In researching Inclusive Foster Care, VACFSS found that it has three components:*

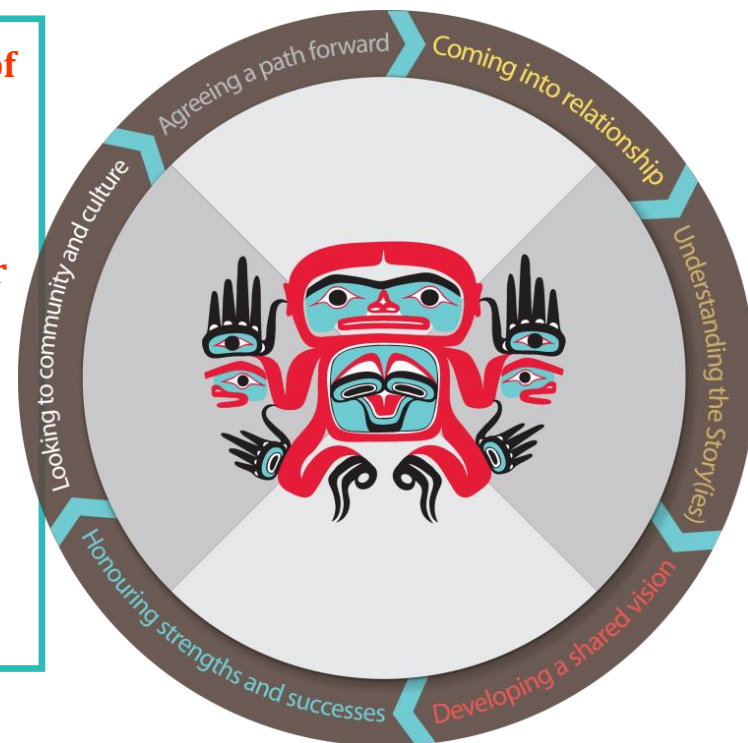
- 1. Partnering with the Child's Parents*
- 2. Supporting the Child's Indigenous Identity*
- 3. Including the Extended Family*

*Most foster caregivers were strong at one of these components, and needed help in another.*



**\*Not sure how to strengthen one of these components of Inclusive Foster Care?**

**Talk about it at an Inclusive Foster Care Meeting. They are held 30 days after a child comes into care and then every 6 months. The foster caregiver, child's Worker and Resource Worker always participate.**



## The Restorative Practice Process

Foster caregivers who have worked towards **all three** components of Inclusive Foster Care describe a particular process for engaging with the child's circle. Known as the Restorative Practice Process, it involves the following steps:

- ◆ Coming Into Relationship
- ◆ Understanding the Stories
- ◆ Developing a Shared Vision
- ◆ Honouring Strengths and Successes
- ◆ Looking to Community and Culture
- ◆ Agreeing a Path Forward

# Foster Caregivers

## Come into Relationship with the child's parents and family by...

- ♦ **Taking it one step at a time:** take a step-by-step approach to building the relationship over time. Try starting with short conversations during visit pick-ups and drop-offs.
- ♦ **Being clear about boundaries while remaining open:** some kind of relationship is always possible, even if it is temporarily limited to ensure safety. Talk to your worker about this.
- ♦ **Managing inconsistency:** this requires flexibility and perseverance but is worth it. Do not require consistency. When it comes to family contact, always have a Plan B in case a visit does not happen.
- ♦ **Communicating directly and electronically as soon as possible:** relationships are easier to maintain when you have direct communication, and regular short texts can really help.

## Understand the Family's Stories by ...

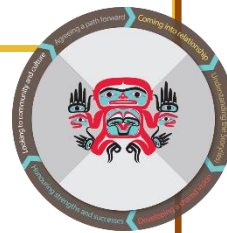
- ♦ Finding common ground in shared life experiences.
- ♦ Participating in training and self-study: learn more about the challenges faced by the family, and the resilience of Indigenous communities.

