

Southern First Nations Network of Care

**SAGKEENG CHILD AND FAMILY
INVESTIGATIVE REPORT**

Executive Summary

The Southern First Nations Network of Care (SFNNC) is providing this Executive Summary of the “Sagkeeng First Nations Investigative Report” to the Grandmothers Council and Chief and Council of Sagkeeng First Nations as follow up to the investigation in 2015 on Sagkeeng Child & Family Services (SCFS). A presentation was provided to Chief and Council in January of 2017 outlining the concerns and recommendations. In addition, a presentation was also provided to the SCFS Board of Directors and the agency Executive Director for follow up.

Summary

On September 8 2015, a Sagkeeng community group known as the ‘Grandmothers Council’ gathered in front of the Sagkeeng Child and Family Services main office. The ‘Grandmother Council’ provided the SFNNC CEO and Chief of Sagkeeng a list of grievances that had been previously forwarded to the Senior Management and Administrators of Sagkeeng Child and Family Services.

The grievances ranged from human resource practices within the Agency, specific staff’s treatment of community members, to an overall dissatisfaction with Agency’s performance and their relationship with the community. The CEO and the Chief of Sagkeeng First Nations met with the Grandmothers to discuss their concerns and to agree to a resolution.

The gravity of the allegations, as well as the statutory obligations to ensure that child and family services were delivered to the community guided the SFNNC’s decision to have the concerns thoroughly investigated. The SFNNC commissioned three reviews into the matter:

- I. Internal review into the Sagkeeng CFS human resource program,
- II. Internal review into the Sagkeeng CFS financial program,
- III. External review to examine the community grievances brought forward by the Grandmother Council.

The SFNNC contracted, Ms. Cybil Williams, who is a community member, familiar with Child Welfare, and cultured in the community norms and practices of Sagkeeng First Nations, to conduct the investigation and to report the findings and recommendations to all the pertinent parties. The investigator compiled the grandmother’s concerns, the legislative requirements and compliances, agency practices to ascertain and streamline the issues and to identify recommendations that would rectify the concerns.

The following is a list of community grievance identified; concerns which were broad in nature however concerning enough for the grandmother’s council to bring forward:

- Senior Management reportedly hiring families and friends and the adverse effect on Agency functions
- Inappropriate termination of employees
- No knowledge of how Agency Family Enhancement funds were allocated.
- Lack of information sharing with families with respect to their cases, lack of investigation into allegations, and the manner in which the Agency interacted with various stakeholders within the community
- Concerns with respect to the intervention styles of specific workers as they appeared “heavy handed” and disrespectful in the performance of their duties. The community as well as the Grandmother Council expressed concerns about the amount of families in the community who were becoming involved with Agency services as well as the rising number of children in care of the agency.
- Alleged that there appeared to be little to no investigations or assessments being done by Agency workers prior to action being taken by Sagkeeng Child and Family Services staff. Workers were perceived to be apprehending children without investigation as to whether the removal was warranted.
- Lack of case planning for families and children involved with the Agency.
- The Grandmother Council cited poor communication to families with respect to what the case expectations were, as well as little to no collaboration with families when developing case plans.
- Issues with respectful and or collaborative practices being conducted at the Agency. The first is the manner in which clients and families are treated. Workers speak to elders, and community members in a condescending and rude manner. When people object to being treated in this manner, it appears that little is done by management to resolve the issue and or correct their employee’s behaviours.
- The practice of police accompaniment to child apprehensions on reserve. From a community perspective, the optics was that of children ‘being arrested’. This came from incidents where children are the individuals removed from their home, and taken into police and child welfare official vehicles.
- Concern with respect to the prevention or enhancement services provided to families. They felt that little ‘work’ was being done with families to assist them overcome their issues. This would include programming, speaking with families about the issues and providing general support such as counselling, or advocating for services for families.
- Issues with respect to foster home licensing on the reserve. Some of these were tangible materials which can be resolved in mediation. (ie: Smoke detectors are required, Need to have cribs/swing- can’t sleep with child, when parents/caregivers/grandparents are sick, children are removed rather than placed with family members, don’t want children going out of community anymore, Children learning other languages in ‘New Canadian’ homes’)
- Relationship with the community: The Grandmother Council’s concerns regarding nepotism, disrespectful treatment, and lack of positive communication has been supported by community collateral agencies, community members and care providers.

- **Aboriginal Governance:** The mandating of Aboriginal agencies under the 1983 Master Agreement were viewed as transition periods to full jurisdiction and control over child and family services in Aboriginal communities. The advent of the AJI-CWI was also viewed as a means to this goal.
- **Dissolution of the former Board:** Community members have expressed concerns with respect to the circumstances surrounding the removal of the Board of Directors in 2014. Information gleaned from former Board members as well as documentation reviews indicate that the Board Chair would have been open to enlisting support and guidance of the SFNNC in resolving the issues.
- **Agency relationship with Chief of Sagkeeng:** There appeared to be no specific concerns, but only that the two were 'friendly' and there appeared to be some suspicion of collusion.

