

Apology

We as the non-Indigenous Children's Aid Societies of Ontario apologize to Indigenous families, children, and communities for our role in the Sixties Scoop and our continued role in the present day over-representation of Indigenous children in our system.

We acknowledge that we, as the Children's Aid Societies, were aware of or should have been aware of the damage and trauma created first by residential schools, then carried forward by our participation in the Sixties Scoop. We saw the broken and devastated communities and were complacent in the belief that the fault was all yours. It was not. The actions we participated in clearly led you to this point.

We apologize to the children, mothers, and fathers who have been hurt by the Sixties Scoop, and who currently find themselves caught up in the child welfare system. During the Sixties Scoop child welfare agencies removed thousands of Indigenous children from their homes, families, and communities across Canada. Many of these children were placed in non-Indigenous homes across Canada, the United States, and even overseas. While some adoptive families did their best to love and care for the Indigenous children, the Sixties Scoop is now recognized as a practice of forced assimilation—one that extended well beyond the 1960s and into the 1980s.

Justice Edwin Kimmelman, the author of the 1985 report **No Quiet Place** on the child welfare system and how it affected Indigenous people, described the practice of the Sixties Scoop as "cultural genocide." This is the same description used by Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin and Commissioner Murray Sinclair to describe the residential school system. While we are working to change this trajectory, we must recognize that today things are worse. Indigenous children continue to be over-represented in our system. They continue to be placed in homes and institutions far from their families and communities. Even in 2017, these placements are not culturally safe. The children tell us this in their words and through their actions of suicide and self-harm.

We have not adequately addressed the need for healing from trauma that is essential for Indigenous communities to move forward. We do not have the proper distribution of resources such that Indigenous organizations are providing the child welfare services to their children and such that treatment opportunities are readily available so that healing can happen closer to home.

It is important that we acknowledge and appreciate the impact and meaning of cultural genocide to the Indigenous people of Ontario. The Sixties Scoop has been a continuation of the inter-generational traumas and cultural loss inflicted on the Indigenous peoples of Ontario. There continues to be a lack of Indigenous culture-based services for children and families, and there continues to be resistance to Indigenous self-determination with respect to the care of their children and families.

These are historic and current day injustices for which we, as Ontario's non-Indigenous Children's Aid Societies, must take responsibility. These are difficult truths, but they are truths we must speak in order to begin the journey towards healing, change, and reconciliation.

It is time that we do more than offer words. Today we commit to Indigenous communities that we will continue to seek and implement your guidance as we undertake active measures to ensure that we are serving Indigenous children and families in a manner that empowers children, families, and communities.

The Ontario non-Indigenous Children's Aid Societies have unanimously agreed to prioritize Reconciliation with Indigenous communities through the **following key commitments**:

- Reduce the number of Indigenous children in care.
- Reduce the number of legal files involving Indigenous children and families.
- Increase the use of formal customary care agreements.
- Ensure Indigenous representation and involvement at the local Boards of Directors.
- Implement mandatory, regular Indigenous training for staff.
- Embed Jordan's Principle in service practice and the inter-agency protocol.
- In consultation with Indigenous communities, develop a unique agency-based plan to better address the needs of the children and families from those communities.
- Continue to develop relationships between the local agency and the local Indigenous communities.
- Assist those individuals wanting to see their historical files by accessing and providing the information they request.

The measuring and tracking of each of these commitments is being undertaken at a local and provincial level. Agencies are committed to reporting on outcomes in each of these areas.

The Board of Directors of the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies has made the following **four key commitments**:

- Shift resources to Indigenous organizations so that they are better able to provide services for and advocate on behalf of Indigenous children, families, and communities.
- Support Indigenous leadership in their quest for self-governance and legislation regarding the care of children within their local communities.
- Support Indigenous autonomy in the development of specific Indigenous services and the child welfare system.
- Support and encourage non-Indigenous agencies to work with local Indigenous communities to ensure that children and families are served in a way that leads to Reconciliation.

The commitments made by the Ontario child welfare sector represent an acknowledgement that it must do better, be held accountable for results, and work in a framework that recognizes and supports Reconciliation with Indigenous communities.

The Sixties Scoop and many current practices have resulted in immeasurable damage to the Indigenous people of Ontario. These words of apology and regret are only an acknowledgement that we must do better. We have a long path towards reconciliation and healing of these historic injustices. The OACAS and the local Children's Aid Societies are committed to working with all stakeholders to ensure we are moving towards a healthier future.



Mary Ballantyne
Chief Executive Officer



Ontario Association of
Children's Aid Societies

October 3, 2017