



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CANADA

BUILDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR URBAN ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

**Judi Longfield, M.P.
Chair**

**John Godfrey, M.P.
Chair
Subcommittee on Children & Youth at Risk**

June 2003

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

has the honour to present its

FOURTH REPORT

In accordance with its mandate under Standing Order 108 (1)(a)(b), your committee established a subcommittee and assigned it the responsibility of examining children and youth at risk.

The Subcommittee studied the status of Aboriginal children 0 to 12 years of age living in urban areas and submitted its report to the Committee.

Your committee adopted the following report which reads as follows:

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
URBAN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN CANADA: A BRIEF OVERVIEW	5
Jurisdiction.....	6
Culturally Relevant Programming	7
URBAN ABORIGINAL CHILDREN: WHAT WE HEARD	9
Poverty.....	10
Mobility.....	10
Single-Parent Families and Families Headed by Young Mothers.....	11
PUBLIC POLICY AND URBAN ABORIGINAL CHILDREN.....	12
BUILDING ON EXISTING EXPERTISE IN THE URBAN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY.....	14
URBAN ABORIGINAL STRATEGY	14
PUBLIC POLICY CHALLENGES	16
Health	17
Child Welfare	17
Education.....	19
Maintaining Cultural Identity.....	20
Disability	20
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS SUPPORTING URBAN ABORIGINAL CHILDREN.....	21
Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities	21
Community Action Plan for Children (CAPC) and Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP)	22
Gap in Services for Children Between the Ages of 6-12.....	23
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAS/FAE) Initiative.....	24
AREAS OF JURISDICTION.....	24
CONCLUSION	25
LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS	27

APPENDIX A — LIST OF WITNESSES 31
APPENDIX B — LIST OF BRIEFS..... 35
REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE..... 37
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS..... 39

INTRODUCTION

The Throne Speeches inaugurating both the First and Second Sessions of the 37th Parliament have made commitments to Aboriginal people in Canada, and more particularly, to Aboriginal children. The commitment to close the gap in life chances between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children was re-emphasized in the 2003 budget, with investments in child care and early learning, support to Aboriginal languages and culture, and an expansion of the Urban Aboriginal Strategy.

The Subcommittee on Children and Youth at Risk initiated a study in 2001 on the conditions of Aboriginal children in Canada, dividing the study into four phases in order to reflect the different jurisdictional realities between on and off-reserve Aboriginal people and the different policies and programs for children in the pre-school years (pre-natal to age six) and the middle years (ages six to twelve). In June 2002, the Subcommittee tabled the first of this series of reports, *Building on Success*, on the condition of First Nations children from the prenatal period to age six living on reserve. In that report, we recognized the need for horizontal collaboration between federal government partners, urging all federal departments with programs for First Nations families and young children living on Canada's reserves to create an integrated policy framework for the development of young First Nations children. We also recommended the implementation of pilot projects in selected First Nations communities to integrate and harmonize the programs and services for on-reserve children from the prenatal period to age six.

This report examines the conditions and needs of urban Aboriginal children from the prenatal period to age twelve. While we originally set out to examine the conditions of off-reserve children from ages 0-6, we quickly became aware of the great diversity among off-reserve Aboriginal people, both in terms of geographical location and in terms of their status and entitlements. For example, the services available to Aboriginal children in small, remote communities differ considerably from those in large urban centres. Likewise, there are significant differences in eligibility for federal government programs and services between status and non-status Indian children, Inuit people outside their communities, and Métis children. Given the limited time available for this study, and our intention to develop targeted and relevant recommendations, we decided to focus on Aboriginal children in Canada's urban centres. At the same time, witnesses noted that the division of the study by age group risked overlooking the need for continuity between early and middle childhood programs and systems. Thus the Subcommittee decided to focus the study on urban Aboriginal children from the prenatal period to age twelve.

The final phase of the study, an examination of the condition of Aboriginal children from the age 6 to 12 living on reserve will be carried out in the autumn of 2003. We acknowledge that, in focusing the current study on urban Aboriginal children, the Subcommittee has not addressed the conditions of off-reserve Aboriginal children in northern, remote and rural areas. We recognize that, while some of the recommendations arising from the three studies will be relevant to these children, they may face other

challenges which have not been addressed. The Subcommittee may consider this gap at a later date.

