

A close-up photograph of a hand placing a smooth, greyish-brown stone onto a stack of four other smooth stones of various colors (brown, tan, grey) on a pebbly beach. The background is a blurred view of the ocean and sky.

HONOURING OUR DIVERSITY

BRINGING ABORIGINAL CHILD RIGHTS TO LIFE
WITHIN URBAN CHILD WELFARE POLICY & PRACTISE



AUTHOR: ALISON JOHNSTON, M.A.

ARTWORK PROVIDED BY VACFSS YOUTH

PROJECT GUIDED BY:

The VACFSS Diversity Committee: Bernadette Spence, Christina Marie Entrekin, Wally Rupert, Bunny Leblanc
The VACFSS Cultural Committee

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS:

VACFSS notes with deep appreciation the contributions made during the research stage of this project by the:

Aboriginal Foster Parents Association
Indian Residential Schools Survivors Society
The Urban Native Youth Association

Vancouver Aboriginal Child & Family Services Society - January 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. CELEBRATING ABORIGINAL CHILD RIGHTS	2
2. OUR SACRED RESPONSIBILITY: THE CHILDREN	4
2.1 The Task: Restoring Culture Within Systems Of Care	4
2.2 Background: Cultural Due Diligence	6
3. OUR MANDATE: HEALTHY CHILDREN, HEALTHY PEOPLES	8
3.1 The Moral & Legal Foundations	8
4. OUR AUTHORITY: INHERENT RIGHTS	10
4.1 Inherent Rights in Law	10
4.2 Inherent Rights in Practise	11
4.3 Table Summarizing Cultural Rights	13
Key to Table 4.3: Significant Laws & Agreements on Cultural Rights	14
5. OUR DESTINATION: CHILD RIGHTS, SACRED GROUND	15
5.1 Safeguarding Aboriginal Child Rights	15
6. HONOURING CULTURAL PROTOCOLS	18
6.1 Understanding & Upholding Cultural Protocols	18
6.2 Policy Respecting Cultural Protocols	24
6.3 PRACTISE CONGRUENT WITH ABORIGINAL CHILD RIGHTS	33
6.3 (A) Assuring Cultural Sustainability	33
6.3 (B) Implementing the Principle of Indivisible Heritage	36
7. CONCLUSIONS: MANIFESTING ABORIGINAL CHILD RIGHTS	38
APPENDIX 1: U.N. DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES	40
APPENDIX 2: REPORT GLOSSARY - Key Terms and their Meanings	54



1. CELEBRATING ABORIGINAL CHILD RIGHTS

The landscape of child welfare work is shifting in Canada - bringing increased awareness of the specific rights and needs of Aboriginal children. There is active dialogue on how to best support Aboriginal children, especially their cultural rights which are vital for health.

The Vancouver Aboriginal Child & Family Services Society (VACFSS) has the privilege of helping to carry forward this work on behalf of Aboriginal children and their families. Its role is to support the inherent rights of Aboriginal Peoples, by revitalizing cultural systems of care and nurturing for Aboriginal children. The health of the children is the health of the people.

In this work VACFSS is reflecting on how to enrich and deepen its services through cultural knowledge. Moving in this direction does not mean overlaying culture or showcasing cultural systems of care and nurturing. It requires all services to actually flow from culture: to embody cultural values, knowledge and teachings. In an urban setting, where many cultures meet, this necessitates great humility and patience for cultural and cross-cultural protocols. There is no single expression of 'culture' or quick summary of 'cultural rights'. Therein lies the difficulty and the necessity for a document such as this.

VACFSS provides support to children from over 50 distinct Aboriginal cultures: each culture has its own language, laws and governance system for maintaining the integrity of cultural knowledge. As an urban Aboriginal agency, VACFSS thus faces unique challenges. Every aspect of its operations must respect and honour culture, while maintaining and supporting cultural diversity. There are no blueprints for this; it is a journey for VACFSS to map.

VACFSS is privileged to work with Aboriginal Peoples across Canada to reshape systems of care, with a restorative focus. It is on a learning journey, travelling together with the many peoples it serves. The Ancestors must be heard. So must the children themselves, since it is their voices that will soften the edges of child welfare practise. This is a time for renewed dreams and visionary action. Culturally grounded dialogue must guide the transition.

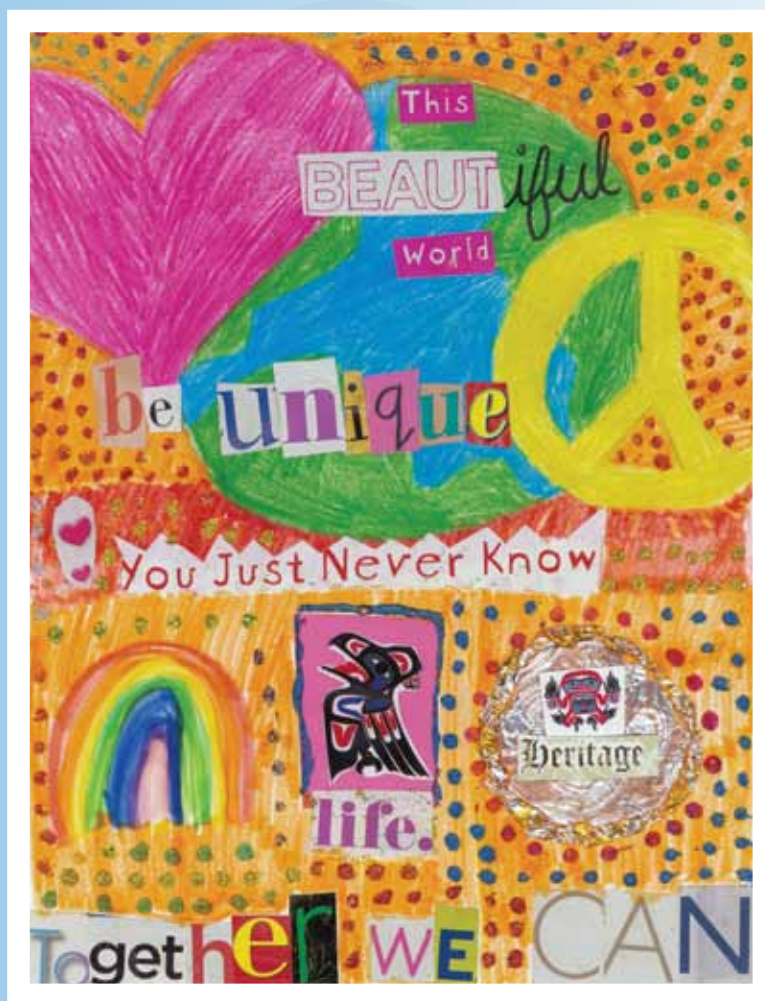
This report is a further step in VACFSS' endeavour to define how culture should be expressed and supported within its services, after its *Cultural Touchstones* inquiry of 2007¹. It asks: What authority does VACFSS have to give priority to culture? How should culture translate into daily practise? Since both topics spark strong emotions and opinions, the first section of this report explores law on the rights of Indigenous Peoples - to demystify cultural rights and present key facts. The second portion synthesizes interviews with VACFSS staff - to harness the wealth of cultural knowledge within VACFSS.

The report covers a wide terrain of issues, each deeply layered and culturally vital. Given this, it strives to balance 'technical' considerations with cultural protocols. Child welfare services for Aboriginal children are not complete, balanced or culturally grounded without the spiritual aspect. It is spiritual practices that hold, and carry forward, cultural knowledge and values.

VACFSS is working from these fundamentals of Aboriginal child rights to strengthen both social work practise and foster care delivery. Its goal is to harmonize 'professional' standards (e.g. clinical knowledge), and other support services, with cultural knowledge systems - uplifting not just individual well-being but also collective health, since the two are intimately connected.

Each child needs to be honoured and supported as a spiritual being, in keeping with customary practises. It is not enough to address only the surface aspects of health and wellness. The language of the sacred needs to be brought into concepts and systems for child welfare.

1. *Cultural Touchstones for Children & Youth: A Report on Consultations with Service Providers, Caregivers, Youth and VACFSS Employees Regarding Culture in Residential Resources*, issued by VACFSS in October 2007.



2. OUR SACRED RESPONSIBILITY: THE CHILDREN

2.1 The Task: Restoring Culture Within Systems Of Care

VACFSS originated as an advocacy agency. It was founded in 2001 to stem the flow of Aboriginal children coming into government care. Given this, its work has focussed on helping Aboriginal families believe once again in their role and ability as caretakers. This has included:

- reversing the continuing colonial attitudes and practices in Canada that devalue and undermine Aboriginal families
- identifying practices congruent with the rights and needs of Aboriginal children
- repatriating care to Aboriginal families, with supports to counteract the inter-generational impacts of Canada's destructive residential schools system
- building partnerships to promote standards and practise that honour culture

Previously, 'conventional' approaches to social work and foster care practise with Aboriginal children and their families undermined culture and thus child welfare. Colonial concepts of 'care' and 'wellness' persisted². However, the Hughes Report of 2006 has called for restorative

2. From Loss to Learning by B.C. Representative for Children & Youth Mary-Ellen Turpel-Lafond (2008); Broken Promises by PIVOT (2008); Reconciliation in Child Welfare: Touchstones of Hope, by National Indian Child Welfare Association (2006)

measures³. Meanwhile, recent developments in international law clarify the baselines (see Table 4.3, p.13). Canada's duties to Aboriginal Peoples under international law include:

- "revitalization" of culture
- "redress" and "reparations" for forced systems of assimilation
- "preventative measures" for further culture loss and genocide
- "special measures" to support cultural identity among children in care

Now, systems of support for Aboriginal children are being evaluated with fresh candour. At last, questions that were long avoided in Canada are being aired.

VACFSS was delegated partial authority under the *B.C. Child, Family & Community Services Act* (1996) in 2001. The Delegation Confirmation Agreement signed in 2007 expanded VACFSS' role to a greater scope of responsibility for child welfare and family preservation. VACFSS has moved from a place of advocating for children and families within the child welfare system to being directly responsible for creating the change necessary for positive outcomes. The historical significance of VACFSS' new role is immense. VACFSS is the first urban Aboriginal agency in Canada to assume full child protection responsibility. This follows the United Nations (U.N.) adopting the *U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, earlier in 2007. It coincides with Canada's formal apology in 2008 for the widespread abuse of Aboriginal children in residential schools⁴. VACFSS now can support the process of reconciliation, by helping families to overcome the inter-generational traumas of colonialism.

VACFSS' primary task is to bring shape to the vision of restorative care. The task is both beautiful and intimidating. It means tackling the root causes of the continuing inter-generational trauma, from a holistic perspective. This includes naming the deepest barriers to change, in all spheres (e.g. at the family, community, nation, and country levels). This also includes embracing topics that may be skirted or avoided within other dialogue arenas - due to conflicts of interest, politics, dynamics associated with healing or other core issues. Through candid reflection and frank dialogue it is possible to achieve the necessary breakthroughs.

VACFSS is well on its way to laying a foundation for implementing Aboriginal child rights as the standard and norm within its child welfare services. Its policy for governance and for inclusive foster care establish a vision for supporting Aboriginal children consistent with their specific cultural rights.

This report asks: What fundamental changes are necessary, to ensure healthy Aboriginal children and families? What are the building blocks to fully restoring cultural systems of care? And, how can VACFSS strengthen and support cultural processes within its own operations and services?

3. *B.C. Children & Youth Review: An Independent Review of B.C.'s Child Protection System* by the Hon. Ted Hughes, April 7, 2006.

4. *The Government of Canada Apology to Aboriginal Peoples* for the residential school system was delivered by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in Canada's House of Commons in Ottawa on June 11, 2008.



2.2 Background: Cultural Due Diligence

As an Aboriginal agency, VACFSS is guided by the mission, vision and ethic of nurturing children as spiritual beings, consistent with Aboriginal cultures and customary laws.

It is focussed on ensuring that “the rights, safety, well-being *and spirit* of Aboriginal children and families are upheld, honoured and protected⁵. VACFSS holds this as a sacred responsibility, inherent to all Aboriginal cultures.

As an agency, VACFSS is mandated to give holistic support and nurturing to Aboriginal children who are ‘in care’. This mandate arises from shared cultural values: which have distinct expressions culture to culture, but similar core values. Aboriginal Peoples across Canada have in common an ethic of honouring the children. Nation to nation, customary law addresses the needs of the children: those born as well as yet to come.

VACFSS’ mandate has been supported within provincial legislation, throughout various sections of the B.C. Child, Family and Community Services Act. Its capacity to lead and to educate, on Aboriginal child rights, will be vital to reaching a new understanding and new basis for partnerships both provincially and nationally.

VACFSS is aware of the need to build future systems of care upon deep foundations, embracing the full spectrum of Aboriginal child rights. It is aware that there is not much time for a turnaround on behalf of Aboriginal children. Culture loss still is accelerating, due to the momentum of assimilation. To break the cycle of culture loss, no topic of significance can be off limits or delayed.

