

# ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT FINAL REPORT

**ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK:  
CHILD WELFARE SERVICES  
FOR INDIGENOUS CLIENTELE LIVING IN MONTREAL**



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## INTRODUCTION

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In November 2013, the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal (NWSM) and Batshaw Youth and Family Centre (now known as the Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux Ouest de l'Île de Montréal - CIUSSS ODIM) signed a collaboration agreement in order to improve child welfare services to Indigenous children and families served by Batshaw Youth and Family Centre (with a mandate to serve the English-speaking population living in the Montreal).

*The collaboration agreement was the result of several years of advocacy work by the NWSM and more recent file reviews by Batshaw that both speak to instances of a lack of understanding about the poor interactions that have historically occurred between child welfare services and Indigenous families throughout the country (Batshaw Youth and Family Centre & Native Women's Shelter of Montreal, 2013).*

There is an abundance of evidence on the need to improve child welfare services to Indigenous peoples in Canada. The history of residential schools, the 60s Scoop, current government policies that undermine the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples, and the increasing urbanization of many Indigenous groups, particularly the Inuit, serve to make this agreement all the more urgent (Manitoba, 1991; Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2008; Sinha et al., 2011).

In addition, there is ample evidence that Indigenous children are overrepresented at every stage of the child welfare system, and that the rates of Indigenous children placed in out-of-home care are not decreasing, despite a greater recognition of this issue by policy-makers (Sinha et al., 2011; Trocmé et al., 2005).

On September 30, 2019, the Viens Commission final report was submitted to the government at the completion of its mandate stating that “the current youth protection system has been imposed on Indigenous peoples from the outside, taking into account neither their cultures nor their concepts of family. Even worse, many believe the youth protection system perpetuates the negative effects of the residential school system, in that it removes a significant number of children from their families and communities each year to place them with non-Indigenous foster families” (Public Inquiry, 2019).

*The commission has recommended 29 calls-for-action specifically related to Indigenous youth protection that are aligned with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which states that Indigenous peoples have “the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions” (UN General Assembly, 2007).*

*It is through this lens, as well as the continuous advocacy of the Native Women’s Shelter of Montreal that created the impetus for this action research project.*

A better vision for the future of Indigenous families in Montreal is a three-year (2016-2019) multiple-institution project funded by a Partnership Development Grant through the Social Science and Humanities Council’s (SSHRC) Building Research Capacity with First Nations and Mainstream Youth Protection Services in Quebec (BRC). This action research project was a partnership between Concordia University, the Native Women’s Shelter of Montreal (NWSM), the Rising Sun Daycare, and the Youth Department at the Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux Ouest de l’Île de Montréal (CIUSSS ODIM)[1]. The goal of the project was to gain a better understanding of the ways that Indigenous children and families are responded to by the child welfare system in Montreal. The project received ethics approval from Concordia University and the Ethics committee at the CIUSSS-ODIM.

The research sought to determine the proportion of families served by the organization that were Indigenous as well as to understand what tools social workers and other clinical intervention staff needed to provide better services and what some of the obstacles were to providing culturally-appropriate services. As an action research project, the collaborating team also attempted to act as a mobilizing force to address the gaps in services that the workers identified along the way.

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## METHOD

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This project has been carried out in close partnership between Concordia University, the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal and the CIUSSS-ODIM. We have also worked with a community advisory committee comprised of staff from various community organizations such as the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal, Rising Sun Childcare Centre, Native Montreal, as well as CIUSSS-ODIM.

A number of planning meetings were held in preparation for the research and in order to get input from the various partners on the appropriate methodology and research questions. The research consisted of several different elements including:

- *Individual interviews with key informants that had key information about the types and quality of service provided to Indigenous families (2016-2017);*
- *Follow up meetings with a core group of staff and upper administration from CIUSSS-ODIM and members of the research team in an effort to address some of the major concerns brought forward in the research (2018-2019).*
- *Meeting with staff and I.T. employees to address information collected on the identity of Indigenous children and families (2016-2017);*
- *Three focus groups with eight employees (front-line service providers and managers overseeing front-line service providers), each representing different departments within the organization that had relevant experience working with or managing staff that worked with Indigenous families (2016-2017);*
- *One focus group with representatives from community organizations with a mandate to provide support to Indigenous children and families living in Montreal (2016);*



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## FINDINGS

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### 1. The number of Indigenous children and families reported to/receiving services from CIUSSS-ODIM youth protection and ongoing services

There are no official numbers published on the number of First Nations, Inuit and Métis families and children reported to youth protection (at CIUSSS-ODIM), nor the number of children in foster care throughout the CIUSSS-ODIM. This remains the case to this date despite the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action that were released in 2015. Call to Action #2: “calls upon the different levels of government to prepare and publish annual reports on the number of Aboriginal children (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) who are in care, compared with non-Aboriginal children, as well as the reasons for apprehension, the total spending on preventive and care services by child-welfare agencies, and the effectiveness of various interventions” (Truth and Reconciliation, 2015).