It is particularly helpful to understand how the following impact adult behavior in ways that are beyond individual blame:

- ♦ Parental mental illness, substance use and/or disability
- ♦ Separation and loss
- ♦ Colonization and intergenerational trauma



**\*Do you have the green light?  
Make sure the child's social worker says it is OK before you contact the child's Nation or new members of the child's circle.**



***“I should have introduced the kids to their biological cousins who were here because now I see...they flock to each other... I should have when they were younger, I should have put more people in their lives.”  
- Foster Caregiver***

## Develop a Shared Vision by...

- ♦ **Committing to the child being with family:** reflect on your personal responsibility to strengthen child's relational and cultural connections: how do your values support this?
- ♦ **Seeing that family and cultural connections meet a core developmental need:** hold a vision of the child's future where they are not 'independent' but interdependent; connected to their family and culture.
- ♦ **Talking about the shared vision for the child:** discuss the plan for the child at Inclusive Foster Care Meetings, Care Plan Meetings and with the social workers.
- ♦ **Seeing Inclusive Foster Care as part of your role:** Fostering a child means actively strengthening their connections.



## Honour Strengths and Successes by...

- ◆ **Acknowledging that parents love their children and are doing the best they can right now.**
- ◆ **Taking a position on strengths:** take a deliberate position that you are here to honour the child's community and culture.
- ◆ **Recognizing the child's circle as people with important expertise:** ask for their advice and be curious about what they have done in the past that has worked well for the child

***“Just to try to meet with the social worker, with the youth, with us foster parents, with Auntie, you know, whoever, like to try to meet and work something out... We were willing to give it a go.”***  
**-Foster Caregiver**

***“The child already has a family – it is right that she knows them.”***

**- Foster Caregiver**

## Support Connections to the Child's Community and Culture by ...

- ◆ **Doing your research:** once you know where the child is from, do some research about the community. Try the VACFSS Inclusive Foster Care website and search engines for community resources and an understanding of what it means to care for a child of that Nation. Your worker or a VACFSS Elder can connect you to more knowledge.
- ◆ **Engaging in cultural activities as a family in the community and at home:** attend VACFSS events like the Cultural Caregiver Camp, Winter Solstice Party and Honouring our Sacred Bundles Ceremony.
- ◆ **Helping the child to participate** in the CIRCLE groups, Urban Butterflies, Culturally Relevant Urban Wellness or the Youth Advisory Committee. These aim to support cultural identity while providing fun and community with peers.
- ◆ **Asking the child's worker about “Touching the Land of Our Relations”:** taking a trip to the child's home territory is a big event that may raise feelings of anxiety but can have a transformative effect. Connect with workers for help with preparation, protocols, and emotional support.
- ◆ **Using resources in schools:** education, resources, and events in the child's school can support cultural knowledge and connections.

## Work on a Path Forward by...

- ◆ **Advocating:** forging a more inclusive path often takes advocacy in support of the child's cultural and relational connections.
- ◆ **Planning** with the social workers and other members of the child's circle. Inclusive Foster Care Meetings were developed for this purpose.



**Inclusive Foster Care** helps to connect the child with their Indigenous community and culture, supporting their Indigenous **identity** by helping them learn about, and be proud of, who they are.

It is important to engage in **community** and **home-based** cultural activities. **Home-based activities can include:** learning how to make food, reading educational books, learning about cultures and territories online, and bringing in Elders/Knowledge Keepers. **Community-based activities could include:** powwows, cultural nights for specific nations and, National Indigenous Day celebrations.

*“He talks about his culture all the time. Like sometimes in a funny way, like he’ll see a salmon or a wolf or something and be like: ‘hey that’s my culture!’ And I’m like: ‘well it’s not really your culture, it’s part of your culture’.*

*I think it gives them a sense of pride and knowledge... he can say the name of his band and he can say where, point it out on the map...”*

*-Foster Caregiver*



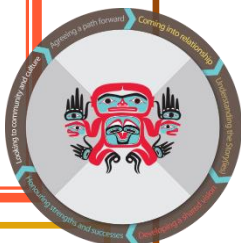
With the consent and support of the social worker, the **most powerful way** to connect a child to their specific culture is visiting the child’s home territory, community and extended family members. Trips home are an important way to make or strengthen relationships with members of the child’s circle and can lead to ongoing relationships and greater openness.

