

# EXTRACTS FROM A STUDY TOUR OF CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES —

**JUNE-  
NOVEMBER  
1976**

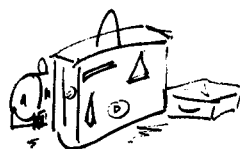
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Mrs. Dyer's trip was made possible by an Aboriginal Overseas Study Grant.

## ONTARIO, KENORA, CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY

Before I came to Kenora I was under the impression that the Children's Aid Society was the equivalent of our Social Welfare Department, however I was wrong — it is a voluntary organisation.

Children's Aid helps families who have been experiencing problems. They look for ways to prevent problems arising which would disadvantage children. Their programs are directed towards supporting and strengthening the family unit.



Some of the programs are:

1. Parent effectiveness training groups — for parents,
2. Management of young children — for teenagers,
3. Visiting home-makers when parent/s are ill,
4. Teaching home-makers to help mothers to cope,
5. Daily visits by child care workers to help parents cope with a difficult child,
6. Home care for retarded children,
7. Group meetings on home economics and nutrition,
8. Debt counselling,
9. High school counselling and sex education,
10. Day camps and boarding camps for city children.

Not all programs are directly run by the Children's Aid but some through separate community organisations which make their facilities available to Children's Aid. Children's Aid assist the family to find and use other community

resources, e.g., housing, detoxification and job re-training programs.

The Society is separate from the Ministry of Community and Social Service (the equivalent of our Social Welfare). It is a private organisation and Directors are elected annually from among persons in the local community and resource people in the area. 80% of their funding comes from the Provincial Government and the other 20% from local councils. At present the Society is concerned about the drastic budget cuts and I was able to sympathize with them. The Society is compelled to operate in accordance with regulations set down in the Child Welfare Act of Ontario and they are required by law to protect children from abuse and neglect.

### An advantage

One of the advantages of the operation that I see, is children are not removed from their parental home by police. The Society is notified in the event of child abuse or neglect, by a neighbour, relative, police or hospital personnel and a child care worker is sent to visit the family to investigate the validity of the complaint. If the complaint is valid, the child-care worker then endeavours to sort out whether or not this is just a temporary situation or whether it is consistent and damaging to the child. It is felt that many child abuse situations arise because parents expect more from the children than their age level can offer. If parents' behaviour is deep-seated, they may need long term counselling or may be assisted by joining a parent education group. Some agencies have established programs where mothers and fathers can take part and learn new parenting techniques. These programs have been tremendously successful and parents who have previously ill treated their children are now learning to enjoy them.

Groups of mothers who often suffer from stress have been organised

and when a mother feels she is near "breaking point" she can telephone another member of the group and 'let off steam'.

In cases of neglect, long term supportive counselling is required. It is considered neglect is caused by depression brought about by poverty. Low income families often despair and an attitude of carelessness is applied to preparation of meals and general care of the home and children. Often the Social Worker makes daily visits to the mother to give her encouragement.

### Group Meetings

Group meetings and talks on nutrition and homemaking are often held in the homes of the parents who are expecting difficulty in coping. This gives them the incentive to improve their homes. Home makers are often employed to demonstrate home-management and family care because many parents who neglect their children are really loving to them and only need motivation to improve.

Most of the parents accept help and co-operate willingly but in a few cases the matter is taken to a family court and the parents are required by law to accept help from the Children's Aid. The parents can elect to be represented by free legal aid or a lawyer of their choice.

It is considered that removal of a child from its family by police is unfair to parent and child (except in exceptional circumstances) because police are not trained to assess a situation and make an on the spot decision. Even in the exceptional circumstances the police will call on the Children's Aid to remove the children rather than put the children through the trauma of being taken away by uniformed officers and held in custody.

Actually the role of the Children's Aid is similar to our own system but a more concentrated effort is put into family preservation and only as a last resort are children removed from their homes.

