



# Northern BC Touchstones of Hope



## E-Newsletter

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First Nations communities and the Ministry for Child and Family Development take the lead in implementing the evidence based Reconciliation in Child Welfare: Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous children, youth and families in Northern British Columbia. This movement is designed to improve the child welfare system so it can better respond to the needs of First Nations children and their families while respecting their distinct cultures and contexts.

### Carrier-Sekani Family Services participates in the Caring Across Boundaries Photography Exhibit



From right to left, Mary Teegee, Cindy Blackstock, Emma Williams and Liam Sharp at the opening the Caring Across Boundaries exhibit in Toronto

World renowned photographer, Liam Sharp volunteered his time to work with First Nations children, youth and families to share messages of reconciliation that they wanted to share with Canadians. We were honoured that three First Nations communities/organizations participated in the project: Tobique First Nation, New Brunswick; Attawapiskat First Nation, Ontario and Carrier Sekani Family Services which is a branch society of the Carrier-Sekani Tribal Council. The pictures document issues ranging from the importance of culture, language, and treaties to the need for equitable investment in education and child welfare on reserves. The exhibit opened at First Canadian Place in Toronto on November 23, 2009 and we were honoured that Mary Teegee and Emma Williams from Carrier-Sekani Family Services were in attendance. First Canadian Place is the largest office tower in Toronto and is visited by over 87,000 people a day which means that on each of the 5 days the exhibit was on display there were 87,000 opportunities to engage caring Canadians in making a difference for First Nations children. As exhibit is meant to educate and engage non-Aboriginal Canadians in reconciliation in ways that truly make a difference for children and families on reserve, post cards with 7 free ways for people to make a difference were available [www.fncaresociety.com](http://www.fncaresociety.com).

Here are just a few of the comments we received about the exhibit:

*"The exhibit is amazing. The pictures are really very moving and they will affect anyone who sees them."*

*"The final selection of photos were extremely powerful."*

*"This is definitely Arts-informed, it does reach out and pulls people in from across social, economic, and cultural boundaries. Imagine this display of photos of the poorest people in Canada, exhibited in one of the richest places in Canada!"*



## Community workshop – Fort St. James

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From November 25-26, the first of six Northern BC Touchstones community workshop took place in Fort St James. The two day session covered the Touchstones of Hope using PATH approach (Pathways for Alternative Tomorrows of Hope). With PATH, the goal is to start with a dream of where Aboriginal children in the north will be living in dignity and respect and then to go back and see what steps need to be taken in order to make that dream a reality. They do this through discussing the Touchstones of Hope and by going through the process of reconciliation in their groups.

In the large groups, participants learned about each of the Touchstones through presentations made by Dianna Mould and Andrea Auger. Nancy Tom also gave a talk on residential schools. After each short presentation, participants divided into their small groups to go through the PATH and to have the conversations that are sometimes difficult when going through the reconciliation process as truth telling is the first step. Since truth telling can be difficult, we tried to provide a comfortable and safe space by letting participants know that they were there as individuals and that job titles were not important. By doing this, we are able to get a more accurate sense of where things need to go in order to improve child welfare in Fort St James and the surrounding areas.

This community workshop included members from the First Nations of Nak'azdli, Tl'azt'en, members from Nezul Be Hunuyeh Child and Family Services Society, and individuals from the Ministry of Child and Family Development. Facilitators included Dianna Mould, Brenda Lewis, Marlaena Mann, Lorene Pulles and Andrea Auger.

MCFD and FNCFCS would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for making this event a huge success:

- Kwa Hall
- Michelle Chase and the Nezul Be Hunuyeh Child and Family Services Society
- Nancy Tom
- Betsy Dennis
- Touchstones Advisory Committee members

Once the PATH sheets have been summarized, MCFD will be meeting with Nezul Be Hunuyeh Child and Family Services Society to discuss the next steps that were provided by participants to see where to go from here. We look forward to continuing with this exciting initiative!