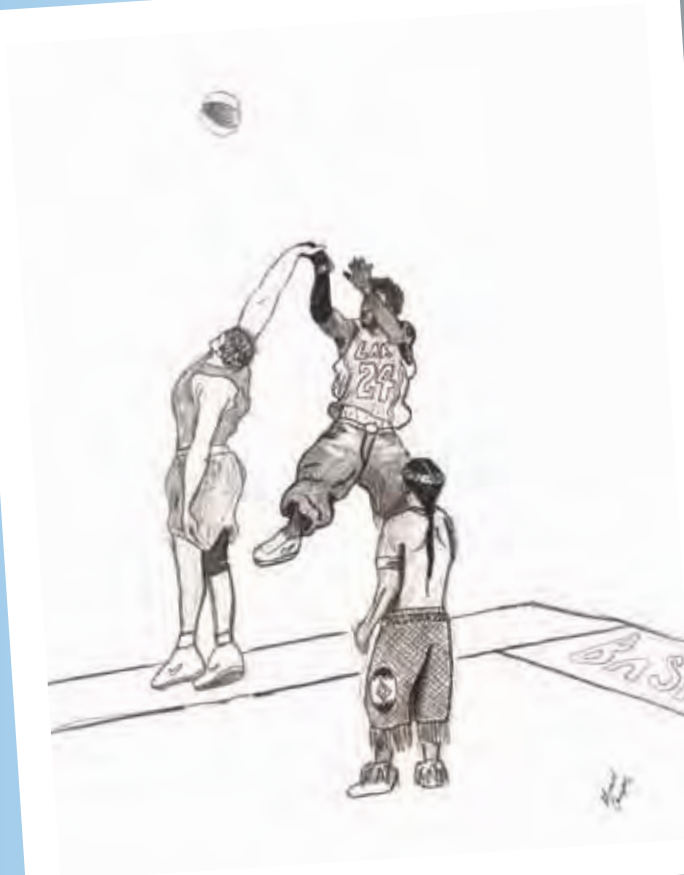
VACFSS has committed to being a strength-based and child-centred agency, rooted in cultural knowledge and values. It is in the process of creating a framework for child welfare that reflects and upholds cultural systems of care. The VACFSS Governance Policy Manual outlines the values inherent to this framework: "Respect, Integrity, Humility, Strength and Belonging" (p.9-12). The VACFSS Cultural Touchstones Report (2007) elaborates the specific foundations, including wrap-around supports. Operationalizing this means integrating the Knowledge and Instructions of the Ancestors. Sacred knowledge must guide decision-making. Cultural responsibilities and cultural disciplines must govern practise. Customary law is the compass for this process.

The basis for VACFSS' work is its protocol agreements with the delegated child and family service agencies of Aboriginal Peoples provincially (and nationally, as necessary). These agreements establish the process for working together to define, safeguard and meet the specific cultural rights of Aboriginal children. Roles and responsibilities with respect to customary law and cultural protocols are clarified. Avenues for identifying and calling upon practising Knowledge Keepers are opened.

As an agency serving Aboriginal Peoples, VACFSS is subject to cultural protocols (defined in Section 6.1, p. 21). Supplying "essential social services to Aboriginal children and families who are 'at risk'", as per the VACFSS Constitution (p. 1), requires due diligence to cultural protocols. VACFSS is now grounding its operations in both cultural and clinical protocols, consistent with Aboriginal 'best practices'. Its services must align with customary practices for assuring balance and health. Its own governance must reflect the inter-generational rights and responsibilities that characterize governance within Aboriginal cultures. This is fundamental to inclusive care.

VACFSS is responsible for upholding the full spectrum of rights of Aboriginal children. The right of Aboriginal children to culture is most clearly defined and protected in international law (see Section 4.0). Although international law itself is often viewed as a new colonial approach, it nonetheless offers a framework for safeguarding the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples. Relevant laws are summarized in the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). VACFSS must navigate by this body of international law (which recognizes and includes pre-existing customary law), to make the critical changes in time for this generation.

For VACFSS, compliance with international standards means re-integrating sacred knowledge into systems of care. This requires implementing the core cultural values, teachings and laws of Aboriginal Peoples across its operations. Guidance from practising Knowledge Keepers will be integral to this task. The agency and its board must develop a process for engaging Knowledge Keepers, to fully operationalize cultural and cross-cultural protocols.



3. OUR MANDATE: HEALTHY CHILDREN, HEALTHY PEOPLES

3.1 The Moral & Legal Foundations

Culturally, Aboriginal nations are child-honouring societies. Among Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, there is a common ethic of grounding the spirit of the children through spiritual teachings. Traditionally, cultural knowledge and values are passed to the next generation, via strict protocols. Children learn to honour the sacred inside themselves, so that the sacred balance of life can be maintained within their own life journey and lifetime, as well as between generations. Often, this is described and translated within and between Aboriginal cultures through the Seventh Generation Principle (also referred to as an “Ecological & Relational World View”, see Glossary), which reflect shared knowledge and values. These shared ethics include:

- understanding that everything is connected within the Sacred Circle of Life
- remembering that our actions have a profound impact on future generations
- learning to nurture oneself while also caring for the grandchildren of our collective grandchildren, as well as those of All Our Relations
- practising gratitude, humility, generosity, love and respect

These ethics underpin customary law, within and between Aboriginal nations. Aboriginal children have the right to know such teachings - as expressed and practised within their own culture(s) -

and/or through appropriate cultural parallels if direct connection is lacking or difficult to access within an urban setting. They cannot know their culture, intimately, without understanding the depth of sacred knowledge carried within it.

VACFSS has two levels of responsibility in nurturing the holistic health and well-being of Aboriginal children. It must respect and support the cultural diversity of the urban Aboriginal community served. Meanwhile, it must open meaningful avenues for the children to access and know their own culture(s) (in particular, cultural teachings and cultural avenues for wellness and healing - which address the full essence of health). This means abiding by the core values and principles within Aboriginal Peoples' respective customary laws. Careful navigation of common cultural protocols is the critical first step (see Section 6.0).

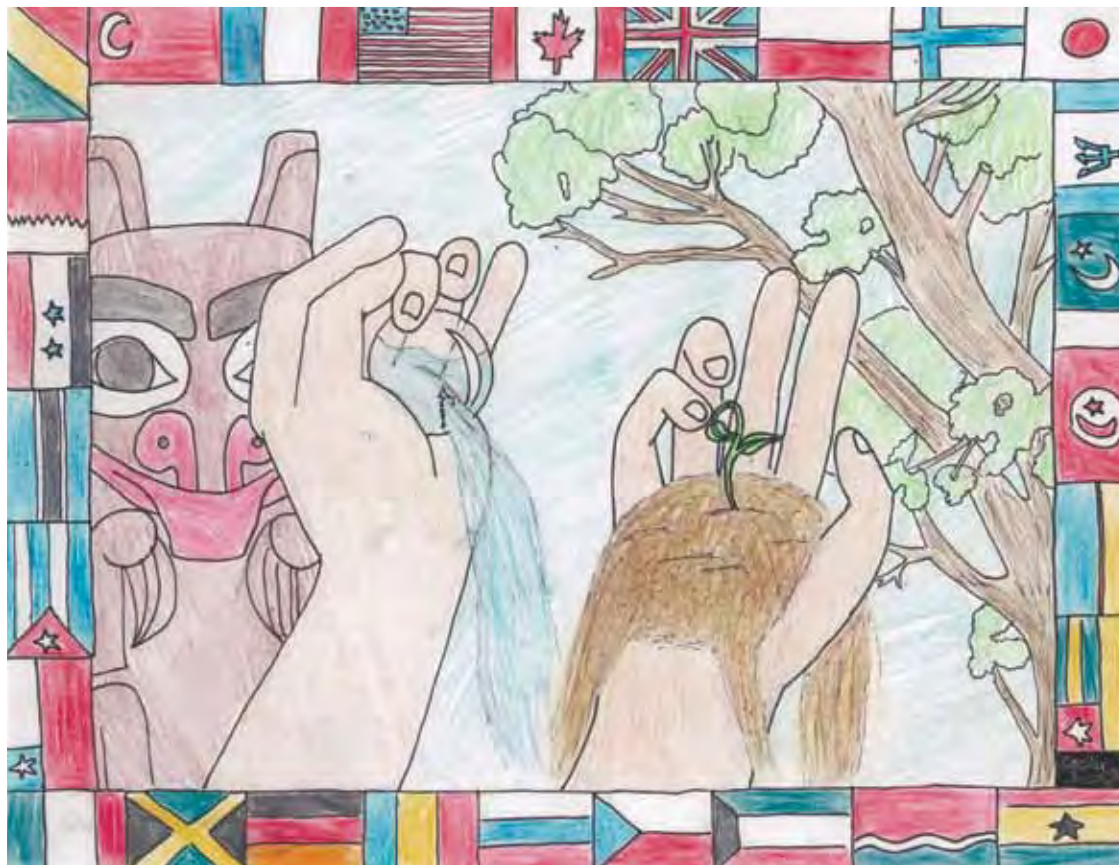
The cultural grounding of VACFSS, as an agency, rests on thorough and disciplined adherence to cultural protocols. VACFSS is in the process of developing such practise across its operations: within its administration, as well as in all Child Protection, Family Preservation and Guardianship programs. It is elaborating a Governance Framework and policy for adhering to cultural protocols⁶. This is fundamental to:

- fulfilling our sacred responsibility and legal duty to Aboriginal children
- being 'child centred', in a culturally appropriate way
- assuring 'strength-based' practise, based on the strengths of Aboriginal cultures as child-centred societies
- enriching child welfare practise through the integration of Aboriginal world views
- infusing Aboriginal knowledge and values into daily child welfare practise
- assuring cultural connection and cultural identity for Aboriginal children 'in care'
- nurturing the spirit of the child, consistent with customary law

Connected to the UNDRIP and accompanying law, there are a number of established and evolving standards, which spell out the rights of Indigenous Peoples and clarify the specific rights of Aboriginal children. It is vital for VACFSS to develop culturally sustainable systems for child welfare (see Section 6.3, p. 33) - which maintain, protect and promote cultural identity - in keeping with such 'best practices' established internationally.

It should be noted that VACFSS has a leadership role both in Canada and internationally in identifying the necessary changes and improving standards in child welfare practise. Its example will be pivotal to raising awareness of Aboriginal child rights. Only when Aboriginal child rights are understood across society can they be fully upheld and protected - with all of us engaged and involved. Accomplishing this is critical for enabling today's Aboriginal children to dream and thrive, to experience success in their endeavours.

6. Progress and goals are addressed in the VACFSS Annual Report 2011, which identifies the cultural grounding of programs as an operational priority.



4. OUR AUTHORITY: INHERENT RIGHTS

4.1 Inherent Rights in Law

Child welfare is regarded as a provincial responsibility within Canada. In British Columbia, the *B.C. Child, Family & Community Services Act* (CFCSA) (1996) governs child welfare. VACFSS is delegated authority by the Director under section 93(1) of the CFCSA. Its delegation agreement recognizes Section 25 and Section 35(1) the national *Constitution Act* (1982), which affirm both the inherent rights and treaty rights held by Aboriginal Peoples of Canada.

While these provincial and national laws provide useful windows for discussing Aboriginal child rights, we must look beyond Canadian horizons to actually understand the scope of existing cultural rights. We have only an abbreviated understanding of cultural rights if we rely solely on law that is familiar to most Canadians. The cultural rights of Aboriginal children have much more depth in law than currently described in provincial or national legislation.

There are four layers of law that define Aboriginal child rights within the child welfare system:

- Customary law, which conveys the sacred Knowledge and Instructions of the Ancestors, and is recognized by the U.N. as a category of international law
- Provincial legislation, translated into practise in B.C. through the *Aboriginal Operational & Practise Standards & Indicators* (AOPSI) (1999)

- National legislation, beginning with the recognition of collective rights within the Constitution Act (1982) and supplemented by federal human rights law such as the Canadian Human Rights Act
- International law confirming the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples, summarized in the United Nations (U.N.) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) and clarified through parallel standard-setting instruments (see Table 4.3 and Appendix 1)

Canadian laws addressing the cultural rights of Indigenous Peoples remain in the early stage of development. There still are colonial overtones to many of these laws - which are particularly evident when they are examined as a complete set of laws. Many layers of contradictions exist within the various pieces of national legislation and national policy concerning Aboriginal rights. Consequently, several U.N. human rights agencies have instructed Canada to comply with international law on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. The U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child has advised Canada to ensure that all provinces are aware of their country's obligations under international law⁷.

Canada and its provinces now are entering a promising era of relationship building with Indigenous Peoples. Canada's signing of the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) in November 2010 signalled a fresh beginning and has provided a practical framework for reconciliation and partnership.

4.2 Inherent Rights in Practise

The U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) affirms the inherent right to base child welfare practise on customary law and cultural protocols. It provides a framework for strengthening provisions of the B.C. Child, Family and Community Services Act, including recent provincial initiatives such as the Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Framework.

The UNDRIP synthesizes the many elements of international law which recognize, safeguard and elaborate cultural rights. Canada is a party to all of the international treaties that it is based on. All of these underlying treaties are legally binding on Canada and its provinces.