There are a number of ways children can come through the Children's Aid Society programs. Parents can sign an agreement with the Society to have their children cared for temporarily and this agreement can be terminated by the parents at any time. Usually this agreement is made during periods of illness and sometimes when a person is transferring from one job location to another. Some of the agencies operate foster day care as an alternative.

When parents are charged with neglect or with ill treating a child, the Court will rule that the Children's Aid take the child/ren into care. The children are not required to attend court — only the parents. If a social worker finds a child deserted or ill treated the Society worker can legally remove that child to a place of safety but that social worker must appear before a judge within five days to ask for court ruling. The parents can be represented if the circumstances warrant.

More often than not children are placed in the care of the Society by family court Judges instead of being sent to a training school. A child cannot become a Ward of the Society or a Ward of the Crown without due legal action. Most times parents raise no objection to the action taken by the society as they are glad to accept the help. The main reason children come into care is because of emotional rejection and lack of supervision followed by behavioural problems of the parents.

About 64% of the children are returned to their families and others are adopted or become independent. Most children are returned within the first twelve months.

Another interesting point is that teenagers who are not getting along with their parents and who want to continue their schooling can go to the Society for aid. 56% of the children in care are boys. The policy is that although children are happiest with their own parents, if the damage is too bad to repair, the best substitute should be provided. When it is apparent that a child can never return to its parents, the permanency of adoption is sought.

### Help for foster parents

Everything is done to ensure that children are not moved from one place to another too frequently, although I was told of incidents where children had as many as 6-8 sets of foster parents before they were 12 years of age. Foster parents now receive help in child care through locally conducted courses or Children's Aid programs and meetings. They often feel the strain while the child is trying to sort out feelings of rejection or of disloyalty towards its own parents or showing resentment of new standards of living and experiencing home-sickness. The foster parents are assisted because it is realized the child needs understanding care. Only people who are deeply committed to the difficult task are selected as foster parents. Many move into a "specialist" class and care for kids who are severely disturbed or physically or mentally handicapped.

The Society helps in many ways with counselling, house-keeping services, separate holidays and providing volunteer home help. Foster parents receive payment for board and clothing, spending allowances, medical and dental care and special needs are provided by the Society.

There is a steady increase in the number of teenagers coming into care — a typical child in care is a boy over the age of 13 years. These children may come through the

courts (as offenders) or simply want to get away from home because of conflict with parents. They often reject foster-care and prefer another type of accommodation with children who have similar problems. The Society considers that peer group homes are the answer in these instances.

### Youth hostels

Some Societies operate youth hostels where teenagers can go temporarily during a family crisis. These 'drop-in' centres enable the children and parents to have a cooling off period after conflict and the Society child care workers work with both children and parents to re-establish communication. Joint counselling sessions are planned where the social worker and family come together to discuss the problems which are causing difficulty or conflict. Recently there has been a change in the Training School Act where parents could ask a Judge to send a child to training school because he/she could not be controlled. In the Child Welfare Act a child who is 'out of control' is now described as being in need of protection and the responsibility of the Children's Aid Society. The Society considers the change good because the majority of these children sent to training school were girls.

Most of the services offered by Children's Aid are preventative. Their aim is to prevent problems before it is too late. The cost of keeping a person in goal, mental hospital or institution is far greater than the cost of setting up programs for helping parents and children communicate with each other — a lost child is a lost adult.

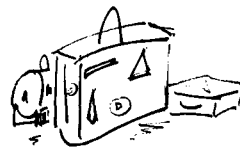
The cost to society of drug addiction, alcoholism and crime is huge when compared with the amount required for family and child services in the state and a dollar spent on

child welfare now will save some thousands of dollars in the future. Until quite recently, removal of children from their homes was considered the answer to child neglect. Today, because of research in social work psychiatry and similar areas it is a known fact that taking a child from its own parents can be more damaging to him than the conditions he was 'rescued' from.

