

ANTI-OPPRESSION  
IN CHILD WELFARE:  
LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR  
CHANGE

*A Discussion Paper*

Prepared by:  
The Child Welfare Anti-Oppression Roundtable

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Anti-oppressive practice is concerned with eradicating social injustice perpetuated by societal structural inequalities, particularly along the lines of race, gender, sexual orientation and identity, ability, age, class, occupation, and social service usage.

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We acknowledge the absence of several critical voices in this preliminary discussion paper, including child welfare services users and our First Nations and Métis colleagues. We also recognize the absence of a francophone perspective. It is our intention to use the consultation process to continue to invite these perspectives into the dialogue.

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# Anti-Oppression in Child Welfare: Laying the Foundation for Change A Discussion Paper

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# INTRODUCTION

## **A. Background**

The Child Welfare Anti-Oppression Roundtable evolved from a 2004 initiative through which a sub-committee of the Provincial Inter-Agency Child Welfare Training Committee was created to develop a training curriculum to assist front-line staff in responding to diversity. Over time, it became apparent that training alone could not overcome the systemic oppression that continues to lead to the over-representation of racialized and marginalized populations within the child welfare system.

The objectives of the sub-committee evolved and led to:

- the expansion of the anti-oppression curriculum and training to address relationships with agency staff as well as with service users; and,
- the creation of the provincial Anti-Oppression Roundtable to develop, support and share initiatives in anti-oppression work.

Seven agencies (Toronto, Toronto Catholic, Hamilton, Wellington, Waterloo, Ottawa and Peel) underwrote the costs of the development of the anti-oppression curriculum, including the development of 13 trainers. Workshop pilots began in April 2008 and have already been delivered to several hundred staff. Following feedback and modifications, a plan will be developed to support delivery of the training throughout the province.

The Anti-Oppression Roundtable now includes representation from almost half of the child welfare agencies in Ontario (see Appendix A). It aims to develop and recommend a strategy to build agency capacity and advocate for the inclusion of anti-oppressive principles in policies, structure, practices and relationships with both internal and external stakeholders. The Roundtable will be seeking formal status through the Local Directors Section and requesting funds from the Provincial Projects Committee to support a consultation process leading to the approval of an anti-oppression framework for child welfare in Ontario. This paper is an invitation to the field to join the discussion and commit to action.

Throughout this same period, a number of agencies have individually begun the process of integrating practices that align with the principles of anti-oppression. We recognize and will continue to benefit from their efforts.

## **B. Anti-Oppression & Other Provincial Initiatives**

This discussion about anti-oppression has been influenced and enriched by several other provincial initiatives.

In 2001, the Provincial Directors of Service published a paper, “A Critical Analysis of the Evolution of Reform”, which called for “a rebalancing of priorities to enable a viable, client-centred protection service”.

This challenge led to a project which aimed to identify best practices and required skills to enhance positive worker interventions with children and their families in child protection services. The results of this project, led by Andy Koster, were published in 2005 as “Child Welfare in Ontario: Developing a Collaborative Intervention Model”. The consultation materials included 20 documents related to advocacy approaches to work for social justice, including anti-oppression work.

Also in 2005, the Provincial Directors of Service published a paper, “Changing the Picture: Succession Planning and Gender Participation” which identified the barriers that perpetuate the under-representation of women at the senior levels of child welfare.

At the same time, the Ministry of Children & Youth Services, through the Child Welfare Secretariat, launched a process that led to a legislative and policy framework designed to “transform” child welfare service delivery in Ontario. Fundamental to this transformation was recognition of the need to work in partnership with service users and to recognize their unique and increasingly complex needs.

### **C. The Purpose of This Discussion Paper**

In 2007, members of the Anti-Oppression Roundtable began to consider how to broaden the dialogue about anti-oppression in child welfare and engage the field to act. This discussion paper is the result of these deliberations. Its purpose is twofold:

- to provide a summary of the current thinking about anti-oppression and its relevance to child welfare; and,
- to stimulate a provincial dialogue and consultation process that will result in the creation of a shared framework for anti-oppression in all Ontario child welfare agencies.

Some readers may come to this paper hoping that it will offer strategies and ideas for delivering anti-oppressive child welfare services. They will likely be disappointed. While we refer to service considerations and implications (and include Gary Dumbrill’s excellent article as Appendix D), we kept coming around again to the need for internal agency reflection, preparation and readiness. Anti-oppressive child welfare practice is something that can be sustained only if the principles are rooted deeply within our own internal structures, policies, procedures and practices. Thus, this is where we have begun: with ourselves.

# DEFINITIONS & PRINCIPLES

## A. Definitions

The language related to anti-oppressive practice is broad and complex. It includes terms such as “diversity”, “equity”, “cultural competence” and “multi-culturalism”. While all of these have their place, we have chosen to use “anti-oppression” to incorporate these terms as well as to underscore the role of power and privilege in perpetuating systemic oppression. A full Glossary of Terms may be found in Appendix A.

D.J. Clifford (1995) defines anti-oppression as a perspective that views social divisions (especially ‘race’, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation and age) as matters of broad social structure, as well as being social and organizational issues. An anti-oppressive perspective looks at the use and abuse of power not only in relation to individual and organizational behaviour but also in relation to broader social structures such as the health, education, political, economic, media and cultural systems and their routine provision of services and rewards to powerful groups. These factors impinge on people’s life stories in unique ways that have to be understood in their socio-historical complexity.

This definition emphasizes the importance of examining all forms of individual and systemic marginalization as it impacts on the design, operation and delivery of child welfare services.

## B. Basic Principles of Anti-Oppression

The following principles are offered as a guide to understanding the scope and potential impact of anti-oppression in child welfare:

- An anti-oppression perspective requires an understanding of the dynamics of privilege, power, oppression and social location.
- An anti-oppression perspective recognizes how our social identities impact our interactions with both service users and colleagues.
- Knowledge and skills are required in order to recognize, analyze and respond to all forms of oppression.
- Commitment to anti-oppression can transform child welfare structures and processes such as engagement, assessment, service planning and service delivery.
- Being a change agent and an ally is integral to the role of child protection workers.
- Organizational strategies are required to create an inclusive workplace which can support the delivery of anti-oppressive services.

# ANTI-OPPRESSION & CHILD WELFARE

## A. The Context

The child welfare system continues to be implicated in the oppression experienced by marginalized groups in society. Marginalized groups include those who are First Nations, Aboriginal, not white, single mothers, people living below the poverty line, people with disabilities, immigrants, people for whom English is a second language, people who do not identify as heterosexual, etc. Their experience is 'marginal' in that it does not reflect the dominant or mainstream experience which is centred both within the child welfare system and in the larger social context.

Historically, we have the example of the 'Sixties Scoop' which saw First Nations and Aboriginal children stolen from their families and cultures, with devastating impact, the extent of which most of us can never fully appreciate. Today, one of the most critical impacts and indicators of the oppressiveness of the child welfare system is the over-representation of marginalized groups within the system. For example, Aboriginal youth aged 0-19 represented less than 3% of the total child population in Ontario (Census 2006), but 14.4% of the numbers of children in care (OACAS, 2008). In an urban centre of Ontario, where the Black population totals 8%, Black youth represent 65% of the youth in group care.

Although the child welfare system is made up of individuals who want to make a positive impact, some theorists argue that the nature of child welfare practice is in itself oppressive. Through the Child and Family Services Act (CFSA), child welfare workers are entrusted by the state with the legal authority and mandate to protect children from maltreatment and abuse by their caregivers. With that authority, child welfare workers have the ability to apply sanctions on service users if they are not compliant with direction and orders. Further, child welfare agencies have the support of other state agencies such as the police and the court, all of which can be used to add further reinforcement to these sanctions.

In exercising their authority, child welfare workers, if not critically examining their own lens, can create a 'power-over' relationship between themselves and the service user. The outcome, however unintended, can often be an oppressive experience.

Dumbrill (2003) observes that the practice of child welfare predominantly adopts a 'power over' approach to practice, rather than a 'power with' approach. The 'power over' approach allows agencies and workers to use their social positions to control the power dynamics of relationships. Conversely, the 'power with' approach relinquishes a certain amount of power and privilege so that more collaborative, open and empowering relationships can be constructed. (See Appendix D for a reprint of Dumbrill's article, "Child Welfare: AOP's Nemesis?")

When the 'power over' approach to practice is exercised by an agency and its workers, it often forces the caregiver(s) to 'play the game' with the child welfare system and its counterparts. In such a scenario, playing the game can include how the caregiver(s) provide workers with information and answers that they feel will help protect their children and themselves from the child welfare system, even if that involves lying or deception (Dumbrill, 2003). Turnell (1997) goes so far as to suggest that child welfare's statutory capacity to initiate investigations, remove children, etc., actually precludes any ability to have a power-neutral relationship between an agency and the parent.



The 'power-over' dynamic is further solidified by the ability of the child welfare system to draw upon the extensive network of resources at its disposal. A child welfare agency will have substantially greater resources or access to these resources than will the children and families it is involved with. Additionally, workers have the ability to control what information can be made available to a child or caregiver(s). This often prevents children and families from challenging the child welfare agency or the legal system, while conversely reinforcing the power being exercised by the workers and the agency (Dumbrill, 2003).

Turnell (1997) observes that at the roots of child welfare is a "history of paternalism", where the professional assesses the nature of the problem, the risk and harm to the child. The professional then formulates the solution required to resolve the problem. Through this process, and using the granted authority, the worker is seen as the expert. This approach to practice is often seen in the context of a service user's access to information and when workers use their social position to take on the role of the expert as it relates to the life of a service user.

## **B. The System**

The child welfare system is often criticized for using dominant or mainstream values which further institutionalize the 'othering' of the marginalized groups. Some critics wonder if the system is even capable of doing what most assume it is doing: keeping children safe. Certainly, the literature would suggest that the system is not designed to keep children safe from the social and structural problems which pose a profoundly more universal risk to their health, well-being and, indeed, survival than that posed by those parents who are truly unable to safely parent their children. Yet, child welfare continues to intervene as experts only after there has been a perceived parental failure.

In the role of expert, the child welfare system and its representatives employ the values of the dominant group to evaluate and make judgments. Service users who do not share the same set of cultural values are defined as 'different' and those differences are perceived as 'inferior' within child welfare. The over-representation of marginalized people in the system is a direct result of the values placed on difference.

As a part of the process of defining service users, the system has relied upon binary language such as good/bad, fit/unfit, safe/dangerous, and normal/abnormal. Those defined as abnormal are a threat to the dominant social order. Karen Swift (1995) argues that the attempt of child welfare to help children has its origins in an effort to reduce threats to the existing social order. Dumbrill (2003) supports Swift in suggesting that the over-representation of marginalized children and families in child welfare is further proof of how difference is defined as inferior within child welfare.

The structure of child welfare practice also serves to reinforce oppression. Child welfare agencies, like other human service organizations, work and operate within a bureaucratic framework. Workers are subjected to the formal rules set by management or the government. Fleming et al (2003) call this corporate [agency] influence on workers a form of cultural engineering whereby organizations ultimately control workers, regardless of their personal values. Weinberg (2006) argues that those workers, for example, who would like to address systemic oppression and marginalization, are caught between an ethic that informs social work as a vehicle of social justice, and a bureaucratic regime in which workers are responsible for social regulation and the discipline of others.

Expanding upon Weinberg's idea, a similar argument could be made about the impact of the larger social service system on any attempts by individual workers or particular systems to address oppression or make change. The constraints of conformity prevent workers or

individual systems from challenging the status quo which, in turn, reinforces oppression. The constraints usually manifest in the form of sanctions or discipline for disrupting the social order. Yet, when we consider the impact that each system has upon the other, it is clear that challenging the status quo will be necessary to change the outcomes of oppression.

It is difficult to talk about the need for an anti-oppression perspective in child welfare without addressing the same need in other systems. Individually, systems such as child welfare, criminal justice and education, struggle with oppression. As a result of the relationship between these systems, they each impact the outcomes of the others. For example, the child welfare system receives a significant portion of its referrals from the education system. In both systems, racialized children are negatively perceived and thus negatively impacted. The bureaucratic culture in social services, which renders criticism and challenge between services unwelcomed and unsolicited, contributes to these oppressive outcomes. The result is that each system remains unchallenged about its oppressiveness and marginalized groups continue to experience oppression. The structural and institutional issues currently found in child welfare need to be addressed collectively and collaboratively in order for substantial change to occur.

## **B. Why Now?**

There is no shortage of research that demonstrates how child welfare practice often contributes to oppressive outcomes. Through the adoption of an anti-oppression framework, the system can begin to recognize and address the negative impacts on marginalized groups. The legislative and policy framework created through the Child Welfare Transformation initiative provides an ideal context within which to integrate an anti-oppression framework. Such a framework will also compliment and enhance other provincial initiatives such as the continuing efforts to develop a Collaborative Model for Child Welfare Practice and the collective commitment to the promotion of evidence-informed and strengths-based practice.

The ultimate measure of Child Welfare Transformation will be its ability to support a new kind of engagement with families and, through this, better outcomes for children and youth. We would suggest that better outcomes cannot and will not be achieved without the introduction of a new kind of practice: one whose purpose is to work in partnership with those who are marginalized and oppressed and one that recognizes and seeks to address the structural roots of that oppression. Without such a systemic shift, marginalized communities will continue to respond with discontent and distrust of the child welfare system and the child welfare system, in turn, will continue to contribute to the oppression of marginalized groups.

# OPERATIONALIZING ANTI-OPPRESSION IN CHILD WELFARE: CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Capacity building strategies are often used to transform community and organizational approaches to social issues. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) defines capacity building as:

*the creation of an enabling environment with appropriate policy and legal frameworks, institutional development, including community participation, human resources development and strengthening of managerial systems. (It is recognized) that capacity-building is a long-term, continuing process in which all stakeholders participate.*

Within child welfare, capacity building has generally been used to describe activities that strengthen skills, abilities and knowledge of individuals and improve organizational structures and processes so that the organization can fulfill its mission and goals in a sustainable way.

The following sections are designed to assist individuals and agencies to plan and reflect on strategies to build capacity to support anti-oppression in child welfare.

Examples of initiatives from several child welfare agencies may be found In Appendix C.

## **A. The Role of Leadership**

An agency's success in becoming an anti-oppressive organization begins with the commitment of its most senior leadership, including the Board of Directors, whose active involvement and support for the process will signal that everyone is expected to participate in the initiative and that the work is valued.

As a starting point, it may be useful to move toward a concept of leadership that integrates anti-oppression and anti-oppressive values.

Senior leadership can directly commit to, model and promote anti-oppressive principles and practice by:

- Holding themselves and others accountable for the creation and operation of an anti-oppressive agency, thus creating collective ownership and making the commitment clear to all staff.
- Developing a policy and practice framework that supports anti-oppressive child welfare work. (See Appendix C for an example.)
- Creating the conditions and establishing expectations for the behaviour and practice of all staff, both internally and in the community.
- Developing a clear process for monitoring and evaluating progress in implementing anti-oppression principles by defining outcomes and holding themselves to an even higher standard of evaluation.
- Following through on identified problems and/or obstacles in a timely and transparent manner.