The UNDRIP is significant because it:

- reiterates existing international law on the rights of Indigenous Peoples
- reaffirms the inherent right to self-determination of Indigenous Peoples
- confirms the principle of prior informed consent, to support self-determination
- spells out the internationally adopted minimum standards, based on existing international law as well as accompanying legal and moral principles

7. See Concluding Observations: Canada, U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child, 34th Session, 27 October, 2003. Concerns about "lack of awareness, in the provinces" with respect to Canada's legal obligations were further noted in 2006 by the U.N. Committee on Economic, Cultural & Social Rights (doc. E/C.12/CAN/C04).

It unequivocally recognizes and reinforces Indigenous Peoples' ancestral rights and customary law as the basis for governance and relationship building.

Minimum standards elaborated in the UNDRIP and accompanying international law include:

- self determination, as peoples
- protection against forced assimilation
- reparation and redress for violations of rights
- revitalization of culture and customary practises
- maintenance, protection and promotion of sacred knowledge systems
- preventative measures for culture loss
- special measures to safeguard culture when cultural expressions are under serious threat

VACFSS has clear authority to develop a system of care for Aboriginal children and families based on inherent ancestral rights. The cultural rights of Aboriginal children are not hypothetical. They are not even controversial. The parameters of cultural rights have been confirmed and settled at the United Nations.

VACFSS has the historical privilege and opportunity to develop a rights-based framework for Aboriginal child welfare and social work practise. By law and by cultural protocol, it must be Aboriginal Peoples that lead the way in this endeavour. The provincial or federal governments can look to VACFSS and its sister agencies for appropriate guidance on bringing child welfare systems (and connected initiatives impacting the cultural health of Aboriginal children, families and peoples) in line with inherent cultural rights and into compliance with international standards.

International law on the rights of Indigenous Peoples is simply another language and tool for safeguarding culture. It is one spoke in the wheel; one rock or timber in the wall for building the dream. It opens space for protecting the sacred. It recognizes the inalienable connection to ancestral lands (as well as the indivisible link between spiritual ceremonies, sacred knowledge, cultural teachings and languages - which all profoundly link to the land). This is the rightful inheritance of Aboriginal children. This is a common purpose worthy of uniting behind.

4.3 Table Summarizing Cultural Rights

TABLE 4.3 - CULTURAL RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Human Rights	ICESCR, ICCPR, UDHR, UNDRIP, VDPA, DADRIP
Protection Against Genocide (affirming U.N. Genocide Convention)	UNDRIP, DADRIP
Protection Against Forced Assimilation	UNDRIP, DADRIP
Right to Redress for Forced Assimilation & Other Rights Violations	UNDRIP, DADRIP
Right to Self Determination as Peoples (affirming rights existing under ICESCR and ICCPR)	UNDRIP, UDCD, UNCSICH, UNCPPDCE, VDPA, DADRIP
Right to Prior Informed Consent	UNDRIP, DADRIP
Cultural Rights as Integral Part of Human Rights (affirming rights existing under ICERD)	UNDRIP, UDCD, DADRIP
Recognition of Collective Rights (affirming rights existing under ICESCR and ICCPR)	UNDRIP, UCRC, UDCD, CSICH, CPPDCE, ILO 169, VDPA, DADRIP
Recognition of Customary Law and Practices	UNDRIP, CSICH, ILO 169, DADRIP
Safeguards for Cultural Diversity	UNDRIP, UDCD, CPPDCE, DADRIP
Right to Safeguard & Revitalize Culture	UNDRIP, CSICH, CPPDCE, DADRIP
Right to Maintain & Protect Cultural Heritage	UNDRIP, CSICH, WHC, DADRIP
Right to Religious Freedom i.e. Spiritual Traditions, Procedures, Practices	UNDRIP, UNCRC, ICCPR, DADRIP
Protection of 'Traditional Knowledge'	UNDRIP, UDCD, CSICH, CPPDCE, DADRIP
Right to Conduct Cultural Practices	UNDRIP, CSICH, CPPDCE, DADRIP
Right of Child to Cultural Identity	UNDRIP, UNCRC, DADRIP
Right of Child to Holistic Health	UNDRIP, UNCRC, DADRIP
Right to Education that Supports Cultural Identity	UNDRIP, UNCRC, UDCD, CPPDCE, DADRIP
Right to Education in Own Indigenous Language	UNDRIP, UNCRC, UDCD, CPPDCE, DADRIP
Right to Maintain Full Connection to Ancestral Lands	UNDRIP, CSICH, WHC, ILO 169, DADRIP

Key to Table 4.3: Significant Laws & Agreements on Cultural Rights

LEGALLY BINDING AGREEMENTS:

CPPDCE - UNESCO Convention on the Protection & Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions;

CSICH - UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage;

ICCPR - U.N. International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights;

ICERD - U.N. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;

ICESCR - U.N. International Covenant on Economic, Social & Cultural Rights;

UNCRC - U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child;

UNDRIP - U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (based upon the ICCPR, ICERD, ICESCR and other accompanying law *);

WHC - UNESCO World Heritage Convention

OTHER MORAL NORMS:

DADRIP - Organization of American States Draft American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;

ILO 169 - U.N. International Labour Organization Convention 169;

UDCD - UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity;

UDHR - Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

UNDRIP - U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;

VDPA - U.N. Vienna Declaration & Programme of Action

* It is vital to note that Canada has signed all the legally binding umbrella treaties: ICCPR, ICERD and ICESCR *

* The UNDRIP must always be read together with the accompanying law. As noted by U.N. Special Rapporteur S. James Anaya, the declaration builds "upon a well-established body of international human rights law" (8th Session of the U.N Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, New York USA, 2008).



5. OUR DESTINATION: CHILD RIGHTS, SACRED GROUND

5.1 Safeguarding Aboriginal Child Rights

Aboriginal children - including those 'in care' and/or in cities - have the right to know their beauty and strength (as well as their child rights) within their own cultural identity. This is fundamental to their health. They have a right to develop spiritually, according to their peoples' customary laws, ceremonial practices and life teachings and/or compatible cultural ways. None of this is possible outside, or separate from, cultural protocols for imparting ancestral knowledge and values.

For VACFSS to materialize Aboriginal child rights, consistent with customary law and other international law summarized in the UNDRIP, it must continue the journey onto visionary ground. There are no templates for such a task. There is no institutional example to follow. It is the voice of the Ancestors that will guide VACFSS: through the cultural protocols that have governed the sharing of cultural knowledge and teachings for millennia. VACFSS' protocol agreements with Aboriginal Peoples at the nation level define the roles and responsibilities. Guidance from practising Knowledge Keepers will lay the foundation.

Among Aboriginal Peoples, governance always has connected to the children. Lifelong systems of learning were in place through families, Elders and recognized Knowledge Keepers to instill cultural knowledge and values across generations. This teaching took place primarily through ceremonies and daily life activities, and was particularly disciplined for children carrying leadership qualities. It grounded each child spiritually, assuring respect for customary laws. Every child learned their purpose, roles, responsibilities and contributions within the Sacred Circle of Life - in relation to all Creation, not just their own family, community or people(s). Nation to nation among Aboriginal Peoples, this form of governance was practised until recently. Canada's residential school and 'child welfare' systems interrupted these practices, but through the resilience of the peoples' spirits the core teachings remain. These sacred teachings are the heart of cultural identity. Across the nations, Knowledge Keepers are actively reaching out to children and families, to touch them with this wisdom of the Ancestors so that balance can be restored.

As an Aboriginal agency, VACFSS is committed to creating the sacred space for cultural grounding and nurturing to happen. The sacred teachings must permeate its child welfare services. This necessitates:

- **RESPECT** - continued collaboration between VACFSS and all its government and community partners to operationalize Aboriginal child rights, based on customary law carrying the Knowledge and Instructions of the Ancestors
- **AWARENESS** - staff well trained in the full spectrum of cultural rights of Indigenous Peoples summarized in the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (2007) and B.C. Child, Family & Community Services Act (2006), and how they apply to Aboriginal children 'in care'
- **HUMILITY** - staff committed to learning about customary law from the Knowledge Keepers (e.g. matriarchs, ceremony keepers) & other customary authorities responsible for safeguarding this sacred knowledge for perpetuity
- **PROTOCOL** - policy and practise incorporating sacred knowledge and cultural values into decision making, so that Aboriginal child rights are normalized
- **CEREMONY** - bridging the different Aboriginal cultural expressions of knowledge, so that the essence of shared cultural knowledge, values and teachings can be woven into practise in keeping with cultural protocols

- **GENTLENESS** - respectful ways of communicating about staff roles and responsibilities, for teamwork that is culturally appropriate and consistent
- **DISCIPLINE** - willingness to name and address the underlying issues and core tasks vital for upholding the rights of Aboriginal children, families and peoples

Adhering to these principles will enable child welfare policy and practise that flows from culture. To get to this place, there are several outstanding issues to reconcile within dialogues with partners provincially and nationally, including:

- The underlying causes of colonial dysfunction and colonial poverty affecting Aboriginal children (resulting in their apprehension) are not yet resolved
- The Indian Act still influences relationship building, despite U.N. agencies finding that it perpetuates racial discrimination and colonial poverty
- Child welfare legislation and standards must be updated to meet the full spectrum of cultural rights of Aboriginal Peoples (emphasizing Aboriginal child rights)
- Systemic barriers to health and healing (for example, the under-funding and disparities within programs and services impacting Aboriginal child welfare) need to be removed
- Breakthroughs require full implementation of recommendations in the Hughes Report (2006), Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (1996) & Task Force on Aboriginal Languages & Cultures (2005), as well as international standards reflected in the UNDRIP and accompanying international law

It is vital for VACFSS to continue dialogue with all levels of government toward addressing and resolving this broader context of its work. Cultural due diligence on behalf of children requires that structural and procedural barriers be removed.



6. HONOURING CULTURAL PROTOCOLS

6.1 Understanding & Upholding Cultural Protocols

Aboriginal children have the right to cultural grounding whether they grow up in a village or city; 'on the land' (i.e. within ancestral lands) or surrounded by urban concrete; in the care of relatives, in a foster home, or in alternative arrangements such as a group home or in detention. This right is not diminished by any life circumstances or geography. Cultural identity and cultural health are portable rights. All that changes are the systems of support required.

Within VACFSS planning is underway about how to uphold each child's right to culturally based care. To advance this dialogue it is necessary to document the cultural protocols governing this work. Although these protocols by nature are oral and sacred, certain aspects of them can be translated. By distilling the core elements VACFSS can arrive at an agreed language for implementation. This is essential for policy and practise accurately reflecting cultural protocols.

In Section 4.0 of this report the rights of Aboriginal children are explored. It is clear from international law (both recent law and customary law) that VACFSS has the right and responsibility to undertake cultural interventions on behalf of each and every child, to ensure that their overall care is congruent with Aboriginal child rights. The question is how can VACFSS best approach this task. Who are the appropriate persons to advise VACFSS on cultural protocols, at an overview level and in specific situations? Operationally, how can cultural principles of care flow together with clinical expertise? What building blocks will safeguard cultural integrity? And how can VACFSS meaningfully 'deliver' culture to a child?

To begin to answer these questions and others, over forty interviews were conducted to bring together the insights of VACFSS staff, in-house Elders and key community partners. Reflections on cultural protocols within this report are informed by those discussions. Issues and priorities identified in the interviews and then enriched by discussion circles within the new VACFSS Cultural Committee have been synthesized below, to help bring concrete shape to the dream.

Aboriginal children have the right to grow up loved, nurtured, grounded and supported in keeping with customary laws and cultural teachings. This includes:

- having a meaningful and sustained connection with adults who carry and live the teachings, and who practise ceremony as a means of sharing the teachings
- receiving the cultural tools to connect to the spiritual essence of these teachings, through a natural flow of ceremony and community experiences
- understanding one's beauty and life purpose experientially, through sacred knowledge instilled and shared as part of a spiritual way of life
- having guidance and support in cultural learning on a daily basis, throughout childhood

It means being able to grow up bathed in the Knowledge and Instructions of the Ancestors - including during times of family dislocation, upheaval or crisis.

VACFSS must ponder how to ensure the cultural health and identity of each child, in an urban setting. Cultural supports and resources usually available to children in their 'home' communities are not so readily or consistently available to them in the city. Given this, different kinds of supports are required. This may lead to a different flavour of connection. However, it does not mean less, in terms of supports or outcomes. It simply means an approach tailored to each child, meeting their respective cultural rights and individual spiritual needs. It is about resourcefulness and flexibility.

What matters is that the care and teachings connect spiritually, in a way that resonates culturally. Realistically - due to assimilation and the inter-generational traumas of the residential schools system - the barriers to profound connection today often are as steep 'on reserve' as in the city. Everywhere, urgent interventions are needed to meet the distinct rights, specific needs and individual circumstances of Aboriginal children and youth. Wisdom in approaching this can be shared between VACFSS and the many peoples it serves, for developing 'best practices'.

The unique challenge facing VACFSS is the huge cultural diversity of the peoples and families served. How, amid 50 or more distinct Aboriginal cultures, can VACFSS embed culture in its services? Deference and adherence to cultural protocols is essential. Engaging healthy (i.e. practising) Knowledge Keepers for guidance is also crucial.