### WASHINGTON D.C.

Spent a little time at the Embassy where I was briefed on the program which had been arranged for me. I also had a few minutes to look over the latest newspapers from home. If this does not sound important enough to mention — have another thought for a lonely Australian after six weeks away from family and friends with no familiar voices or faces. Meeting David and the other Australians at the Consulate was a tremendous boost.

I was only the second most important visitor to the Consulate that day — Malcolm Fraser took first honour!!



At 1.30 p.m. I was taken to the Child Welfare Division of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (hereinafter referred to as B.I.A.) where I was welcomed by Mrs. Clare Jerdone. It seems that there again the problems of the Indian children are much the same as those of our Aboriginal children. However an advantage here is that there are now Indian families able to foster and adopt the Indian children.

A very strong organisation in the United States is the National Action for Foster Children Committee, Inc., which represents a number of organisations and concerned citizens in every community who are interested in improving the quality of care for foster children. Four in every thousand children in the U.S. are in foster care — many should not be and many are in care far too long — lost in a system that gives too little attention to their rights. The Government and local communities are becoming more aware of these problems and citizens have established action committees to join with foster parents and agencies in finding solutions.

### Bill of Rights

During a special week "National Action for Foster Children Week - 1973" a Bill of Rights for Foster Children was ratified in Congress Hall, Philadelphia. Articles in that Bill are as follows:—

"Even more than for other children, society has a responsibility along with parents for the well-being of foster children. Citizens are responsible for acting to insure their welfare.

EVERY foster child is endowed with the rights inherently belonging to all children. In addition because of the temporary or permanent separation from and loss of parents and other family members the foster child requires special safeguards, resources and care.

**EVERY FOSTER CHILD HAS THE INHERENT RIGHT:**

ARTICLE the first ... to be cherished by a family of his own, either his family helped by readily available services and supports to reassume his care, or as a last alternative an adoptive family or by plan, a continuing foster family.

ARTICLE the second ... to be nurtured by foster parents who have been selected to meet his individual needs and who are provided services and supports, including specialized education, so that they can grow in their ability to enable the child to reach his potential.

ARTICLE the third ... to receive sensitive, continuing help in understanding and accepting the reasons for his own family's inability to take care of him and in developing confidence in his own self-worth.

ARTICLE the fourth ... to receive continuing loving care and respect as a unique human being ... a child growing in trust in himself and others.

ARTICLE the fifth ... to grow up in freedom and dignity in a neighbourhood of people who accept him with understanding respect and friendship.

ARTICLE the sixth ... to receive help in overcoming deprivation or whatever distortion to his emotional, physical, intellectual, social and spiritual growth may have resulted from his early experiences.

ARTICLE the seventh ... to receive education, training and career guidance to prepare him for a useful and satisfying life and maximize the potential for which he is capable.

ARTICLE the eighth ... to receive preparation for citizenship and parenthood through interaction with foster parents and other adults who are consistent role models.

ARTICLE the ninth ... to be represented by an Attorney at Law in administrative or judicial proceedings with access to fair hearings and court review of decisions, so that his best interests are safeguarded.

ARTICLE the tenth ... to receive a high quality of child welfare services, including involvement of the natural parents and his own involvement in major decisions that affect his life.

## NEW YORK

During my stay I met Judge Joseph Williams, Administrative Judge, City of New York, Family Division. Judge Williams is Negro and a most charming person. He expressed interest in our Aboriginal Child Placement Agency and asked for more information as we progress. He stated that most of the people at the administrative levels in the Social Welfare and Courts had to 'unlearn' much of what they had been taught and be completely re-educated if we were ever going to cope with the problems of the children of today.