*“She told us she would come in and do smudging in the home with us. I think to have that kind of spiritual stuff to come into the home where they’re living is a good idea.”*  
*Foster Caregiver*

**Indigenous foster caregivers** often draw on their own extended family as a cultural resource for children.

*“They sent the kids back to their home territory...Oh they loved it! They learned stuff and went berry picking...because they’re older [they] enjoyed learning the language...they did enjoy it, it was worthwhile.”* *–Foster Caregiver*

# Social Workers



## Support Inclusive Relationships by...

- ◆ **Getting to know the foster caregivers:** develop a relationship characterized by supporting them in **moments of crisis, sharing as much information as possible, listening** in an active way, and **appreciating** their hard work and expertise.
- ◆ **Facilitating early contact between foster caregivers and child's family and helping them to navigate the relationship-building process:** provide support in setting boundaries, managing inconsistency, and establishing direct communication as soon as possible. Once they can communicate by text it is much easier for them to problem-solve minor issues and share day-to-day updates about the child in a way that maintains their relationship.

## Understand the Stories by...

- ◆ **Empathizing with foster caregivers:** fostering impacts day-to-day family life and is exceptionally hard emotional work; foster caregivers may feel misunderstood and appreciate your understanding of their daily experiences of separation, grief, vulnerability, and worrying about the child.
- ◆ **Giving information:** helping foster caregivers understand the strengths and resilience of the family and empathize with their situation contributes to their ability and willingness to engage in Inclusive Foster Care.

*"I felt supported when I phoned [my social worker]. If I gave her a problem and gave her what I thought was a solution she would either kind of say: 'yes you're on the right track'. Or she'd say: 'well, have you thought about this?'"*

*-Foster Caregiver*

**\* Visiting a child's community often has a significant impact on the child and the foster caregiver. Social workers play a pivotal role in helping foster caregivers understand the importance of these visits. \***



## Develop a Shared Vision...

- ◆ **Discuss what Inclusive Foster Care means:** describe Inclusive Foster Care's three components and how these fit within a foster caregivers' role; review the policy when needed.
- ◆ **Reframe** the view that the child belongs within the foster family's circle to the view that the foster family are joining the child's circle; a child-centered approach.
- ◆ **Understand foster caregivers' vision of why they foster:** provide opportunities for foster caregivers to reflect on their hopes, values, and vision of fostering; this can support positive relationships and provide avenues for a way forward.



## Honour Strengths and Successes by...

- ◆ **Highlighting the strength, gifts and expertise of the child's circle:** reframe parents' actions in a positive way and acknowledge the wisdom of family and culture through inviting storytelling and incorporating parental/familial advice. Ask how the child's circle might facilitate family visits and support the child's placement.
- ◆ **Applying strengths-based practice in working with foster caregivers:** acknowledge foster caregivers' own strengths, successes and expertise; listen to their opinions and support them in making decisions.

\* Developing social worker-foster caregiver partnerships and a more participatory decision-making process is important to avoid foster caregivers "giving notice" on a child. \*

## Connect to Community and Culture by ...

- ◆ **Providing information:** share your knowledge about the child's cultural community, territory and status with the foster caregivers. Be clear about when the foster caregiver can contact the family and community directly and include them in developing the cultural plan.
- ◆ **Supporting foster caregivers to prepare for "Touching the Land of Our Relations" trips:** foster caregivers may experience anxieties in relation to the trip; they want to be better prepared for the visit and need support from social workers and staff.
- ◆ **Recognizing the importance of foster caregivers' networks:** family and friends of the foster caregivers provide practical support (e.g. money, childcare) and emotional support relating to the challenges of fostering.
- ◆ **Acknowledging the foster caregivers' own culture:** help them to reflect on how their own culture and values might help them to care for the child in an Inclusive way.