During this time of transition VACFSS is "grasping for the 'cultural' skill". Some staff and partners view this as a process or phase of decolonization. Others see it more as a sacred time of re-connection

and renewal, within and between cultures, which VACFSS is an integral part of. However, there is consensus on the need for a common roadmap to restore shared cultural values and customary practices into models for child welfare - by reincorporating sacred knowledge.

This process that VACFSS is now defining has several layers, all connected to customary law:

- i. **CULTURAL RIGHTS:** The inherent rights to self-determination and to cultural health/identity, expressed through customary law and supported by other international law summarized in the UNDRIP (see Table 4.3).
- ii. **CULTURAL FLUENCY:** Within each Aboriginal culture, it is the practising Knowledge Keepers that have cultural fluency. These individuals are responsible for keeping systems of customary law intact and therefore have apprenticed over their lifetime under other Knowledge Keeper(s). They are formally recognized and mandated by their People and community, to carry the sacred Knowledge and Instructions of the Ancestors. Through their guidance and teachings - and their care for the integrity of ceremonies and language (which hold and transmit the core teachings) - cultural knowledge and values are preserved and put into practise. Among Knowledge Keepers of different cultures, there is now discussion on common challenges to overcome in order to resume thorough cultural grounding for all children. VACFSS will need to invite the guidance of such Knowledge Keepers, on both an ongoing and 'as needed' basis. One option for sustained guidance is to form a *Sacred Circle of Advisors* for VACFSS (see Section 6.2(iv), p. 32) - involving practising Knowledge Keepers. Other channels for support should be elaborated and refined over time through protocol agreements, with each nation.
- iii. **CULTURAL COMPETENCY:** Bringing cultural due diligence to child welfare practise requires reaching a place of cultural competence, as an agency. Cultural competence exists when (1) the structure and process of the agency is fluid and consistent with cultural protocols, accommodating the rights and needs of the various Aboriginal Peoples served; and (2) the mandate, knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and skills of the board, staff and primary partners facilitate and guarantee Aboriginal child rights, in keeping with customary law (carrying the Knowledge and Instructions of the Ancestors) and other supportive international law summarized within the *U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Key ingredients include:
 - » legislative support, including an end to both contradictions in legislation and delays in updating legislation/policy, vis-a-vis cultural rights
 - » adequate funding and, specifically, an end to chronic under-funding for revitalizing and restoring culture
 - » comprehensive strategic planning based on cultural knowledge and values
 - » visionary training, that is culturally inclusive and guided by practising Knowledge Keepers

- » rights-based evaluation, to help refine operational 'best practices'
 - » peoples-based process, welcoming guidance on cultural protocols and practise
 - » child honouring, putting the sacred journey of childhood first (before politics)
- iv. **CULTURAL PRINCIPLES:** These are the 'common threads' that enable VACFSS to support and promote culture, while also safeguarding cultural diversity⁸. They bridge the various customary laws and cultural teachings. The *Seventh Generation Principle* (defined in the Glossary, and sometimes described as an "Ecological & Relational World View") is a well known example. Some prophecies - a form of sacred knowledge, passed orally, to impart ancestral teachings - also overlap. VACFSS can utilize such principles to translate Aboriginal child rights into respectful and consistent practise, within the urban Aboriginal community. They have become part of a shared language of translation across North America, for describing ancestral rights and responsibilities as well as shared cultural expressions of sacred knowledge. This language offers a meeting point, between cultures, for keeping the essence of the sacred teachings intact.
- v. **CULTURAL PROTOCOLS:** These flow from customary laws and are the means to keep integrity in cultural practise. Cultural protocols carry societal ethics and thus guide individual conduct: based on an understanding of sacred relationships in the Circle of Life, including environmental stewardship. Essentially, they put specific customary laws and cultural values into action - so that there is adequate depth of understanding, discipline and consistency about the appropriate acquiring and sharing of sacred knowledge. For example, they govern how different cultural expressions of sacred knowledge (e.g. ceremonies and related sacred practises, teachings, stories/parables, songs, regalia, art forms, traditional games, medicines) can be shared, as well as how harmful acts or behaviour can be corrected to restore balance. As such, they address both collective and personal responsibility. While they are distinct within each Aboriginal culture, the core protocols are similar nation to nation. VACFSS can work within the boundaries of established cultural and cross-cultural protocols, seeking guidance as appropriate on specific cultural protocols from each nation's verified Knowledge Keepers. It will need to translate the general principles into policy, to safeguard cultural practise; also, to avoid inappropriate interpretations and/or posturing about cultural authority.

It is important to note that cultural protocols are different from the clinical protocols that guide the 'nuts and bolts' administration of child welfare work. They are just as prescriptive, but more all encompassing. Cultural protocols embody the wisdom of the Ancestors with respect to maintaining (and rebuilding) healthy nations, healthy communities and healthy families - in the present, as well as between generations. They address all dimensions of the health and well-being of the peoples and children, including the spiritual.

8 See discussion paper on "Cultural Practise in Child Welfare Programs" by VACFSS worker Laurie MacDonald (2005).

CULTURAL PRACTISE: Cultural practises vary between Aboriginal cultures, and thus have many expressions in an urban setting. Commonly held cultural practices include:

- » prayer, as a means to give thanks and seek guidance
- » smudging, as a means to ground, cleanse and prepare for life commitments
- » gatherings, as a means to respect and renew our sacred commitments
- » witnessing, as a means to record, remember and teach responsibilities
- » gift giving, as a means to look after our relations in the Circle of Life
- » offerings, as a means to honour the Creator and keep balance spiritually
- » ceremonies, as a means to connect with the Creator, Mother Earth, Ancestors and sacred teachings

Often, certain practices are believed to be shared, but may differ substantially from culture to culture: for instance, the use of sacred plant medicines for offerings or cleansing; the knowledge of methods and rites for spiritual connection, development and healing; and reliance on the circle or other rituals for health and healing. Meanwhile, there are distinct, lifelong practices (e.g. sacred ceremonies) at the heart of each culture for the grounding and preparation of the spirit throughout one's life journey. Examples include welcoming the spirit of an unborn child; grounding mother and child during and after birth; nurturing each child from infancy through puberty with the sacred teachings, to prepare them for adulthood; and caring for the spirit when it passes on. In an urban setting, where many cultures converge, it is vital to locate or if necessary create the sacred space for such cultural practices. However, it is up to each family and/or child, on the basis of their own life experiences, culture(s) and cultural teachings (which may embrace other compatible cultural teachings) to decide or at least have a voice in which particular cultural practices best support their health and healing.

VACFSS is creating respectful and flexible policies by mapping out applicable cultural and cross-cultural protocols. Extensive training will be required to enable all staff to understand cultural protocols as well as the cultural nuances and preferences among the families and peoples served, and to fully implement cultural rights (with the emphasis on Aboriginal child rights).

- vi. **CULTURAL SAFETY:** Cultural safety - that sacred space where culture can be freely expressed, shared, learned and supported - is the right of each Aboriginal child. Implementing such cultural rights in an urban setting requires deep teamwork: unity. To this end, VACFSS brings together a variety of staff (themselves from multiple world cultures) to support the urban Aboriginal community. Effective teamwork among staff requires cross-cultural safety between all staff members (many new to cultural or cross-cultural practise; some hesitant or resistant about culture and/or cultural practise). Staff must be open to being guided and supported in mainstreaming Aboriginal knowledge/ values into their own daily professional practise.

VACFSS is now charting its path toward cultural competence and cultural safety. There are frameworks available to help shape this endeavour⁹. However, the process must be peoples-based and child-centred, not just research-framed or professionally-driven. Above all, it must engage both practising Knowledge Keepers and the children themselves, at appropriate intervals. This will ensure that the outcomes are truly nurturing and grounding, rather than symbolic or cosmetic. It also will remind us to extend changes in child welfare practise to all realms of a child's world, tied to cultural identity and well-being, instead of only those conventionally considered in existing provincial legislation and practise standards.

At a systems level, high priority building blocks for VACFSS to consider include:

- **NATION LEVEL OUTREACH PROCESS** - formalizing engagement on cultural rights and cultural protocol issues, on a peoples basis¹⁰ (through both nation level and inter-cultural dialogues with practising Knowledge Keepers)
- **PEOPLES BASED PROTOCOL AGREEMENTS** - establishing collaboration to uphold the full spectrum of Aboriginal child rights, flowing from customary law and summarized in the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- **CULTURAL RIGHTS STRATEGIC PLAN** - envisioning holistic systems of nurturing, support, spiritual grounding and teaching for urban Aboriginal children - linked to supports for healthy families, healthy communities and healthy peoples
- **CULTURAL RIGHTS ORIENTATION, TRAINING & IMMERSION SYSTEM** - bringing all staff (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) to a common level of awareness, understanding and ability concerning Aboriginal child rights and to a shared understanding of the teamwork required to implement those rights

This will give VACFSS a rights-based filter for decision making, enabling full integration of cultural knowledge and values - with cultural competency cross-fertilizing between programs.

⁹ See presentations of Raymond Obomsawin (Senior Researcher, National Aboriginal Health Organization) and Jessica Ball (Professor, University of Victoria) at Cultural Competency & Inclusion Forum of Vancouver Coastal Health, February 2009

¹⁰ Refer to Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs map showing the 23 Indigenous nations in B.C. (the optimal basis for dialogue provincially)



6.2 Policy Respecting Cultural Protocols

Translating cultural protocols into daily practise in child welfare work means putting Aboriginal values and ethics into action, through policy. Cultural protocols bring together some familiar elements of ethical practise, yet are distinguished from regular professional ethics by distinctly spiritual qualities:

- **CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE** - not just 'best available science' or 'best practices' as normally documented, but also knowledge and wisdom flowing from sacred laws (commonly referred to as customary law)
- **CULTURAL VALUES** - not just the usual ethic of 'do no harm' or taking a 'precautionary approach', but also the responsibility of honouring and respecting the sacred (i.e. sacred relationships within the Circle of Life)

They describe respectful ways of relating: "how we are to conduct ourselves from birth to death". At the centre are sacred views of life and living, with clear instructions on personal responsibility and life purpose. This brings real accountability to the notion that "It takes a village to raise a child".

In an urban setting, several questions arise around cultural protocols, including:

- Which protocols govern decision making, among diverse Aboriginal cultures? How can we rework institutional decision-making systems, to root them in cultural protocols?
- Who are the appropriate cultural authorities? What are the protocols for engaging Elders and/or Knowledge Keepers? How can their involvement as advisors be sustained?

- Can we adhere fully to these protocols, or will issues such as geography (e.g. access to recognized Elders or practising Knowledge Keepers) and budget (e.g. time for meaningful dialogue) interfere?
- What safeguards are necessary to prevent misappropriation of sacred knowledge or watering down of cultural knowledge and cultural practise?
- What kinds of mentoring, programs, learning supports and safety measures are needed for child-centred sharing and teaching of cultural knowledge/values?

VACFSS is beginning to methodically address such issues, and deepen reflection, through its new Cultural Committee. The cultural rights framework (see Table 4.3) gives a common language and baseline for discussion about appropriate policy and practise. It incorporates customary law as well as supportive international law summarized in the UNDRIP. This is a reliable starting point for respectful process, balancing the rights of peoples with the specific rights and needs of Aboriginal children.

VACFSS has the task of facilitating culture in the life of each child; honouring and protecting cultural diversity go hand in hand with this. Although there are many layers of consideration in an urban setting, the core questions are not so different from challenges 'on reserve'. In both situations the reclamation and revitalization of culture is a complex topic, due to the continuing influence of the *Indian Act*, the inter-generational traumas of the residential schools system - and recently, the intense globalization of youth consumer 'culture' (highly impacting 'at risk' youth). There are strong parallels between issues and remedies, especially in relation to cultural identity and cultural health. Rapid culture loss is demanding creative responses.

In an urban setting, shared cultural teachings are one mechanism of revitalizing culture among children and youth. While some VACFSS staff have expressed concern about avoiding 'pan Indian' approaches (i.e. methods that blend cultures), there generally is recognition that these core teachings offer "a doorway... for people to step through and claim some part of themselves and their own culture." With guidance from a practising Knowledge Keeper, the teaching can be instilled with the original message and spiritual essence intact.

Certain cultural practises, such as the yuwipi and sweatlodge ceremonies, or in coastal areas some longhouse practises and clan system traditions, have been shared (and accepted) widely as a means of revitalizing spirituality as a way of life. There are specific cultural protocols (i.e. laws and teachings) governing the sharing of such cultural practises, enlivened one heart at a time. There also are established cross-cultural protocols governing this generous sharing of ancestral knowledge, which are understood between peoples. Nation to nation across North America, the underlying, common principle between Indigenous Peoples' systems of customary law is the sacredness of life and of relationships within the Circle of Life.

Cross-cultural protocols give a solid reference point for policy governing cultural practise, because they acknowledge “there is sacredness here”. They function like guidelines, clarifying ethics for the asking, sharing and practise of sacred knowledge. They communicate the shared values distinguishing Aboriginal systems of governance as holistic and inherently spiritual. Applying them does not detract from culture; it simply creates a wider berth for protecting diverse cultural ways. These protocols make way for each culture to be supported, according to shared and agreed principles. This ensures that policy will adhere to a minimum standard, consistent with cultural rights and responsibilities.