He took me down to one of the Family Courts where Judge Miller was sitting and after being introduced, she invited me to watch what was happening. The case being heard was a paternity dispute. From there I was taken to another court where Judge Aileen Schwartz was hearing foster-care review cases. This was particularly interesting for me. Under the existing law in New York all children who are placed in foster care **must** have their cases reviewed within two years of being removed from their natural paren/s. During this review, the social workers must report back to the court on the progress made in relation to what steps have been taken to re-unite the child with family. If there has been no progress then an explanation is required by the Judge. *If it is apparent that nothing can be done to repair the damage and reunite the child and family, then that child is released for adoption.* If on the other hand, some progress has been made and it seems a little more time is needed to work with the family, then the Judge allocates an additional period when

the case will again come before the court. In many instances, children are returned to their family immediately following this first hearing as so much effort is spent working on family preservation.

As each case was being heard, Judge Schwartz passed me the social worker's report outlining what had been done during the period of separation. After court, Judge Schwartz took me on a sight-seeing tour.

I also visited the Child Welfare League of America. A number of other organisations had amalgamated with the Child Welfare League and together they worked in all areas of adoption, child care and family preservation.

## North American Centre of Adoption

The North American Centre on Adoption is funded by a grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. This centre was created as it has been clearly demonstrated by repeated studies that thousands of children remain unnecessarily in foster care and are in need of adoptive planning. Although the exact number of children is uncertain, the most recent estimate indicates that the national figure could be as high as 100,000

Those waiting the longest for homes are black children, older children and handicapped children, as well as sibling groups of three or more. Over the last several years there have been many fewer babies and toddlers available for adoption than couples wanting to adopt. The tasks then are to let parents know about these waiting children and to remove legal, racial and other obstacles that may stand between them and prospective parents.

ARENA, the Adoption Resource Exchange of North America is part

of the North American Centre of Adoption. Established in 1967 by the Child Welfare League of America, ARENA is not an adoption agency but a clearing house which helps agencies in the United States and Canada find adoptive homes for legally free children for whom no local permanent home has been found. ARENA maintains a registry of waiting children and families throughout North America and assists agencies in bringing together children and families who seem suited to each other.

ARENA also offers consultation to those wishing to set up or improve state, provincial and regional adoption exchanges. Agencies with legal custody of waiting children register them with ARENA on a simple form that provides facts about the child. Approved families who have expressed an interest in adopting children with special needs are also registered by agencies.

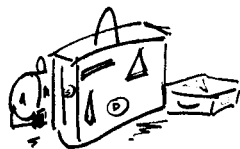
ARENA seeks registration of families who can accept healthy white children over 10, sibling groups of three or more, black children primarily of school age, youngsters with severe physical handicaps; retarded children. ARENA also seeks to increase its registration of American Indian families. Agencies may register any child for whom they do not have a family. From the information on the registration forms, ARENA makes referrals to appropriate agencies. It is often necessary to make several referrals before a placement can result. Children and families remain registered until that time or until the registrations are withdrawn by the referring agency.

When the agency with the child receives a referral of a family, the worker involves the child to a degree commensurate with his age and level of maturity. Prospective adoptive parents must also be given the opportunity to consider a particular

child and his or her particular needs. The two agencies together plan and carry out the placement and notify ARENA.

The following are representative of ARENA placements:

- \* Two sisters, 9 and 7, the older a dwarf, the younger of normal height were placed with a family in which the mother and oldest sons are dwarfs and the father and youngest son, normal height.
- \* Outgoing, healthy black brothers, 7 and 10 were placed with a black childless couple.
- \* After 11 placements, the last of which was a residential centre, a 15 year old white boy was placed with a single male parent.
- \* A four year old black boy with cerebral palsy, and wearing a brace for a hip deformity, was placed with a white family who had already adopted two black children.
- \* American Indian sisters, 11 and 15½ were placed with a childless white couple, both teachers, who were comfortable with Indian culture.
- \* Four white siblings, ranging in age from 4 to 13½ were placed with a childless family.