Simultaneous to this study, the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples is examining the issue of urban Aboriginal youth. It is our hope that, together, these two studies will bring to light issues of importance to Aboriginal children and youth in our cities and propose a continuum of solutions to address their needs.

In order to gain an appreciation of the challenges facing urban Aboriginal children, the Subcommittee heard from a wide cross-section of witnesses representing Aboriginal organizations at the national and local levels, service-providers who work with urban Aboriginal children, researchers, and representatives of federal government departments who deliver programs to urban Aboriginal children. This report will also draw on testimony from the first phase of the study on on-reserve Aboriginal children, where appropriate, recognizing that many Aboriginal people move between reserves and urban areas, and that there are many issues common to Aboriginal children whether they live on reserves or in cities.

In this report, the Subcommittee has attempted to capture the main strengths and challenges of Aboriginal children and their families in our cities. We acknowledge that the scope of this study did not allow us to examine in detail some of the issues which are key to the well-being of urban Aboriginal people, such as housing and access to employment. We also recognize that a family-enabling society must create the conditions in which the urban Aboriginal family, in its broadest sense, can access and mobilize services to improve the quality of life of its children in a holistic way. The creation of a family-enabling society, for many Aboriginal people, will require support for healing from the “multi-generational grief resulting from colonization.”¹ and a recognition that:

... the distinct nature of Aboriginal child poverty in Canada are rooted in the multi-generational experiences of residential schools; wardship through the child welfare system; and economic, social, and political marginalization from mainstream Canadian society.²

The Subcommittee has heard from remarkable witnesses who testified to the hope, strength and dedication which exists in the urban Aboriginal community. In the words of one witness:

Most social programs have targeted deficiencies in Aboriginal communities and the health and social deficits of Aboriginal children and they have not started from the

¹ SCYR, *Evidence*, Ms. Cindy Blackstock (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada) March 26, 2003(1605).

² SCYR, *Evidence*, Mr. Rick Lobzun (National Association of Friendship Centres) February 5, 2003 (1540.)

inherent strengths of indigenous communities and their well earned reputation for resilience.³

The Subcommittee recognizes the importance of building on this strength, and re-emphasises the importance of the commitment made in *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan* to recognize that Aboriginal people must participate fully in the design and delivery of programs affecting their lives and communities. We also recognize the need for better coordination between the federal, provincial/territorial and municipal levels of government in creating family-enabling conditions for urban Aboriginal people. We believe that the federal government has a moral obligation to provide leadership in engaging Aboriginal people and all levels of government to work toward building better futures for urban Aboriginal children.

Not only is a concerted effort to improve the lives of urban Aboriginal children important in recognition of our obligation to them as members of our society, and in recognition of their future importance in the labour force, but also in light of international obligations undertaken by the government of Canada. As signatory to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Canada has recognized that children belonging to indigenous groups have the right to participate freely in cultural life as well as receive health care and social security to ensure an adequate standard of living. The outcome document of the United Nations Special Session on Children, *A World Fit for Children*, urged all members of the society to make commitments to eradicate poverty and to provide care and education for each child in such a way that no child is left behind. Both the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and *A World Fit for Children* recognize the central role of parents and families as well as the important role of the State in protecting the rights of children.

We are at an important juncture in which to address the challenges of urban Aboriginal children in Canada. In *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*, the Government of Canada recognized that “an investment in Aboriginal people begins with an investment in children”. In the Early Childhood Development Agreement signed between the federal government and the provincial and territorial governments in 2000, governments agreed to “work with the Aboriginal people of Canada to find practical solutions to address the developmental needs of Aboriginal children.” In the past two Speeches from the Throne, the government has pledged its support for closing the gap in life chances between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children, recently announcing measures to expand the Aboriginal Head Start Program for Aboriginal children living on and off reserve, to enhance and expand the First Nations and Inuit Child Care program, to intensify its efforts to address Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAS/FAE) in First Nations communities on reserve, and to conduct a national survey on Aboriginal children.

³ SCYR, *Evidence*, Dr. Jessica Ball (University of Victoria) April 9, 2003 (1530).

The necessity to address the needs of urban Aboriginal children has also been identified in recent research on urban Aboriginal communities. A recent report by the Canadian Policy Research Network noted that:

... the demographic profile of Aboriginal people in cities suggests that special efforts should be placed on initiatives that respond to the circumstances of Aboriginal women, youth and children in cities.⁴

It is our hope that the recommendations arising from this report will help bring about an environment in which the strengths and resiliency of urban Aboriginal communities can be more thoroughly supported and nurtured, such that the gap in life chances between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children might be closed at last.