The main reasons that collecting this information is difficult include the following:

1. *No systematic process exists by which workers ask families if they identify as Indigenous, and as such, several workers have reported that the number of Indigenous families is most likely underreported;*

\*This had reportedly improved as a result of the presence of and advocacy by the Indigenous team in Application des Mesures department (ongoing services) and as a result of the increasing awareness of the need for accurate information by the research team and the trainings the research team has helped to organize.

2. *The categories of Indigenous children and families are problematic because the worker is forced to select one box for identity. For children or families of mixed backgrounds, there is no possibility to self-identify (for example if a child comes from two different nations or is both Inuk and First Nations);*

3. *The instructions given for Métis identity are incorrect and defined as a child who has one First Nations and one non-First Nations parent. This is erroneous and leaves out children from the Métis Nation and does not ensure that children with First Nations background are properly identified from the beginning of service;*

4. *Changes to this system need to be made at the provincial level, which is a lengthy and difficult process as stated by Batshaw administrators. The Provincial government through the Ministry of Health and Social Services is responsible for the Projet Integration Jeunesse (the computerized tracking system that keeps information about the families being served) and the ministry is not likely to be amenable;*

5. *Clarity is lacking on service agreements for Inuit families and children: As a result of service agreements between CIUSSS-ODIM and the government of Nunavik, many Inuit children receive services from CIUSSS-ODIM but technically remain clients of their home organization and the organization has no mechanism for determining how many children and families they are providing services to.*

## 2. What community organizations who work directly with families and children are saying

Community workers were those who had jobs with a mandate to provide support services and or advocacy to Indigenous families. Ten individuals came together from either local urban or provincial organizations. The main message we heard was that the **workers and families had very negative and stressful interactions with youth protection workers from CIUSSS-ODIM**. It was very difficult for this group to answer questions regarding the strengths of CIUSSS-ODIM in working with Indigenous children and families. There were a few notable exceptions including some dedicated workers who made efforts to work with community supports.

The main challenges to good practice brought forward in this focus group were **racist attitudes on the part of CIUSSS-ODIM workers and management**, where they felt families were victims of stereotyping and that many held the attitude of Indigenous families as somehow separate from other families they worked with – and a strong feeling they were treated as “those people”.

Some families had spoken about workers asking intrusive questions once they found out they were Indigenous, such as “oh, were you sexually abused?” The participants in this group also noted that **workers had little knowledge on services in the community, and generally did not see the need for culturally appropriate services**.

In the instances where workers have reached out to community organizations, the participants noted **inconsistent follow-up by CIUSSS-ODIM resulting in confusion in who is doing what**. They also stated that CIUSSS-ODIM tended to connect with one worker from the Indigenous community and connect only with them so that one worker has to do all the leg work. The participants also noted that there are **no direct or transparent processes for families or community organizations to file complaints** and that often families will not take the risk of complaining, even when they feel they are being discriminated against for risk of it having negative repercussions on the workers’ recommendations of whether or not the children can remain with their families.

**Participants noted that some families did not understand the expectation that they remain in touch with their CIUSSS-ODIM worker and as a result ended up having their children removed** from their care because they did not have a phone to stay in touch, for example. When children are placed outside of their families, the participants in this focus group have noted that parents are given lists of what they need to do to get their children back, but are not given referrals, support or follow up in order to make these changes.

**There is an overall lack of understanding and support for harm reduction at the CIUSSS-ODIM**, and instead parents are expected to make changes without the understanding for the time and supports needed to address addictions and mental health issues that stem from intergenerational and colonial traumas. In addition, in cases where the youth court is involved, there is **a lack of communication from the parents’ lawyers and the court and the language used is often technical and not in the parents’ first language**. All of these barriers result in families’ lacking a clear understanding of their rights or the expectations of them in order to regain custody of their children.

