



Kinship & Alternate Care Awareness Week 2023: Day 1

Reconciliation, Equity, and Kinship & Alternate Care: What Data Tells Us About Improving Outcomes for Children and Youth

Research shows that children and youth involved in the child welfare system do better when they remain connected to their families and their communities, and in placements that reflect their intersectional identities. Children and youth have rights to identity and belonging within their families and communities, and for culturally appropriate service delivery. Kinship is especially critical in addressing overrepresentation and disparities in outcomes for Indigenous, Black, and 2SLGBTQ+ children, youth, and families.

Customary Care, Kinship & Indigenous Communities

"Customary care is an inherent right and practice that predates the evolution of child welfare on Turtle Island and supersedes jurisdiction. Indigenous worldviews see children and youth at the centre of circles of care. Our collective work is to prioritize and build meaningful relationships with families, communities, and nations, honoring them as the experts in kinship and alternate care." – Julia Jamieson, FNIM Holistic Practice Director, OACAS

The [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Final Report](#) calls for child welfare to reduce the number of Indigenous children in care, to keep families together where it is safe to do so, and to keep children in culturally appropriate environments. Similarly, the [Calls for Justice](#) compel child welfare agencies to uphold and protect the rights of Indigenous children and their health and well-being, including by placing them with family or community members.

The [Federal Act](#) sets standards, principles, and obligations for child welfare agencies to ensure culturally appropriate placements of Indigenous children and youth in order of priority: 1) with a parent,

[Let kin caregiver Tanisha](#) from Kettle & Stony Point First Nation tell you about the impact of providing care to a member of her community.

Or [hear from Veronica and Beedahsiga](#) about what it is like to be Alternative Caregivers.

2) with a family member, 3) with an adult who belongs to the same Indigenous group, 4) with an adult who belongs to a different Indigenous group, 5) with any other adult.

Many Indigenous children in Ontario are being looked after within their communities through kinship and alternate care. In 2020–21, nearly 1,700 Indigenous children and youth in Ontario were in customary care arrangements overseen by child welfare agencies.¹ Most customary care arrangements were held by Indigenous Child & Family Well-Being Agencies. Research on out-of-home placements shows that:

- For First Nations children and youth:
 - 16% of investigations resulted in out-of-home placement:
 - 10% were placed with a relative
 - 5% were placed in foster care
 - 1% were placed in a group or treatment home. (Source: [Mashkiwenmi-daa Noojimowin: Let's Have Strong Minds for the Healing, 2021](#))
 - Informal placements (including kinship service), represented the most frequently noted placement type, followed by non-relative foster care and kinship care. (Source: [First Nations/Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2019](#))
- Comparable data was not available for Inuit and Métis children and youth, although a study from [Newfoundland and Labrador](#) found that of 690 kinship placements, only 14% (or 100 placements) were Indigenous, half which were Innu, one-third Inuit, and ten Mi'kmaq.

Kinship and customary placement options are critical in addressing overrepresentation and disparities in outcomes for Indigenous children and youth, as well as ensuring their wellness.

Kinship & African Canadian Communities

In 2016, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child raised concerns about the significant overrepresentation of African Canadian children and youth in Canada's child welfare system and recommended that Canada "take effective

¹ Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, accessed July 17, 2023: www.ontario.ca/page/customary-care

measures to address the root causes of overrepresentation of African-Canadian children in care institutions.”

[Ontario Kinship Standards](#) require continual search for kin and collaboration with extended families and communities in placement decisions. Priority must be given to placements with relatives, extended family members, or members of the child’s community.

However, like other Canadian institutions, child welfare agencies have evolved within an historical context of white supremacy, colonialism, and anti-Black racism, all of which have been woven into the fabric of child welfare policies and practices. To fully understand the involvement of Black children, youth, and families in Ontario’s child welfare system, it is necessary to understand the historical and ongoing anti-Black racism, and how it leads to bias when carrying out investigations, kinship search, assessment, and placement decisions.

[Hear from Keishia Facey](#), Manager of the [One Vision One Voice](#) program, as she shares about the ways that culture and community through kinship placements can improve resiliency and outcomes for African Canadian children and youth.

[Research](#) on out-of-home placements for African Canadian children and youth show that:

- Black children represent 7% of the child population but represent nearly 14% of the child welfare service population.
- Compared to white children, Black children were 2.2 times as likely to be investigated and 2.5 times as likely to be placed in out-of-home care during an investigation.
- Of the proportion of investigations involving Black children, 2% were placed with a relative in an informal arrangement and another 1% were placed in foster care (which includes kinship care). No investigations involving Black children resulted in placement in a group or treatment home.

Within African Canadian families, the extended family unit and community provide a flexible and adaptable supportive network that protects children.

“The community is a positive social support that promotes healthy coping strategies, endorses cultural connections, and creates a protective factor against

the harmful impacts of anti-Black racism.” – Keishia Facey, OVOV Program Manager, OACAS

Child welfare agencies can support positive outcomes for African Canadian children and youth in care by following OVOV’s [race equity practices](#) (REPs). REP 11 emphasizes that care by kin is preferred for African Canadian children and youth and recommends placing with kin when possible, or with African Canadian families as the second option, to maintain cultural connections. Culturally appropriate services should also be made available to African Canadian children and youth as needed.