The Child Welfare League of America is a national voluntary accrediting organisation for child welfare agencies in the United States. Its primary functions include setting standards for child services, providing consultation to local agencies and communities, conducting research, issuing child welfare publications and sponsoring annual regional conferences.

I had previously seen advertisements in the press where children were 'advertised' "FOR ADOPTION" and I was horrified — my reaction was that this is the method used to advertised lost dogs. However, the Child Welfare League is one of the many Adoption Agencies who use this method of recruitment. I was told that there were many years of arguing the whole question of 'advertising' the children before it had actually been put into operation. It seems that thousands of children had found a family through advertising where previously they had been incarcerated in institutions. This was especially evident in the cases of older and handicapped and emotionally disturbed children. Children are advertised in a column entitled "A child is waiting" and applicants are carefully investigated. Some of the applicants are not considered suitable to care for any child, but among the many applicants, most will accept a child other than the one 'advertised'.

In the event that a physically handicapped or severely emotionally disturbed child is adopted, the social workers and child care workers offer the new parents every assistance for as long as the need is there. In some cases where continuing medical treatment or therapy is necessary, special subsidies are also available to the adoptive parents.

#### YAKIMA — WASHINGTON D.C.

In the south-central part of the State of Washington you will find the Yakima Valley.

The Yakima Indian Nation has persisted in maintaining their land base since the Treaty signing in 1855. The Yakima Nation is creating industry and is striving to utilize their natural resources to the benefit of the land and their people. In spite of the evolution of all cultures, the Yakimas have attempted to maintain their culture and traditions and a pride in being members of the Yakima Indian Nation.

## **-KU-NAK-WE-SHE**

Maxine Robbins was my guide for this part of the tour. Maxine's father was Yakima Indian and her mother is Irish.

Although Maxine had been in the Yakima Valley most of the time since her graduation from the University of Washington, the past five years are her first working only with Indian people. Experienced in social work and in training social workers, Maxine's background was made to order for the position of Director of the national social worker associate program of the Indian Health Service.

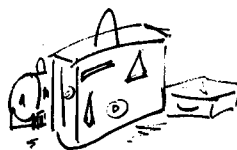
With headquarters in Maryland, she directs programs on the Navajo reservation and in Alaska, training tribal members to be social worker associates. The program was designed to expand the services of the social service branch in the Indian Health Service and to expand the program to more reservations. The idea was a practical one as the social worker on the spot can train tribal members to serve under supervision with their own people.

In 1973 there were 22 social worker associates and each was guaranteed a position after two years training on the job. Maxine then introduced the program into South Dakota and New Mexico. Actively involved in increasing the number of Indian social workers she then worked with a national task force of members of the Association of American Indian Social Workers. With long experience in Yakima County as a case worker, then in case work and supervisor training, earning her masters degree in social work, she has been a good resource for planning advice on the reservation and in the Yakima Valley.

Maxine is now the Director of a program, known by an Indian name — KU-NAK-WE-SHE — which means 'CARING PLACE'.

Project Ku-nak-we-sha, the Yakima Indian Nation Family and Child Welfare project has been in operation now just over one year. During this period the project has been increasingly successful in meeting the needs of the children in the tribal community who are subject to abusive or neglectful family situations.

The project has had a total of 171 referrals since the Receiving Home opened in September of 1975 and referrals continued to increase. The project has served a total of 95 children in 2261 days of care for children who required emergency intervention in order to remain safe from families experiencing a variety of social problems. This intervention has resulted in the continued well being of children who might otherwise have been the victims of family disruption and family conflict.



The project offers a variety of services to the tribal community. A receiving home facility is available on an emergency basis for neglected or abused children and the home is staffed with Homemakers on a 24 hour basis. Professional counselling is available by trained workers to families who are experiencing trouble at home. This project can licence foster homes and make adoptive placements of children if this becomes necessary. All children who come into care are screened for health needs by the Registered Nurse on the staff.