VACFSS has committed to these shared cultural principles to open sacred ground for meeting the rights and needs of each child. These principles are now being operationalized through a variety of means, to move values into practise and to avoid clichés. Recent developments include:

- Elders forums to seek guidance on deepening cultural process and strengthening cultural practise as an urban agency
- the VACFSS Cultural Committee, which will evaluate how to ensure comprehensive implementation of Aboriginal child rights
- new policy articulating cultural and cross-cultural protocols
- a holistic Plan of Care for each child

A key next step will be to evolve a practical framework for Aboriginal child rights, through a process involving practising Knowledge Keepers (based on customary law, as well as the UNDRIP and B.C. Child, Family & Community Services Act).

The ultimate test of success is whether cultural responsibilities are being met for each child, which in cultural terms means daily. Is there meaningful cultural grounding and nurturing during every phase of a child’s life journey - or is there only surface connection through ‘blended’ activities and ‘snapshot’ moments or events? Criteria and indicators (see p. 35) will help to reveal this and pinpoint gaps in service delivery.

In this regard, there are four crucial cross-cultural protocol issues to consider:

- i. **CROSS-FERTILIZATION OF CULTURAL TEACHINGS:** Cultural diversity is maintained through mutual support among cultures, not blending of cultures. Given this, it is vital to distinguish between culture that is alive and culture that is synthetic. Concerns expressed by VACFSS staff about ‘pan-Indianism’ must be reflected in policy.

In the 1970s, when the Aboriginal rights movement gained momentum and international support, there was increasing funding for ‘pan Indian’ political structures and ‘pan Indian’ cultural programs (including commercialized pow wows) - allowing cultural expression but also blurring identity. Some welcomed this as an opening for cultural revitalization; others saw it as a means of government coopting customary gatherings.

Much of this took place as ceremonies were generously shared between Aboriginal Peoples across North America, to help one another strengthen in their own cultural ways (through the retention and revitalization of sacred cultural practises locally). Many communities, families and persons reconnected with their own cultural identity and customary practices by borrowing cultural tools that they found culturally compatible or which resonated spiritually.

As this resurgence of culture and cultural activities happened, there was much reflection on appropriate ways of sharing of cultural knowledge - including discussion of limitations within government-funded events, forums and structures. Government funding of cultural expression created a wedge within some families, communities and nations between those strictly safeguarding customary practices and those wanting to benefit from available funds.

In this time period, indiscretions around spiritual ceremonies and sacred rituals were reported in an increasing number of situations where cultural protocols were not followed in full. In some extreme cases culture became commercialized. Certain ceremonies were offered outside their sacred context (that is, without the core teachings) - commercialized by either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal participants, who for material reasons ignored the cultural protocols.

In some places this trend has generated deep concern about the integrity of cultural teachings. Breaches in protocol have contributed to the fusion and mass marketing of Aboriginal 'culture'. Many cultural expressions - such as regalia, drums, dream catchers and the Medicine Wheel - have been turned into cultural icons and sold worldwide, disconnected from the accompanying teachings. Although this commercialization is primarily in the hands of non-Aboriginals, there are serious ripples within Aboriginal communities. Symbols of 'Indian' culture, made with sweatshop labour in Third World factories, are being marketed to Aboriginal Peoples at pow wows and other 'cultural' events. They often are brought into programs and workshops, to teach children about 'culture'. While this may be an entry point to embracing cultural identity and cultural expression, it also carries risks.

Both on-reserve and in urban areas, Aboriginal children are using manufactured items (for example, leather or plastic beads) instead of customary materials to produce emblems of 'culture'. Some fear that this has resulted in shallow and generic teachings instead of disciplined spiritual learning. Others worry that it has institutionalized 'culture' one level further, within 'cultural' programs, instead of as a way of life. There is concern that protocol about proper gathering and use of the original materials has been lost and

needs to be restored. There also is a desire to be encouraging: to provide the cultural teachings necessary to work with available materials. It is the teachings that empower a child to communicate and celebrate who he or she is, through different forms of cultural expression

The depth of concern raised about the integrity of sacred teachings signals the urgent need for cultural interventions guided and grounded by practising Knowledge Keepers. Among funders of child welfare systems the 'programming' mentality must go, the 'workshop' approach to culture must end, the convenient 'packaging' of culture must stop. Instead, cultural integrity must be respected. This means that the inherent rights of Aboriginal Peoples must guide funding, with all dimensions of rights accommodated. There must be adequate budget to ensure appropriate development and delivery of restorative measures within child welfare work. Then cultural teachings, cultural tools and cultural practise can be instilled in the daily walk and rhythm of a child's life - by all involved - with the necessary guidance and continuity.

VACFSS will need to address such challenges within its strategic planning. Supporting a child's rights to cultural identity, cultural grounding and cultural health means rethinking the way that culture is 'delivered'. Innovation is particularly vital in urban areas, where there often is more budgetary pressure to default to readily available resources instead of truly accommodating culture. However, short-term solutions must not come at the expense of long-term outcomes - for it is the children and future generations that would bear the cost.

- ii. **RE-ROOTING OF CULTURAL VALUES:** Supporting culture and safeguarding cultural diversity both require careful attention to terminology: in particular, an awareness of colonial concepts. Culture is one integral whole; heritage is indivisible (see p. 36). Given this, it is not possible to understand or advance cultural rights through compartmentalized thinking. As the children's song says: "the thigh bone connects to the hip bone; the hip bone connects to the backbone." Sacred knowledge is indivisible from sacred ceremonies, from sacred lands and from the Aboriginal languages carrying the entire essence of this body of knowledge. Funding streams that promote a little 'culture' here, a little 'culture' there, fragment culture. Programs improvised under such constraints create high stress for workers on the frontline, witnessing the devastating results: children who flounder. For culture to actually manifest in the life of an Aboriginal child it must be reflected in all aspects of child welfare work, system-wide and mandate-deep. It also must connect to the cultural health of the families, communities and peoples served, or patterns of colonial dysfunction and colonial poverty stemming from Canada's residential schools system will continue - and child welfare services never will become obsolete.

Terminology will be central to VACFSS endeavours to culturally ground its services. Currently, the language of 'cultural pieces' is used by most staff. This is a debilitating carry-over from previous Aboriginal 'child welfare' concepts, and reflects the piecemeal funding and programming that has long been the norm. The broad spectrum of Aboriginal child rights provides for intact cultures, intact systems of sacred knowledge, intact values and teachings, intact children. Bringing this to life means infusing the agreed legal and ethical principles (and congruent practise) into all spheres of child welfare work, daily - not developing more 'stand alone' activities or 'showcase' pieces. All services and practise must flow from culture.

The single most important principle for VACFSS to integrate in its systems for planning, implementation and evaluation is that Indigenous Peoples' cultural heritage is indivisible¹¹. Some staff reflecting on culture say "Each of us carry a different piece." Many describe culture as an extra load to carry professionally: a burden. One sentiment echoed during staff interviews is that "Everyone is already inundated and bombarded with work that they cannot keep up with. So taking on the 'cultural piece' - how does this happen?"

While each staff member has the capacity to support different cultural expressions - in other words, a unique window of cultural competency to share - a unifying and empowering terminology is needed. This is achievable with a cultural rights training system for staff. Elaborating a framework for Aboriginal child rights, based on the B.C. Child, Family & Community Services Act - as well as customary law and other supportive law summarized in the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) - will give a language for teamwork and measurable results.

Within VACFSS, Aboriginal child rights must become the language of decision-making and implementation. The specific cultural rights of Aboriginal children need to be understood - not as a vague subset of Aboriginal rights, but as a distinct, clear, established and measurable bundle of rights (embracing inter-generational rights and responsibilities). This is accomplished by translating Aboriginal child rights into concrete standards, first and foremost through the window of customary law. Only practising Knowledge Keepers can guide this process. They have the authority and expertise to navigate cultural and cross-cultural protocols, to develop mechanisms suitable for urban child welfare work.

11. The 'Principle of Indivisible Heritage' speaks to Indigenous Peoples' distinct spiritual relationship with ancestral lands, and the inalienable connection between culture, sacred practises, language and land. This is a core principle within the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It was articulated as a means to reflect and uphold customary law. See the U.N. Principles & Guidelines for the Protection of the Heritage of Indigenous Peoples (1995), for background.

- iii. **SAFEGUARDING SACRED KNOWLEDGE:** In an urban setting, where there is a diversity of Aboriginal cultures, policy mobilizing cultural knowledge and values needs to traverse a number of cultural and cross-cultural protocols. Written versions of these protocols must be approached cautiously, because of the risk of any 'public' expressions of sacred knowledge being appropriated or misused.

Worldwide, Indigenous Peoples find that they need to be extremely vigilant of disclosing sacred knowledge, due to the many forms of cultural appropriation now underway. Unauthorized replication and/or marketing of ceremony - plus other cultural expressions such as sacred stories, songs, dance, regalia, arts and related images - is rampant. Sacred knowledge of medicinal plants, now commercially valuable, is particularly vulnerable. Meanwhile, 'new age' products and websites misinterpreting and publicizing sacred knowledge (e.g. prophecies) are a growing concern. Such appropriation of culture involves not just business interests, but also individuals perceiving their informal 'borrowing' and 'sharing' as harmless.

Within local Aboriginal communities, there has been intensifying concern over these trends. Outsiders with access or exposure to cultural knowledge are not always open to learning the reason for cultural protocols, interested in understanding their sacred aspects, or honourable about upholding them. Aboriginal Peoples are concerned about the associated racial discrimination, colonial poverty and culture loss.

For the last decade, international negotiations have been underway among countries on intellectual property issues of concern to Indigenous Peoples - allegedly to protect 'traditional knowledge' and other cultural expressions. However, intellectual property law fails to protect Indigenous Peoples and their diverse cultures¹². Any 'safeguards' developed under this international framework must be evaluated carefully, to avoid applying or perpetuating terminology, standards and/or mechanisms that may sound progressive but actually undermine cultural rights (including basic human rights). There should be careful distinction between intellectual property concepts and the extensive cultural rights enshrined in the UNDRIP and underlying international laws (which have as their foundation Indigenous Peoples' inherent right to self-determination).

¹² See [Report of the Secretariat on Indigenous Traditional Knowledge](#) (2007), prepared for the U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (doc. E/C.19/2007/10) and the follow-up report on protecting 'traditional knowledge' issued by the International Institute for Environment & Development in advance of WIPO talks on June 29, 2009.

Internationally, the best protection tools available for sacred knowledge (alongside customary law, plus the UNDRIP and accompanying laws) are:

- » *The Mataatua Declaration* (1993): addressing the 'intellectual property rights' of Indigenous Peoples, based on principles defined in the *Declaration of Principles of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples*, *Kari-Oca Declaration* (1992), and *Indigenous Peoples Earth Charter* (1992)
- » *U.N. Principles & Guidelines for the Protection of the Heritage of Indigenous Peoples* (1995): defining standards and setting the foundation for the UNDRIP and current body of cultural rights (elaborated by U.N. Special Rapporteur Dr. Erica-Irene Daes)

Within VACFSS, any policy development concerning sacred knowledge should be approached applying established standards and best practices, with meticulous attention to terminology and other technical considerations. However, it should be noted that the primary safeguard for sacred knowledge remains Aboriginal customary law - governed and interpreted by practising Knowledge Keepers through strict oral disciplines.

- iv. **OPERATIONALIZING CUSTOMARY LAW:** Among Aboriginal Peoples, customary law describes inherent rights and responsibilities, maintained and practised continuously over generations from the time of the earliest Ancestors (see Glossary). Customary law now is considered a category of international law.¹³ The *Royal Commission on Aboriginal People* (RCAP) advised the governments of Canada that customary laws should "take precedence over federal and provincial laws when they conflict". This RCAP recommendation is supported by the *U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) - which recognizes Aboriginal sovereignty (i.e. self determination) - and the legally binding treaties underlying the UNDRIP which Canada has signed. (see p.14)

The best route for VACFSS toward cultural due diligence - including cultural grounding of its services - is to formally make room for customary law systems within its own governance process. There is no protection for sacred knowledge, or therefore for culture, without customary law (that is, core cultural protocols). Certain domains of sacred knowledge belong only in the hands of practising Knowledge Keepers. Without this discipline culture may be eroded and even jeopardized.