- Committing to the provision of adequate resources (human and financial) to ensure the sustainability of anti-oppression efforts.
- Inviting community counterparts to join the dialogue and work collaboratively to develop shared anti-oppression principles and practice.

**Questions to consider:**

- Do the agency’s mission, vision, values and strategic directions align with anti-oppression principles?
- Do the agency’s Board and staff reflect the community they serve? If not, what strategies might be implemented to address this?
- Do the agency service plan and functional work plans include anti-oppression goals and outcomes?
- Have all agency policies and practices been critically examined to identify and challenge bias or language (e.g. utilization of “service user” versus “client”)?
- Does service planning occur within an anti-oppression framework, e.g. is there systemic analysis and use of data in a way that identifies, for example, over-representation of marginalized people and populations?
- Have key roles and responsibilities been assigned and communicated? Are reporting guidelines in place to support accountability?

**B. Organizational Preparation for Change**

Once a commitment to anti-oppression is secured at the senior level, consideration can be given to developing a strategy to facilitate the extensive and complex change process required to support this shift. As with any change process, it is critical to engage as many people as possible in the process as well to anticipate, identify and respond to resistance at any and all levels.

Some agencies have found it useful to complete baseline assessments with regard to anti-oppression to assist with engaging interest, developing outcomes and measuring change. Consideration may be given to the retention of third party assessors to bring in expertise, add credibility, and protect confidentiality. Such assessments might include:

- A Governance Analysis
  - How the Board operates, Board composition, By-Laws/governance policies, attention to anti-oppression in conducting business, etc.
- A Workplace Analysis
  - Assess current anti-oppression knowledge and skill as reflected in operations and composition of teams/ leadership/care providers/ volunteers, etc.
  - Review whether teams/departments reflect the diversity of service users. Identify potential barriers to equitable opportunities for employment and promotion. Identify gaps in knowledge and skills which may be considered in recruitment.
  - Review human resource policies and practices, including supervision and performance management, with a view to incorporating anti-oppression.
- A Systems Analysis
  - Look at how systems work together to promote employment practice and service delivery that reflects anti-oppression principles.

## Questions to consider:

- What resources (human and financial) have been or can be allocated to support anti-oppression?
- Do all agency committees reflect the diversity of staff (and the community)?
- Is an anti-oppression lens reflected in the work of all committees, e.g. do the Terms of Reference include a commitment to anti-oppression?
- Is there a standing forum/committee that focuses on anti-oppression? If so, does its mandate focus on all types of oppression and does it include representation from all departments and functions?
- Can each department/function identify its own culture and practices and how these may serve as being inclusive or exclusive of others?
- Have barriers in policies, procedures and practices which hinder full participation and representation of designated groups been identified and removed?
- Do performance reviews/appraisals examine the application of anti-oppression principles in day to day practice?
- Do agency initiatives reflect the diversity of staff, foster parents, volunteers and the community?
- Have barriers been addressed that may impact participation, e.g. training, skills, language, location, meeting times, etc.?

## C. Accountability

Anti-oppression fundamentally challenges the “usual way of doing business” in agencies. In order for policies, procedures and practices to encompass this new way of working, it is critical that accountability mechanisms be created and monitored. It is important to identify who will be accountable to whom and for what. Accountability for anti-oppressive results must be built into the goals and objectives of work plans at every level of the agency. Ultimately, the agency’s Strategic Plan should speak to the global outcomes and results desired.

Consideration should also be given to how the agency will involve and be accountable to service users and key community stakeholders in defining anti-oppressive outcomes, developing goals and strategies and monitoring results.

The following ideas may be useful in establishing and maintaining accountability for results:

- Complete annual anti-oppression policy review to ensure integration into all aspects of organizational planning and report on progress and setbacks. Reports and recommendations should be presented to the Board, management, staff, service users and other community stakeholders.
- Establish both formal and informal procedures for resolving complaints and concerns and ensure that those responsible for helping to resolve these (management, union stewards, etc.) are trained in recognizing and responding all forms of oppression.
- Collect and report on data about complaints and other examples of systemic oppression/barriers that require action by the agency.
- Be clear about what those at each level of the organization are responsible for doing, e.g. supervisors, senior leadership, the Board, etc.
- Ensure that all vendors and contractors agree to abide by the agency’s anti-oppression policy as well as to reflect anti-oppression principles as employers as well as providers of goods and services

## **D. Resources & Sustainability**

Anti-oppression cannot be sustained without commitment and resources, both human and financial. Many anti-oppression initiatives have relied on the commitment of a few individuals who volunteer on top of their existing responsibilities. Major systemic change cannot be implemented or sustained in this fashion. It is strongly recommended that a lead manager be identified and responsible for tracking, monitoring and reporting on anti-oppression results at specified times to specified audiences. Several agencies have also established internal committees that champion and monitor the work. (See Appendix C for examples.)

In addition to allocation of staff time, resources are required to support initiatives. Examples of such resources include agency space, meeting expenses and the ability to access external expert consultation.

Implementing and sustaining anti-oppressive work also requires knowledge and skills. Anti-oppression competencies should be identified at the Board, management and staff levels. The following questions may also be helpful in designing an anti-oppressive learning and development strategy:

- Are there formal and informal opportunities to discuss the root causes of oppression and find solutions to the daily manifestations of it?
- Are there opportunities to learn in safe environments that respect confidentiality, model active listening and where there are no reprisals for talking about difficult issues?
- What training can be provided to all employees, foster parents and volunteers to assist them in understanding their own power and privilege and how to work in a way that is anti-oppressive?
- What mechanisms can be put in place to build on and deepen this knowledge year over year?
- How will new employees, foster parents and volunteers be oriented to anti-oppression principles and practices?

The sustainability and viability of anti-oppression efforts will ultimately be measured by the impact on and involvement of the diverse communities served by the agency. Some questions to consider:

- What mechanisms are currently in place to solicit feedback from service users, including children and youth in care? Are these mechanisms being used?
- Have efforts been made to invite specific marginalized communities to identify and address gaps in community resources?
- Are there formal and informal opportunities for marginalized communities to provide advice to the agency about ways to prevent and/or decrease agency involvement, including the admission of children into care and/or into mainstream homes?
- Have barriers been addressed that may impact participation, e.g. training, skills, language, location, child care, transportation, meeting times, etc.?
- Are multiple methods of communication being used to inform people about initiatives, e.g. e-mail, person-to-person, media, newsletters, posters, etc?

# WHAT NEXT? CREATING AN ANTI-OPPRESSIVE FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS, STRUCTURES AND PRACTICE

We hope that this paper will provide a foundation for thoughtful and meaningful dialogue about the fundamental nature of child welfare work. What responsibility do we share for the outcomes that continue to negatively impact marginalized families and children? Is it possible to work in a way that honours and respects each person's unique needs and identity? If so, how do our systems, structures and practices need to change?

In the coming months, the Anti-Oppression Roundtable will be seeking invitations to meet with agencies, regions/zones, networks and others who may be interested in providing feedback and ideas about these critical issues.

It is our goal to develop a *Framework for Anti-Oppression in Ontario Child Welfare Agencies* for approval and distribution by the end of 2010. This project is supported by the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, the Child Welfare Local Directors Section and the Provincial Project Management Committee.

Comments on this paper and/or invitations to consult may be directed to the co-chairs of the Child Welfare Anti-Oppression Framework Project:

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## DISCUSSION GUIDE

The following questions are offered to assist with review of this paper. They are designed to open dialogue and recognize voices which may not always be heard.

1. Name one thing that resonated for you in this paper.
2. Name one thing that challenged you in this paper.
3. Was there anything that you did not understand and/or you would like more information about?
4. Reflecting on the definition of anti-oppression (p.7), can you think of concrete examples of systemic oppression in your own organization?
5. On a scale of one to ten, with one being 'not at all' and ten being 'completely', how does your organization currently reflect the basic principles of anti-oppression (p.7)? Would you change or add anything to these principles?
6. How does power and privilege work in your organization? Using Dumbrill's concepts of 'power over' versus 'power with' (p.8), can you give examples? How does this impact service delivery?
7. Can you think of ways that your practice, and that of your organization's, contributes to the over-representation of marginalized groups within child welfare?
8. Name one thing your organization could do differently to reflect an anti-oppressive perspective. Name one thing you personally could do differently.
9. What would need to change in the following areas to reflect anti-oppression principles:
  - Leadership and Accountability?
  - Learning and Development?
  - Human Resource Practices?
  - Supervision?
  - Communication?
  - Service and Program Delivery?
  - Community Partnerships?
  - Feedback and Complaints?
9. What strengths and opportunities currently exist to integrate anti-oppression within child welfare? Within your function? Within your organization? Within the field?
10. What issues are most critical in considering the design and implementation of an anti-oppression framework for child welfare in Ontario?

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## Glossary of Terms

### Anti-oppression

- Anti-oppression refers to engaging in work that critically examines how social structures and social institutions work to create and perpetuate the oppression and marginalization of those who have been identified as not belonging to the dominant group. By identifying these various forms of oppression, it is also crucial to recognize the power and privilege that manifests itself as a result of the oppression of others. A commitment to anti-oppression requires that we act by working towards achieving greater social justice and equality. Anti-oppression can also be understood as a framework that guides our day-to-day practice, our interactions with others, and how we give meaning to our life experiences.

### Anti-racism

- Anti-racism refers to engaging in work that challenges our social structures and social institutions with the goal being to bring about systemic change with respect to racism and racial oppression. This work is intended to empower racialized individuals while also encouraging White people to become aware of and begin challenging the power and privileges afforded to them so that they may develop into Allies.

### Becoming an Ally

- Becoming an Ally is the process or transformation that a member of the dominant group engages in by acting against oppression and privilege at both the personal and structural levels. Becoming an Ally is inspired by the belief that eliminating oppression will benefit those who are the targets of oppression and create a more equal and equitable society.

### Classism

- Classism refers to the practice by the dominant group of assigning value to people based upon their perceived social class. Those who are perceived to be at a lower social class are marginalized and disadvantaged by the dominant group through the exploitation of labour and resources.

### Collaborative Relationship

- A collaborative relationship refers to a relationship between two or more people that is concerned with, and consciously aware of, the power dynamics between its members. Members collectively work together to create relationships based upon equality and social equity.

### Colonialism

- Occurs when a foreign country or power uses domination, violence and exploitation to take land and resources from an indigenous group of people. In doing so, the foreign power will often exploit any available human labour from the indigenous group. Colonialism draws upon racial and discriminatory ideologies to justify the oppression and marginalization of others.

### Critical Deconstruction

- Critical deconstruction involves thinking, reflecting and critically understanding how our knowledge, values, and experiences are constructed and shaped by social discourses and the dominant culture. Once we understand the impact this has we can begin to critically reconstruct the knowledge, values, and experiences we hold by challenging legitimacy of these social discourses and of the dominant culture.

### Cultural

- Culture is the collective experiences, knowledge, traditions, values, and beliefs that a group of individuals share. Culture can be understood as being fluid and ever-evolving, changing as the people and the environment change. Culture can be shaped and

evolved in many ways, including by language, religion, ethnicity, geography, gender, sexual orientation, family, politics, etc.

#### Discourse

- A discourse is the creation or production of knowledge and its meaning through language and social practices.

#### Discrimination

- Discrimination refers to how members who are not considered part of the dominant group are the recipients of unequal treatment and differential allocation of society's resources. Anti-oppression practice is concerned with how our social structures and social institutions work to disadvantage various groups of individuals based upon some shared characteristic that the group holds.

#### Diversity

- From an anti-oppressive perspective, diversity refers to how difference should be both embraced and celebrated. From this perspective diversity concerns itself with empowering those who hold personal characteristics that do not fit within that of the dominant group. Thus diversity can be understood as a continuous life-long process, rather than the more traditional definition which identifies diversity as a static state.

#### Dominant Group

- The dominant group refers to a group of individuals who share certain characteristics that as a result of these characteristics are afforded specific forms of power and privileges, which are at the expense of the oppression of other groups of individuals. Characteristics of the dominant group include being White, male, middle to upper class, heterosexual, able-bodied, 18 to 65 years of age, Christian, English-speaking, university educated, and living within an urban community.

#### Equity

- Equity is an individual's or group's right to an equitable share of society's resources and input into the practices of our social structures and social institutions.

#### Harassment

- Harassment is the process by which power is exercised with the intended purpose of intimidating and threatening a person through persistent negative attitudes and behaviours.

#### Hegemony

- Hegemony refers to the social, cultural, and religious traditions and knowledge that are constructed by the dominant group which work to help maintain the status quo.

#### Heterosexism

- Heterosexism refers to the practices carried out through social structures and social institutions that propose heterosexual individuals are inherently superior to individuals who do not identify as being heterosexual. Hidden within this practice is the assumption conveyed by the dominant group that everyone is heterosexual.

#### Internalized Oppression

- Internalized oppression occurs when an individual or group of individuals accepts their social position as one that is deserved, natural, and inevitable. Individuals accept that they are in some way inferior when compared to those who are part of the dominant group.

#### Intersectionality

- The notion of intersectionality suggests that various forms of oppression intersect with each other to form new forms of oppression rather than various forms of oppression compounding each other. Each form of oppression is considered unique and none are perceived to be worse than another.

## Knowledge

- From an anti-oppressive perspective knowledge is believed to be an ever-evolving process that takes on new meaning when it is passed on from one person to the next. There is no absolute truth attached to knowledge, rather it is unique to each person.

## Marginalization

- Marginalization occurs when social structures and social institutions are used to disadvantage those who are not perceived as part of the dominant group. These individuals are often denied equitable access to resources and become vulnerable to further exploitation and social exclusion.

## Multiculturalism

- From an anti-oppressive perspective multiculturalism refers a society or environment consisting of various cultures that receive equal access to resources and that do not experience oppression from one another. Within such an environment various groups of people and the culture to which they identify with are embraced and celebrated rather than merely tolerated.

## Oppression

- Oppression occurs when one socially defined group exerts power and dominance over another group so that it benefits the former and oppresses the latter. Social structures and social institutions are often the tools used to carry out this power and dominance of one group over another. Repeated acts of oppression can eventually become institutionalized or systemic, thus becoming hidden and seemingly 'normal'.

## People of Colour

- An attempt made by racialized individuals to name or identify themselves as people with a positive identity rather than accepting an oppressive label given by the dominant group.

## Power

- Power is the unearned and often hidden ability for individuals from the dominant group exert their influence over other individuals as a result of their social position. Power is often afforded to individuals through social structures and social institutions, which is also how power is often exercised and perpetuated as well.

## Prejudice

- Prejudices, which draw upon unfounded stereotypes, are attitudes held by the dominant and used to substantiate the inferiority or subordination of other individuals. They eventually become systemic and are perceived as normal and universally applicable to all those who fit within the defined group.

## Privilege

- The term privilege refers to the unearned power and advantages that members of the dominant group receive as a direct result of the oppression and marginalization experienced by individuals who are not considered members of the dominant group.

## Race

- Race is a social category created for the purpose of classifying individuals based upon physical features such as skin colour. The dominant group, with help from social structures and social institutions, uses race to identify and socially organize groups of individuals in a manner that oppresses any group of individuals who are not perceived to be White.