*"There is a plan to take them out there one day, to their homeland...I'm a bit nervous about the day that happens...so hopefully I'll get some support, you know, some emotional support or have a social worker travel there with me or whatever."*

*-Foster Caregiver*

## Pave a Path Forward by...

- ◆ **Giving space to the voices of the foster caregivers and the child's parents and family:** include the child's circle in planning for the child; honour their knowledge of the family's needs and strengths.
- ◆ **Addressing power imbalances and practicing transparency:** avoid blindsides by developing partnerships in decision-making; utilize Inclusive Foster Care Meetings, Care Plan meetings, family conferences, and other collaborative practices.
- ◆ **Ensuring that everyone is clear we seek to strengthen the four dimensions of permanency and return every child in care to their parents, family, community and culture.**

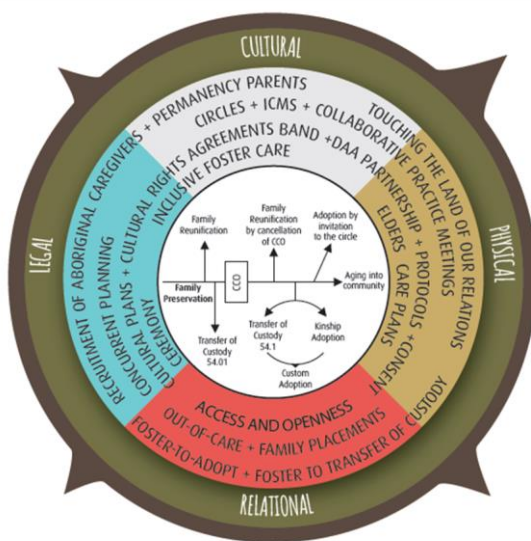




## The Four Dimensions of Permanency

- 🏠 Relational Permanency
- 🏠 Cultural Permanency
- 🏠 Physical Permanency
- 🏠 Legal Permanency

*Does everyone in the circle know about these and how Inclusive Foster Care supports them?*



### ♦ Support to the Child's Family

Inclusive fostering works when the people involved have **concrete supports** which meet their needs, and when there is help to develop and maintain **positive relationships** between the child, their parents and family, and the foster caregivers.

- ♦ Skilled, **involved social workers** are key to building and sustaining the relationships and accessing the **support networks** that keep Inclusive Foster Care on track.
- ♦ Think **empathy, respect** and **inclusion**. Social workers and foster caregivers can support parents by being **accepting and non-judgmental**, by including parents in the planning process and by being **clear and reasonable** with expectations.

### *The Child's Right to Access*

*Every child has a right to access that supports safe connections to their parent(s), family, community(ies), and culture(s).*

*Supporting this right is a restorative child welfare practice that can:*

- ♦ *Strengthen the child's sense of belonging, attachments and resilience*
- ♦ *Support the child's well-being and adjustment to their placement*
- ♦ *Honour the child's cultural identity*
- ♦ *Enable the child's parent(s) to learn, practice and demonstrate parenting skills*
- ♦ *Strengthen parental confidence and capacity to meet the child's needs*
- ♦ *Facilitate and strengthen the parent-child relationships*

*Access Practice Directive – April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018*

### Support to Foster Caregivers

- ♦ Foster caregivers cannot do their jobs unless they are given complete information and are **included as team members** in planning.
- ♦ **Relationship is key to support**. It has to be built-in, routine, ongoing, comfortable, personal, and face-to-face.
- ♦ **The first year of fostering is critical**. It is important to **respect** the energy, knowledge and skill that new caregivers bring to the job, and while **avoiding overload**.

## Social Workers...

- ◆ Help the parent(s) and the caregiver(s) get to know each other through discussions about how to best look after the child; set up an information exchange meeting early in the placement and ask how they will work together. Help them swap information and photos on an ongoing basis.
- ◆ Talk about the child's family and their caregivers in a strengths-based way.
- ◆ Make a flexible plan that forms the basis for working together; fit the plan to the family.
- ◆ Encourage the parent(s) and foster caregiver(s) to work with and evaluate the plan and make changes as needed; encourage them to take over organizing the visits when they're comfortable.
- ◆ Help with anticipating and resolving potential obstacles, e.g. transportation.
- ◆ Set up and mediate a problem-solving process with the expectation that everyone will talk about concerns as they arise and try to find solutions; be open to suggestions and watch out for triangulation.
- ◆ Arrange for sibling contact.
- ◆ Have regular "progress report" meetings with the parent(s) and foster caregiver(s).
- ◆ Make sure the parent(s) receives information about school, medical concerns and other guardianship matters; take the parent(s) to appointments and meetings.