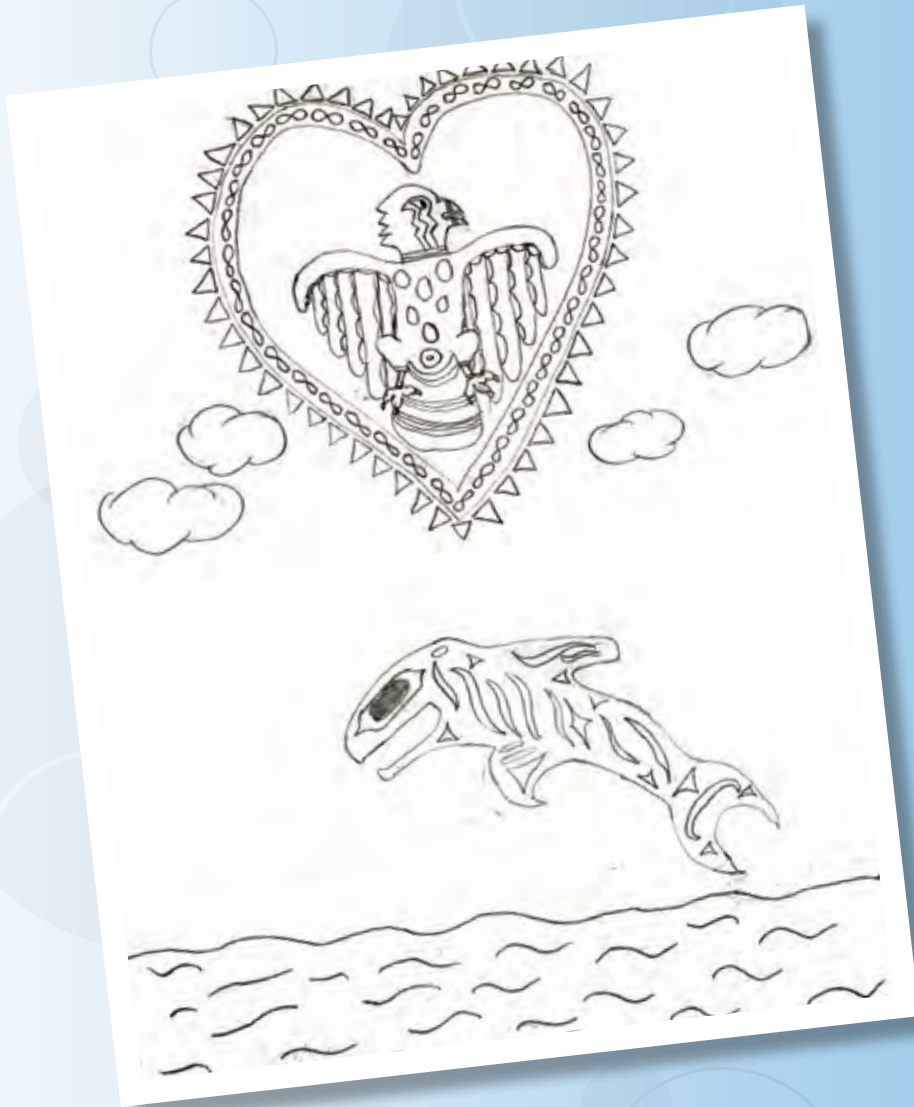
13 See *Beyond Intellectual Property: Toward Traditional Resource Rights for Indigenous Peoples & Local Communities* by Darrell A. Posey & Graham Dutfield, IDRC (1996), p. 54 and p. 120.

This is why development of a Sacred Circle of Advisors is recommended to VACFSS (previously discussed, Section 6.1,) (see p.20). This group would have the cultural authority to advise on issues such as:

- » identifying which elements of customary law must anchor VACFSS governance
- » determining how the VACFSS Board and administrative structures should evaluate their own adherence to customary law
- » utilizing sacred knowledge systems to strengthen decision-making filters within the agency and its various programs
- » identifying the extent to which customary law and cultural protocols should be documented in policy, for integrity of cultural practise
- » evolving 'in-house' cultural practices (e.g. VACFSS ceremonies) as a means to transmit and instill core knowledge, values and teachings
- » developing a training system and curriculum to support staff and caregivers as facilitators of culture on behalf of the children
- » facilitating engagement between children and practising Knowledge Keepers, for meaningful experience by each child of cultural identity, cultural health and cultural/spiritual grounding throughout childhood

It should be noted that this proposed group of Knowledge Keepers is distinct from individuals regarded as Elders who may be engaged by VACFSS to offer guidance in an Elders capacity (e.g. through Elders dialogues). Selection criteria and terms of reference for practising Knowledge Keepers will differ substantially. Not all recognized Elders are conversant with core customary law, or with the specific spiritual considerations and ceremonial responsibilities at the heart of it. Roles must be differentiated accordingly, to bring the appropriate level (and match) of cultural and cross-cultural protocols into consideration as issues emerge; and to share the 'workload' in customary ways.

The Sacred Circle of Advisors may be very small due to its specialized task. However, this circle would be the core force within VACFSS for enlivening cultural rights. Its terms of reference would integrate customary law with other relevant realms of law (see Table 4.3), to safeguard indivisible heritage and help bring concrete shape to cultural provisions within the B.C. Child, Family & Community Services Act. At regular intervals, this circle of Knowledge Keepers should guide the VACFSS Cultural Committee (responsible for deepening cultural practise). This will ensure comprehensive realization of Aboriginal child rights, with customary law and sacred cultural knowledge as the foundation.



6.3 PRACTISE CONGRUENT WITH ABORIGINAL CHILD RIGHTS

6.3 (A) Assuring Cultural Sustainability

The term 'cultural sustainability' is often heard today. Cultural sustainability is a concept that emerged from international dialogues on protecting 'traditional knowledge'. It addresses the link between cultural diversity and environmental stewardship. It reflects our inter-connectedness with one another and with Mother Earth (often referred to as the Web or Circle of Life) - acknowledging the serious effects of culture loss today, for all humanity. The concept is intended to help protect cultural diversity. It gives a useful lens for discussing cultural safeguards within an urban setting such as Vancouver.

Cultural sustainability means practising due diligence with respect to safeguarding culture. General elements include:

- Culture and cultural diversity are valued and respected
- Cultural rights are upheld as an indivisible whole, assuring cultural integrity
- Prior informed consent and fully informed decision making are maintained on all issues potentially impacting culture and/or cultural rights
- Communication and decision making systems are rights-based, and fully bi-cultural and/or cross-cultural as appropriate
- Cultural practices (e.g. processes, methodologies, tools) are honoured and reinforced as the basis for dialogue, planning, decision making, evaluation etc.
- Cultural values and cultural knowledge are heeded, consistent with applicable customary law and any associated cultural/cross-cultural protocols
- Cultural teachings are given priority support, to preserve lifelong systems of learning and responsibility within and between generations

The VACFSS values statement should address cultural sustainability, from the perspective of both ancestral rights and responsibilities expressed in customary law (such as cultural/spiritual obligations for safeguarding the spirit of the child) and other established standards for cultural rights (including the UNDRIP, affirming the rights of Indigenous Peoples as peoples). This values statement must connect to the well-being of each child, assuring that the child can develop fully in balance - through rites of passage and other cultural supports necessary to bridge sacred ceremony and daily teachings. For example, it might state:

Each child will be nurtured in keeping with sacred knowledge so that s/he can (1) mature with awareness of him/herself as a spiritual being; (2) journey through adolescence with the customary supports necessary to develop a spiritual way of life; (3) reach adulthood with the cultural teachings, knowledge and tools to ensure health for not just themselves, but also for next generations and all relations in the Circle of Life; and (4) become a loving person able to fully understand and exercise his/her cultural rights and responsibilities.

For cultural sustainability within VACFSS, five main areas of practise urgently require further consideration. At an operational level these are:

1. **DEVELOPMENT OF RIGHTS-BASED STANDARDS** - Standards are needed to guide the implementation of Aboriginal child rights in all practise areas. These standards must go well beyond AOPSI and address the full spectrum of Aboriginal child rights, in keeping with customary law as well as all supportive international law summarized in the U.N. Declaration of Indigenous Peoples (see Table 4.3).

2. **CONSENSUS ON CORE TEACHINGS** - Focus is required on core teachings, so that the essence of shared cultural teachings can manifest in the daily life of each child.
3. **CANDID ASSESSMENT OF GAPS** - A scan of present cultural outcomes should be undertaken to identify weak areas within core cultural supports for children.
4. **BUILDING BLOCKS FOR ABORIGINAL CHILD RIGHTS** -Clarity is needed on how to develop a system to culturally nourish and prepare each child, based on the network of Elders and practising Knowledge Keepers available locally for steady involvement. This will link to culturally based strategic planning (see Cultural Rights Strategic Plan, p. 23).
5. **CULTURAL RIGHTS EVALUATION TOOLS** - Measures are required to monitor progress toward timely and effective implementation of Aboriginal child rights

Examples are:

- i. Expanded definitions for health and healing, based on Aboriginal child rights, to serve as a compass and crosscheck, e.g.:
 - » Definition of health (the 'destination') describing healthy connection (e.g. to Creator, to land, to oneself, to one another)
 - » Definition of healing (the 'journey') describing healthy re-connection (e.g. to Creator, to land, to oneself, to one another)
 - » These definitions would embrace, in depth, both cultural and clinical knowledge and responsibilities - in the context of customary law and the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- ii. Criteria and indicators for health and healing, to evaluate support systems from a cultural rights perspective, developed as follows:
 - » specific and detailed, to measure meaningful implementation of cultural rights in the daily life and developmental lifespan of each child
 - » linked to strategic planning, to ensure quick adjustments and remedies as needed at both program and operational levels

Adjustments to social work practise and foster parenting practise will flow from this foundation.

Perspectives shared by VACFSS Elders and staff during interviews for this report will provide a strong foundation for dialogue and decision-making on Tasks (1) thru (4) above. Insights within the VACFSS Cultural Committee will provide further ground for discussions. This information should be fully synthesized in order to help along the next stages of reflection.



6.3 (B) Implementing the Principle of Indivisible Heritage

The *Principle of Indivisible Heritage* (introduced in Section 6.2, p. 29) must guide all VACFSS discussions and decision-making on standards of care.

VACFSS has inherited a number of challenges tied to previous social work practise and foster care standards. These challenges are systemic: linked to systems of education, schools of professional thought, social attitudes and ideas of 'good enough' that still have colonial foundations. They block the best interests of the Aboriginal child. It will take VACFSS nothing less than a systemic review (and re-mapping) of Aboriginal child rights to develop and implement a child welfare system that flows from culture.

Aboriginal child rights, and cultural rights generally, embrace several inter-connected areas (see Chart 4.3) - including access to ancestral lands and sacred sites, to sacred ceremonies, and to sacred knowledge. Culturally, one dimension cannot be isolated from another. The sacred knowledge imparted to children is intimately connected to the land, ceremony and language.

Translating Aboriginal child rights into practise will require careful thought and attention to baselines, which reflect the ancestral values, knowledge and laws shared among Aboriginal Peoples. It also will require careful consideration of issues relevant to each child in the context of his/her own culture(s) and circumstances, on a case by case basis. Practise must remain child-centred. There is no shortcut for this due diligence. By law, standards of care for Aboriginal children must uphold both culture and cultural diversity, with the child's own needs coming first.

For example, standards of care need to address aspects of cultural sustainability specifically linked to family and to the land. Among Aboriginal Peoples, family roles and responsibilities are central to the customary laws of the People. For millennia spiritual grounding and teaching within the extended family have connected each child to his or her Ancestors. Traditionally, it is primarily through family channels that sacred knowledge is passed. Today other cultural teachers may be called upon to support or guide this learning, but the fundamentals remain the same. Instruction happens on the land, through a natural lifelong flow of teachings and ceremonies.

Sacred knowledge is what roots a child spiritually - enabling the child to understand balance within his own life, within in her community and within the Circle of Life. It can be imparted only through appropriate cultural disciplines and ceremony. This process can be guided only by practising Knowledge Keepers. There is no artificial way, or 'program' substitute, for providing access to the teachings. Sacred knowledge is the very seat of culture. Protocols around sharing it keep the knowledge (and thus culture) intact for future generations.

Given this, systems of support for a child must be rooted within wider cultural supports (in keeping with the principle of indivisible heritage), or efforts to restore cultural health of the child will flounder. Spiritual elements of care need equivalent attention and funding support as social work practise, foster care delivery and other child welfare provisions. Land-based nurturing and teaching (including a natural and sustained progression of spiritual ceremonies) needs to have priority. Otherwise, fragmented 'professional' interventions may contribute to culture loss.

The development of comprehensive standards for Aboriginal child rights and accompanying criteria and indicators (see discussion in Section 6.3A, p. 35) will make the contemplation of such tasks easier - because this is where concrete safeguards for indivisible heritage are defined.

Full-spectrum funding needs and partnership goals should be determined in this context.



7. CONCLUSIONS: MANIFESTING ABORIGINAL CHILD RIGHTS

VACFSS has the privilege of working for Aboriginal Peoples at a historic time. The United Nations (U.N.) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (2007) has brought certainty to the question of Aboriginal rights. This declaration, based on customary law - as well as several legally binding treaties recognizing inherent rights, already existing in international law and signed by Canada - is regarded at the U.N. as the minimum standard for the rights of Indigenous Peoples. It lays out a framework and baselines for cultural rights. The heart of it is recognition of Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination.

The UNDRIP gives a basis to understand Aboriginal child rights and to strengthen provisions of the B.C. Child, Family & Community Services Act. These rights can be realized only through systemic changes to child welfare practise. Restorative measures must be implemented - without delay. Otherwise, culture loss will remain the trend and the colonial legacies of trauma and poverty will continue.