## Racial Equality

- It is the process of challenging our social structures and social institutions as well as the white privilege that works to create and perpetuate racial inequalities. Racial equality refers to not only more equitable distribution of resources but also of equitable distribution of power and influence.



### Racial Profiling

- It is the process of administration-of-justice officials identifying specific individuals as potential threatening, dangerous or criminal based solely on their race, ethnicity, nationality or religious affiliation. Racial profiling is often fueled by stereotypical and discriminatory views created by the dominant group.

### Racialization

- Racialization is the process through which individuals are socialized to various groups of people on the basis of their physical characteristics. It is these physical characteristics that the dominant group uses to differentiate groups of individuals from themselves, while at the same time making their own physical characteristics invisible and normal.

### Racism

- The process of attributing value and normalcy to White people and to Whiteness, while at the same time devaluing and oppressing individuals and groups of individuals who are not White.

### Reflexive Practice

- Reflexive practice requires the worker to use critical thinking and reflection with respect to issues, knowledge and discourses that are often taken for granted. This form of practice also requires the worker to critically deconstruct and then reconstruct any feelings, perceptions, experiences that present themselves.

### Religious Discrimination

- Religious discrimination is the individual and systemic practices that marginalize and discriminate individuals as a result their religious beliefs. The dominant group is defined within Canada as those individuals who practice Christianity.

### Sexism

- Sexism refers to both the individual and systemic practices found within our society that privilege and gives power to men while also working to disadvantage and oppress women. These practices are based upon notions of patriarchy and the absurd perception that men are superior to women.

### Social Construction

- A social construction is the creation of a social category that creates and works to perpetuate social, political, and economical inequalities to those groups of people not considered part of the dominant group.

### Social Exclusion

- Social exclusion occurs when an individual or group of people are marginalized, disempowered, disenfranchised, or denied equitable participation and access to resources by the dominant group based upon oppressive and discriminatory policies and practices carried out at a systemic level.

### Social Location

- How one is treated in society based on their position/location that includes the power and privilege associated with one's economic status, race, education, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, marital status, religion, national origin, legal status.

### Social Structures and Social Institutions

- These terms refer to the various systems and bodies of government that hold a certain amount of power and use these powers to exert their undue influence upon society's members. These social structures and institutions have been formed from, and are perpetuated from the perspective of the dominant group. The result is that these structures and institutions work to give power and privilege to members of the dominant group while also working to oppress and marginalize those not perceived as part of the dominant group. These systems include the education system, the legal system, government bodies, the media, etc.

### Systemic Discrimination

- Systemic discrimination is the unequal treatment of individuals and groups of people as a result of system-wide policies, procedures and practices created by our social structures and social institutions.

### Systemic Racism

- Systemic racism refers to the social structures and social institutions that create, tolerate, reproduce, and perpetuate the racial inequalities and racism that has oppressed and marginalized those not part of the dominant group.

### White Privilege

- White privilege refers to the many unearned assets or advantages that White people receive everyday as a result of the systemic oppression and marginalization experienced by individuals who have been defined as not belonging to the dominant group. These privileges that White individuals receive remain hidden or invisible so that it appears normal and continues on without being challenged.

### Workplace Diversity

- Workplace diversity is a lifelong and ever-evolving process that requires a commitment by the entire agency or organization to engage in work that creates a socially equitable and inclusive working environment free from all forms of oppression and discrimination. Internal and external working relationships should align themselves with aforementioned term collaborative relationships.

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Glossary of Terms draws upon the works of:

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## Example #1: The Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAST)

Bridging Diversity Staff Advisory Committee  
Children's Aid Society of Toronto

### Anti-Oppression, Anti-Racism Policy

#### PROPOSED POLICY IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

The implementation of an agency Anti-Oppression/Anti-Racism policy will require an organizational change process within the Society based on the values and principles outlined in the Policy.

With the changing face of the population of Toronto, the agency is being called upon to provide services that are reflective of and responsive to those changes. It should be noted that the population served by the agency has changed dramatically over the last ten years. At present over 50% of Toronto's population identify with a racially or culturally diverse background. This is equally reflected in the composition of the Agency's clients where 49% of the Society's clients self identify as members of racially or culturally diverse communities.

A work plan that attempts to implement such organizational change related to values of equality, diversity and human rights is a significant undertaking, which needs to infiltrate all areas and levels of the Agency. Leadership and ownership for this initiative must start at the Board level and should flow throughout the entire organization from senior management down. Policy implementation demands that stakeholders throughout the agency partner together in a collective ownership to create an anti-oppressive, anti-racism environment. It is not the responsibility of any one selected group to ensure this.

It should be acknowledged that in some areas, CAST has already made positive strides in the promotion of human and equity rights impacting on children/youth and families. A prime example is the agency's "Out and Proud" program which provides training, consultation, programs and advocacy services to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgendered, inter-sexed and gender variant children/ youth. Other examples include the agency's Bridging Diversity Advisory Committee (BDC), the Black Education & Awareness Committee, the Bridging Child Welfare Services to the Somali Community Project, the Scarborough Branch Tamil Reference Group and a range of initiatives in which agency staff are engaged with Toronto's newcomer, diverse communities.

The Agency has also made strides in ensuring that foster homes, staff and volunteers are reflective of the diverse racial and religious population being served. The agency is challenged however, to ensure that all levels of the Agency, especially the supervisory, senior management and governance levels, are appropriately reflective of the City's diverse communities and populations.

The following outlines a recommended policy implementation framework to assist the agency to engage in an organizational change process that adopting an Anti-Oppression/Anti-Racism Policy will require. While such a change process can be viewed as a long term one, there are immediate/short and medium term objectives and actions to be considered as well.

The major components of the implementation process are as follows:

#### COMMUNICATION PLANNING

The first step will be to develop a communication strategy to introduce the policy to all

levels of the organization and to coordinate feedback from agency stakeholders. The introduction of this policy will also need to be communicated to the Society's community service partners and Toronto's specific ethno-racial communities.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP & ACCOUNTABILITY**

Leadership for the organizational change process must begin with the Board, be modelled by Senior Management and become integrated into the culture, practices and services provided by all staff, foster and residential care providers and volunteers. In keeping with the belief that everyone shares responsibility for implementation of the policy, each service area of the agency will be responsible for designating, within their annual service plan, specific objectives related to policy implementation, including a corresponding plan for review and evaluation. Ultimate accountability resides with the Board and Senior Management. If requested, the Bridging Diversity Committee is prepared to continue to operate in order to monitor and advise on the implementation and organizational change process taking place across the Society. The Committee can also play a valuable role in providing linkages to the community as well as providing a forum to allow feedback from the community regarding the agency's perceived performance related to the policy implementation. If the

## **TRAINING**

The centralized work group/committee will promote, lead and sustain the organizational leadership capacity at senior levels, as well as throughout the organization to promote, lead and sustain the organizational change process. This will be supported by curriculum development for training at all levels.

### **a) Leadership Training:**

- Board and Board Committee training will be an essential component of the policy implementation and organizational change process.
- Training models for clinical supervision within an anti-oppression framework.
- Training for service directors, managers and supervisors related to managing a diverse workforce.
- Curriculum development on competencies and learning objectives.
- Mentorship, and coaching guidelines to inform supervisory practice.
- Training for foster and residential care providers, as well as volunteers will be essential
- Development of an effective practice model and guidelines.

### **b) Agency Training:**

Training will be required for direct service staff, foster parents, residential care providers and volunteers. An OACAS, Provincial Diversity Trainers Workgroup, on which the Society is a member, has been developing a curriculum framework for anti-oppression/anti-racism training. The plan is for CAST & CCAS to partner in piloting the new curriculum for their own agency stakeholders, as well as for a select number of other provincial CAS'. The roll out timeframe for this initiative is early fall, 2006.

### **c) Train the Trainers:**

It will be crucial for the agency to build organizational capacity to sustain training over the long term. This can be accomplished through the development of a train-the-trainers initiative designed to enhance the agency's capacity to sustain the organizational change process. Once the provincial anti-oppression/anti-racism pilot training is completed, a train-the-trainers opportunity will be provided for provincial CAS staff to allow individual Society's to enhance their capacity to assist, support and sustain training within their respective agencies. CAST will play a key role in this training.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS**

While it may be possible to conduct an organizational analysis with internal agency resources, funding should be sought or allocated to allow for consultants with specialized knowledge and demonstrated experience to be hired on a fee-for-service basis. The work will be accomplished in a shorter period of time and the presence of external resources creates a perceived sense of heightened confidentiality for those wishing to participate. An organizational analysis should involve the following.

**a) Governance Analysis:**

To take place through analysis of Board and Board Committee composition, by-laws and overall analysis of the degree of attention given to anti-oppression/anti-racism policy and practice in the conducting of Board business.

**b) Work Place Analysis:**

The analysis would focus on issues of race, ethnicity, culture, language, potential barriers to access to employment and promotions. Methodology would include non-identifying, confidential surveys as well as self-identifying surveys. The advantage of engaging an outside consultant to complete this kind of analysis is the enhanced perception of confidentiality among the stakeholders. It creates a benchmark against which to measure change and would be applied to all levels within the Society:

- Senior management
- Supervisors
- Direct Service staff
- Support Service staff
- Care Providers
- Volunteers

**c) Systems Analysis:**

This would include:

- Review of Board and operational policies
- Review of agency policies, practices and procedures. Of particular importance is the need for a review of current hiring practices, interview grids, and promotion practices to ensure that they create and promote a safe and encouraging environment for all staff. Barriers both real and perceived by staff from diverse backgrounds should also be addressed.
- Consideration should be given to a succession plan that includes mentorship opportunities for front-line staff aspiring to being promoted to a management position within the agency.
- Review of practices related to recruitment of foster homes in ensuring adequate representation of foster homes of racial and religious diversity. Barriers experienced by prospective foster parents from newcomer, diverse communities should be identified and addressed.
- Review of workload practices to ensure provision of opportunities for staff to participate in agency initiatives of a non-case carrying nature related to issues of diversity, anti-oppression/racism.
- Review of job descriptions and performance evaluations throughout the agency to ensure they reflect the competencies and learning objectives established by the Agency to reflect the Anti-Oppression/Anti-Racism Policy

Methodology for systems analysis outlined above would take place through:

- Focus groups
- Surveys/Questionnaires
- Individual interviews

**EVALUATION**

An essential component of the policy implementation/organizational change process will be an evaluation component that will track and measure progress or lack of progress. The evaluation may be achieved through the evaluation component of both agency and service areas' annual Service Plans, as well as the bi-annual reports to the Board.

**a) Data Collection:**

A review and revision of why and what data is collected and distributed related to agency clients will be required in order to ensure information accurately reflects the clients we are serving.

**b) Monitoring & Evaluation**

It will be important to establish baselines and benchmarks by which to measure progress. An annual evaluation will be required to, utilizing the data collected from the governance, workforce and systems analysis, to measure the progress of policy implementation initiatives.

## **Summary**

It is evident that the systemic change inherent in the implementation of the Agency's Anti-Oppression, Anti-Racism Policy will require the commitment and efforts of all individuals, service areas and levels of the agency in order to be successful. It is also clear that implementation of such organisational change is not a choice but a necessity if the Agency is to maintain credibility in providing child welfare services and in creating a work environment experienced by stakeholders as an anti-oppressive, anti-racist.

The Society should be recognized for its courage and foresight in embarking on the adoption of an Anti-Oppression/Anti-Racism Policy. It will engage all the stakeholders in a journey of change that will include its share of challenges and rewards and one that has the potential to significantly enrich the culture of the organization as stakeholders learn about and from each other's history, cultures, religions traditions and the lens through which each of us views the world. Ultimately, the greatest beneficiaries will be the thousands of diverse children, youth, families and communities served by the Society.

## **CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF TORONTO ANTI-OPPRESSION, ANTI-RACISM POLICY**

**Approved by the Board of Directors  
November 9, 2006**

The Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAST) values the advancement of equality, diversity and human rights for clients, staff, care providers and volunteers. It recognizes and upholds the inherent dignity, worth, and rights of each individual and is committed to the pursuit of equality, freedom from adverse discrimination and harassment and the removal of all barriers to equal opportunity. We recognize and uphold the principle of equality of access to appropriate services which are sensitive to the needs of clients whatever their race, religion, colour, national origin, ethnic origin, ancestry, citizenship, age, sex, sexual orientation, place of origin, marital status, or ability. (Reference: CAST Code of Ethics, 1989). In addition, the Society believes that each individual should be free from discrimination, harassment and barriers to equal opportunity related to their gender identity and social condition, including their economic status.

## **BACKGROUND**

Last year, April 2005 to March 2006, the Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAST) served 13,511 families and 30,891 children and youth, 27,565 of whom were served in their own home. 55% of families and 60% of the 3,326 children/youth served in foster or residential care self-identified themselves as members of a minority culture or race. Many are newcomers to Toronto. In 2001, 49% or almost 1 of every 2 persons in Toronto was born outside Canada making the City of Toronto home to people from 169 countries speaking more than 100 languages. It is estimated that by the year 2017, 51% of the population of Greater Toronto will not be from the traditional dominant culture.

Approximately 63% of the children and youth served by the Society live at or below the poverty line. Some children/youth live with a physical and or developmental disability while others identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, trans-gendered, gender-variant or inter-sexed. A disproportionate number of families served by the Society are single parent, women led - 51% compared to the national average of 25%.

The children, youth, families and communities served by CAST reflect the increasing diversity of the City of Toronto, aptly described as one of the most multicultural cities in the world. In addition, Society staff, foster parents and volunteers increasingly reflect the City's diversity.

Like most child welfare organizations the Society recognizes the need to develop and provide culturally appropriate child welfare practices and services to the children, youth, families and communities living in

Toronto. Culturally appropriate refers to meeting the unique needs of each individual and/or family by responding equitably to that person's social, historical, cultural, ethnic, racial and religious location. Cultural appropriateness recognizes that the Society has a responsibility to work sensitively, respectfully and creatively with families from diverse cultures.

Many newcomer families and communities come to Toronto from countries where no formal child welfare system exists and where little to no information about Ontario child welfare legislation is provided to them as part of the pre-migration process. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Society has found itself confronted and challenged by newcomer communities who are unfamiliar with the legislated role of child welfare agencies to intervene with families to ensure the safety of children/youth. While this has created tension and occasionally conflict, newcomer, diverse communities and the Society share a common belief that every child/youth has a right to safety and security and to be free from abuse.

In its efforts to address the concerns articulated at both a family and community level, CAST has, over the past several years, engaged in a number of bridging diversity initiatives in partnership with a number of Toronto's communities. In 1995, for example, the Society approved a policy committing itself to making services safe and accessible to lesbian, gay and bisexual children/youth. Earlier, the Board had approved same sex fostering and adoption policies. The current Bridging Diversity Advisory Committee (BDC) is another example of a Society bridging diversity initiative, as are a number of other agency initiatives involving partnerships with diverse, newcomer communities.