## Suggestions for Visits

### Parents...

- ◆ Make sure you have a support person to help you work through feelings that arise from having your child in care, and the feelings that can be triggered by visits. Ask the social worker for a referral if you don't have a support person in place.
- ◆ If you need to make changes to the visiting plan, try to talk it over with the social worker and foster caregiver(s) ahead of time.
- ◆ Tell the foster caregiver(s) about your child's diet, routines, health, cultural and religious practices, likes and dislikes; you are the expert on your child.
- ◆ Tell the foster caregiver(s) what relatives are called in your family and what you would like your child to call the foster caregiver(s). Share as much as you are comfortable sharing about where you are from and what is important to you.
- ◆ Give the foster caregiver(s) pictures of yourself and other family members to put in the child's room.
- ◆ Let the foster caregiver(s) know when they do something you appreciate.

## Foster Caregivers...

- ◆ Let the parent(s) know that you emphasize – say to yourself "If I had to visit my child in someone else's home I'd feel..."; help the parent(s) feel welcome.
- ◆ Share your 'About Us' information to help the circle get to know you.
- ◆ If you are asked to document visits, avoid feelings of betrayal by ensuring the parent(s) know you are doing this.
- ◆ Convey to the child and parent(s) that you want visits to happen.
- ◆ Involve the child in preparing for the visits: plan an activity, make something for mom/dad etc.
- ◆ Schedule visits to include parents in activities in the foster home, school, and community, e.g. school meetings, clothes shopping, etc.
- ◆ Take pictures during the visits and give these and other mementos to the parent; make a place for the parent(s) in the home by putting up pictures of the parent(s)/extended family.
- ◆ Ask the parent for advice and their wisdom about their child; make no assumptions and always check with the parent(s) before changing the child's appearance in any way, e.g. cutting hair
- ◆ Encourage the child to talk about their parent(s) and family.
- ◆ Help the child express their feelings after visits; see behavioural/emotional upset as a healthy response to grief and loss.



# Message from a Foster Caregiver



*I have chosen to write about what I believe are the fundamental things that **I have had to change about myself**...I have had to learn to **open my heart and my mind** more than I would have thought possible, to put aside all of the judgements that I have had and to most importantly **work with the well part of the family** (myself included)...*

*When I began to foster I had a notion that I was somehow a better parent than these children's birth parents. I hid my judgements behind many good intentions and behaviour that I believed was "right" or "best". **Thank goodness I learned better**. I now believe that I have been **given the privilege** of looking after these children for parents who for whatever reasons are unable to do so...I have found that trust has developed between the children's parents and me because of the **inclusiveness** - the **trust** built from honest, direct and non-judgmental communication - and as a result, the children feel free to express themselves, their love for their parents, their feelings of loyalty to both their parents and myself, without feeling that somehow they "should" be behaving differently...*

*For my part I had to work really hard at letting go of my "martyr" stand that I was taking and forget about the "after all I've done for you's" that were running through my mind and look at this woman - their mother - with compassion; to find an honest way to tell her how her behaviour affects her children, how it affects me and **listen to her feelings** and to **what she wants for our future relationship as a family**...The important thing is that it is and will continue to be an important part of their lives and it is my responsibility, because I have agreed to **help** raise these children, to make the very best of all the relationships in the children's lives...*

*Our **job**, however difficult it may be, is to help and nurture these families, to work with the well part of the family and **build on the strengths** that are there...It is my hope that all of us who care for children other than our own are able to look beyond what may be familiar to us and find new ways of opening up one another and **redefining "family"** for the benefit of these wonderful children whose care we have been entrusted with...*

*Debbie Hartlen in Towards Inclusive Foster Care: A policy handbook (VACFSS, 2003).*



## Check out these resources...

### ◆ **The VACFSS Inclusive Foster Care website**

Developed in response to caregiver requests for help with Inclusive Foster Care, the site is packed full of information and resources to support caregivers and workers keep children in care connected to family, community and culture. Find out about current cultural events in the local community, watch videos and hear stories of Inclusive Foster Care in action, learn what culturally grounded caregiving means for children of specific Nations, and link to a wide range of resources.  
Going Live: January 2020.