Child welfare agencies should ensure that caregivers receive the supports they need, which may include training and access to funding, specialized treatment, parenting classes, and counselling, to support the development of a strong and positive racial identity.

Kinship & 2SLGBTQ+ Communities

Although data for 2SLGBTQ+ children and youth in Ontario and their experiences in the child welfare system is lacking, research indicates that 2SLGBTQ+ children and youth are overrepresented in the child welfare system.

Child welfare agencies have observed that an increasing number of 2SLGBTQ+ children and youth, especially trans and non-binary children and youth, are interacting with the child welfare system due to a lack of support from and identity rejection by their primary caregivers. Amidst rising anti-2SLGBTQ+ hate, it is critical we examine the ways in which cis-heteronormativity persists across systems of care and impacts service planning.

[Research across jurisdictions](#) has shown that 2SLGBTQ+ children and youth are more likely to:

- Experience poor treatment in child welfare, marginalization, discrimination, lack of acceptance, and related mental health concerns,
- Experience multiple foster placements, and
- Experience harassment and violence in group placements.

2SLGBTQ+ children and youth are less likely to:

- Achieve permanency, with [increased likelihood](#) of aging out of foster care.



“Family acceptance and support is the number one protective factor for 2SLGBTQ+ youth when it comes to their mental health, well-being, and positive outcomes. Providing a home which affirms the sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression of a youth can be lifesaving!” – Kristin Roe, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Lead, OACAS; Jacob Stokl, 2SLGBTQ+ Analyst, OACAS

Even when caregivers and families may initially struggle to support their 2SLGBTQ+ child or youth, [research](#) shows that families typically become more accepting over time, opening later possibilities of reunification and kinship placement. Even if family placements are not possible, family search and engagement methods of immediate, extended, and chosen families can be effective in developing networks of adults that can support the child or youth’s identity and transition into adulthood. Networks of supportive connections and affirming placements are critical to ensuring the safety, health, and well-being of 2SLGBTQ+ children and youth.

Resources:

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015: https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019: https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Calls_for_Justice.pdf

An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families (S.C. 2019, c. 24): <https://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/F-11.73/index.html>

CAS Kin Family, Sarnia Lambton Children’s Aid Society, 2019: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8bLd9HOlzk>

What is Alternative Care? Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child & Family Services, 2020: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGqfHdyXW_A

Mashkiwenmi-daa Noojimowin: Let’s Have Strong Minds for the Healing, 2021: https://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/Mashkiwenmi-Daa%20Noojimowin_Let%E2%80%99s%20Have%20Strong%20Minds%20For%20The%20Healing_First%20Nations%20Ontario%20Incidence%20Study%20Of%20Reported%20Child%20Abuse%20And%20Neglect%202018.pdf

Denouncing the Continued Overrepresentation of First Nations Children in Canadian Child Welfare, [First Nations/Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2019](#)



Report on Child Welfare Services to Indigenous Children, Youth and Families, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2019–20: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/cssd/files/Report-June-17-online.pdf>

Policy directive: CW 004–06 – Kinship Service Standards Directive, Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, 2006: <https://www.ontario.ca/document/child-protection-service-directives-forms-and-guidelines/policy-directive-cw-004-06-kinship-service-standards-directive>

Community and kinship for Black children and youth, One Vision One Voice, 2021: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynGzkZJ3ffM>

Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2018: Understanding the Over-Representation of Black Children in Ontario Child Welfare Services, 2022: <https://www.oacas.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Black-Children-in-Care-OIS-Report-2022-Final.pdf>

Changing the Ontario Child Welfare System to Better Serve African Canadians: Practice Framework Part 2: Race Equity Practices, September 2016: https://www.oacas.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/One-Vision-One-Voice-Part-2_digital_english-May-2019.pdf

Kaasbøll, J., Pedersen, S. A., & Paulsen, V. (2022). What is known about the LGBTQ perspective in child welfare services: A scoping review. *Child & Family Social Work*, 27(2), 358–369. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12894>

Adam McCormick, Kathryn Schmidt & Samuel Terrazas (2017) LGBTQ Youth in the Child Welfare System: An Overview of Research, Practice, and Policy, *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 11:1, 27–39, DOI: [10.1080/15548732.2016.1221368](https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2016.1221368)

Mallon, G. P. (2011). The home study assessment process for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender prospective foster and adoptive families. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 7(1–2), 9–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1550428X.2011.537229>

Lorthridge, Jaymie, Marneena Evans, Leanne Heaton, Andrea Stevens, and Lisa Phillips. 2018. “Strengthening Family Connections and Support for Youth in Foster Care Who Identify as LGBTQ: Findings from the PII-RISE Evaluation.” *Child Welfare* 96 (1): 53–78. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sxi&AN=130544597&site=ehost-live>.

Erney, Rosalynd, and Kristen Weber. 2018. “Not All Children Are Straight and White: Strategies for Serving Youth of Color in Out-of-Home Care Who Identify as LGBTQ.” *Child Welfare* 96 (2): 151–77. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sxi&AN=130544611&site=ehost-live>.