Society staff and members of a number of Toronto's diverse, newcomer communities working together on the BDC were mandated to recommend an organizational change process to guide the Society in providing culturally appropriate child welfare services within the context of the Child & Family Services Act. A critical first step is the creation of a Board approved Anti-Oppression, Anti-Racism Policy that will frame the organizational change process at the governance, human resource and service levels of the agency. In taking this step, it should be recognized that CAST continues its tradition of developing forward thinking, leading-edge child welfare policy to reflect the ever-changing community it serves.

It is important to note that the policy has been deliberately and consciously titled anti-oppression, anti-racism at the strong recommendation of the BDC members and subsequently supported by stakeholder consultation feedback, including the community stakeholders. Much discussion and debate took place within the BDC as to the title. It is critical that the title of the policy reflect the belief that the end goal of policy implementation is an organization and services that are free of all forms of oppression for all stakeholders and achieves equity. A deliberate decision was made to also include the term racism, which while included under the umbrella term oppression, was deemed to be of such a significant nature for the children, youth and families served by the society, as well as all agency stakeholders, that it required highlighting. It is believed that identifying racism in the title of the policy highlights the significant impact of racism on agency stakeholders and demands that it be addressed as a component of policy implementation.

## ***POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS***

The process of developing this policy has been comprehensive and lengthy, involving frank and courageous discussions among members of the BDC and agency stakeholders. The BDC members have spent considerable time in self-reflection, self-education and setting out guiding principles. Part of the education process involved hearing about similar efforts in other related organizations such as the Family Service Association of Toronto, CCAS and the Centre for Addictions and Mental Health, as well as presentations and discussions facilitated by BDC members.

Stakeholder Consultations took place from May to September, 2006 when a working draft of the policy was shared with the Board of Directors, the Board Advocacy-Policy Committee, the Senior Advisory Team, agency staff, foster parents, volunteers, youth in care, CUPE Local 2316 and the community at large. The BDC developed a Question Guide to help facilitate the feedback consultations that took place at staff team meetings, branch focus groups or through individual feedback to BDC members using phones, fax, e-mails, conversations with BDC members or other methods of their choice. The Board of

Directors engaged in an in-camera consultation with an external facilitator prior to considering the policy for approval.

The proposed policy was welcomed and well received by all stakeholders, who commended the Society for developing an Anti-Oppression, Anti-Racism Policy. The community stakeholders were impressed that the policy speaks directly to the issues of power and privilege which they felt were not always addressed in similar policy statements. However, they, along with other stakeholders struggled to understand the Anti-Oppression, Anti-Racism Policy in the context of the Child & Family Services Act, which can be perceived and experienced by many families from diverse, newcomer communities to be in and of itself oppressive.

Common themes identified in the consultations included:

- The importance of strong organizational commitment and leadership on the part of the Board and senior management to implement the policy within specific timeframes and change impact measurements;
- The need for all stakeholders to create a “safe and respectful” environment that encourages, supports and sustains self-reflection, the appreciation of differences and diversity, and engagement in both the difficult conversations and the organizational changes that policy implementation will require;
- Organizational commitment of dedicated human and financial resources to provide the tools required for stakeholders to engage in the change process;
- The development of internal, organizational infrastructures to implement and sustain the change process. This may include: training; systems and governance analysis; coordination; communications; dedicated time and staffing resources; and evaluation resources;
- Measuring the impact of the organizational change process on a regular and on-going basis;
- Individual and organizational accountability for developing anti-oppressive, anti-racist child welfare policies and practices and for creating a work environment free from all forms of oppression and racism.

## CONTEXT

Anti-oppression, in combating all facets of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, disableism, etc, begins with the premise that there are inequities in power that pervade all social relations. These power imbalances are socially constructed or learned ideologies where a hierarchical relationship (implicitly or explicitly) benefits a dominant or privileged individual/group(s) and marginalizes others (Bell, 1997; Bishop, 1994, Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). Oppression occurs when a person is blocked from opportunities towards self development, excluded from full participation in society, denied rights that the dominant group takes for granted or is assigned a second class citizenship, not because of individual talent, merit or failure, but because of her/his membership in a particular group or category of people (*Mullaly,2002*).

***Both the dominant group and those who are oppressed learn oppression through an unconscious, socialization process rather than through an active, conscious learning process. Therefore, deconstructing and ‘unlearning’ oppression is possible by engaging in a conscious and active process of challenging previously held personal and organizational values, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes. If one believes that oppression is learned, then anti-oppression can be viewed as a process of deconstructing and ‘unlearning’.***

We believe that, while Toronto’s diversity has added cultural, social and economic benefits to our community, it has also resulted in the marginalization and oppression of groups who experience neither



full access to nor participation in the life of the City and its institutions. Despite continuously demonstrating their resiliency and strength, many newcomer communities are experiencing disproportionately high rates of poverty, unemployment, under employment, reduced academic success, high rates of youth dropping out of school and increasing contact between youth and the criminal justice systems.

Oppressions such as racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, disableism etc., are interrelated and interlocked (Dei, 1996). That is to say, aspects of social differences such as race, gender, sexual orientation and class are unintelligible without considering them in relation to each other (Ng, 1993). Thus individuals and/or groups can simultaneously experience oppression from more than one source of their social location.

While not endorsing a hierarchy of oppression, practice tells us that an increasing number of children, youth and parents being served by the Society identify with a racial minority group. Race or skin colour seems to be a salient aspect of social difference when considering the experience of visible minority communities who experience disproportionate levels of unemployment, under-employment, poverty and academic underachievement. Racism is defined as “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.” (International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1965)

In a landmark study by Michael Ornstein, *“Ethno-Racial Groups in Toronto, 1971-2001: A Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile”*, Institute for Social research, York University, January, 2006, he reports that non-European ethno- racial groups experience considerable disadvantage in the labour market compared to European groups. “Accounting for the effects of age, education and immigration leaves a gap of about 20 percent in the income of men from European and non-European ethno-racial groups, with the members of the African groups somewhat worse off (about 25percent) and the South and Central Americans somewhat better off (about 17 percent).” More recent newcomers fare worse than those who have been in Canada longer. “Extreme poverty affects the Somali, Afghan and Ethiopian groups, over half of whose members are below the low income cut-off: and the rate of low income is between 40 and 50 percent for the “Other West Asian”, Iraqi and Taiwanese groups. .... Extreme economic disadvantage is highly racialized. All twenty of the poorest ethno-racial groups in Toronto are non-European. ”

All facets of oppression are interrelated by common elements of power and control (Pharr, 1996) The dynamics of oppression share three pervasive components: 1) stereotypes, assumptions, theories and/or the dominant ideology; 2) bias, prejudice and /or the attitudes, positive or negative directed at the oppressed group(s); and 3) discrimination whether it is expressed individually, internal or on a societal, systemic or institutional level. Each form of social oppression is pervasive, feeds on and is sustained by the next.

The dynamics of oppression create a climate of silence and invisibility for marginalized groups. For example, marginalized people rarely have a representative voice or image in mainstream society. This results in stereotypical misrepresentations and encourages prejudicial attitudes. When these prejudices are acted out, discrimination occurs. Systemic discrimination occurs when individual acts of discrimination develop into widely accepted norm. “It must be acknowledged that while oppression may manifest itself as an overt, intentional, individualistic act, it is most likely to be covert, unintentional, and embedded in the culture and institutions of our society”. (Mullaly, 2002)

Anti-oppressive practice recognizes that social identity and oppression is complex, takes many forms and has many intersecting relationships. Power and privilege are relative to one’s location or position in society. Anti-oppression means allying with the marginalized individual or group and requires that all individuals, groups and institutions acknowledge the power and privilege that comes with their social location. Strategies for change require that we all share responsibility to address oppression.

Anti-oppressive practice involves working to eliminate oppression by addressing the power imbalance derived from membership in a dominant group and complicated by the power associated with the

legislated mandate of child welfare. It is “an approach to social work practice which seeks to reduce, undermine or eliminate discrimination and oppression, specifically in terms of challenging sexism, racism, ageism, and ableism and other forms of discrimination encountered in social work.” (Thompson, 1993) Practice is driven in service delivery systems by culturally preferred choices, not by interventions that are culturally blind or free. (Cross T. et al, 1989)

## PRINCIPLES

While in keeping with the legal mandate of the Child & Family Services Act, Ministry Standards & Guidelines and other relevant legislative requirements and Society policies, CAS-Toronto is committed to anti-oppression in the following ways:

### Access

Aims to ensure that all aspects of the agency, including its employ, physical space, services and governance are reachable, approachable, obtainable and permits entry.

### Inclusiveness

Actively reaching out, in culturally appropriate and respectful ways, to include and welcome people from diverse communities to participate in the decision making processes of the organization as well as to promote fair access to information and services at CAST. It also involves including and welcoming individuals from diverse groups to provide input into agency policies and services.

### Respect

Recognizing, valuing, and respecting different views, values, orientations, histories and cultures of diverse groups, while acknowledging the significance of child welfare legislation and the CAST mission statement, Code of Ethics and any other relevant agency policies.

### Accountability

Aim to ensure that the Board of Directors, staff, foster and residential care providers and volunteers actively engage in implementing an anti-oppression-anti-racism policy. Further, that purchase of service providers be informed of and be expected to provide care and services that comply with the Society’s Anti-Oppression-Anti-racism Policy and practices.

### Advocacy

Continue to ensure that, both internally and externally, policies and services seek to eradicate systemic barriers to equity, equality, inclusiveness, access, and respect.

### Equity

Aim to ensure fairness in the ways services and information are provided, to include communities in decision-making processes, sharing power and resources, and that recruitment and hiring practices at all levels of CAS-Toronto are reflective of the diversity of our society.

Equity is the standard by which to measure all related principles.

## POLICY STATEMENT

**Whereas the Children’s Aid Society of Toronto believes that it is the right of all children, youth, families, communities, staff, care providers, volunteers and persons affiliated with the Society to be free from all forms of oppression and racism be it resolved that:**

**The Children’s Aid Society of Toronto will, with diligence, take the steps required to review existing agency policies and practices, develop new ones, deliver services and create a work environment free from all forms of oppression, including racism.**

## BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

*Adopting this policy demonstrates the commitment of CAST to delivering anti-oppression/anti-racism child welfare practices. The policy will require an organizational change process that will have varying implications, some of which can be anticipated and others that can't. Some anticipated implications are:*

- *The implementation of this policy, while being consistent with Canadian laws, will result in services delivered to children, youth, families and care providers that values and respects their cultural, racial, ethnic and religious diversity, resulting in improved relationships of CAST within diverse, newcomer communities and the community at large.*
- *The policy is an official and formal way to acknowledge and encourage organizational change. The anti-oppression/anti-racism policy will require the agency to examine systemic barriers that inadvertently disadvantage access to services for clients, access to employment for internationally trained social workers, promotion opportunities for staff from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds, and access to opportunities for newcomer families to qualify as foster parents, adoptive parents and volunteers, including board membership.*
- *Adopting this Anti-Oppression/Anti-Racism Policy sets the agency on a course of organizational change that will require all involved to challenge both personal and organizational values and practices that may be experienced as oppressive and/or racist. Reflecting on how one's personal power and privilege, in combination with the inherent power associated with the child welfare mandate, impacts on our interactions with our clients and colleagues can be enlightening but also emotionally demanding and challenging. There is no easy way to accomplish this process, as it will require all stakeholders to engage in difficult conversations with each other, as well as ask the organization to review and revise current policies and practices.*
- *Creating an anti-oppressive/anti-racist organization furthers the creation of an equitable, respectful and positive work environment that values and benefits from the diversity of staff, foster parents, care providers and volunteers, including board members. This kind of work environment encourages people to want to be part of the organization and sustains them to remain part of it over the long term.*
- *Significant commitment and leadership will be required from the Board and senior management in guiding and supporting the implementation of the policy. Children, youth, parents and families will look to them to help the agency engage in a change process that will require staff, foster parents, care providers and volunteers to reflect on the power and privilege that comes from their location in society and to consciously challenge previously held values, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of people different than themselves. The Board and senior managers will be expected to set the example and act as role models in this process.*
- *Policy implementation will require dedicated human and financial resources to support training and consultation, carry out systemic reviews, implement new procedures and practices and conduct on-going evaluation, subject to financial ability*
- *Data collection within the agency will need to be revised and improved in order for it to accurately reflect the clients being served. This may require a review of the purpose for which the data is being collected, how it will be used and its impact on service planning and delivery.*

- ***The adoption of the policy will impact on the agency's community partners, requiring the development and implementation of a communication strategy to inform the community about the new policy as well as the implications of its implementation. It might also be realistic to anticipate that as the Society establishes a 'higher standard' of anti-oppressive/anti-racist child welfare practices for itself, expectations of other organizations and systems providing services and care for CAST involved children, youth and families may also be raised to a 'higher standard'. This may require CAST, subject to the Society's financial ability, to assist community service providers to meet new agency expectations.***

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Ableism/Disableism	<b><i>Ableism refers to consciously or unconsciously held beliefs that take expression in individual and/or institutional actions, policies, and practices that subordinates and views as inferior a person or group who suffers from physical, emotional, developmental, psychological, or psychiatric challenges.</i></b>
Ageism	<b><i>Ageism refers to consciously or unconsciously held beliefs that take expression in individual and/or institutional actions, policies, and practices that subordinates and views as inferior a person or group based upon age.</i></b>
Anti-Oppression	<b><i>Anti-oppression, in combating all facets of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, disableism, etc, begins with the premise that there are inequities in power that pervade all social relations.</i></b>
Classism	<b><i>Classism refers to consciously or unconsciously held beliefs that take expression in individual, institutional, and economic systems that promote policies and practices that subordinates and views as inferior, a person or group who suffers from economic hardship.</i></b>
Discrimination	<b><i>Unequal treatment based on one or more of the prohibited grounds, except where conduct is permitted under the Ontario Human Rights Code. Discrimination can be intentional or unintentional, direct or indirect but the result is adverse on prohibited grounds.</i></b>
Diversity	Refers to the wide ranging aspects of social differences including such areas as race, colour, sexual orientation, religion, gender, language, age, ability, place of origin, and culture.
Equity	<b><i>A state of fairness or justice, in which individuals and groups are provided with services, information, and benefits in a way that promotes fair and just conditions.</i></b>
Harassment	<b><i>A course of vexatious comments or conduct based on a prohibited ground as defined in the Ontario Human Rights Code, that is known to be or should reasonably be known to be unwelcome.</i></b>
Heterosexism	<b><i>The systemic beliefs and practices that benefit heterosexuals. It is the most pervasive source of LGB discrimination, even if unintended and, is often based on the assumption of heterosexuality and that being heterosexual is normal or preferred.</i></b>
Inclusiveness	<b><i>The degree to which an agency actively seeks, welcomes and collaborates with diverse community partners.</i></b>
Power Sharing	<b><i>Having in common, between two or more individuals or groups, the capacity to affect decision-making. Power sharing involves aiming to ensure that individuals or groups, particularly those from marginalized communities, have the capacity and resources to participate fully in effecting decision-making outcomes.</i></b>

Racism	<b><i>Racism is defined as “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.” (International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1965).</i></b>
Sharing Resources	<b><i>Networking with community support groups to sharing in common services, programs, information, knowledge, funding and skills to promote the well being of children, youth, families and communities.</i></b>
Social Location	<b><i>How one is treated in society based on their position/location that includes the power and privilege associated with one’s economic status, race, education, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, marital status, religion, national origin, legal status.</i></b>

Related Agency Policies:

- Code of Ethics
- Harassment & Discrimination Policy
- We Are Your Children Too: Accessible Child Welfare Services For Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth Policy
- Same Sex Adoption Policy
- Same Sex Fostering Policy.