⁴ Katherine Graham and Evelyn Peters. *Aboriginal Communities and Urban Sustainability*. Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2002. p.iii.

BUILDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR URBAN ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

URBAN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN CANADA: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Canada's Census data show slow, but steady, growth among Aboriginal people residing in the nation's cities. In 2001, almost one-half (49%) of Aboriginal people lived in urban areas.⁵ The urban Aboriginal population, significantly younger than the non-Aboriginal population and experiencing a birth rate 1.5 times greater than that in the non-Aboriginal population, will represent an important component of the future labour force of urban areas. Moreover, urban Aboriginal people are disproportionately concentrated in Western Canada, with approximately one quarter of all Aboriginal people living in one of ten metropolitan areas.

Aboriginal people in Canada's cities include people from diverse Aboriginal backgrounds and nations; people who were born in the city, and others who migrated to a city from a Métis settlement, First Nation reserve, or northern community. There is also much diversity within the urban Aboriginal population in terms of educational attainment, income, employment and migration patterns. For example, Aboriginal single parents and unattached individuals in Winnipeg are particularly concentrated in the inner city, where 85% of Aboriginal households live in poverty, while Aboriginal people in neighbourhoods outside the inner city approach city averages in terms of education and income. Witnesses noted that, despite their differences, many urban Aboriginal people share a common experience of institutionalized racism and discrimination, as well as the challenge of maintaining their cultural identity. In the words of one witness:

Aboriginal peoples living off reserves span the socio-economic categories. They include the very poor, the middle classes and the very wealthy. Children from these families live and function in a world outside their family life that can be disrespectful and non supportive of their cultural identity. Without cultural supports outside the home, they often find it difficult to establish good self-esteem and a strong sense of who they are. These children are also at risk.⁶

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), mandated in 1991 to investigate the evolution of the relationship among Aboriginal peoples (Indian, Inuit and Métis), the Canadian government, and Canadian society as a whole, documented challenges faced by urban Aboriginal people. Several witnesses to this Subcommittee expressed disappointment that many substantive recommendations from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples had not been implemented. Recognizing the progress made by the Government of Canada on several of the RCAP recommendations, the

⁵ Urban areas are defined in the Census as places with a population over 1,000.

⁶ SCYR, *Evidence*, Ms. Deborah Wright (Congress of Aboriginal Peoples), February 5, 2003, (1530).

Subcommittee wishes to acknowledge that a number of the issues discussed in the RCAP's review of urban Aboriginal people in 1996 remain unresolved today. Mr. Calvin Hanselmann, researcher with the Canada West Foundation who has extensively researched urban Aboriginal policy-making in Western Canada noted:

*... many Aboriginal people are falling through the cracks. That is the case. That was the case in the early nineties, and it continues to be the case in the early 21st century.*⁷

Some of the policy challenges which emerged in this study remain the same as when the RCAP report was written, most notably those of jurisdictional incongruence and the need for culturally-relevant and culturally-specific programs.

Jurisdiction

Despite the fact that the majority of Aboriginal people live off reserve, their needs have been largely over-looked by public policies and programs as a result of disagreements over jurisdiction. The federal government has historically claimed responsibility for First Nations on reserves and Inuit in Inuit communities, but not for off-reserve Aboriginal people. Many provincial governments have maintained that the federal level is responsible for all Aboriginal people, and, until recently, have largely limited their responsibility for off-reserve Aboriginal people to programs and services available to the general population.

Supported by the Aboriginal Secretariat in the Privy Council Office, the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians is an advocate for Métis and Non-Status Indians within Cabinet. In his presentation before the Subcommittee, the Federal Interlocutor noted that, "of the almost \$8 billion per year that the Government of Canada invests in Aboriginal-specific programming of various kinds, almost 90% goes to assist first nations people on reserve — that is, less than one-third of the total aboriginal population".⁸ Recognizing that the funding to on-reserve Aboriginal people covers many expenses, such as basic programs and services, which are provided for urban Aboriginal people by other levels of government, and emphasizing the importance of maintaining funding levels to First Nations people on reserves, the Subcommittee is nonetheless concerned at the low level of funding by the federal government for the specific needs of urban Aboriginal people.

The Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians also noted that, off reserve, 22 federal departments currently deliver eighty programs to Aboriginal people in a relatively uncoordinated fashion. Thus the jurisdictional web in which urban Aboriginal policy-making takes place includes silos both within and between the municipal, provincial

⁷ SCYR, *Evidence*, Mr. Calvin Hanselmann (Canada West Foundation) February 12, 2003, (1700).

⁸ SCYR, *Evidence*, Hon. Ralph Goodale (Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians), February 19, 2003, (1520).

and federal levels of government. The federal government's Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS), which attempts to break down these silos and to foster better collaboration, will be discussed later in this report.

Culturally Relevant Programming

Urban Aboriginal people receive services from all levels of government, from mainstream service organizations as well as from non-profit Aboriginal organizations. While many urban Aboriginal families and children require supportive services, we were told that these are not always accessible or relevant for urban Aboriginal people.

The report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples commented that "many urban services designed for the general population are not culturally relevant to Aboriginal people."⁹ The need for culturally-relevant programming for urban Aboriginal people was repeatedly raised by witnesses in relation to a broad range of supports. The issue of cultural relevance, for many of the witnesses, included the need for services to be holistic, easy to access, non-threatening, and available in the language of the participants.

We heard that, while many mainstream organizations tend to deal with specific issues in isolation, Aboriginal people come from a more holistic perspective which incorporates the emotional, intellectual, spiritual and physical components of the family. An example was provided of a program which addressed Fetal Alcohol Syndrome by engaging women in talking circles:

When they sat together as a committee, they realized very quickly that simply going out to community members and providing them information about fetal alcohol syndrome was not enough. This is because in order to talk about fetal alcohol syndrome we need to talk about addictions, and in order to talk about addictions we need to talk about multi-generational grief resulting from colonization.¹⁰

We heard that knowing how to access services, and feeling comfortable accessing those services are challenges for urban Aboriginal parents. In the words of a representative of Pauktuutit (the Inuit Women's Association):

I know there are a lot of Inuit in urban settings throughout Canada, and many more are coming into the cities to escape violence. I know a lot of them are not educated to your southern standard, so to speak, and a lot of times they don't know enough about where to go for assistance, how we get our education, how we get our medical looked after, or how we get our children involved at the community level. These are the kinds of things we are faced with.¹¹

⁹ Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 4, p. 554.

¹⁰ SCYR, *Evidence*, Ms. Cindy Blackstock (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada), March 26, 2003, (1605).

¹¹ SCYR, *Evidence*, Ms. Veronica Dewar (President Pauktuutit), February 12, 2003, (1635).

A witness who works with young urban Aboriginal single mothers noted:

Contacting community resources can often be more challenging than we'd like to believe. Knowing how to find community supports often requires a skill level that isn't there for people with lower literacy and lower education levels. Low self-confidence also proves to be a major barrier that goes hand-in-hand with the lower skill levels as people often feel inadequate and incapable of making positive changes in their lives.¹²

Given that the need for support services to urban Aboriginal people is so high, and that their access to those services are improved when they are provided in a culturally-relevant way, it seems clear that programs and services aiming at improving the well-being of Canadian children need to consider delivery mechanisms which can respond to the urban Aboriginal cultural reality.

The federal government provides funding for services to urban Aboriginal people indirectly in programs available to the general population. These programs include, among others, the Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI)¹³, the Community Action Plan for Children (CAPC), the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) and Health Canada's Fetal Alcohol Syndrome /Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAS/FAE) Initiative.

Where funds are flowed from the federal government through provincial and territorial governments, or in collaboration with those governments, it is incumbent on each provincial/territorial government to determine whether any portion of the funding should be targeted specifically for the off-reserve Aboriginal population. For example, the Community Action Plan for Children (CAPC) and Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) are governed by administrative Protocols, signed at the ministerial level between the federal government and each province and territory. The Protocols set out the terms and conditions for the management of CAPC and CPNP in each province/territory, identify funding priorities and demonstrating the commitment of the two levels of government to support communities for the benefit of children at risk. While some provincial governments have identified services to Aboriginal people as a priority, others have not. This results in disparities in the availability of Aboriginal-specific programs and services across the country.