Fundamental shifts in child welfare standards and practise are possible through VACFSS operationalizing Aboriginal child rights from the starting point of customary law, as supported by the UNDRIP and underlying international law. Change will not come by adjustments alone. A fresh system is needed, free of colonial overtones and based on a holistic vision. This will include:

- a rights-based approach, moving forward with confidence in cultural rights
- safeguards for indivisible heritage, in all spheres of decision-making

- adherence to cultural protocols, to maintain, protect and promote the deepest expression(s) of culture and cultural knowledge
- deference to practising Knowledge Keepers, on matters of sacred knowledge and customary law
- sacred space for the voices of children to be heard, to ensure that their whole constellation of needs are met, including their spiritual growth
- practise that meets international standards for both individual & collective rights, while remaining child-centred
- generous funding support for special measures, both restorative and preventative, to revitalize culture and prevent culture loss

VACFSS is in the process of translating Aboriginal child rights into practise, to ensure that children 'in care' are nurtured and grounded in keeping with the full spectrum of cultural rights. It is bringing sacred knowledge back to the centre of child welfare - by revitalizing core cultural values, cultural protocols and customary practises. This gives a solid foundation for health and healing for Aboriginal children and their families.

Developing comprehensive standards for Aboriginal child rights, plus criteria and indicators (see Section 6.3A, p. 35), will give VACFSS a framework for strengthening policy and practise congruent with rights - as well as for measuring and celebrating its progress. This is the next stage.

As VACFSS advances on this path, its insights hold powerful lessons for us all, with respect to protecting culture while honouring cultural diversity. Its leadership as an agency promises profound changes to both social work and foster care standards and practise - benefiting not just Aboriginal Peoples, but also our societal beliefs of what is possible, on behalf of all children.

Today, VACFSS is not just a service provider to Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, but also a standard-setting institution whose work will be watched internationally. VACFSS should consider documenting and sharing its insights on 'best practices', via a case study formally submitted to both the U.N. Independent Expert on Cultural Rights and the Expert Group of the U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

VACFSS has the potential to bring new depth and integrity to our understanding of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) - both as a human rights instrument and as a standard-setting law within the broader international framework of cultural rights. This is a very fitting place to arrive at following the 20th anniversary of that declaration. Arriving here gives VACFSS the opportunity to help strengthen child welfare standards and practise, together with government partners who share legal responsibility for child rights.

APPENDIX 1:

U.N. DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples



Resolution adopted by the General Assembly

61/295. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The General Assembly,

Taking note of the recommendation of the Human Rights Council contained in its resolution 1/2 of 29 June 2006,(1) by which the Council adopted the text of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,

Recalling its resolution 61/178 of 20 December 2006, by which it decided to defer consideration of and action on the Declaration to allow time for further consultations thereon, and also decided to conclude its consideration before the end of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly,

Adopts the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as contained in the annex to the present resolution.

107th plenary meeting
13 September 2007

Annex

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The General Assembly,

Guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and good faith in the fulfilment of the obligations assumed by States in accordance with the Charter,

Affirming that indigenous peoples are equal to all other peoples, while recognizing the right of all peoples to be different, to consider themselves different, and to be respected as such,

Affirming also that all peoples contribute to the diversity and richness of civilizations and cultures, which constitute the common heritage of humankind,

Affirming further that all doctrines, policies and practices based on or advocating superiority of peoples or individuals on the basis of national origin or racial, religious, ethnic or cultural differences are racist, scientifically false, legally invalid, morally condemnable and socially unjust,

Reaffirming that indigenous peoples, in the exercise of their rights, should be free from discrimination of any kind,

Concerned that indigenous peoples have suffered from historic injustices as a result of, inter alia, their colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources, thus preventing them from exercising, in particular, their right to development in accordance with their own needs and interests,

Recognizing the urgent need to respect and promote the inherent rights of indigenous peoples which derive from their political, economic and social structures and from their cultures, spiritual traditions, histories and philosophies, especially their rights to their lands, territories and resources,

Recognizing also the urgent need to respect and promote the rights of indigenous peoples affirmed in treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements with States,

Welcoming the fact that indigenous peoples are organizing themselves for political, economic, social and cultural enhancement and in order to bring to an end all forms of discrimination and oppression wherever they occur,

Convinced that control by indigenous peoples over developments affecting them and their lands, territories and resources will enable them to maintain and strengthen their institutions, cultures and traditions, and to promote their development in accordance with their aspirations and needs,

Recognizing that respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment,

Emphasizing the contribution of the demilitarization of the lands and territories of indigenous peoples to peace, economic and social progress and development, understanding and friendly relations among nations and peoples of the world,

Recognizing in particular the right of indigenous families and communities to retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, training, education and well-being of their children, consistent with the rights of the child,

Considering that the rights affirmed in treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements between States and indigenous peoples are, in some situations, matters of international concern, interest, responsibility and character,

Considering also that treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements, and the relationship they represent, are the basis for a strengthened partnership between indigenous peoples and States,

Acknowledging that the Charter of the United Nations, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,² as well as the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action,⁽³⁾ affirm the fundamental importance of the right to self-determination of all peoples, by virtue of which they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development,

Bearing in mind that nothing in this Declaration may be used to deny any peoples their right to self-determination, exercised in conformity with international law,

Convinced that the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples in this Declaration will enhance harmonious and cooperative relations between the State and indigenous peoples, based on principles of justice, democracy, respect for human rights, non-discrimination and good faith,

Encouraging States to comply with and effectively implement all their obligations as they apply to indigenous peoples under international instruments, in particular those related to human rights, in consultation and cooperation with the peoples concerned,

Emphasizing that the United Nations has an important and continuing role to play in promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples,

Believing that this Declaration is a further important step forward for the recognition, promotion and protection of the rights and freedoms of indigenous peoples and in the development of relevant activities of the United Nations system in this field,

Recognizing and reaffirming that indigenous individuals are entitled without discrimination to all human rights recognized in international law, and that

indigenous peoples possess collective rights which are indispensable for their existence, well-being and integral development as peoples,

Recognizing that the situation of indigenous peoples varies from region to region and from country to country and that the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical and cultural backgrounds should be taken into consideration,

Solemnly proclaims the following United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a standard of achievement to be pursued in a spirit of partnership and mutual respect:

Article 1

Indigenous peoples have the right to the full enjoyment, as a collective or as individuals, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms as recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights(4) and international human rights law.

Article 2

Indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular that based on their indigenous origin or identity.

Article 3

Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

Article 4

Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.

Article 5

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions, while retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State.

Article 6

Every indigenous individual has the right to a nationality.

Article 7

1. Indigenous individuals have the rights to life, physical and mental integrity, liberty and security of person.
2. Indigenous peoples have the collective right to live in freedom, peace and security as distinct peoples and shall not be subjected to any act of genocide or any other act of violence, including forcibly removing children of the group to another group.

Article 8

1. Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture.
2. States shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for:
 - c. Any action which has the aim or effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities;
 - d. Any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them of their lands, territories or resources;
 - e. Any form of forced population transfer which has the aim or effect of violating or undermining any of their rights;
 - f. Any form of forced assimilation or integration;
 - g. Any form of propaganda designed to promote or incite racial or ethnic discrimination directed against them.

Article 9

Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right to belong to an indigenous community or nation, in accordance with the traditions and customs of the community or nation concerned. No discrimination of any kind may arise from the exercise of such a right.

Article 10

Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return.

Article 11

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.
2. States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs.

Article 12

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.
2. States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned.

Article 13

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.
2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected and also to ensure that indigenous peoples can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means.

Article 14

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.
3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

Article 15

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information.
2. States shall take effective measures, in consultation and cooperation with the indigenous peoples concerned, to combat prejudice and eliminate discrimination and to promote tolerance, understanding and good relations among indigenous peoples and all other segments of society.

Article 16

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-indigenous media without discrimination.
2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that State-owned media duly reflect indigenous cultural diversity. States, without prejudice to ensuring full freedom of expression, should encourage privately owned media to adequately reflect indigenous cultural diversity.

Article 17

1. Indigenous individuals and peoples have the right to enjoy fully all rights established under applicable international and domestic labour law.
2. States shall in consultation and cooperation with indigenous peoples take specific measures to protect indigenous children from economic

exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development, taking into account their special vulnerability and the importance of education for their empowerment.

3. Indigenous individuals have the right not to be subjected to any discriminatory conditions of labour and, inter alia, employment or salary.

Article 18

Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions.

Article 19

States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.

Article 20

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and develop their political, economic and social systems or institutions, to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities.
2. Indigenous peoples deprived of their means of subsistence and development are entitled to just and fair redress.

Article 21

1. Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.
2. States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.

Article 22

1. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities in the implementation of this Declaration.
2. States shall take measures, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination.

Article 23

Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.

Article 24

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals. Indigenous individuals also have the right to access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services.
2. Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States shall take the necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of this right.

Article 25

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.

Article 26

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.

2. Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired.
3. States shall give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories and resources. Such recognition shall be conducted with due respect to the customs, traditions and land tenure systems of the indigenous peoples concerned.

Article 27

States shall establish and implement, in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned, a fair, independent, impartial, open and transparent process, giving due recognition to indigenous peoples' laws, traditions, customs and land tenure systems, to recognize and adjudicate the rights of indigenous peoples pertaining to their lands, territories and resources, including those which were traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used. Indigenous peoples shall have the right to participate in this process.

Article 28

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to redress, by means that can include restitution or, when this is not possible, just, fair and equitable compensation, for the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used, and which have been confiscated, taken, occupied, used or damaged without their free, prior and informed consent.
2. Unless otherwise freely agreed upon by the peoples concerned, compensation shall take the form of lands, territories and resources equal in quality, size and legal status or of monetary compensation or other appropriate redress.

Article 29

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. States shall establish and implement assistance programmes for indigenous peoples for such conservation and protection, without discrimination.
2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that no storage or disposal of hazardous materials shall take place in the lands or territories of indigenous peoples without their free, prior and informed consent.

3. States shall also take effective measures to ensure, as needed, that programmes for monitoring, maintaining and restoring the health of indigenous peoples, as developed and implemented by the peoples affected by such materials, are duly implemented.

Article 30

1. Military activities shall not take place in the lands or territories of indigenous peoples, unless justified by a relevant public interest or otherwise freely agreed with or requested by the indigenous peoples concerned.
2. States shall undertake effective consultations with the indigenous peoples concerned, through appropriate procedures and in particular through their representative institutions, prior to using their lands or territories for military activities.

Article 31

3. Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.
4. In conjunction with indigenous peoples, States shall take effective measures to recognize and protect the exercise of these rights.

Article 32

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories and other resources.
2. States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.

3. States shall provide effective mechanisms for just and fair redress for any such activities, and appropriate measures shall be taken to mitigate adverse environmental, economic, social, cultural or spiritual impact.

Article 33

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to determine their own identity or membership in accordance with their customs and traditions. This does not impair the right of indigenous individuals to obtain citizenship of the States in which they live.
2. Indigenous peoples have the right to determine the structures and to select the membership of their institutions in accordance with their own procedures.

Article 34

Indigenous peoples have the right to promote, develop and maintain their institutional structures and their distinctive customs, spirituality, traditions, procedures, practices and, in the cases where they exist, juridical systems or customs, in accordance with international human rights standards.

Article 35

Indigenous peoples have the right to determine the responsibilities of individuals to their communities.

Article 36

1. Indigenous peoples, in particular those divided by international borders, have the right to maintain and develop contacts, relations and cooperation, including activities for spiritual, cultural, political, economic and social purposes, with their own members as well as other peoples across borders.
2. States, in consultation and cooperation with indigenous peoples, shall take effective measures to facilitate the exercise and ensure the implementation of this right.

Article 37

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the recognition, observance and enforcement of treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements concluded with States or their successors and to have States honour and respect such treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements.

2. Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as diminishing or eliminating the rights of indigenous peoples contained in treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements.

Article 38

States in consultation and cooperation with indigenous peoples, shall take the appropriate measures, including legislative measures, to achieve the ends of this Declaration.

Article 39

Indigenous peoples have the right to have access to financial and technical assistance from States and through international cooperation, for the enjoyment of the rights contained in this Declaration.

Article 40

Indigenous peoples have the right to access to and prompt decision through just and fair procedures for the resolution of conflicts and disputes with States or other parties, as well as to effective remedies for all infringements of their individual and collective rights. Such a decision shall give due consideration to the customs, traditions, rules and legal systems of the indigenous peoples concerned and international human rights.

Article 41

The organs and specialized agencies of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations shall contribute to the full realization of the provisions of this Declaration through the mobilization, inter alia, of financial cooperation and technical assistance. Ways and means of ensuring participation of indigenous peoples on issues affecting them shall be established.

Article 42

The United Nations, its bodies, including the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and specialized agencies, including at the country level, and States shall promote respect for and full application of the provisions of this Declaration and follow up the effectiveness of this Declaration.

Article 43

The rights recognized herein constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world.

Article 44

All the rights and freedoms recognized herein are equally guaranteed to male and female indigenous individuals.