The following techniques were used to gather information for this report in order to develop appropriate recommendations:

1. Case Studies- interviews and file reviews on families involved with the Agency.
2. File Reviews- random file reviews.
3. Interviews from Collaterals- interviews with on-reserve representatives of collateral or supportive organizations.
4. Staff interviews- open ended discussions with staff on service delivery methods.
5. Document reviews- review of non-file documentation such as Agency policies, minutes, and related reports
6. Interviews with community members/stakeholders
7. Review of literature, legislation, regulations, Case Standards

The following recommendations were made to address concerns that were outstanding, to provide immediate attention to those that required it, and to ensure previous recommendations from past reports were also followed up.

Recommendations:

I - Human Resources

HR- 1

That the Board of Directors establish a committee with the purpose of reviewing and revising the current Human Resource Policy. Particular emphasis should be on clarification of penalties, establishment of timelines, and clarification of the conflict of interest section.

HR- 2

That promotion of incentives for Ojibway language fluency for staff be included into the Human Resource Manual and Agency budget.

HR-3

That Sagkeeng Child and Family Services, in collaboration with Southern First Nation Network of Care, revise the position of Quality Assurance Manager, within the Agency so that the individual in the position is not placed in a conflict when conducting their duties.

II - Finance

FI- 1

That the Board of Directors establish a committee with the purpose of developing a comprehensive financial policy for the Agency.

FI-2

That the financial policy outline process for tendering and awarding contracts.

III - Service Delivery

SD-1

That Sagkeeng Child and Family Services immediately plan and host a community intra-Agency conference with the purpose to positively re-engage collateral organizations and communicate Agency programs and services.

SD- 2

That Sagkeeng Child and Family Services receive in-house training on Case Management processes.

SD-3

That Sagkeeng Child and Family Services, in accordance with the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, receive training on the intergenerational impact of Residential School, as well as Collective Trauma.

SD-4

That each and every open file within the Agency be reviewed by a case management specialist, supervisor, and worker to ensure that a collaborative case plan in accordance with Manitoba Child and Family Services Standards is completed.

SD-5

That the Agency ensures that an accurate count of all children in care and all families in receipt of services from the agency be compiled. That the agency considers assigning this function to the quality assurance position.

SD- 6

That the Ojibway language be promoted in children in care, and or families in receipt of services from the Agency. That this promotion occur in programming as well as in various existing programs throughout the Agency.

SD-7

That the SCFS Agency and SFNNC review the current practice of utilizing Voluntary Surrender of Guardianships, and create approval processes which support anti-oppressive practice, as well as support parental rights for full legal representation.

SD-8

That guidelines, policies, roles, responsibilities and procedural guidelines, be clarified in the 'Circle of Care program' in a program manual.

IV. Governance – this heading was added at a later time as further exploration guided the investigator to speak to issues pertaining to the governance of the agency.

G0-1

That the Board of Directors, upon the end of the Administration Order, create a work-plan with the Agency Director, with clear timelines and deliverables for these recommendations as well as review into the status of the Gage Guimond Review.

G0-2

That the Board of Directors clarify the legal reporting relationship with Sagkeeng First Nation as an Board Appointing Body and that this definition be incorporated into the Agency by-laws.

G0-3

That the Board of Directors establishes a reporting and communication protocol with Chiefs and Council, and once ratified, incorporates the protocol into the Board policy manual.

G0-4

That the Board of Director members complete training on the fundamentals of policy governance; by-laws; legal liabilities of boards; CFS legislation; and the Board's fiduciary duty to the Agency, including financial oversight and monitoring.

G0-5

That the Board of Directors in collaboration with the Agency Director, and Child and Family portfolio Councillor, develop and implement strategies for building community partnerships, collaboration, and that this plan be communicated to all staff within the Agency.

G0-6.

That the Agency, in partnership with Sagkeeng First Nation, as per provisions within the Child and Family Services Standards Section 1.2.1 Standard 5 regarding community groups; institute and develop a community group with functions that promote positive relationship building and overall positive family support.

G0-7

That the Agency ensures governance record keeping is in keeping with established best practices for Governance documentation filing. This includes but is not limited to up to date and accurate minute books, up to date and accurate legal documents such as Policies, Agency By-laws, and corporate seals.

The recommendations were compiled into a work plan for the agency to track and identify the completed tasks. The agency was provided a one year timeline to complete the tasks and to report their results to the SFNNC, although given the complexity of the issues; the SFNNC has been flexible in the agency's response time. To date, the agency has since identified 55% completed. The agency has also provided updates in the annual Strategic Service Plans which are presented to the SFNNC, the province and the federal funders on an annual basis.

During the course of the SFNNC involvement, several recommendations were implemented within the agency apart from the investigation. Many of those recommendations were completed or ongoing prior to the agency receiving its autonomy. Simultaneously, the recommendations were linked together in a work plan for ongoing follow up. The SFNNC and SCFS have agreed to set aside those recommendations that were found to be redundant or not achievable.

Conclusion

Child Welfare Agencies often come into contact with families who are at their most vulnerable and fragile state. Respectful interventions with understanding into the contextual factors such as trauma, historical disruption of parenting, and how these are related to and affect addictions are crucial to reinforcing the humanity and dignity of First Nations families.

Preliminary findings indicate a need for strong measures to be implemented which will support Sagkeeng Child and Family Services in re-establishing much of its core relationships and core functions. Stability and harmony is of utmost importance with the evolving changes in child welfare.

The SFNNC fully supports the community of Sagkeeng, Chief and Council, Board of Directors, the Executive Director, and staff in their coordinated efforts towards solidarity.

Respectfully submitted,

Southern First Nations Network of Care