Although this Subcommittee has not explored the institutional mechanisms which could be put in place to ensure that funds be put aside for culturally-relevant programs to urban Aboriginal people, both in discretionary program funding by federal government departments and in federally-transferred funds to provincial/territorial governments, we wish to flag the importance of examining this issue further. This is particularly important

¹² SCYR, *Evidence*, Ms. Nadine Egler-Wiome (Rainbow Youth Centre), April 30, 2003, (1615).

¹³ The Government of Quebec does not adhere to the federal/provincial/territorial Early Childhood Development Agreement. It receives its share of funding from the Government of Canada for early childhood development programs and services through the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST).

for programs and services in areas where statistical evidence indicates a gap in well-being between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

URBAN ABORIGINAL CHILDREN: WHAT WE HEARD

The important role of children in Aboriginal families and communities has been well documented and was reinforced by witnesses. The report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples noted:

Two themes stand out in presentations by Aboriginal people at our public hearings: the overwhelming concern for the well-being of children, and the belief that families are at the crux of personal and community healing.¹⁴

While Aboriginal children represent the fastest growing segment of Canada's youth population, they continue to lag behind the Canadian average on socio-economic indicators of wellness such as infant mortality, incidence of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, and disability rates. Urban Aboriginal children are approximately twice as likely as non-Aboriginal children to live in single-parent households, to be poor, and to have moved in the previous year. They are four times as likely to be born to adolescent parents and to have experienced hunger.

The Subcommittee heard very disturbing testimony from service-providers across the country about the conditions in which many urban Aboriginal children are living. This includes their growing over-representation in the child welfare system, high levels of disabilities such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAS/FAE), and disproportionate rates of school drop-out. Summarizing the input she had received from young parents in a program she co-facilitates in Regina, one witness told us:

The young parent program participants spoke about young, urban Aboriginals who are, and I quote: "Living the life as they know it". Parenting as they were parented, coping as they see their parents cope and meeting financial needs in the same way that they know their parent's financial needs are being met. As often passed on through the generations, young, urban, Aboriginal parents are coping with poverty, isolation, homelessness, reduced support systems, addictions, violence, de-culturalization, low self-esteem and little self-worth.¹⁵

While it is important to acknowledge the challenges facing urban Aboriginal children and their families, it is equally important to recognize that many Aboriginal communities and groups have made impressive improvements in education levels, reductions in infant mortality rates and substance use.¹⁶ For example, data from the 2001 Census indicates that the share of Aboriginal people with post-secondary qualifications

¹⁴ Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Vol. 3, Chapter 2, Section 1.1.

¹⁵ SCYR, *Evidence*, Ms. Nadine Egler-Wiome (Rainbow Youth Centre), April 30, 2003, (1615).

¹⁶ Health Canada. Background: Improving the Health of Canada's Aboriginal People.

increased importantly from 33% to 38% between 1996 and 2001. It is also important to recognize the diversity which exists in the urban Aboriginal community, particularly in terms of educational attainment and income.

Poverty

Urban Aboriginal people have higher rates of labour force participation and employment rates than Aboriginal people on reserves. While there is a growing Aboriginal middle class in cities, it is important to note that urban Aboriginal people disproportionately live in poverty.

Data from the 1996 Census indicates that approximately 55.6% of Aboriginal people in cities were living in poverty. Several witnesses described the realities of this poverty for urban Aboriginal families, including the inability to provide the basic necessities such as food, housing, and transportation. We also heard that Aboriginal people in some western Canadian cities are being further concentrated into geographical pockets of deep poverty in what appears to be the emergence of ghettos.

Urban Aboriginal children disproportionately live in single-parent families and families led by young mothers, circumstances which predispose them to high levels of poverty. Approximately 45% of urban Aboriginal children from birth to age five are in a lone-parent family with 39% of Aboriginal single mothers earning less than \$12,000 per year.

Mobility

The lives of many urban Aboriginal children often include frequent moves, both within a given city/town and between urban and rural/reserve areas. As a result of the regular moving from urban area to reserve, otherwise known as the “churn factor”, there are important links between conditions and programs on reserve and off reserve. Good public policy by federal government departments with programs for Aboriginal people requires, therefore, that consideration be given to the impacts of programs on Aboriginal people both on and off reserves.