This policy was developed by the Bridging Diversity Committee of the Children’s Aid Society of Toronto.

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**Example #2: The Children's Aid Society of Brant**



**POSITION PAPER ON DIVERSITY  
AND  
ANTI-OPPRESSIVE PRACTICE  
AT  
THE CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY  
OF BRANT**

**Distributed to all Staff, Summer 2008  
Presented to the Board of Directors, Fall 2008  
To be reviewed on an annual basis.**

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## **What is Anti-Oppressive Practice?**

As social workers, and those working in and for a Social Work Agency, we all have a responsibility to treat others with dignity, respect and equality. We carry the responsibility to challenge discriminative actions, behaviours, language, policies and procedures. We have a responsibility to act accordingly so that our actions do not directly or indirectly impede on a person or family's inherent right to practice their values and beliefs. It is our responsibility to encourage the continuation of such individualized family practices. Each person's experience is individual to that person. Each family's values and beliefs are individual to that family. It is our responsibility to honor such practices and values, and to ensure that they are being respected and valued while ensuring that children are safe.

For the context of this proposal, Anti-Oppressive Practice will be defined as the following:

*...to indicate an explicit evaluative position that constructs social divisions (especially 'race', class, gender, disability, sexual orientations and age) as matters of broad social structure, at the same time as being personal and organizational issues. It looks at the use and abuse of power not only in relations to individual or organizational behaviour, which may be overtly, covertly or indirectly racist, classist, sexist, and so on, but also in relation to broader social structures for example, the health, educational, political and economic, media and cultural systems and their routine provisions of services and rewards for powerful groups at local as well as national and international levels. These factors impinge on people's life stories in unique ways that have to be understood in their social-historical complex.*

Within this definition, you are able to identify the use and abuse of power and control within relationships on personal, family, community, organizational, political and structural levels. These levels are interconnected, shaping one's reality and experiences; albeit positive or negative. Challenging such inequities is the motivating factor of Anti-Oppressive Practice. Challenging one's thoughts, ideas, language and actions towards such marginalized groups so that every person's values, beliefs and practices are being honored and respected accordingly.

Attached within, you will find a proposal which was completed by the Diversity & Anti-Oppressive Practice Committee. It is our intention to challenge some of these inequities and practices so that every family receiving service is being treated with dignity and respect.

Clifford, D.J. (1995) 'Methods in oral history and social' *Journal of the Oral History Society* 23 (2).

## **Introduction**

The Children's Aid Society of Brant is committed to working with families in order to ensure safe and nurturing environments for children. In doing so, it has been highlighted that in order to provide respectful, anti-oppressive and collaborative service to families, the Agency needs to address the systems of power that are inherent in the Child Welfare System. This Agency services a disproportionate number of families who are marginalized based on their class, race, mental health, etc. This disproportionate representation behooves us to advocate for social justice and change in order to bring forth the voices from the margins to help even the playing field for every child so that there is equal access and opportunity to live and grow in families and communities where each person is valued and treated with dignity and respect.

The Diversity and Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) Committee at CAS Brant was created in October 2007 at the request of the Executive Director, Andrew Koster. This Committee consists of a cross-section of employees (21 members) who volunteered to be part of this initiative.

This Committee meets on a bi-weekly basis to discuss variable issues. An Education and Training Subcommittee which meets every alternative week, has evolved from the larger committee. The purpose of this subcommittee is to bring forward opportunities for learning to the larger committee as well as to create, disseminate and analyze an Agency-wide survey and to create this proposal.

**Purpose:**

The aim of this proposal to the Board of Directors is to recommend changes which would enhance the culture of Brant CAS as an inclusive and Anti-Oppressive Agency where workers and families are treated “in a manner that respects cultural, religious and regional differences” (the Service Philosophy Manual pg. 6). The expected outcome of this initiative is to have the Children’s Aid Society of Brant be reflected as an Agency where all families, community partners, staff and foster parents feel that they are respected, valued and heard.

This proposal will address and make recommendations on six particular facets of the Agency and service delivery. These recommendations will focus on practice and policy measures and will pertain to all staff, foster-parents and other groups either providing or receiving service from the Children’s Aid Society of Brant. Each recommendation is broken down into four different sub-sections: (i) definition, (ii) action needed, (iii) recommendations and (iv) outcome. The material contained in this proposal is a result of feedback from Agency staff through an Agency-wide survey and the Diversity/AOP Committee.

The Key issues which will be addressed are:

1. Cultural Competence
2. Communication
3. Sharing Power
4. Kinship services
5. Information sharing
6. Orientation

**THE CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF BRANT**

**Vision Statement**

- All children will be safe, supported, encouraged and nurtured in order to achieve their potential
- All children will have their inherent right to be children protected
- All children will be valued members of a family and community
- Each family will be valued as the primary source of safety, stability and nurturing
- Each family will promote a sense of belonging and cultural identity for its members
- Families will demonstrate a value system that affirms respect, dignity, self-reliance and commitment to responsible parenting and citizenship
- Families will have sufficient resources and opportunities to realize their potential as hopeful and responsible citizens

- The community will promote economic and social well-being of its members, enabling them to live in harmony
- The community will be respectful and responsive to the environment and to the needs and rights of all its members

### **Purpose Statement**

- We will work with the families and the community to safeguard a permanent, nurturing family for all children at risk of abuse, neglect or abandonment
- We will recognize and use the strengths of families in all assessments, decision-making and actions
- We share with the community the responsibility for protecting children and strengthening families
- We will work in collaboration with the community to achieve this purpose

## **THE DIVERSITY AND AOP COMMITTEE**

### **Mandate**

The mandate of the Diversity and Anti-Oppression (AOP) Committee is:

- To reflect the Agency's Code of Ethics and social work values
- To promote an environment and culture in which staff and clients are treated with mutual respect and equality
- To pay attention to the needs of clients and to advocate to help change structures that oppress families based on issues such as class (poverty), race, mental health, ability, sexual orientation, gender, culture, etc.
- To eradicate discrimination in our practice/daily interactions and challenge it in the practice of ourselves and others and the institutional structures in which we operate
- To encourage, support and bring to the centre the knowledge and perspectives of those who have been marginalized, and incorporate these perspectives into practice
- To develop and recommend changes to policy within the Agency regarding anti-oppressive practice
- To create an environment where people are free to share their thoughts and ideas

### **Vision Statement**

The Diversity and Anti-Oppression Committee will work to address systemic barriers for those who are marginalized within and outside this Agency in order to build communities of caring and respect.

At the core of this value system is the belief that all persons have a right to be treated with dignity, respect and compassion.

### **Issue #1: CULTURAL COMPETENCE**

1. What is Cultural Competence?
  - Assessing Agency cultural competence vs. team delegation
  - Individual vs. team cultural competence skill areas
  - Defining professional standards

## 2. Understanding Culture and Cultural Differences

- Culture vs. race in the definition of differences
- Dimensions of culture - language, nature, environment, human relations, work, human nature, values, history, etc

## 3. Aboriginal Peoples in Canada

- Mental Health Issues
- Models of Racial Identity Development
- Assimilation and Acculturation
- Immigration and Acculturation
- Acculturation and Community Breakdown
- Psychological Trauma
- Drug and Alcohol Use
- Cultural Meaning of Recovery

### **Definition of Culture and Cultural Competence**

#### **Culture**

Culture refers to how people understand, interpret and give meaning to their environment. Culture has been defined as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.

#### **Cultural Competence**

Cultural competence refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. Cultural competence is comprised of four components:

- (a) Awareness of one's own cultural worldview
- (b) Attitude towards cultural differences
- (c) Knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews
- (d) Cross-cultural skills

Developing cultural competence results in an ability to understand communicate with and effectively interact with people across cultures.

Cultural competence is becoming increasingly necessary for work, home, and community social lives. Awareness of culture is not to be limited to race, as all groups share a culture.

Consider the following definitions for cultural competence:

A set of congruent behaviors, attitudes and policies that come together as a system, Agency, or among professionals and enable that system, Agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.

- Cultural competence requires that organizations have a defined set of values and principles, and demonstrate behaviors, attitudes, policies, and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally.

- Cultural competence is defined simply as the level of knowledge-based skills required to provide effective clinical care to patients from a particular ethnic or racial group.
- Cultural competence is a developmental process that evolves over an extended period. Both individuals and organizations are at various levels of awareness, knowledge and skills along the cultural competence continuum.

Can you even measure something like cultural competence? In an attempt to offer solutions for developing cultural competence, Diversity Training University International (DTUI) isolated four cognitive components:

- (a) Awareness
- (b) Attitude
- (c) Knowledge
- (d) Skills

### **Awareness**

Awareness is consciousness of one's personal reactions to people who are different. A police officer who recognizes that he profiles people who look like they are from Mexico as “illegal aliens” has cultural awareness of his reactions to this group of people.

### **Attitude**

Paul Pedersen’s multicultural competence model emphasized three components: awareness, knowledge and skills. DTUI added the attitude component in order to emphasize the difference between training that increases awareness of cultural bias and beliefs and that gets participants to carefully examine their beliefs and values about cultural differences.

### **Knowledge**

Social science research indicates that our values and beliefs about equality may be inconsistent with our behaviors, and we ironically may be unaware of it. Social psychologist Patricia Devine and her colleagues, for example, showed in their research that many people who score low on a prejudice test tend to do things in cross cultural encounters that exemplify prejudice (e.g., using out-dated labels such as “illegal aliens”, “colored”, and “homosexual”). This makes the Knowledge component an important part of cultural competence development.

Regardless of whether our attitude towards cultural differences matches our behaviors, we can all benefit by improving our cross-cultural effectiveness. One common goal of diversity professionals is to create inclusive systems that allow members to work at maximum productivity levels.

### **Skills**

The Skills component focuses on practicing cultural competence to perfection. Communication is the fundamental tool by which people interact in organizations. This includes gestures and other non-verbal communication that tend to vary from culture to culture.

Notice that the set of four components of our cultural competence definition—awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills—represents the key features of each of the popular definitions.

The utility of the definition goes beyond the simple integration of previous definitions, however. It is the diagnostic and intervention development benefits that make the approach most appealing.

**Action needed:**

Training would be required for all staff for the purpose of increasing awareness regarding this particular issue. Cultural competence should become part of the Agency culture through ongoing assessment via clinical and peer supervision. There should be implementation of training to better serve the Aboriginal Community in addition to the various other growing cultural and ethnic communities. The Agency should also ensure that policies and procedures are inclusive and are representative of the diverse and cultural groups we serve. Additionally the Agency's foster care system and foster parents should begin to reflect and embrace the culturally diverse community that Brant serves.

**Recommendations:**

- The Diversity and AOP committee recommends that the Agency conduct 2-3 day training on issues around diversity and anti-oppression. This will include an extensive component on cultural competence. Please refer to page 18 for elaboration regarding training needs.
- That the Agency liaises with Immigrant and Settlement Services to provide ongoing support and education to staff around the diverse groups within our community.
- That the Agency pursues and builds a collaborative relationship with established cultural groups within our community.
- That the Agency through these relationships is able to recruit foster parents that reflect the diversity of the Brant community.
- That the Agency environment begins to reflect through toys, pictures and books the diverse community the Agency serves, including the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer (LGBTQ) community.
- That LGBTQ resources are made available for kids and families who need them.

**Additional recommendations from the survey**

- i. Conference or group presentation about diversity/cultural issues
- ii. Share articles
- iii. Site on intranet
- iv. Group participation exercises
- v. Mandatory in-house training around Aboriginal culture and practices for all workers
- vi. Potluck over lunch and presentation
- vii. Easy access to information on issues of culture, race, creed etc...including tools to help foster and respect peoples of all different backgrounds, culture, race, creed, etc.

**Expected Outcomes:**

An Agency (inclusive of all staff, board members and foster parents) that is culturally sensitive and culturally aware. This knowledge and awareness should result in our families being provided with more appropriate services. Staff will also have an increase in connections within the community so that workers can better serve our families and children. This will also help to enhance a foster care system which will ensure that children in care are maintaining or are able to remain connected to their diverse cultures.

**Issue # 2: COMMUNICATION**

It is imperative that the language used within the Agency is reflective of Anti-Oppressive Practice. Written and verbal communication should be inclusive of all groups within the Agency and community. This includes, but is not limited to, policies, procedures, and referral forms. The Agency-wide survey identified communication as an issue, with recommendations of overall improvement throughout the Agency, to ensure that all staff is being treated fairly and equitable. It was identified that the Agency needed to improve service delivery to clients and collaterals by staff having an increased awareness of how different facets of the Agency support families.

**Action Needed:**

Quarterly Agency AOP Newsletter to address AOP within the Agency and highlight the positive effect(s) it has on clients and families. Staff would be encouraged to share articles, exercises etc to go into the newsletter. A small subcommittee from the Diversity/AOP Committee could be in charge of this newsletter. In addition, clinical and peer supervision would offer opportunities to discuss tenants of AOP as well as to reinforce the importance of AOP on service delivery. Lastly, make visible reminders and reinforce the Agency's mandate and the policies and procedures which are already in place that highlight AOP.

**Recommendations:**

- Distribute the AOP Newsletter quarterly
- Visual cues that the Agency is inclusive and anti-oppressive. For example, posters that include marginalized groups such as LGBTQ groups, racial groups, disability groups, etc.
- Review of the current Policy and Procedures at unit meetings. Each meeting could start with reviewing one policy/procedure
- Review accessibility of all sites for staff, clients and collaterals
- Review the current Agency logo and assess whether it is representative of the families served

**Additional recommendations from the survey**

- i. Ensuring that all voices are heard and consistency is followed within all levels
- ii. Create guidelines in dealing with anti-oppression in order that everyone is treated the same, no matter of gender or background. Set clear consequences when these are not followed

**Expected Outcome:**

This implementation will result in an inclusive environment which will not only increase staff morale, but will also have positive effects on the service delivered to clients and collaterals.

**Issue # 3: SHARING POWER**

The Diversity and Anti-Oppressive Committee identifies a need to address how the Agency shares power between families and collaterals. This includes, but is not limited to, the involvement of our families in the decision making process. Sharing power will provide workers with the opportunity to consult with our families and assist them in the process of mobilizing their resources e.g. friends and family. These consultations should also occur through processes such as Accreditation and through the Advisory Board.

**Action Needed:**

In order to successfully achieve this, we need to ensure that our clients are more actively involved in the decision making process. We need to consistently apply the Society's strength based approach to our practice with families and collaterals in conjunction with the Signs of Safety. In addition to this, staff needs to be supported and encouraged through clinical and peer supervision, regarding individual decision making in order to ensure that family input is being received.