When children are placed outside of their homes, often at a considerable distance from their parents, there is a lack of money for transportation to visit children. **There are many instances where children want to be in contact with family but the social worker or foster family will not allow it**. There are also **no services for children when they are removed from home such as emotional support and often siblings do not have contact or access to each other**. In instances where families are living in the north, there are occasions where the social worker in community will become foster family and take one child but the rest are sent down south the Montreal and separated from their parents, siblings, and community. When children with medical needs are alone in hospitals, volunteers do not speak their language and they are completely cut off from support systems.

**Participants noted that both Indigenous children and their families are victims of systemic discrimination when their children are placed in non-Indigenous foster homes** as there is limited support to non-Indigenous foster families raising Indigenous children on how to provide culturally-appropriate care. In addition, the **foster families’ lack of knowledge and sensitization has resulted in racist comments and prejudice towards the children’s parents**.



The participants noted particular gaps in services for Indigenous youth: For instance, there is an **overall lack of services for young people in group homes**, that CIUSSS-ODIM workers criminalize adolescent behavior, which ends up putting Indigenous youth in contact with others with elevated criminal behavior. They also noted there is **a lack of adequate support for youth transitioning to independent living and no communication for youth that are being sexually exploited**. In other words, these participants noted that youth are not seen as a priority and often fall through the cracks.

### 3. What Batshaw (CIUSSS-ODIM) employees report

Three focus groups and five follow-up meetings with eight employees (front-line service providers and managers overseeing front-line service providers), each representing different departments within the organization that had relevant experience working with or managing staff that worked with Indigenous families took place between 2016 and the fall of 2019.

Although these participants were able to name what they saw as more positive interactions with Indigenous families than the community workers, they also had many things to say about their incapacity to do culturally safe and appropriate work with Indigenous families due to a number of institutional and political barriers.

**The workers generally spoke about their concerns in three main areas: training/educational needs, lack of representation of Indigenous staff/social workers, and policy and logistical barriers.**

We feel it is important to note that there are a number of committed workers “on the ground” that try to act as change makers within the system, despite how incredibly difficult and frustrating this can be.

#### CONCERN 1

##### Training and educational needs

Overall, there was a recognition that there was **a major lack of training and communication across the agency**. Most social workers had a **lack of knowledge of Indigenous resources** (internal and external to the organization) and **little awareness of the diversity amongst Nations in Quebec and Indigenous peoples generally**. Throughout the past two years, for example, there has been one training on Indigenous/colonial histories and contemporary realities for the Evaluation/Orientation team (the team that evaluates new reports of child abuse or neglect to the organization). This is problematic as this team has a high turnover, they are the staff person that the family has contact with, **they do not have a specialized team or designated workers with any expertise on Indigenous peoples, contemporary realities and historical context, and they do not have any Indigenous staff** (that we have been made aware of). It is also problematic as workers cannot be expected to learn everything they need to know to understand the historical and contemporary realities of Indigenous families after one half or full day of training. One of the main reasons that trainings have not happened on a more regular basis include limited resources for training.

All mandatory/ongoing trainings have no budget to hire external trainers and staff are expected to volunteer their own time and resources to conduct these trainings. However, with few Indigenous workers at the organization, it is worrisome and even dangerous to try and create this in isolation from extensive consultation and collaboration with Indigenous peoples and organizations.

#### CONCERN 2

##### Lack of Indigenous Representation

There is one designated team that services Indigenous families in CIUSSS-ODIM, which is located in the ongoing service department (Application des Mesures). **The First Nations, Inuit, and Metis team as of the writing of this report did not employ any Indigenous people**. We were not provided an exact number of Indigenous people working across the entire organization but unofficial estimates relate that there are under 10 Indigenous employees (likely less) across the organization of over 10,000 employees. There is one official Indigenous liaison person for the CIUSS-Quebec-de-L'ile who is non-Indigenous.

### 3. What Batshaw (CIUSSS-ODIM) employees report (cont'd)

In terms of other aspects of representation, **lack of translation services is seen as a barrier to services for families and this is particularly the case for Inuit families.** There are also **few Indigenous foster families** and recruitment of these families was indicated as a priority by the workers. As indicated in the first section of this report, workers also indicated that in many cases, there is a **lack of information about the identity of Indigenous families**, including specific cultural background, Nation, home community, as well as the identity of the children.