## Dr. Saini's Recording Format

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Dr. Michael Saini, professor at the University of Toronto, has volunteered to help us document the workshops to see if there are themes that repeat throughout the six workshops and to gauge the effectiveness of the Touchstones in communities and in child welfare practices.

Dr. Saini has created a recording format that we will follow for the six workshops. Through this recording format, he has proposed a new method of research that will be participatory which means that all research comes from everyone who participate in the community workshops, including participants, facilitators and speakers. Facilitators are responsible for using tape recorders to record the rich discussions that occur. Along with the tape recordings, the facilitators are to take notes on the PATH. They are also asked to write a small summary of their experience at the end. Once all of the notes and tapes are collected, we will be sending the information to Dr. Saini. Dianna Mould and Andrea Auger will be assisting Dr. Saini in the research and writing the final report as they will be facilitators at all six workshops.

This research is important for the following reasons:

- Community members are actually doing all of the research through participating in discussions, therefore giving an authentic voice to the research
- Previous research has not been accurate in capturing the holistic nature of Aboriginal cultures as it does not incorporate the spiritual or emotional aspects
- It will allow not only communities to see the work that was done but also other individuals and organizations to see whether or not the Touchstones are effective in changing the face of Indigenous child welfare



## Diary of a Touchstones Traveller

My son, Aaron, is a world traveller. He loves to visit and explore other countries and their culture. As I write this, he is in Peru for a month and his email this morning stated "I just realized tonight that I haven't spoken English since I arrived because there is no one here who speaks it. That has been the best thing about being here." He is speaking to his being totally fluent in Spanish. My journey with Touchstones is akin to his exciting travels and his determination to discover the cultures and language of the countries he visits.

My excursion into the Touchstones of Hope is an experience not unlike that of coming to a foreign country. I am bringing myself into a place where my life experience and learning is different from that of the experience and history of a people that make a country what it is.

Like my son who is drawn to the vibrant culture and exotic dialects of South America, and I admit, the white sand beaches and crystal blue waters area are an attraction for him as well, so, also, was I drawn to the values and processes of Touchstones of Hope. The first time I read them..."Self-determination"... "Non-discrimination"... "Structural Interventions"... "Holistic approach"... "Language and Culture" and that beautiful full of hope word..."Reconciliation"; I felt I had finally found an oasis in the often challenging climate of working in child welfare with First Nations and Aboriginal peoples. Often I was aware that I was speaking one language and needed to speak something else. I felt the Touchstones were my "Lonely Planet" guide" and a compass that would guide me and others to a place of white sand and crystal waters.

I am at this point, still learning the language. I know the words now. Well...I thought I knew them even the first time a read them, but the depth of their meaning is an ongoing process of listening, reflecting and readjusting my thoughts and subsequent behaviour. I would have to admit that my understanding of each of the Touchstones and how it looks today in my practice is very different than it looked 18 months ago.

I know now that whatever my identification with the language and spirit of the Touchstones curriculum, my experience is parallel to the difference between being able to say hello and thank you in a tongue and being able to really understand the context and the meaning of a language in order to have a rich and meaningful dialogue. I am continuing to learn, and I am daily grateful for the forgiveness and good will afforded me when I wander off course or inadvertently make a mistake.

I believe in the great promise of the Touchstones of Hope and I eagerly embrace a future that will include it in our North region. However, as I learn every day that while the sound of the language may appeal to many, the living it will be the ongoing challenge.

For now, I continue to remain committed to learn and practice the language and culture of the Touchstones. I have realized that being fluent in it will be a process not unlike my son's. He has immersed himself for years in the Spanish language in order to master it. I look forward to the day I can write Cindy Blackstock and say "I realized I have only spoken Touchstones for weeks now because that is all anyone here speaks !"

Take care. Stay tuned for more reflections on my amazing journey. And whenever you can, seek opportunities to learn and grow in the language and culture of Touchstones.

Mussi cho  
Brenda Lewis

For more information contact Diana Mould, Touchstone Coordinator, Ministry for Child and Family Development and watch for information on the launch of the website.

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