### ◆ **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)**

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples outlines and defines the individual and collective rights of Indigenous peoples, including their ownership rights to cultural and ceremonial expression, identity, language, employment, health, education and other issues. It prohibits the discrimination against Indigenous peoples and promotes their full and effective participation in all matters that concern them. Developed through 1994-2006, it was not until 2016 that Canada officially adopted and promised to implement the declaration fully; in 2017, the BC provincial government announced that it will govern in accordance with the principles outlined in the Declaration.

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>

### ◆ **Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC)**

The TRC was organized by the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement and was officially established in 2008 with the purpose of documenting the history and lasting impacts of the Canadian Indian Residential School system on Indigenous students and their families. The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) is an archival repository home to the research, documents, and testimony collected from 2008-2015. Check out the NCTR website with links to the TRC Final Report, Calls to Action, and other related documents.

<http://nctr.ca/reports.php>





◆ **Final Report of Special Advisor Chief Ed John – Indigenous Child Welfare in BC**

“Indigenous Resilience, Connectedness and Reunification – From Root Causes to Root Solutions” is the final report from Special Advisor Grand Chief Ed John on Indigenous Children in Care. Grand Chief Ed John travelled to many Indigenous communities to hear firsthand from the families and communities about their children in care and receive advice from those who are directly impacted by the existing laws, regulations, policies, and practices of the state. The report includes the context of Indigenous child welfare service delivery (e.g. MCFD, delegated agencies, UNDRIP) and the context behind the report, areas for focused action including prevention services, reunification and permanency planning, and policy frameworks, and final reflections.

<http://fns.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Final-Report-of-Grand-Chief-Ed-John-re-Indig-Child-Welfare-in-BC-November-2016.pdf>

◆ **National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG)**

The National Inquiry into MMIWG was established in 2016 to 2019 to gather truths and testimony from family members, survivors of violence, experts, and Knowledge Keepers at public hearings across the country. The National Inquiry’s Final Report reveals the root causes of violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people, as well as Calls for Justice directed at governments, institutions, social service providers, industries, and all Canadians.

<https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>

◆ **CBC Indigenous**

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has an Indigenous section that covers current social issues, Indigenous events, and inspiring Indigenous artists, leaders, and activists. Check out CBC Indigenous Top Stories or focus on issues and events happening in BC through the local section. You can also follow CBC Indigenous on Facebook and Twitter!

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous>

◆ **You can also check out CBC Radio and Other Podcasts**

**Unreserved** is the radio space for Indigenous community, culture, and conversation. Host Rosanna Deerchild introduces listeners to the storytellers, culture makers and community shakers from across the country. Listen live or download podcasts to listen on the go!

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved>

**The Secret Life of Canada** highlights the people, places and stories that have been hidden in Canadian history. Although this podcast is not solely focused on Indigenous stories, there are quite a few stories focused on Indigenous history.

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/secretlifeofcanada>

**New Fire** focuses on stories from remote reserves to bustling big cities sharing the voices and passions of Indigenous youth today. Urban Native Girl, Lisa Charleyboy, weaves her gift as a storyteller and personal experiences together to tell the contemporary stories of the Indigenous people of Turtle Island.

◆ **Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN)**

The Aboriginal Peoples Television Network is a Canadian broadcast television network. APTN was established in 1992; the network airs and produced programs made by, for and about Indigenous peoples in Canada and the US. Check out show options and schedules on their website, including APTN documentaries, kid shows, and news. APTN has full shows and docuseries available to watch on their website, including “We Were Children”, “Taken”, “Mohawk Girls”, “Medicine Line”, “First Contact”, “All Our Relations”, and “Urban Native”, among others.

<https://aptn.ca/>