#### CONCERN 3

##### Policy and Logistical barriers

One of the most disturbing findings was the **lack of will on the part of the CIUSSS-ODIM's upper management to recognize and commit to the TRC's Calls to Action and the blatant admission that the calls-to-action are "not on the radar of the provincial decision makers"**. Repeated meetings with the CIUSSS-ODIM demonstrated the few committed employees who work within a broken system that impedes their ability to do their jobs, albeit with the best intentions, and we commend them for their hard work.

**The willingness to commit to change is the first step in shifting the existing paradigm in order to conduct appropriate, effective and safe cultural planning, and we are demanding this from those in leadership and decision-making positions as we go forward, collectively implementing the recommended actions.**

The Youth Protection Act (YPA) itself is culturally inappropriate for Indigenous families as it lacks family-centered practice. **As the Viens Commission points out in its final report, the YPA's principles "put the youth protection system at odds with Indigenous cultural values, which then leads to discrimination"** (Public Inquiry, 2019). Based on attachment theory, the YPA requires that children spend lengthy time periods in foster care as a supposed method of early bonding yet this approach is adverse to Indigenous kinship systems of extended-family and community child rearing (Public Inquiry, 2019) and negates the support networks available to them within their traditional collective-care systems,

e.g. specific ministerial guidelines prohibit room sharing, making it difficult for Indigenous kinship arrangements or to find suitable Indigenous foster homes. Not only is the system not respecting Indigenous traditions, it has also been demonstrated that although the YPA is based on attachment theory, **children are often moved repeatedly from foster family to foster family.**

**Alarmingly, placements of Indigenous children into care are also made because of the lack of basic community-based health services**, i.e. cases are opened only because the child needs medical care. This contradicts the International Guidelines on Children without Parental Care (UNCRC, 2006) and Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (UNICEF, 2009) emphasizing that **no child should be separated from the care of the family because of poverty or lack of access to adequate resources**. Based on the focus group and key informant responses, there is reason to believe that this is also the case for Indigenous families being served in Montreal.

### 4. Key informants

Four key informants with significant experience working with Indigenous families and knowledge of different departments at CIUSSS-ODIM provided further insights into the themes that were brought up during the focus groups.

The interviews **highlighted several barriers to culturally-safe practices** with Indigenous families including the lack of knowledge about Indigenous histories and contemporary realities, the lack of Indigenous representation across the organization, and the ways that children continue to be separated from their families as a result of lack of services in their own communities.

#### EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

##### knowledge about Indigenous histories and contemporary realities

Informants pointed out the need for staff at all levels and across departments to be educated on the historical and ongoing effects of colonialism on Indigenous communities. It was felt that Indigenous families are over-reported to child welfare authorities due to bias and that colleagues lack empathy and nuance when it comes interacting with and speaking about Indigenous clients.

*There is a lot of bias definitely, and I think that people don't understand sometimes where that bias comes from, or like, aren't knowledgeable, we don't know... I hear workers sometimes saying why they would even come to Montreal, you know... (T#2, p.5)*

*They are like labeled...feels like seen in a generalized way in terms of like Native...or that Inuk woman.....so I think if someone describes or our report describes them in that way, then, there is a lot of barriers that you do not really understand...(and) a lack of recognition in the specificity about that family and their experience... which is basic social work, but that being said, you know, with the Indigenous people, there is a whole other layer of that in terms of interaction with social services (T#4, p.4)*

*...frankly, if there were a white family you would refer them to a CLSC and close it. (T#1, p.4)*

In other words, **Indigenous families are treated differently – what might be seen as low risk for a non-Indigenous family is treated with more surveillance and kept open with youth protection services.** These quotes explain how the **lack of training and awareness is putting more Indigenous children at risk** of being separated from their families and from the opportunity to be brought up in their own culture. This practice can be seen as a re-creation or continuation of imposed colonial practices, such as the residential school system and the 60s Scoop, even if not intended.

## INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATION

The interviews also highlighted the high turnover among staff that is affecting the consistency of interventions. The turnover is especially apparent with Indigenous staff, who are finding it difficult to integrate a culturally-based approach into a system that lacks flexibility. In this context, recruiting and retaining Indigenous staff, at least in the Indigenous specialized service is crucial, as implied by one of the interview participants:

*If you don't know anyone who is of First Nations descent, you might not, it might not hit close enough to home, for you to look close enough at your behavior and the way you are acting and what you are talking, how you go about doing this job. (T#2, p.7)*

One additional staffing challenge was linked to the **language barrier (especially Inuktitut)**, given the scarcity of interpreters who are available during emergencies and the initial assessment conversations.