### **Recommendations:**

- Ensure that every staff member and foster parent is provided with the book on the signs of safety
- Focus groups/Advisory Committee including clients and service providers to further assess and determine how the Society can "share power" with our marginalized groups
- Regular enforcement of the complaint procedures

### **Expected Outcome:**

This will foster an Agency environment that is more inclusive and thereby more in tune with the community it serves. This will further allow the Society to "encourage, support and bring to the "centre" the knowledge and perspectives of those who have been marginalized, and incorporate these perspectives into practice," (AOP Mandate)

### **Issue #4: KINSHIP SERVICES**

Overall concerns as to whether Bill 210 is being properly and consistently interpreted by teams and units. This can be an intrusive process and consistency is needed to further determine suitability as to whether a file should be open under Kinship Service.

What happens if parents (s) are placing their child (ren) with a relative on their own initiative without CAS assistance, or we learn this has happened after the children have moved in with family? Is a Kin file opened up under this family name? If so, this practice removes the autonomy of families to make safe decisions for their children. This works contrary to the strength based approach that the ministry and some agencies are promoting.

Staff is finding a discrepancy in opinion from unit to unit. For example, if a child is going to reside with "Kin" for a few days or a week, does the same process apply? What happens if a family placement is only needed a month? What are the time deadlines about opening a "Kinship Service" home?

In addition, staff is finding that Kin homes require ongoing emotional and financial support from the Agency. Kin families express frustrations that the Society has expectations of them and will not provide much, or no financial help.

### **Action Needed:**

The Agency needs to implement kinship service in a way that is supportive and consistent throughout the various teams and departments. Workers and managers (upper management and service managers) will require clarification regarding standards of Kin Service families in order to ensure consistent interpretation and application of this service across the Agency. In



addition, the Agency will need to be proactive and represented in feedback to the Ministry with respect to lack of funding to kinship service arrangements, as there is a clear role for AOP to support this advocacy and need.

**Recommendations:**

- Agency training to review Bill 210 for a minimum of ½ day of training to discuss and review the aforementioned issues. Training would include presentations from community partners who are directly or indirectly involved in Kinship Service, this includes but is not limited to, Ontario Works.
- Review of financial availability to assist ‘kin homes’ with financial support. Consistency and financial standards need to be set in place, and used across the Agency. Some families have more money than others and may not require much or no financial help.
- Increase in sharing of information regarding available supports for kinship families on the intranet.
- The need for consistent Agency standards regarding the acceptance or recommendation of “kin homes”. For instance, there are families who rely on Ontario Works for an income. In reality, families in receipt of Ontario Works live at or below the poverty line. Do we exclude a loving family because they live at or below the poverty line? Are some Workers or Units using middle class standards as a benchmark for placing a child with “Kin”?

**Expected Outcome:**

The outcome of these recommendations will provide a more supportive and collaborative approach between the Society and community to ensure the safety and well-being of children. Having a supportive service to kinship service homes is a true example of “transparency.”

**Issue # 5: SHARING INFORMATION**

Currently, there is a lack of consistent sharing of information regarding protocols, policies, programs and services between upper management, service managers, and front-line staff. As a result, front-line staff are not conducting service that is adhering to such designed practices, and there is limited direction from management to front line staff to ensure that such policies are being practice in accordance to the actual policy directives.

**Action Needed:**

All staff, including service managers, needs to be consistently and equally informed about current and modified programs, policies, procedures and services within this Agency, as well as protocol(s) for community partners.

**Recommendations:**

- Upper management, including service managers, to review with all their respective units the most commonly misused and underutilized programs and policies. This includes, but is not limited to, the Supervised Access Program. This program and policy, for the most part, has not been executed in accordance to the 2006 modified policy. As such, the current practice of the Supervised Access Program is not adhering to these modifications and front line staff is not aware of proper protocol for referral.
- For these programs that have been under or mis-utilized, it is recommended that representatives appear during unit/team meetings to discuss these misunderstood practices with the front line staff and service managers (i.e.) CDU, SAP, transportation.

- In order to ensure that sharing of information is taking place, there needs to be shared accountability between upper management, service managers, and front line staff. This will help to ensure that current and modified programs, policies, and protocols are being implemented as they were designed and intended. This may be accomplished by having service managers and front line staff signs a disclaimer initializing that this disclosure was completed.

**Expected Outcome:**

Both clients and collaterals are receiving consistent information and service from various workers and from various cases.

Front line staff will have an increase in accurate knowledge regarding the proper protocols, programs, and policies. This will assist workers in being able to make referrals according to the family needs and strengths.

**Issue # 6: ORIENTATION FOR NEW STAFF MEMBERS**

The Diversity and Anti-Oppressive Committee would like to make recommendations around the need for an improved Orientation process for new employees of Brant CAS. Presently, information is not being clearly presented or easily accessible for new employees entering the Agency. Information regarding the Society’s perspectives on strengths based approach and/or Anti-Oppressive practice is not reflected and can only be found if a new employee is “looking” for this information.

The current practice of self-guided orientation can be confusing and frustrating for a new employee as they are left on their own to dismantle an Agency full of vast and important information. New employees need to understand and learn the policies and procedures through guidance. New employees need to know the Society’s perspective on Anti-Oppressive practice and how it will be upheld within this Agency.

**Action Needed:**

The Agency needs to ensure that all employees (full-time, part-time, contract) are properly oriented to Brant CAS regarding policies and procedures. New employees need to be aware of the Society’s strength based approach to practice in conjunction with the Signs of Safety and the implication and implementation of this combined practice. New employees need to be made cognizant of the role that Anti-Oppressive practice has within the Agency. In order to ensure that this transfer of learning is being successfully achieved, new employees need to be supported and encouraged through clinical and peer supervision and in the individual decision making process.

**Recommendations:**

- Provide “Orientation Training” to help deliver important information regarding Brant CAS (Executive Director, Agency Services e.g. Information Services, Resource Units can also make introduction at this time, other Agency groups). This can be one full day or half day training offered at quarterly intervals.
- Establish a Committee to assist in the development of an Orientation Training

- Ensure that every new staff member and foster parent is provided with the book on the Signs of Safety.
- Managers need to support and ensure that this transfer of learning is taking place through Clinical and Peer Supervision.
- A Peer Mentorship Program needs to be established within the Agency so that experienced workers are able to assist new employees through their learning process. This program should have clear outlines and expectations for all involved parties.
- As part of the orientation package, new workers will sign off on policies outlining Agency expectations around not only harassment (which is currently in place) but also workplace bullying.

### **Expected Outcome:**

An Agency wherein new employees will have the information they need to successfully carry out their role so that new workers can effectively service our clients and feel a certain level of competence. In addition, this may also result in an Agency that is able to retain staff and reduce the high level of new staff members.

### **ANNUAL WORKPLAN**

It is important for the Agency that the Diversity and AOP Committee, over time, remains both transparent and accountable to the needs of the Agency. In order to achieve this, the Committee will present an independent workplan to the Agency on an annual basis. This being the first one it also includes an understanding of the core values and beliefs involved in diversity and anti-oppressive practice.

Annualized workplans will outline the direction for the upcoming year including specialized workshops, cultural events, conferences, and outreach events that will be identified by both the Committee and our staff. For example, the training proposal outlined in this Report is designed to produce generic understandings and insights for staff. Once this is completed, more specialized workshops can then be designed to create greater understanding of, and work with, specific client groups or colleagues. In addition, once the Clinical Approach to Supervision policy is instituted, some if not all staff will be able to identify areas for their growth and understanding as it pertains to Diversity/AOP. A renewed work plan developed by the Committee can help support these identified areas and help us move to an even more responsive level of service.

### **EDUCATION AND TRAINING NEEDS**

In light of the foregoing we, the Diversity Committee, propose that the Agency undergo training in the area of Diversity and Anti-Oppressive Practice to address the aforementioned issues in a structured forum. This training is suggested to be offered on a mandated basis (2-3 days minimal) to all staff (including but not limited to, part-time, full-time, contract, support, and management), collaterals, foster parents, and the Board of Directors.

In order for the aforementioned issues to be successfully executed, this proposed training will provide staff with the required skills and tools so that they can effectively work with our marginalized clients and work within Brant's growing diverse communities. It will help to bridge gaps within our community and our partners by acknowledging that change is needed, and that action is being taken within our Agency. This training will provide the Agency with the required

skills so that those same representatives are behaving and adhering to the values and beliefs of the Children's Aid Society of Brant when they are with clients, collaterals and colleagues.

Research has been completed by the committee, and it has been identified and agreed that the training be conducted primarily by Dr. Gary Dumbrill and Dr. June Yee. Attached as Appendix "A" and Appendix "B" to this proposal are their respective Curriculum Vitae which will outline their expertise in this area and therefore their suitability to do this said training.

The committee is also recommending that Dr. Dumbrill and Dr. Yee be contracted for an extended period to act as consultants in establishing focus groups as well as "interest groups" within and around the Brant community. These interest groups will assist Brant CAS in determining areas of improvement within the Agency, and will help to facilitate a better working relationship with our community. This consultative period will afford the Agency the assistance it will need to have an increased skill level in building relationships within the community as well to continue to encourage and develop a community that embraces and is open to its growing diversity.

In order for the above mentioned terms to be successfully met, financial support is required.

With this being said, the Diversity and AOP Committee requests that you kindly consider this proposal, and the positive impact it will have on our clients, collaterals and our community. We understand that we are in a time of change, and in order to reflect some of the new changes brought forward from Bill210 and e-forms, we kindly request that you consider approval of our request so that we can better assist our families and children.

On behalf of the Diversity and AOP Committee, we would like to thank you for your time.

## **Example #3: Simcoe County Children's Aid Society**

### **Anti-Oppression "Champions" Committee (AOCC) (4/15/2008)**

#### **A. Accountability**

The AOCC is accountable to the Board of Directors of Simcoe County CAS, through the Executive Director.

#### **B. Functions**

The AOCC will be responsible for the completion of the following functions:

1. Determine the vision and long term strategies for the initiative.
2. Develop a work plan based on the document entitled *Anti-Oppression Organizational Change Initiative: Organizational Needs Assessment February 1, 2008* complete with responsibilities and timelines.
3. Implement strategies outlined in the work plan through the development of sub-committee work groups.
4. Set terms of evaluation and establish an evaluation process.
5. Represent and promote the AOCC within the agency and community forums that address community development on this issue.
6. Act as a resource to the Board of Directors, executive Director and Senior Management.
7. Monitor to ensure that the anti-oppression philosophy and practice is integrated into all aspects of the agency and its work.

#### **C. Leadership of the Anti-Oppression "Champions" Committee**

The AOCC will be Co-Chaired by two members of the committee who have demonstrated knowledge and commitment to work within and promote an anti-oppressive framework within the Society.

The role of the Co-Chairs will be to ensure that the Terms of Reference for the Committee are being adhered to and that progress is being made towards accomplishing the overall goals objectives and recommendations of the AOCC.

The role of the Co-Chairs will also be to unite the committee and focus the group, ensure free-flowing communication within the group and assist in building consensus decision-making.

#### **D. Committee Composition**

Membership will be drawn from the agency Board of Directors, staff, foster parents and volunteers who demonstrate a knowledge and commitment to work within and promote an anti-oppressive framework within the Society.

The majority of members shall be persons representing populations most affected by the issues of oppression such as: gender, race, sexual and gender orientation, aboriginals, the disabled.

AOCC will include at least 10 members who equitably represent all aspects of the of the agency and will be free to expand the number of members in consideration of workload and other factors if need be to accomplish its role.

## **E. Member Conduct**

AOCC members are expected to:

- Make a two-year commitment to the committee.
- Attend monthly meetings and others as called on a regular basis and actively participate. Regular attendance is defined by attending nine out of 12 meetings.
- Be prepared for each meeting by reviewing information in advance.
- Work collaboratively with the members of the AOCC and others involved with the initiative.
- Accept assignments willingly in an effort to complete the tasks to be addressed by the AOCC.

## **F. Guidelines for Participation**

AOCC members agree to the following principles and conduct that will guide the development and implementation of the committee recommendations:

- Acceptance of the Terms of Reference as a guide regarding the development and implementation of the committee.
- Engage issues of diversity, equity reform and anti-oppressive practice in their own actions.
- Promote the agency's anti-oppressive philosophy within their area of influence within the agency and the broader community of services.

## **G. Meeting Schedule**

Minimum one meeting per month at a time and date to be determined by the committee. The AOCC will meet on a regular basis to address the tasks identified in their work plan.

## **H. Meeting Protocol and Procedures**

Members will jointly determine process for holding each other accountable for their participation in the AOCC.

A meeting agenda, minutes of the last meeting and supporting information will be forwarded to members before the scheduled meeting.

All minutes will be distributed agency-wide for maximum transparency of decisions and actions.

Members are required to contact a Co-Chair if they are unable to attend a meeting prior to the meeting.

In addition to attending meetings, AOCC members may be required, on occasion, to volunteer time to participate in activities or initiatives sponsored by the committee, both in the agency and in the community.

The AOCC will strive to achieve consensus in planning and operationalizing the committee's goals and recommendations. However, the alternative to consensus will mean that the majority will prevail. The decisions of the Co-Chairs will be final in the event that no clear majority exists.

## **I. Resources**

The agency will support the work of the AOCC through provision of space for meetings and activities, refreshments, honoraria if necessary, administrative support, and access to expert advice through use of external consultation services.

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## Child Welfare: AOP's Nemesis?

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How can child protection workers address issues of child abuse and neglect with families in a way that is anti-oppressive? My struggles with this question, both as a practitioner and as an academic, have consistently led me to one conclusion—answers to working anti-oppressively do not lie in social work ideas but in the ideas of those receiving social work services. Acting on this conclusion, I have sought “client” ideas about how to work anti-oppressively. Before I present the results of this research, I will examine the challenge of working anti-oppressively within the context of child welfare. I begin by outlining the nature of anti-oppressive practice (AOP) and the ways it attempts to dismantle systemic inequalities that underlie social injustice. I then suggest that child welfare is a nemesis of such practice because modern child welfare’s origins lie in the efforts of society’s privileged to control those they perceived as a threat to their dominance. I will show that such control is not just historical—current child welfare practice continues to preserve systems of dominance. Child welfare, therefore, presents AOP with a poignant challenge: How can child welfare be transformed into an activity that challenges the dominant discourses that gave it birth while also protecting children? I contend that social work has no answer to this challenge because remedies formulated within social work simply perpetuate the discourses of domination in which child welfare is steeped. Instead, transformation lies in remedies formulated by service users—it lies in social work giving up speaking about what child welfare “clients” need and listening to what service users themselves say they need. I demonstrate the viability of listening to child welfare service users by presenting the findings of my research that examined parents’ views of child protection services.