Article 45

Nothing in this Declaration may be construed as diminishing or extinguishing the rights indigenous peoples have now or may acquire in the future

Article 46

1. Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, people, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act contrary to the Charter of the United Nations or construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States.
2. In the exercise of the rights enunciated in the present Declaration, human rights and fundamental freedoms of all shall be respected. The exercise of the rights set forth in this Declaration shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law and in accordance with international human rights obligations. Any such limitations shall be non-discriminatory and strictly necessary solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for meeting the just and most compelling requirements of a democratic society.
3. The provisions set forth in this Declaration shall be interpreted in accordance with the principles of justice, democracy, respect for human rights, equality, non-discrimination, good governance and good faith.

(1) See Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-first Session, Supplement

No. 53 (A/61/53), part one, chap. II, sect. A.

(2) See resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

(3) A/CONF.157/24 (Part I), chap. III.

(4) Resolution 217 A (III).

APPENDIX 2:

REPORT GLOSSARY - Key Terms and their Meanings

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

An Indigenous People (in Canada, referred to as 'Aboriginal') is the people whose ancestors have resided in a land since time immemorial and whose culture reflects a close relationship with that land. Indigenous Peoples have diverse cultures, each entirely unique in its language, customary laws and cultural expressions. However, all Indigenous Peoples have in common a distinct spiritual relationship with ancestral lands. Across North America, Indigenous Peoples share similar values rooted in the knowledge that life is sacred and that all is inter-connected in the Circle of Life.

PEOPLE

'People' refers to a distinct population sharing a language, territory and governance system. In international law, peoples have the right to self determination. This right is a central principle of international law.

CULTURE

Culture is a term used to describe a people's world view, value system and customary way of life including their language, relationship with the land (e.g. food), rituals and outward expressions such as dress. Among Indigenous cultures the common thread is a profound connection between culture and ancestral lands, through sacred knowledge and the spiritual ceremonies through which this knowledge is passed between generations. The United Nations (U.N.) has recognized that this cultural heritage is indivisible. The culture and cultural identity of Indigenous Peoples are intimately and inalienably connected to ancestral lands. This has been noted in *R. v. Gladue* (1999).

CULTURAL RIGHTS

The term 'cultural rights' is used at the United Nations to summarize various categories of rights existing under international law concerning cultural heritage (some being unique to Indigenous Peoples, while others also apply more broadly). This term embraces rights to safeguard culture as well as cultural diversity. It is a useful window for understanding the rights of Indigenous Peoples, when it is combined with the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and all the treaties and other internationally adopted standards underlying this declaration (see Table 4.3). Together, these instruments define the legal obligations of Canada (because Canada has signed the applicable treaties, all legally binding).

In 2009 the U.N. Human Rights Council established the U.N. Independent Expert on Cultural Rights, to monitor compliance by countries.

CUSTOMARY LAW

Among Indigenous Peoples, customary law is a body of oral law carrying the Knowledge and Instructions of the Ancestors. This law describes sacred life relationships: the knowledge that everything is connected and that every choice we make (e.g. attitudes, behaviour) has an impact within the delicate balance of life systems. Customary law is recognized by the U.N. as a distinct category of international law. It is the primary expression of self-determination as a people.

KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS

Knowledge Keepers are those individuals within an Aboriginal nation who carry the sacred knowledge of the Ancestors, on which customary law is based. These persons are responsible for preserving and transmitting the oral teachings which guide the spiritual way of life of their people, so that sacred roles and responsibilities are honoured between generations (and balance is maintained within the Circle of Life). They have apprenticed over their lifetime to learn the spiritual discipline required to serve in this role. They safeguard the integrity of the ceremonies through which sacred knowledge is passed from one generation to the next; and they practise ceremony as a way of life. Their legitimacy can be verified by other Knowledge Keepers, in the territory and/or among their peers.

SACRED KNOWLEDGE

Sacred knowledge is a holistic body of knowledge describing the profound inter-connectedness of all life. It addresses ethical conduct: how to create and nurture healthy and balanced relationships that can be sustained over time, within and between generations. It is passed orally - one heart at a time - to ensure that the teachings resonate at a deep level to guide decision-making. The teachings carry customary law: connecting rights to responsibility. They are the heart of cultural identity. They are transmitted primarily through spiritual ceremonies, from the time of conception and birth onward through an individual's life journey.

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Traditional knowledge is a term commonly used in Canada and internationally to describe the cultural knowledge and values of Indigenous Peoples. However, it is generally a colonial term - describing the concept of sacred knowledge outside its proper domain of customary law. Colonial governments have used this term at the United Nations to skirt customary law and try to bring matters of sacred knowledge under national legislation (supposedly, for 'protection'), because of the commercial value of certain cultural expressions (e.g. ancestral practices for keeping ecosystems - including 'biodiversity' - intact over millennia and ancestral knowledge of medicinal plants). The term is deliberately confusing and has served to undermine provisions for safeguarding culture.

The term 'sacred knowledge' is more appropriate. This term acknowledges the spiritual dimensions of ancestral knowledge, keeping cultural practise firmly in the realm of customary law. It is a more accurate, respectful and safe translation to use when speaking about shared Aboriginal cultural values (e.g. world view) and shared Aboriginal customary practices (e.g. systems of governance which are holistic), or matters of customary law and/or cultural protocol specific to one Aboriginal People. When we refer to core aspects of Aboriginal culture(s) as 'sacred knowledge', it is clear that governance decisions which belong (by both tradition and by law) only in the hands of practising Knowledge Keepers must stay strictly in their care. The integrity of cultural knowledge and cultural practise is preserved. Cultural assimilation, culture loss and genocide are prevented.

SEVENTH GENERATION PRINCIPLE

The Seventh Generation Principle is a term commonly used among Aboriginal Peoples across Canada to refer to sacred knowledge and customary law. It speaks to the inter-connectedness of life and all living beings. Directly translated, it means that how we choose to live in our lifetime - both as individuals and as a society - affects the lives of children seven generations from now. This provides a reminder of our responsibility to look after not only ourselves, but also our relations in the Circle of Life (sometimes called the Web of Life, to reflect the delicate balance of life systems which we are connected to and part of).

The teaching of the Seventh Generation Principle summarizes the 'Ecological and Relational World View' shared among Aboriginal Peoples. It is a way of explaining systems of sacred knowledge, through a straightforward concept describing our intimate connection to one another, as well as to the Earth (aptly called 'Mother Earth', to reflect the fundamental relationships sustaining life). This gives a means to talk about inter-relationships, which among Aboriginal Peoples are described in spiritual terms, but bind us all regardless of our own particular cultural (or societal) lens/language of understanding.

ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

In Canada we refer to the rights of Indigenous Peoples as Aboriginal rights. These rights are inherent: meaning that they are ancestral rights which are fundamental to existing as a people and are therefore inalienable. Today Aboriginal rights are protected in international law, through a variety of treaties and 'soft law' (i.e. other internationally adopted standards) evolving over recent decades -

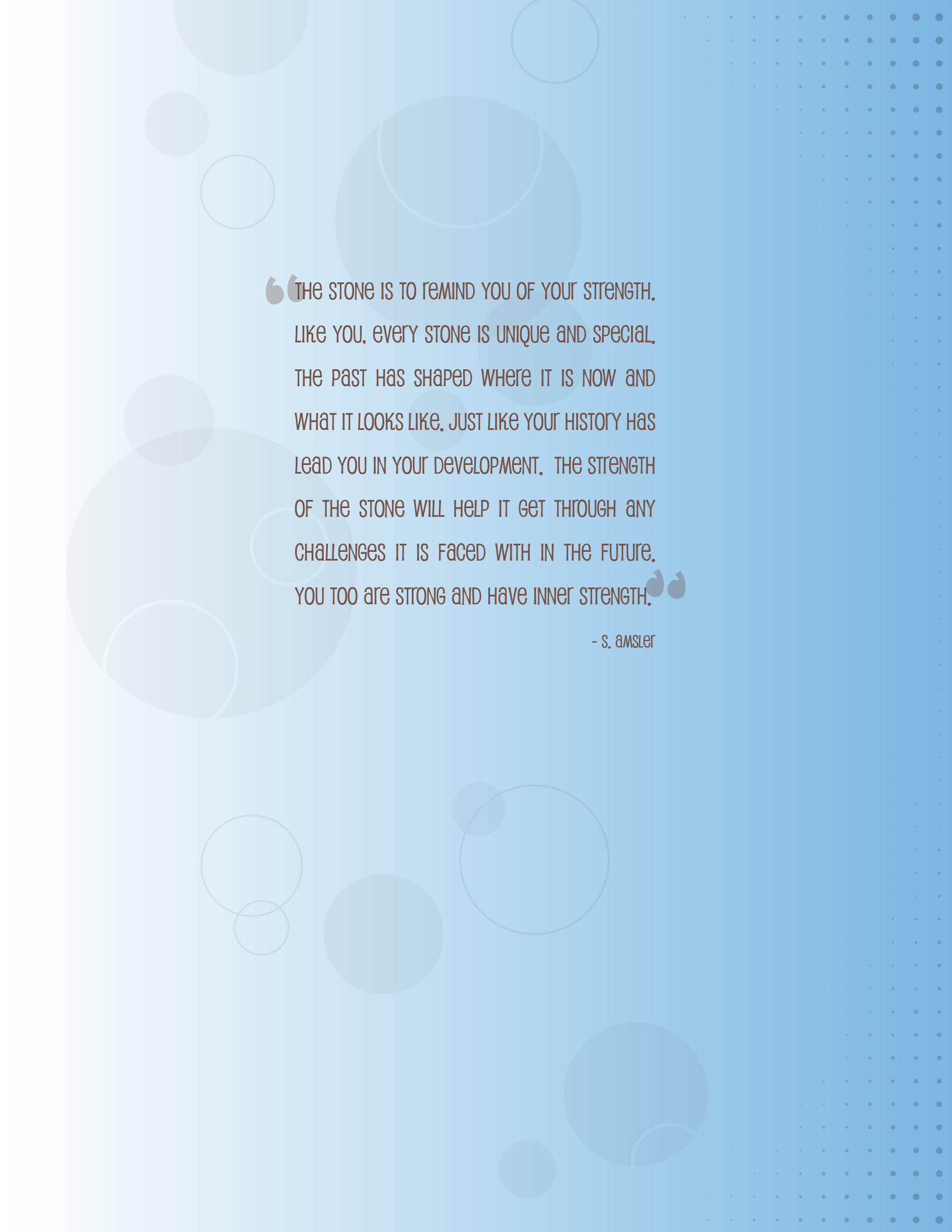
summarized in the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007). However, they flow from ancestral rights and responsibilities, as expressed in customary law. Overall this remains poorly understood in Canada. International standards on the rights of Indigenous Peoples include:

- the right to self-determination, as a people (e.g. prior informed consent)
- the right to keep systems of sacred knowledge intact and active

Underlying these rights is the Principle of Indivisible Heritage - which recognizes that Indigenous Peoples' cultures are intimately connected to not only traditional governance structures (including customary practices between generations), but also to their language and their distinct spiritual relationship with ancestral lands.

ABORIGINAL CHILD RIGHTS

The rights of Aboriginal children extend well beyond both provincial legislation and Canada's duties under the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. International law summarized in the U.N. Declaration in the Rights of Indigenous Peoples also applies. This body of law maps the legal obligations of countries (see Section 4.0 and Table 4.3). It includes customary law: the foundation of Aboriginal Peoples' right to self-determination. Within Aboriginal systems of customary law, it is recognized that each child is a spiritual being, whose full spiritual development must be nurtured from the time of conception forward. Best interests of the child must be defined in keeping with such cultural rights, allowing a child to meet his/her full potential. Each Aboriginal child has the right to develop and thrive consistent with their own culture(s): grounded in the sacred knowledge, teachings and customary practices of their People(s) and/or compatible cultural ways.

The background is a light blue gradient. On the left side, there are several overlapping circles of various sizes, some solid light blue and some white with blue outlines. On the right side, there is a vertical band of a darker blue color with a white dot pattern, resembling a grid or a series of dots.

“THE STONE IS TO REMIND YOU OF YOUR STRENGTH.
LIKE YOU, EVERY STONE IS UNIQUE AND SPECIAL.
THE PAST HAS SHAPED WHERE IT IS NOW AND
WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE. JUST LIKE YOUR HISTORY HAS
LEAD YOU IN YOUR DEVELOPMENT. THE STRENGTH
OF THE STONE WILL HELP IT GET THROUGH ANY
CHALLENGES IT IS FACED WITH IN THE FUTURE.
YOU TOO ARE STRONG AND HAVE INNER STRENGTH.”

- S. AMSLER

CONTACT US

HEAD OFFICE & FAMILY PRESERVATION

745 Clark Drive, Vancouver, BC V5L 3J3

Ph: 604-872-6723 Fax: 604-872-5274

GUARDIANSHIP & RESIDENTIAL RESOURCES

3284 E. Broadway, Vancouver, BC V5M 1Z8

Ph: 604-872-6723 Fax: (G.) 604-215-0273 (R.R.) 604-215-0176

CHILD PROTECTION & FAMILY SERVICES

471 E. Broadway, Vancouver, BC V5T 1W9

Ph: 778-331-4500 Fax: 778-331-4515

TOLL FREE: 1-877-982-2377

CHILD PROTECTION TOLL FREE: 1-877-331-4505

AFTER HOURS: 604-310-1234

E-MAIL: info@vacfss.com

WEB: www.vacfss.com