Witnesses described the impact of frequent moving on children and their families. They noted that the lack of a permanent address or phone number made it difficult to access services with waiting lists, such as subsidized daycare. Participation in ongoing services, such as Aboriginal Head Start programs, are jeopardised when children move to new neighbourhoods across the city and parents are unable to provide transportation. Several witnesses also discussed the impact of frequent moves on the ability to establish trusted service relationships and social support networks in neighbourhoods or communities.

*We know these frequent moves contribute to family stress and distress, and are particularly hard on children. Instability in the home, as we all know, makes it harder for children to get on with the business of growing up, succeeding in school, and reaching their full potential as they move into post-secondary education and ultimately become members of the workforce. The result of this instability deriving from high mobility is particularly pronounced in major urban centres. Yet the somewhat artificial distinctions determining which level of government provides services makes it that much harder to provide support to these families at risk.*¹⁷

The Subcommittee heard that many Aboriginal people move on and off reserve to access appropriate services for their children. Some families, such as those with children with disabilities, have few choices but to relocate to urban areas. These families leave reserves, either because the infrastructure on the reserve is not accessible to children with mobility impairments, or because specialized services are only available in urban areas.

Witnesses told us that Aboriginal persons find it difficult to navigate the complex social service systems of the urban environment to access service for themselves and for their children. Whether this involves filling in forms to register for coverage by the provincial medical system or finding the services they need, the process can be intimidating for newcomers to the city.

Single-Parent Families and Families Headed by Young Mothers

Aboriginal children in Canadian cities are more than twice as likely as non-Aboriginal children to be in single-parent households and three times as likely to be born to teen-age mothers. Single-parent urban Aboriginal families are usually headed by women, and most often live in poverty. Witnesses who work with young Aboriginal parents told us that isolation is a key issue confronted by these parents, particularly when they are not accessing available community services. Analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth (NLSCY)¹⁸ indicates that adolescent mothers are more likely to be depressed, have lower educational outcomes, be single mothers, and live in poverty. The children of adolescent mothers are more likely to demonstrate difficult temperament and have lower vocabulary scores than children of older groups of mothers.¹⁹

We were struck by the paradox that, while many single-parent families move to cities to access employment, housing, health, and educational opportunities, they are

¹⁷ SCYR, *Evidence*, Hon. Ralph Goodale (Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians) February 19, 2003, (1525).

¹⁸ The National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth (NLSCY) is a long-term study of Canadian children, jointly conducted by Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada, that follows their development and well-being from birth to early adulthood

¹⁹ Susan Dahinten and J. Douglas Willms "The Effects of Adolescent Child-Bearing on Children's Outcomes", in J. Douglas Willms. (ed.). *Vulnerable Children*. 2002. p. 249.

often unable to access these services. Without the support of their families and communities of origin, we heard that these parents often experience great isolation.

A study based on the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth found that teen-age mothers were twice as likely as older mothers to be depressed.²⁰ The findings of the Canadian Community Health Survey was that 21% of off-reserve Aboriginal people in low-income households reported a major depressive episode in the year before the survey. The high levels of depression could have significant repercussions for Aboriginal children, as research indicates that children of depressed mothers are 1.5 times more likely to have poor cognitive development, and twice as likely to display behavioural problems.

We have heard that, in spite of the challenges of raising children in what is often a culturally-hostile environment with little community support, many young urban Aboriginal parents demonstrate great strength and resilience. We reaffirm the tribute to these parents which was delivered by a witness:

*We appreciate the genuine care that they (young parents) have for their families and their children. We marvel at their determination when wading through red tape that's often involved in the services they have to seek. We validate their courage in asking for guidance and support despite the stigmas that are attached to the services. Most of all, we admire their ability to envision a brighter future for themselves, their families, their children.*²¹

PUBLIC POLICY AND URBAN ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

Recent policy research on the needs of urban Aboriginal communities have identified the importance of locally-driven initiatives and collaboration between all levels of government. Witnesses emphasized the need to work in a holistic fashion to meet the needs of urban Aboriginal people. In the words of one witness:

*... urban Aboriginal issues are not dealt with on a one-issue basis. It doesn't work that way. You cannot address employment without addressing perhaps housing or homelessness or income support, education, child care.*²²

We propose that services need to be delivered in the context of a holistic, family-enabling policy framework within which families and communities can nurture urban Aboriginal children. The diversity of the urban Aboriginal population and the high level of residential mobility are important considerations in urban Aboriginal policy-making. Rather than considering two discrete sets of children, on-reserve and

²⁰ *ibid.* p. 256.