The program is federally financed by a three year grant from the office of Child Development, Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

The budget is approx. 170,000 dollars yearly and 80% of the funds are spent for provision of family and child services.

The project is a referral source for the entire tribal community and workers ask that any person who has knowledge of a situation that is unhealthy or dangerous to a child to report it help to prevent the problems from becoming more serious and endangering the child.

Ku-nak-we-sha is one of the two federally-funded reservation demonstration projects in the United States. The other is located on the Choctaw Reservation.

One of the reasons the Yakima reservation was chosen for a project, according to Maxine was because the State was responding to reservation abuse and neglect 'ineffectively'. The typical response from the State was to remove Indian children from their homes and place them in adoptive non-Indian homes and although children appreciated the care they got in non-Indian homes, it is a completely different life style.

The goal of the Receiving Home is to return children to their own homes as soon as possible. With the help of the State this is becoming a reality. The Home recognized by the State as a child-placing agency, receives referrals from the State Department of Social and Health Services and from Juvenile courts. The Home opened its doors to children last August under the direction of Maxine, a tribal member who calls the home her "once in a lifetime chance to do her thing".

Most of the children who come to the home are referred by their relatives. The great majority have been neglected, rather than abused. The most obvious indication of child neglect is usually 'someone who's not there'. Children's relatives often call the receiving home when they know children have been unattended for a length of time.

Word of the home has spread among tribal members mostly by word of mouth, to Maxine and the Indian Health Service Counsellor who works closely with the home. The Indian Health Service is closely allied with the home and pays Maxine's salary.

About one half of the Children who come to the home are in need of medical attention as the result of their neglect. They are seen by the home's registered nurse and then referred to a doctor if necessary.

Commonly, the children have upper respiratory problems and ear infections. Some have eczema or diaper rash. Many need glasses or dental care. All however, have on thing in common — a ravenous appetite.

During the interim when a child cannot or should not return to his or her home, for various reasons, the home's family counsellors talk to the child's parents as 'peers'. the counsellors rotate their schedules to provide 24-hour service for children and parents.

Counsellors make it clear to parents that they know parenting is 'tough' and approach parents with a helpful attitude saying they know about a problem that needs to be

dealt with. About half the time, counsellors talk to parents about problems which don't require their children's temporary removal. Parents often feared their children might be taken from them before the receiving home opened. The home has helped to soothe some of that fear.

Although the home is licensed to care for only five or six children, it has cared temporarily for a few more. Children's lengths of stay range from a few days to much longer, depending on the home situation from which they have been removed.

About half the children who've have been seen in the home are adolescent — about half are younger. Maxine said the home's number of adolescents illustrates the tribe's need for two adolescent group homes. She is in the process of applying for group home funding from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

The home works to maintain and strengthen the Indian family and its workers keep reminding Indian parents of the traditional Indian way of explaining to their children **why** they are about to be disciplined. Failure to use that approach has resulted in many runaways and in other discipline problems home

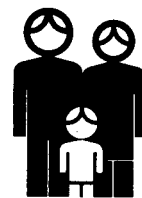
staff must deal with. According to an Indian Health Service worker, the home works in a quiet way to advocate the return of jurisdiction over children to the tribe. Whilst the Yakima tribe want jurisdiction over their children they must work with the State because they have so many of their children.

During my stay in Yakima I visited the Indian Health Service which has many of the same facilities described in other programs. The State Social Welfare Department was another place visited and there I was told that Kunak-we-sha project was of tremendous assistance to them.

I returned to Melbourne on November 17th (by the way if anyone knows what happened to Tuesday, November 16th, please let me know — I lost that day during the return trip), tired and weary, but hopeful that my experience will be of benefit to all Australians.

Although the main purpose of my trip was to look at programs designed for children in cross-cultural and cross-racial foster-care and adoption, I was fortunate to be able to visit many other programs. I would be happy to make available to future awardees, information about other programs and resource people they can contact.

# hops, steps and jumps



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