

## **NATIVE CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES OF TORONTO ADOPTION SERVICES AND PERMANENCY PLANNING**

Contact with Europeans resulted in the subjugation of many traditional structures by perpetuated and maintained cultural genocide through colonization, the Indian Act, residential school systems, the 60's Scoop and mainstream child welfare practice. Native Child and Family Services of Toronto is striving to reverse this trend by creating a service model that is culturally based and respects the values of Native people, the extended family and the right to self-determination.

First Peoples have always recognized that at the core of every healthy individual are strong, resilient families and communities. This view is at the foundation of NCFST's Adoption and Permanency Planning department as it endeavours to find homes for Native children.

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto has been mandated with the responsibility to place Native children, who are eligible for adoption and other permanency options, in culturally congruent homes. Since its inception in September 2005, NCFST's adoption department has successfully placed our children across Turtle Island.

Historically, Native children involved in the child welfare system have been placed in non-Native homes, a practice that has interfered with their birthright by inhibiting access to heritage, community, ceremony and teachings. This practice has had a devastating impact on their self-identity, global sense of belonging and personal growth. NCFST recognizes that Native Nations have also suffered an incalculable loss as whole generations of children have been torn from the fabric of their communities.

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto strives to provide the necessary supports in order to strengthen families recognizing that a child's best interest is served when they remain in a safe and healthy environment. Many children involved with NCFST are living temporarily with extended family members or foster care providers while efforts are made to bring children and their parent(s) back together. When this is not possible, other placement alternatives are explored.

NCFST is committed to permanency planning for every child. Under the Child and Family Service Act several permanency options exist:

**Adoption:** a permanency option in which non-birth parents voluntarily agree to assume the legal, spiritual, emotional, cognitive and physical responsibility of the child providing a safe, loving, forever home.

**Customary Care:** a permanency option recognizing the unique nature of First Nations peoples and the need to place Native children in traditional communities. This is a formal agreement supported by the Band/Reserve community, child welfare agency and birth parent(s). A child under a customary care agreement is no longer in care of the Province. Care providers in the child's community, who are approved by NCFST, and the host Band/Reserve, commit to care for the child over the long-term.

**Kinship Care:** the child remains in care of the Province and the Kinship home is identified as a extended family or community member who has passed all Provincial regulations.

**Legal Custody:** a court order that appoints the custody of a child to a family usually with the agreement of the birth parent(s).

**Relinquishment:** the rights of the birth parent(s) are voluntarily relinquished to the child welfare agency or private adoption worker. Typically, the birth parent(s) in this scenario choose the family that will permanently plan for the child.

Statistically on a per-capita basis there are more First Nations children in the care of child welfare authorities, who are often placed in non-Native foster homes or placed for adoption in non-Native families. It is imperative that NCFST strive to maintain the integrity of the First Nations traditions and community by repatriating children to their Band/Reserve communities or with Native families through the various forms of permanency options.