*If you are going out on an emergency, you don't have that kind of time...so I think it is similar with Inuktitut interpreters...it has been a couple of times where workers were able to get someone to get out ... but usually it is at the second intervention...it is not always right away in that time sensitive way...so that can have a definite impact in terms of clear understanding depending on how the communication goes. (T#4, p.5).*

Representation of Indigenous peoples' across the organization will require not only a commitment to have better representation, but will also **prioritize creating a climate that will be conducive to retaining Indigenous employees and managers.**

## PLACEMENT AS A RESULT OF LACK OF SERVICES

An alarming observation made by one of the interview participants was that in many instances, the placement decision is made because of the lack of community-based health services – in other words that **cases are opened only because the child needs medical care.**

*We also have open cases for children who don't have physicians in the community and who never had medical care or have a lot of health issues. (T#2, p.3)*

This fact blatantly contradicts the *International Guidelines on Children without Parental Care* (UNCRC, 2006) and *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* (UNICEF, 2009), provisions that emphasize that **no child should be separated from the care of the family because of poverty or lack of access to adequate resources.**

*Moms would usually return back home to their community, but the child stays here usually because there is no resources up North. So, then there is an...umm...for sure...umm...the child is being estranged from their parent.(T#2, p.6)*

#### 4. Key informants (cont'd)

The interviews revealed an additional complexity related to decisions affecting permanency planning, as **children are sometimes placed because of delays in planning or additional time required for the parents to address the identified risks to their children's safety.** This decision is made at the expense of the right of the child to reunite with his/her family and community.

*...emergency placement and if ...like...within the first year if it wasn't possible for the child to reintegrate into the parents' care, they would be transferred to a family member or to a longer-term foster home... and...umm...so, some of these kids, instead of staying for one year, they end up staying for 18 months or almost two years of age. So, for the attachment piece. (T#3, p.7)*

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## ACTION & RECOMMENDATIONS

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### ONGOING ACTION & RECOMMENDATIONS TO CIUSSS-ODIM AND THE PROVINCIAL DIRECTORS OF CHILD WELFARE

During the focus groups and key informant interviews, participants were asked to identify what would be concretely needed to improve practices and outcomes for Indigenous children and families served by CIUSSS-ODIM.

The following are a list of recommendations that align with the results of this research as well as with the recently released Viens Commission Report and the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action.

#### 1. Recommendations for Education of Non-Indigenous Staff, Leaders & Decision-makers:

- Make a financial and human commitment to recurrent and multi-level staff training on the historical and contemporary realities of colonisation and the impacts on Indigenous families, as well as a focus on culturally-safe interventions with families.
- Train staff on the availability of culturally-appropriate community resources and how to access them.
- Establish an ongoing working group (for example a “Clinical integration group”) to allow for a consultation table where community experts could come together with CIUSSS-ODIM staff to develop and implement culturally-safe practice guidelines for the entire agency.

#### Aligned with Viens Commission Calls for Action:

- CALL FOR ACTION No. 109 Amend the Youth Protection Act to include a provision on care that is consistent with Indigenous traditions, drawing on Ontario’s Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017.
- CALL FOR ACTION No. 112 Share the new directives and standards that apply in youth protection with all professionals responsible for such cases in Indigenous communities in real time.
- CALL FOR ACTION No. 113 Make youth protection evaluations and decisions in a way that takes the historical, social and cultural factors related to First Nations and Inuit into account.
- CALL FOR ACTION No. 115 Validate the evaluation tools used in youth protection with Indigenous clinical experts.
- CALL FOR ACTION No. 116 Overhaul the clinical evaluation tools used in youth protection whose effects are deemed to be discriminatory toward Indigenous peoples, in cooperation with experts from the First Nations and Inuit peoples.

**Aligned with Viens Commission Calls for Action (cont'd):**

- CALL FOR ACTION No. 117 Amend the Act respecting health services and social services to include a provision requiring workers to record objectives and methods for preserving cultural identity in the intervention plans and individualized service plans of all children who identify as First Nation or Inuit and are placed outside their family environments.
- CALL FOR ACTION No. 121 Make sure that a cultural intervention plan is produced and implemented whenever an Indigenous child must be placed in a non-Indigenous alternative environment.
- CALL FOR ACTION No. 125 Recognize and financially support cultural healing approaches when proposed by families subject to the Youth Protection Act.