### What is Anti-Oppressive Practice?

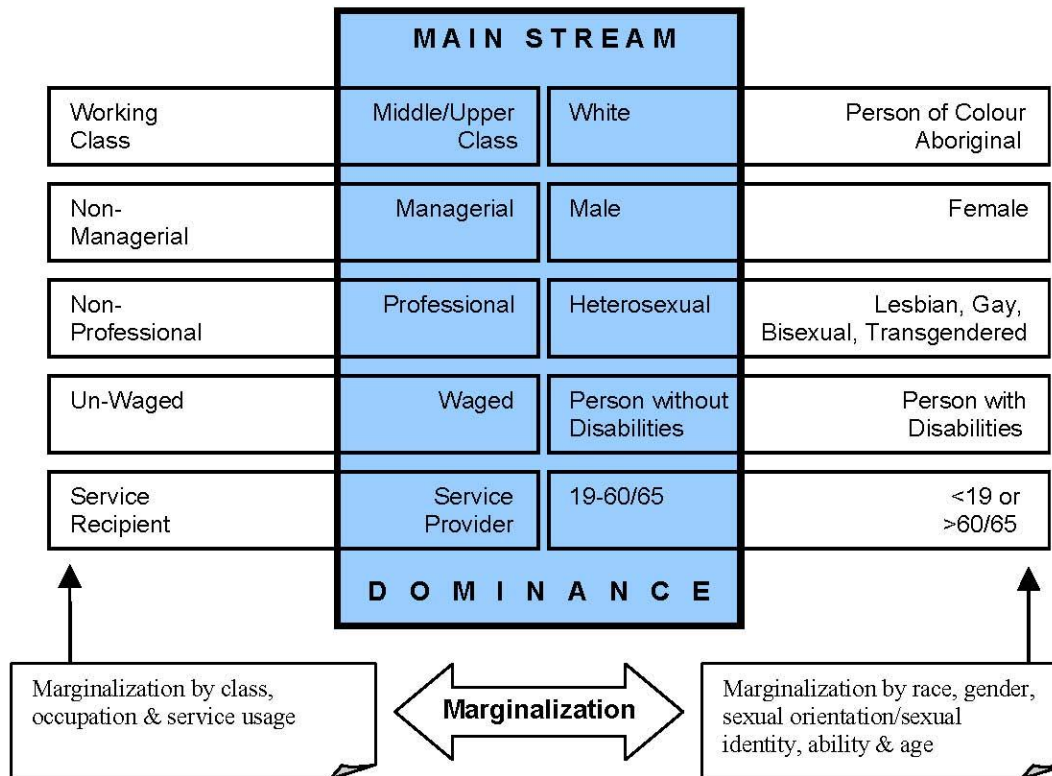
Anti-oppressive practice is concerned with eradicating social injustice perpetuated by societal structural inequalities, particularly along the lines of race, gender, sexual orientation and identity, ability, age, class, occupation and social service usage. Young (1990) explains how such inequality is maintained, in part, by five forms of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. “Exploitation” results from fixed social relations between social classes and groups causing “a transfer of energies from one group to another that produce unequal distributions” (Young, 1990 p. 53). “Marginalization” pushes classes and groups of people to the edges of society where they are “expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation” (Ibid.). “Powerlessness” leaves categories of people experiencing “inhibition in the development of [their] capacities, lack of decision making power in [their] life, and exposure to disrespectful treatment because of the status [they occupy]” (Young, 1990, p. 58). “Cultural imperialism” causes groups of people to find that “the dominant meanings of society render the particular perspective of [their] own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype[sic] [that] group and mark it as the Other” (Young, 1990, pp. 58-59). “Violence” is systemically “directed at members of a group simply because they are members of that group” (Young, 1990, p. 62).

These five forms of oppression, and the social injustice they support, result from the domination and privilege held by select societal groups and classes. Figure 6.1 presents a spatial representation of the



relationship between domination and oppression and shows how “mainstream” societal space is occupied by locations of privilege and “minority” locations are pushed to the social margins. The oppression shown in Figure 6.1 is accumulative with the more marginalized sites pushed further from the centre. For instance, a lesbian woman of colour living with a disability is likely to experience more marginality and other forms of oppression than a heterosexual White male with a disability. Just as sites of oppression interlock, so do sites of dominance and privilege with prime societal space monopolised by the dominant male, heterosexual, White, able, middle-class, professional/ managerial locations that situate themselves as epitomising the Canadian social fabric (Yee & Dumbrill, 2003).

**Figure 6.1: A Spatial Analysis of Domination & Oppression**



Although Figure 6.1 aids social analysis, it does not empirically represent society—it is abstracted from select characteristics of society. Figure 6.1 must not be taken literally because to do so would oversimplify and reduce the dynamics of oppression into a clash of binary opposites. Such reduction is problematic because although power is held within the locations shown in the centre of Figure 6.1, this is not universally so and the ways oppression operates are much more fluid and complex. Figure 6.1 is further complicated by its categories being social constructions. “Race,” for instance, is a category that gains meaning only because of the oppression experienced as a result of racialization. Consequently, the significance of the locations shown in Figure 6.1 do not lie in an “essential” difference within the categories listed, but in the power held by the dominant groups to define specific locations as “different” and marginalize those so defined. Figure 6.1, therefore, does not provide a map of society that can be used to identify individuals who oppress and others who are oppressed, but it provides a broad topography of Canada’s social landscape that reveals the socially constructed contours that shape oppression.

Social work was combating social injustice and dominance along the dimensions shown in Figure 6.1 long before the term “AOP” was coined; feminists, anti-racists, and structuralists have addressed these forms of oppression for decades. Even interlocking oppression and the socially constructed nature of

“difference” has been recognized for some time. In my own and others’ anti-racist work in Britain in the 1980s, interlocking oppression was recognized and the term “Black” was used by those from oppressed groups as a term of resistance not only referring to race but also to others forced to society’s margins (Gilroy, 1987; Hiro, 1971). More recently, the term “Whiteness” has been used to refer to the groups that dominate (Kincheloe, 1999; McIntosh, 1998; Yee & Dumbrell, 2003). AOP, therefore, does not bring a radically new perspective to social work; it brings a synthesis and refinement of earlier social justice perspectives. With the spatial analysis shown in Figure 6.1, AOP also brings attention to the social location of those who speak and are heard in social discourses. It is no longer sufficient for social work to speak of social justice without considering the location it speaks from, which is usually the dominant location at the centre of Figure 6.1. Indeed, laws governing social work, most Canadian social work institutions, and the theories that underpin social work intervention tend to be steeped in White European thought and ways of being. By speaking from a location of dominance, social work not only removes the opportunity for those on the margins to speak for themselves, it also perpetuates mainstream discourses that underpin injustice. Consequently, high on AOP’s agenda is examining and dismantling the role social work plays in maintaining oppression. This self-examination is not only required by the discipline as a whole, but by each of us within the discipline. For me, therefore, a White British male who appears to be located in the centre of Figure 6.1, I must not only ask how social work oppresses and how it might become anti-oppressive, I must also ask how I oppress and how I might become anti-oppressive? The question posed at the beginning of this chapter, therefore, is very personal for me: How can I address issues of child abuse and neglect with families while also being anti-oppressive? To understand the challenge of answering this question, one must first be aware of how child welfare systems protect dominance.

### **Child Welfare: A System of Dominance**

Child welfare masks its propensity to oppress by presenting its efforts to protect children as the product of “civilised” society and contrasting its compassionate treatment of children with the barbaric treatment of children in past societies (Fraser, 1976; Radbill, 1974, 1980; Rycus, Hughes & Garrison, 1995). Indeed, the protection of children from abuse is said to have begun in 1874 when the New York Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals discovered six-year-old Mary Ellen being beaten by her caregivers and “rescued” her after recognising that children deserved at least the same rights as animals (Costin, Karger, & Stoesz, 1996; Lazoritz & Shelman, 1996; Litzelfelner & Petr, 1997; Mohr, Gelles, & Schwartz, 1999). Further advances occurred in 1962 when the medical team of Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegmueller and Silver (1962) refocused society’s attention on child abuse by discovering the “battered child syndrome.” More progress was made in the 1970s when the extent of sexual abuse became evident (Committee on Sexual Offences Against Children and Youth, 1984; Finkelhor, 1984; Kempe & Kempe, 1978; Russell, 1983). Now, children in the modern developed world are protected by social workers who police parenting with an array of risk-assessment instruments.

The above accounts misrepresent both the past and present. Life in ancient societies was often brutish for adults and children alike, yet efforts to protect children from physical abuse, sexual abuse and also neglect can be traced back to the beginnings of recorded history (Corby, 2000; Dumbrell & Trocmé, 1999; Pollock, 1983). Historical accounts, therefore, contrasting ancient barbarism toward children with modern caring for children do not provide a basis for understanding the past but an oversimplified binary opposite against which modern child welfare characterises itself as “advanced.” Indeed, once the ancients are considered “barbaric,” the moderns are more easily considered “civilised” and acts of modern child welfare that might be regarded as oppressive are more easily overlooked. For instance, portraying modern child welfare as “civilised” overlooks the fact that when Mary Ellen inspired the 1874 “advances” in child welfare, First Nations children were being removed from their families in a deliberate attempt to eradicate Aboriginal language and culture. Also overlooked is the fact that when Kempe and colleagues’ 1962 “advances” occurred, the “sixties scoop” was underway in which, supported by a Federal stipend for every Aboriginal child apprehended, provincial child welfare agencies “scooped” thousands of First Nations children from their parents and placed them with White families. Although the

treatment of Aboriginal peoples is the clearest form of oppression by child welfare organisations, other marginalized groups have also been oppressed (Gordon, 1988; Pfol, 1977; Swift, 1995a, 1995b). This oppression results from child welfare organisations not only being founded to protect children like Mary Ellen from harm, but also being designed to protect social order. Swift explains the motivation of those founding modern child welfare organizations:

They believed that in “saving” neglected children, they also could save themselves and their positions of privilege. They most certainly hoped to help neglected children, but they wanted to reduce threats to the existing social order that they believed these children might come to pose. Their scheme was ingenious, providing themselves and their representatives with the authority of the state to intervene in and alter the private lives of those they saw as dangerous to their own interests.... This basic approach, with continual refinements, remains in place today. (Swift, 1995b, p. 74)

This approach remaining in place today is evidenced by the continued overrepresentation in care of children from groups that the founders of modern child welfare saw as a potential threat to their privilege. First Nations children are still removed from their parents in disproportionate numbers (Fournier & Crey, 1997a, 1997b) as are children of single parents (Callahan & Lumb, 1995). Child protection agencies’ focus on marginalized groups is not just a Canadian phenomena; in the United States child removal is linked to poverty (Lindsey, 1994); gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered parents consistently come “under fire” (Polikoff, 1999); and children of colour are over represented in care (Chand, 2000). Examining the impact of interlocking sites of oppression on involvement with child welfare services makes the scope of this problem apparent. Working with British statistics, Jones (1994) calculates the compound risk of child removal for a child aged five to nine from a single-parent family of mixed ethnic origin receiving social assistance with four or more children living in rented accommodation with one or more persons per room to be one in ten. In contrast, a similar child from a two-parent White family not receiving social assistance with three or fewer children living in a home they own with one or more persons per room faces a one in 7,000 chance of entering care. This 700:1 ratio does not result from the parenting of White middle class families being 700 times better than single parent mixed ethnicity families dependent on benefits; it results from prejudices and structural inequalities deeply embedded within child welfare and other social systems. Child welfare and AOP, therefore, are diametrically opposed: child welfare protects privilege by removing the children of those marginalized within society rather than examining the structural inequalities that disadvantage these families, while AOP demands that these structural factors are examined and dismantled—child welfare is AOP’s nemesis.

### **Tackling the Nemesis**

To break its own cycle of abuse, child welfare must challenge and change the dominant discourses that gave it birth. Such challenge is not possible from within the child welfare system because remedies conceived from a site of dominance will simply reproduce the privilege preserving activities initiated by those who founded the modern child welfare system. Indeed, the founders of modern child welfare did not meet and consciously plot ways to preserve their privilege, but attempting to prevent child abuse and neglect from their position of privilege caused their remedies to be steeped within the world view they operated within. Consequently, their ideal of a White, two parent, heterosexual, able-bodied, hard working Christian family became the solution they set for the children and families they helped—a solution that institutionalized the marginalization of families who did not match this ideal. Current child welfare remedies conceived from a location of dominance will do the same—although well intended, they will perpetuate a discourse in which the privileged conceptualise and determine what the marginalized need. Transforming child welfare, therefore, requires “privileging” voices from “the margins” and drawing solutions from outside dominant space.

AOP is already drawing on knowledge from the margins—a growing number of child welfare professionals speaking from personal experience of marginalization are challenging child welfare’s

dominance from the inside out. Literature from the margins is also being drawn into the centre of AOP social work education. Such work is crucial, yet efforts must go further—those outside social work who are directly impacted by child welfare intervention must gain a voice in shaping the services they receive. Social work needs to listen to remedies rather than generate them—it needs to de-centre its own dominant knowledge and make space for service users’ knowledge. Beresford explains that, “there has always been service users’ knowledge—from the earliest days of the secular religious charity and the beginnings of state intervention and the poor law” (Beresford, 2000, p. 492). Such knowledge is based in the real lives, struggles, ways of being, and locations of those whom services are directed. If the founders of modern child welfare services had drawn on knowledge from those in these locations rather than from their own positions or privilege, perhaps the systems they designed might have transformed the existence of those who received intervention rather than preserved the dominance of those who delivered it. If social work focused more on facilitating service users defining their own problems and remedies rather than establishing its right as a profession to speak for them, social work might have had more success in remedying rather than reinforcing social injustice. AOP, therefore, must facilitate and tap the development of service users’ knowledge. Indeed, because “service users knowledge grows out of their personal and direct collective experience of policy and provision from the receiving end” (Beresford, 2000, p. 493), such knowledge is crucial if AOP is to overcome the nemesis of child welfare.

### **Undoing dominance: What child welfare service users say:**

Children have been gaining an increasing voice in Canadian child welfare (Strega, 2000) and this voice is crucial because ultimately it is children the system attempts to serve. My work, however, has focused on the voice of parents for two reasons. First, parents receiving child protection services are rarely heard in Canada. Second, my child protection practice usually placed me face-to-face with parents in attempting to bring change. It has been primarily in this face-to-face encounter with parents that I have struggled with the question of working anti-oppressively—what does AOP look like in this context? Answering this question requires me to hear what parents have to say. In previous work, reported elsewhere, I have explored parents designing and evaluating the services they received at mezzo levels (Dumbrill & Maiter, 1997; Dumbrill, Maiter, & Mason, 1995). My current work explores parental views at the micro level in an attempt to answer the question outlined at the beginning of this paper—how do I address issues of child abuse and neglect with families in a way that is anti-oppressive?

### **Previous Research**

The few studies that examine the ways Canadian parents experience child protection intervention reveal that parents have a predominantly negative view of services. Anderson (1998) examined the views of six Native parents in Toronto who had been involved with child protection agencies and elicited themes of, “anger, hate, fear, despair, isolation, frustration, pain, guilt, distrust, betrayal, and worry.” Given the history of the residential school system and the “sixties scoop,” such themes are not surprising. Yet not only First Nations parents held these views; McCullum (1995) examined the experiences of ten non-Aboriginal parents receiving child protection from an Ontario Children’s Aid Society (CAS) and found that “parents were conscious, and frightened, of the extent of worker and agency power. Parents knew their children could be removed and feared they would never be returned” (McCullum, 1995, p.55).

