

### **Whu Neeh Nee: Building a New Carrier Sekani Child and Family Well-Being Model**

Carrier Sekani Family Services

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Canadian child welfare legislation and policy is used as a tool for colonizing Indigenous people. Its ongoing enforcement of western perspectives of child wellbeing onto Indigenous children is viewed as an apparatus for colonization in the contemporary context. Consequentially, current child welfare legislation, policy and practices are not conducive to Indigenous values, traditions, and practices and perpetuate negative outcomes on Indigenous children that are not reflective of Indigenous child wellbeing.

The forced removal of Carrier Sekani children from their communities by a colonial government on unceded Carrier Sekani – First Nations - territory has created a humanitarian crisis. In June 2019, Canada ratified Federal enabling legislation that provides Indigenous Nations mechanisms to assert sovereignty over their own child and family welfare decisions. Carrier Sekani Child and Family Services (CSFS) has developed a model with the goal of transition from a “child protection” to “child wellbeing” model that will improve the holistic wellness of children, youth, families and communities. The draft Carrier Sekani Child Wellbeing Act reflects a governance and service delivery model enmeshing values and practices of the potlatch system inherent to the territories.

The CSFS research methodology centres community members as the experts of Carrier and Sekani child and family wellbeing indicators. Research has been gathered through community health plans and service delivery plans, safety plans and community engagement sessions. The Bat’lats (potlatch) is the Carrier Sekani traditional governance model that oversees CSFS community engagement, structures, governance and decision making which evidences outcomes through a holistic, and culturally grounded, description of organizational strengths, how they work, and reasons for failure.

Outcomes of community driven research re-assert that children are the communities’ most sacred resource and illustrate the interconnection of child, family and community wellbeing. Further, the inextricable link between ongoing systemic discriminatory funding, service gaps, and negative impacts on Indigenous child wellbeing, is clearly demonstrated and further exacerbated by the lack of clean data representing Indigenous children’s indicators of wellbeing.

CSFS governance sovereignty supported by a stable and needs based funding model, and community capacity building is essential to unveiling, and supporting outcomes based on Carrier Sekani-specific child wellbeing indicators. CSFS representatives continue to engage with Federal Government officials in the development of a funding model that will fulsomely support a new CSFS child wellbeing model and relevant indicators illustrative of communal child rearing, holistic wellness, and the Lifecycle Model.

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