**2. Recommendations for Representation:**

- Fill designated positions for the First Nations, Inuit and Metis team with Indigenous workers only and create a mechanism to replace Indigenous employees when they are on leave by new Indigenous workers.
- Hire an Indigenous manager/supervisor to oversee Indigenous employees.
- Circulate job descriptions to Indigenous organizations and community collaborators to access more Indigenous candidates.
- Redefine job qualifications for Indigenous candidates taking into account community experience as equivalency - Indigenous candidates will have experience working outside colonial institutions, which is pertinent to Indigenous youth protection and care.
- Cluster hire for Indigenous positions - hire more than one Indigenous person at a time so that they are able to support each other.
- Have an Indigenous representative on hiring committees for Indigenous positions.
- Have an Indigenous community member accompany evaluations of Indigenous families in the immediate future (as per agreement discussed between NWSM and CIUSSS-ODIM) and designate an Indigenous worker for Evaluation/Orientation (not necessarily a social worker, need flexibility in the hiring of this position).

**Aligned with Viens Commission Calls for Action:**

- CALL FOR ACTION No. 108 Amend the Youth Protection Act to exempt Indigenous children from the application of maximum periods for alternative living environments as stipulated in sections 53.0.1 and 91.1.
- CALL FOR ACTION No. 110 Enshrine in the Youth Protection Act a requirement that a family council be set up as soon as an Indigenous child is involved in a youth protection intervention, whether or not the child is at risk of being placed.
- CALL FOR ACTION No. 118 Fund the development of intensive support services in urban environments and Indigenous communities covered by an agreement for parents of Indigenous children who have been placed in foster care.
- CALL FOR ACTION No. 127 Increase availability and funding for local services intended for Indigenous children and their families, including crisis management services, in communities covered by an agreement and in urban environments.



### 3. Recommendations on policy-level changes:

- Create Indigenous best practice procedures for those employees working with Indigenous youth.
- Change the PIJ to accurately report the number of Indigenous children in the child welfare system and those in foster care and other forms of out-of-home care.
- Advocate for and develop where possible specific services for Indigenous children aging out of care together with Indigenous collaborators similar to that of Ontario's Ministry for Children, Community and Social Services:
  - » *Continued Care and Support for Youth* - Youth who are 18 and transitioning from care to adulthood be eligible to receive financial support and guidance up to the age of 21.
  - » *Aftercare Benefits Initiative* - Young adults aged 21 to 24 who have left care, and their dependents, may be eligible to receive prescription drug, dental, vision and extended health benefits. In addition, they may also be eligible to receive counselling and life skills supports up to the age of 29.
  - » *Transition and life skills programs* - Youth-in-transition workers connect youth who are 16 to 24 years old to community services and provide support with stable housing, education resources, employment services, and life skills training.
  - » *Registered Education Savings Plan* - When youth in or leaving care, customary care, or a Voluntary Youth Services Agreement, register for an eligible post-secondary education or vocational training program, they can access funds to support education-related expenses.
  - » *Stay Home for School Program* - Youth 18 to 21 who are leaving care and need additional time to complete high school be eligible to remain with their caregivers who will receive extended funding.
  - » *Financial support for post-secondary studies and training* for former youth in care.
 (Ontario's Ministry for Children, Community and Social Services, 2018)
- Involve Indigenous collaborators in all creation and rewriting of CIUSSS-ODIM policies/documentation regarding Indigenous children.
- Advocate together with Indigenous collaborators for ministerial guidelines to be changed according to a prevention-based model that takes into account the cultural and financial realities of Indigenous families (i.e. leave children with their families while taking into account the difficulties they face and the lack of intensive and preventive services available, allow siblings to share bedrooms and always keep siblings together).
- Implement parental assessments that consider intergenerational trauma, as per Gladue considerations for criminal court.
- Develop and provide cultural plans to all Indigenous children in care in close collaboration with NWSM. These need to be required and formalized.