²¹ SCYR, *Evidence*, Ms. Nadine Egler-Wiome (Rainbow Youth Centre), April 30, 2003, (16:20)

²² SCYR, *Evidence*, Mr. Calvin Hanselmann (Canada West Foundation) February 12, 2003, (16:55).

off-reserve, it is important to address the ease with which appropriate services can be accessed with minimal disruption both on reserves and in urban areas.

In this Subcommittee's previous report on Aboriginal children on reserves, *Building on Success*, we had recommended greater collaboration between federal departments with programs for First Nations families and children. In its response, the Government outlined its commitment to ensure that federal departments plan and implement programs and services for Aboriginal children in an integrated and coordinated way within the context of its Strategy on Early Childhood Development for First Nations and other Aboriginal Children. The need for policy coordination and collaboration across jurisdictions is also a common theme in urban Aboriginal policy-making. A review of urban Aboriginal policy-making in Western Canada led one witness to conclude:

... we have found there are ways to work within the silo system; there are ways to work across the silo system. We've suggested it's imperative that decision-makers allow officials to work in a way that doesn't remove the accountability that has to exist in the public service, but at the same time allows them to be creative and innovative, to break down the silos, to pool their funds, and to work across mandates. This all comes down to holistic approaches.²³

This requires a level of coordination which this Subcommittee believes can best be offered by the federal government:

RECOMMENDATION 1

Building on the present Urban Aboriginal Strategy, and recognizing the federal government's commitment to Aboriginal children, the Subcommittee recommends that:

- 1. the federal government should identify a government department to take responsibility for providing policy and organizational coordination among all federal departments with programs for Aboriginal people (both on and off reserve) in order to better collaborate with provincial/territorial governments and, where appropriate, municipalities²⁴;**
- 2. Aboriginal organizations, both political and those representing Aboriginal service-providers, be invited to take a proactive participatory role in such an initiative; and**
- 3. a key output of this initiative be the creation of an integrated federal policy and program framework for the development of**

²³ SCYR, *Evidence*, Mr. Calvin Hanselmann (Canada West Foundation) February 12, 2003, (1650).

²⁴ The Subcommittee recognizes that municipalities fall under provincial jurisdiction, and chooses not to be prescriptive in defining when it might be appropriate to involve the municipalities in urban Aboriginal intergovernmental collaboration.

young Aboriginal children, both on and off reserve, from the prenatal period to age twelve.

BUILDING ON EXISTING EXPERTISE IN THE URBAN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

Aboriginal people in Canada are represented by a large number of political organizations, both at the national and provincial/territorial levels, which represent particular identity-based segments of the population: First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and non-Status persons, as well as groups Aboriginal women within those groups. There are also many organizations which provide services to urban Aboriginal people. While the National Association of Friendship Centres has the largest network of urban Aboriginal service centres in Canada, services are provided by many organizations which may or may not have affiliation to a national organization, such as schools, native health centres, non-profit housing providers, community organizations and Aboriginal child welfare services.

The Subcommittee has heard that, while it is important to have Aboriginal political organizations at the table when programs are being developed for urban Aboriginal children, these political organizations do not always have a comprehensive understanding of service delivery issues. As a result, it was suggested that more appropriate programs would emerge if Aboriginal service-providers were invited to participate in the development of programs and evaluation frameworks. While we recognize that it is difficult for government departments to select which service-providers should be consulted, we feel that it is possible to identify organizations with service-delivery expertise of relevance to any given program area.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Subcommittee recommends that all federal government departments with programs for urban Aboriginal families and children ensure that urban Aboriginal service-providers are consulted in program development, implementation and evaluation.

URBAN ABORIGINAL STRATEGY

In response to the growing socio-economic needs and concerns of many Aboriginal people residing in urban centres, the federal government launched the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) in 1998. The goals of the UAS were to raise awareness about the needs of urban Aboriginal people, to improve their access to federal programs and services, and to improve linkages, both among federal departments and with others partners such as provinces, municipalities, and the private sector. The UAS was renewed for a two year period in the 2003 budget, with \$17 million allocated to pilot projects to explore new ways to better meet the needs of Aboriginal people living in urban centres. Pilot projects are being developed around specific issues identified by each of the eight participating cities.