McCullum found that fear caused parents to feel angry, resentful and frustrated with the agency. Parents in British Columbia felt similarly; Callahan, Field, Hubberstey and Wharf (1998) examined the views of thirty parents, twenty-one child protection workers, and five voluntary agency workers in an attempt to distil the elements of “best practice” within child protection. Parents not only feared workers, but saw one of their main parenting tasks as protecting their children from child welfare intervention. Also in British Columbia, Grams (1989) examined the views of thirty-five parents who were afraid of workers and felt that they had little control over the process or outcome of child protection intervention. Not all the findings of these studies were negative; variables mitigating against fear included workers and parents being open about their fears (Callahan et al., 1998); workers showing compassion, commitment, concern

for the family's problems and listening to what parents had to say (McCullum, 1995). When fears were not addressed, parents were unwilling to be honest with workers and began to "play the game," which involved "learning what workers expect and providing workers with the answers workers wanted to hear, even if this means lying," (McCullum, 1995, p. 119-120). One parent who took some time to learn the rules of this game reported that if she had know these rules earlier, "I would have been humbled a long time ago. ... I would have kissed their arses, bowed, whatever," (McCullum, 1995, p. 98). There is also evidence of parents fearing child protection workers in Britain and the United States (Cleaver & Freeman, 1995; Corby, Millar, & Young, 1996; Diorio, 1992) as well as evidence of parents "playing the game" (Corby et al., 1996; Howe, 1989). Whether the findings of these international studies can be transferred to Canada is unclear because of differences between British, American and Canadian child protection systems. Even the transferability of Canadian study findings within Canada is problematic due to methodological limitations. More problematic is building anti-oppressive practice on these findings. Anderson, for instance, describes the feelings of First Nations parents toward child protection workers and contrasts these with qualities parents appreciated in workers through services they had received from outside the child protection system, but Anderson (1998) does not develop a viable means to utilize these qualities while delivering child protection intervention. McCullum (1995) attempted to develop a model of child protection intervention by using a grounded theory and recommended child protection workers intervene by building on parental strengths, but these recommendations are limited because her study examines only cases of sexual abuse. Grams (1989) also attempted to develop a model by using grounded theory, but his findings are limited by containing few recommendations for practice. Callahan and colleagues' (1998) study contains several implications for intervention and they provide workers with guidelines for "best practice." Central in their recommendations is that parents discuss with workers their fears of children being removed and that workers dialogue with parents about their fears of children being harmed. Callahan and colleagues, however, do not formulate "service users' knowledge" into theory that explains the process of intervention from a parental perspective. In fact, none of the above studies provide a theoretical model that explains the process of how parents experience and make sense of intervention. Such knowledge is crucial because if child welfare is to be transformed so that it does not oppress, it is essential to understand how those it oppresses consider it to oppress, and to understand the changes they believe are necessary for it to become anti-oppressive. Thus, to transform the child welfare intervention process into an anti-oppressive activity requires that the theories and ways of understanding of parents be used to develop appropriate interventions.

## **Research Design**

I set out to discover how parents experienced and made sense of child protection intervention. A grounded theory design was used so that the research would map parental experience and also allow a model to be developed explaining intervention from a parental perspective. In-depth interviews lasting between forty to ninety minutes were undertaken with seventeen parents. Member checking interviews took place with four parents. A focus group of five child protection workers explored emerging themes and considered implications for their practice.

## **Sample Characteristics**

Sampling took place primarily in Ontario with only one parent from outside Ontario (in British Columbia) being interviewed. Theoretical sampling was used, a process where as themes begin to emerge from data, cases are selected into the sample to allow the perimeters and characteristics of these themes to be tested and mapped. Although mapping of themes was possible, some limitations occurred as a result of workload pressures at the participating agencies, thus preventing them providing an extensive sampling pool. Participants ranged in age from nineteen to over sixty with a mean age in the mid-thirties. Ten parents were men and seven were women. Most—seven fathers and three mothers—were single parents. Parents were primarily from lower socio-economic groups. Three of the fathers were employed in unskilled or semi-skilled work, one was a homemaker, one unemployed and one on long-term disability. Three fathers did not specify their occupations, but lived in lower income, working-class

neighbourhoods. One father was a successful businessperson and politician. Four mothers were homemakers living in working-class neighbourhoods and two—one student and the other unemployed—were living in a woman’s shelter at the time of the interviews. One mother was a professional or semi-professional working in accounts for a large company and also owned her own home. Parents were predominantly White; two were women of colour and one father was Aboriginal.

## Findings

Parents described the encounter with child protection services as being confronted with “absolute” power. Some parents connected this power with history and oppression on a political level. Mr. E., a First Nations parent, packed his bags and left home when child protection workers came to talk about concerns regarding his children—he had been taken from his mother in the “sixties scoop” and had no faith in talking with child protection workers. Mr. A. spoke of the physical and sexual abuse suffered by his family members two generations previously as orphans in state care, and was indignant that child welfare agents had now come back to criticize his parenting. Ms. O., a Black mother who had five children removed by White workers and placed with White foster mothers, found her baby developing an increasing inability to look into her “Black face” during access visits. Apologising for talking about “discrimination,” Ms. O. said she wonders “why they are having Black babies bonding with White women?” Mrs. B., a French Canadian parent, was not only refused a French-speaking worker but was also prohibited from speaking French to her children in supervised access visits. Mrs. B. resisted:

I refused to speak to them in English, I have only spoken to my children in French since the day they were born... I was not about to give them, by an action of mine, the impression that authority means English. ... It is difficult enough to try and raise children in French in such an overwhelmingly English environment, without giving them the message that any time that there is anything serious going on we speak English.

Most parents did not connect child protection intervention to broader social or political issues, and with the exception of one parent, no difference existed in the ways parents experienced or dealt with intervention between those who recognized a political dimension to their experience and those who did not. All parents simply described child protection intervention as a force far more powerful than themselves and spoke of quickly learning that given the power differential between workers and themselves, they had to “play the game.” This game was similar to that identified by earlier research where parents feigned co-operation to get child protection services out of their lives. Mr. J. was the exception to this rule: Mr. J., a single parent and full-time homemaker, learnt legal skills in jail and devoted his full energies to challenging child protection and other social service departments. Mr. J. reported that his efforts gained him financial settlements and caused workers to be “fired,” but said he was unable to change the system from exerting power over parents.

The ways power is wielded over parents by child protection services conforms to the three dimensions Lukes (1974) claims social power is exercised through: coercion, controlling agendas and controlling consciousness. In Luke’s first dimension, overt coercion is used to force a person to do something. The experience of Ms. F. typifies how such power was used. Ms. F. wanted her partner, Mr. E., to return home, but child protection services had concerns about his parenting abilities, Ms. F. describes the impact of intervention: “Every time she came here she made me cry, every single time she came here. Every time I said to her, ‘you know what, you are scaring me.’ She says, ‘if we find Mr. E. here your kids are gone!’”

In the second dimension, power is exercised through the control of agendas and by determining what is debated and what is not. The case of Mr. A. typifies how this power is used. Mr. A. became increasingly frustrated by decisions about his family being made by child protection services in closed meetings he had no access to; he described how this left him feeling powerless: “I cannot do anything because I am put against a wall, I am facing an enemy that is not a visible enemy—who do I fight? What do I do?”

In the third dimension, control is exerted through the power to shape or limit consciousness. When this type of power is wielded, there is an absence of observable conflict because power operates through establishing “taken-for-granted” practices. This power operates by parents accepting and not challenging the ways service is delivered. Mr. J. explains: “Most parent are so caught up in the struggle that they have with their children who are in need of services that they cannot perceive ways and means by which this service can be provided.”

Although Luke’s framework reveals how parents are controlled by differing forms of power, the study’s focus was on identifying how the theory of service users, rather than theory developed within the academy, explains parental experience. It is important to analyze power as defined by parents themselves because their definitions give access to the world of those receiving service rather than the world of those delivering it.

Parents articulated how workers had access to five specific power mechanisms: coercion, resources, knowledge, defining and procedure. Parents not only articulated how workers gain “power over” them through these five mechanisms, they also described how these same mechanisms can be used in a constructive manner—as “power with” them. The concepts of “power over” and “power with” are well developed in social work literature (Miller, 1991). Simply stated, “power over” is a worker directing power at a client to cause him or her to conform, while “power with” is a worker joining his or her power with that of the client to achieve a jointly agreed objective.

How parents experienced “coercion” being used as “power over” them was described above—Ms. F. being reduced to tears in fear of her children being removed. Such fear has enormous coercive power over parents. At the same time, however, parents recognized that coercive power could be used by workers on their behalf. Ms. P. explained: “If I ever had a problem, I would consult the CAS because I like to have some kind of power advice, advice from people who are very powerful.” Ms. P. went on to describe how child protection services had sided with her and forced other agencies and landlords to cooperate with her. Similarly, Ms. C. recalled how her child protection worker came to her defence and demanded that she be released from a psychiatric ward when nurses were badgering her to remain.

The “resources” child protection services have access to were also viewed by parents as providing workers with power. Ms. B. explained that because “they [child protection services] have this absolute power that corrupts absolutely, that it was best to ... consent to a Supervision Order for six months and get the children home instead of fighting them. Well I thought that really goes against the grain, but I did not have a couple of hundred thousand dollars to really argue about it.” Unable to match the legal resources of child protection services, Ms. B. consented to a supervision order and proceeded to “play the game.”

Child protection resources are not just financial; they include the ability to endure and maintain a long drawn-out struggle. Mr. J. explained that to contest child protection power, he needed to also learn to endure. As a result of his endurance and successful battles with child protection services, other parents now ask him for help with child protection services. Inevitably the parents who come to Mr. J. are overwhelmed; he describes the advice he gives them: “‘You gotta stop crying and you gotta start acting.’ But once I start telling them the process, then they can’t because, uh, they’re too caught up in the emotional issues that they cannot see the process behind it and they cannot detach themselves.” According to Mr. J., therefore, parents are so involved in the struggle to manage their day-to-day affairs that they have difficulty finding the emotional resources to “fight” child protection services. Child protection workers can, however, use their resources to assist overwhelmed parents. Ms. K. describes her experience: “The CAS was very, very helpful. ... She [the worker] took us everywhere we needed to go and she was there for us, [had] different ideas about different things [regarding parenting] and so we had a really good rapport with the CAS.”

Ms. K.’s experience of being supported by child protection resources changed when she was assigned a

new worker and it quickly became evident to her that her “power with” experience was changing to a “power over” process. Ms. K. first became aware that the new worker was exercising power over her by the way he controlled “knowledge.” She said “the biggest problem was the secretive part where he’d [the second worker] make decisions and then tell us and we had to go along with them whether we liked it or not, while she [first worker] never made a decision without our input.”

The ability to “define” also afforded workers power. Ms. B. recalls a conversation with her worker: “When I heard her [worker] say to me that taking the TV away was ‘too harsh a discipline,’ I knew I had stepped into the twilight zone.” Ms. B. elaborated that the “twilight zone” experience resulted not from the child protection worker defining an event in a way she disagreed with, but from the worker’s “absolute” power to impose her definitions of an event upon her. No matter how absurd Ms. B. considered the worker’s opinion, she felt unable to challenge it.

The combination of “absolute power” and worker opinion also provided a means to support parents. Ms. C., a teenage mother, describes how a worker used defining power to help her overcome the fears she experienced when first taking care of her newborn child:

I didn’t know what to do! I looked at this baby and was like, ‘yeah okay what do I do? How do I know when to change her, how do I know when to feed her?’ And she’s [the worker] like, “You’ll know don’t worry.” She told me, “You can do it.” ...Knowing somebody, especially a professional, believed in me helped me believe in myself.

Taken outside a power context, the above comment “You can do it” seem benign and almost insignificant. For this mother, however, who experienced her worker as having “absolute power,” this comment defined the reality she existed within—the mother began to believe she really could be a good parent.

Child protection “procedure” is also experienced by parents as a form of worker power that can be used over them or with them. Ms. B. describes how procedure gave workers power over her: “I call it a song and dance. You know that in the mean time the period in which the children are away from home is going from one day, two days, to a month, while they [child protection services] are exercising their god-given right to do whatever they want.” Ms. B. believed that the longer her children were in foster care while she was waiting for a court date, the weaker her case for having them return home became. Ms. K. on the other hand, experienced procedure as enabling: “For the first two years it took us that long to find out what was wrong with him [grandson], to get him on the right medication, to try and get the proper help for him. ... Our worker did a fantastic job, you know she was right there to help us.” For Ms. K., therefore, the careful methodical steps child protection services took to uncover the causes of her child management problems provided her with exactly the support she needed.

Parents’ responses to intervention hinged on the way they experienced workers’ use of power and they described three ways of responding: fighting child protection services, playing the game by feigning co-operation, and cooperatively working with services. Parents describing experiences of power being used over them tended to fight or “play the game.” Parents describing power being used with them tended to speak of having co-operative relationships with their workers. There was, however, some overlap between “playing the game,” “fighting” and “co-operative” working. Ms. K. explained that she co-operated with her first worker, who used “power with” her and fought her second worker, who used “power over” her, but in both situations she also “played the game” because, in her opinion, it was impossible to always fight or always co-operate.

Although parental experience and reaction hinged on their perception of a worker’s use of power, the varying parental perceptions cannot be explained by worker style. It became evident in interviews that some parents shared the same workers and that the same worker could be experienced by one parent as exercising “power over” them and another as “power with” them. These differing perceptions cannot hinge on worker style unless workers change their styles with different parents. Similarly,



perceptions cannot be explained solely by parental characteristics because some parents' experience of child protection power switched from "power with" to "power over" and visa versa with a change of worker. Neither do differences between "power over" and "power with" experiences hinge on workers and parents agreeing on issues—parents described disagreeing with workers in "power with" scenarios. More assistance from parents is needed, therefore, to identify the ways in which intervention can be shifted from "power over" to "power with" processes. Such identification is crucial because unless "power over" experiences can be transformed into "power with" experiences, parents resort to "playing the game" and child welfare workers will evoke no more than the appearance of co-operation from parents.

## Conclusions

Parents in this study spoke of feeling afraid, powerless, intimidated and silenced in the face of child protection intervention. Clearly, different ways of delivering child protection intervention must be identified and to be anti-oppressive, parents must be involved in identifying these different ways of delivering service. Such forms of practice are possible and parents can help identify such practice—parents described workers using the same powers that had been used to control them, being used to help them with their problems. Parents described in detail the sources of power used by workers and gave coherent and detailed descriptions of the ways workers use that power either "over" them or "with" them. It should be possible, with the further assistance of parents, to gain more information about the ways to minimise the use of "power over" and maximise the use of "power with" in micro child protection casework. If additional research projects provide parents and families with further opportunities to evaluate and contribute to the redevelopment of child welfare practice on micro, mezzo and macro levels, there is every reason to believe that new ways of working can be developed and that child welfare need not be AOP's nemesis.

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## **From EMERGING PERSPECTIVES ON ANTI-OPPRESSIVE PRACTICE**

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