#### Aligned with Viens Commission Calls for Action:

- CALL FOR ACTION No. 120 Working with Indigenous authorities, draw up a placement policy specific to members of First Nations and Inuit that provides that Indigenous children be first placed with their immediate or extended families and, if that is not possible, with members of their communities or nations.
- CALL FOR ACTION No. 126 Working with Indigenous authorities, make an annual calculation of the number of Indigenous children subject to the Youth Protection Act and obtain any other data deemed relevant under the Act in order to accurately assess the presence of Indigenous children in the system and how they are treated.
- CALL FOR ACTION No. 128 Initiate tripartite negotiations with the federal government and Indigenous authorities to increase the availability of local services intended for Indigenous children and their families, including crisis management services, in communities not covered by an agreement.

**Aligned with Viens Commission Calls for Action:**

- CALL FOR ACTION No. 129 Clarify and change the eligibility criteria for Indigenous foster families, including the criteria for the physical environment and the follow-up done with foster families, so that those families can access the services they need to provide the best possible environment for the children.
- CALL FOR ACTION No. 131 Invest to increase the number of available spaces where needed at youth rehabilitation centres in Indigenous communities covered by an agreement.
- CALL FOR ACTION No. 132 Initiate tripartite negotiations with the federal government and Indigenous authorities to increase the number of available spaces where needed at youth rehabilitation centres in Indigenous communities not covered by an agreement.
- CALL FOR ACTION No. 133 Increase the level of and funding for post-placement services for indigenous children in communities covered by an agreement and in urban centres.
- CALL FOR ACTION No. 134 Initiate tripartite negotiations with the federal government and Indigenous authorities to increase the level of and funding for post-placement services in Indigenous communities not covered by an agreement.
- CALL FOR ACTION No. 135 Provide communities that want to update their agreements or to take over youth protection services under s. 37.7 of the Youth Protection Act with financial support and immediate and unrestricted guidance.
- CALL FOR ACTION No. 137 Provide communities that want to take over youth protection services under s. 37.5 of the Youth Protection Act with financial support and immediate and unrestricted guidance.

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## CONCLUSION

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**Research and policy development, in Quebec specifically and in Canada as a whole, has too often neglected the self-determination of urban Indigenous communities.** In this sense, the community is seen as incapable of participating in decision-making that affects its members, and /or the governments fail to conceptualize urban communities as having a right to self-determination in policy-making (Newhouse & Peters, 2003; White & Bruhn, 2010).

In his Final Report, Commissioner Jacques Viens stated:

*"[I have] no doubt that, **for Indigenous peoples, the youth protection system has reached its limit...it is necessary and urgent to reduce the control exercised by government officials...by continuing to impose or develop policies that ignore the will of Indigenous people, the government is helping to keep communities fragile and merely delaying an internal transformation that is already well under way...**"*

Indigenous self-determination as it relates to Indigenous children and their families and communities is how we are proceeding, and **we expect the CIUSSS-ODIM to begin working immediately with established working committees and organizations that represent and are represented by Indigenous peoples living in Montreal**, as well as other representatives from communities that have children serviced by the CIUSSS. This entails **listening to and carrying out directives presented by these representatives** to ensure the well-being of Indigenous children in care, youth aging out of care, and their communities.

### WHAT WE EXPECT FROM THE CIUSSS-ODIM:

1. **To meet with the research team in early 2020** to provide guidance, and we expect a progress report annually from the CIUSSS detailing which recommendations have been addressed and how.
2. **The first progress report by December 15, 2020.**
3. **Support as needed when we reach out to Premier François Legault and the Laurent Commission regarding changes that need to be made at the provincial level**, similar to Ontario's Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy.
4. **Support as we continue to make our demands** to various organizations and provincial bodies by co-signing our letters/documents, advocating at our side, making any necessary meetings/phone calls that will move these changes forward, for example, to the PIJ system so that we have a more efficient and effective way of collecting information on the identity of Indigenous children and families.

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## AUTHOR BIOS

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**Dr. Elizabeth Fast** is Métis from St. François-Xavier, Manitoba. She has a PhD in Social Work from McGill University (2014) and was hired as a Strategic Hire for Indigenous Youth at Concordia University in 2015 as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Applied Human Sciences. From 2016-2017 Elizabeth served as the Special Advisor to the Provost on Indigenous Directions at Concordia. Before returning to school, Elizabeth worked with youth that were transitioning out of care from the child welfare system and as a social worker. Elizabeth is currently the principal investigator on research grant that seeks to understand how “legacy education” can be used to strengthen cultural pride among urban Indigenous youth and is leading an action research project on improving child welfare services for Indigenous families in Montreal in partnership with the Native Women’s Shelter of Montreal.

