

and child-welfare facilities. By 1960, the federal government estimated that 50% of the children in residential schools were there for child-welfare reasons.⁹

The residential school experience was followed by the “Sixties Scoop”—the wide-scale national apprehension of Aboriginal children by child-welfare agencies. Child-welfare authorities removed thousands of Aboriginal children from their families and communities and placed them in non-Aboriginal homes without taking steps to preserve their culture and identity. Children were placed in homes across Canada, in the United States, and even overseas. This practice actually extended well beyond the 1960s, until at least the mid- to late 1980s.¹⁰

Today, the effects of the residential school experience and the Sixties Scoop have adversely affected parenting skills and the success of many Aboriginal families. These factors, combined with prejudicial attitudes toward Aboriginal parenting skills and a tendency to see Aboriginal poverty as a symptom of neglect, rather than as a consequence of failed government policies, have resulted in grossly disproportionate rates of child apprehension among Aboriginal people. A 2011 Statistics Canada study found that 14,225 or 3.6% of all First Nations children aged fourteen and under were in foster care, compared with 15,345 or 0.3% of non-Aboriginal children.¹¹ As Old Crow Chief Norma Kassi said at the Northern National Event in Inuvik, “The doors are closed at the residential schools but the foster homes are still existing and our children are still being taken away.”¹² The Commission agrees: Canada’s child-welfare system has simply continued the assimilation that the residential school system started.

Canada’s child-welfare crisis has not gone unnoticed in the international community. In 2012, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed to Canada its concern about the frequent removal of children in Canada from families as a “first resort” in cases of neglect, financial hardship, or disability. In its report, the committee singled out the frequency with which Aboriginal children are placed outside their communities.¹³ Noting that Canada had failed to act on its own auditor general’s findings of inequitable child-welfare funding, the committee concluded that “urgent measures” were needed to address the discriminatory overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.¹⁴

Disturbing data

The First Nations Component of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, designed by the Public Health Agency of Canada and its provincial, academic, and agency partners, confirmed that Aboriginal children in the geographic areas studied are also significantly overrepresented as subjects of child maltreatment investigations. For every 1,000 First Nations children, there were 140.6 child maltreatment-related investigations, as compared with 33.5 investigations for non-Aboriginal children.¹⁵ The rate of