**Vicky Boldo** is the Cree/Métis Elder in residence at Concordia’s Aboriginal Student Resource Centre. Born in British Columbia and raised on Vancouver Island, Vicky is a transracial adoptee from the ‘60’s Scoop Era. Although she was placed for adoption at birth, she is a strong ally to the survivors of this time. Vicky is of Cree/Coast Salish/Métis heritage. Vicky is a registered energy medicine practitioner (ANQ) and has a certificate in journalism for Concordia. As a research coordinator, she is passionate about affecting change in policy, education and attitudes in social work, health care and education for First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. She is highly involved in and around the city as Co-Chair of the Montreal Urban Aboriginal Community Strategy NETWORK. Vicky sits on the boards of the Native Women’s Shelter and Montreal’s First People’s Justice Centre as Vice-president and she is on the (Police Service of Montreal) SPVM Aboriginal Advisory Committee. In 2016, she resigned from her coordinator position in women’s reproductive medicine with McGill University Health Center (MUHC) to pursue her passions within the Urban community full-time.

**Nakuset** is an activist and the Executive Director of the Native Women’s Shelter of Montréal; she is Cree from Lac la Ronge, Saskatchewan. She has three beautiful boys, Kistin, Mahkisis and Mahihkan. She was adopted by a Jewish family in Montreal and draws on her adoptee experience in her advocacy work for Indigenous children in care. Nakuset is the creator, producer and host of the television series Indigenous Power, she was voted “Woman of the Year 2014” by the Montreal Council of Women, and she is the Indigenous columnist for MaTV’s CityLife. Nakuset was featured in Real Talk on Race, the award winning CBC series. In 2017, she was selected by the CKX City Series as a speaker/ shift disturber due to the work she does to shift the status quo for urban Aboriginal women. In November 2017, she was a speaker for TEDxMontrealWomen. Nakuset is dedicated to improving the lives of urban Aboriginals.

**Marti Miller** is the Clinical Coordinator at the Native Women’s Shelter of Montreal. She was born and grew up in British Columbia on the lands of the Okanagan and Kwakwaka’wakw peoples, and now makes her home in Tohtìà:ke (Montreal). She received her MSW from McGill University and has worked as an ally and advocate in urban Indigenous communities in both Vancouver and Montreal over the last 30 years.

**Alana-Dawn Phillips** is a Kanien:keha’ka (Mohawk) woman originally from Kahnawake, Quebec. She currently resides in Montreal and has been an active member of the Indigenous community for the past 25+ years. Alana completed a Baccalaureate of Arts in 2011 from Concordia University with a major in Child Studies and a minor in Philosophy. She has also completed a Certificate in Public Relations Management at McGill University. Alana has worked as the Executive Director of the Rising Sun Childcare Centre since March 2008. Officially opening in May of 2009, the Centre is the first full-time, provincially-funded Indigenous childcare centre in Montreal. Over the past 11 years, this work has led Alana to become more involved with youth protection services in Montreal.

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## AUTHOR BIOS

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**Melanie Lefebvre** is a Métis-Nehiyaw-Nakota-Saulteaux community worker, researcher, writer, visual artist, and graduate student at Concordia University. Working closely with the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal, Melanie sits on the board and advocates for the safety of Indigenous people as well as Indigenous representation, education, and employment. Melanie is a research assistant to Dr. Elizabeth Fast for Concordia University as well as Dr. Morgan Phillips and Dr. Nicole Ives of McGill University for projects focused on Indigenous youth initiatives.

**Lance Lamore** is First Nations (Anishnaabe) and Irish. He has worked in the field of Health and Social Services for nearly 20 years. Lance previously worked in community in the field of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C with MSM, Indigenous, and itinerant populations. In his work for the Department of Youth Protection within CIUSSS-ODIM, Lance has been a designated Indigenous worker at Application of Measures and was the first Indigenous Liaison to the Foster Care Department. He currently works in the Intake department.



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**Decolonizing Montreal's colonial child welfare system** means delivering culturally grounded, prevention-focused child and family services to Indigenous families.

The urban Indigenous community expects to have greater self-determination by encouraging federal and provincial governments to continue to provide adequate funding to Indigenous organizations to offer prevention and support services in order to gradually take on the mandate of youth protection services as has been done in other urban centres and on-reserve communities across the country.