We have heard evidence on the importance of early childhood development programs in setting the foundation for future health and well-being of children and supporting parents. In an earlier submission to this Subcommittee, Dr. Fraser Mustard emphasized the importance of the preschool years in brain development and the effect of the early years on future health, learning and behaviour. He identified the need to expand and integrate resources for early childhood development and parenting centres in Aboriginal communities and for Aboriginal children in urban centres. This idea was reinforced by other witnesses before this Subcommittee, some of whom expounded a vision of services built around a “hub” of children’s services such as child care and community schools:

I am becoming increasingly convinced that Aboriginal communities are very ready to mobilize around the well-being of children from zero to 12 years old. Their programs that focus on children’s well-being are effective hubs for multisectoral service delivery. Early childhood care programs, such as Aboriginal Headstart, are good core elements, and the community schools model is brilliant at the six- to 12-year-old level, and beyond, in mobilizing community involvement. I think strategies to mobilize community involvement are crucial.²⁵

That’s generally what we were recommending with a community school model that would include embracing early childhood education as well as elementary-secondary programming, and wrapping services around the early childhood and the K to12 system, bringing in health and the dental stuff that was mentioned, as well as social services, trying to deal with issues before they blow up, so that you can intervene before things have gone too far and end up in family breakdown.²⁶

The high proportion and deep poverty of single parents in urban Aboriginal communities would make early childhood development programs and community schools natural sites around which to mobilize services. We believe that, given the high level of mobility of Aboriginal children, the development of multi-sectoral hubs in urban areas would also benefit children in rural settings. Given the significant barriers to accessing services described earlier in this report, we feel that the Urban Aboriginal Strategy provides an ideal opportunity to bring together service-providers who work with Aboriginal children in order to capitalize on these services as a “hook” for connecting people to appropriate programs and a “hub” around which those services can be organized.²⁷

The Government, in its response to *Building on Success*, committed to support a number of pilot projects in order to demonstrate and assess key aspects of horizontal coordination and integration in early childhood development programming on reserves. We feel that the Urban Aboriginal Strategy provides an opportunity to expand this coordination in the area of services for urban Aboriginal children.

²⁵ SCYR, *Evidence*, Dr. Jessica Ball (University of Victoria), April 9, 2003, (1630).

²⁶ SCYR, *Evidence*, Ms. Christa Williams (First Nations Education Steering Committee), April 9, 2003, (1650).

²⁷ The concept of the early childhood development as a “hook” and “hub” was presented in the testimony of Dr. Jessica Ball, the Coordinator of the First Nations Partnership Programs and Professor in the School of Child Care and Youth Care at the University of Victoria.

RECOMMENDATION 3

We recommend that steps be taken to build a pilot project around services for children in the Urban Aboriginal Strategy pilot projects.

- 1. Recognizing that pilot projects are community driven, we urge the Privy Council Office to engage representatives of children's services to preliminary meetings in cities where the pilot projects have not yet been defined. These would include, among others, Child and Family services, early childhood development services, and schools.**
- 2. Acknowledging the difficulties confronted by many urban Aboriginal parents in moving between areas of federal and provincial jurisdiction, we further recommend that the evaluation of the Urban Aboriginal Strategy pilot projects include indicators of increased collaboration on jurisdiction and resourcing issues related to programming and funding for children with complex needs, such as children with disabilities and children with emotional and/or medical needs. We also recommend that evaluation of the pilot projects examine to what extent the funding results in concrete, meaningful outcomes for urban Aboriginal families.**
- 3. The Subcommittee has heard about the importance of ensuring that collaborative projects remain community-based and work toward outcomes defined by communities. We would therefore urge the Privy Council Office to ensure that community partners in the Urban Aboriginal Strategy pilot projects play a key role in defining the strategy and outcomes upon which the pilot projects will be evaluated.**
- 4. The Subcommittee urges the Privy Council Office to work with its federal government partners to adopt, at a national level, the collaborative practices between federal government departments which might emerge from the pilot projects.**

PUBLIC POLICY CHALLENGES

While the need for policy and jurisdictional collaboration and consultation were important themes arising in our study of urban Aboriginal children, we also heard about specific challenges in a variety of service areas, including health care, child welfare, education, culture, and disability supports.

Health

Last year, Statistics Canada released findings of the Canadian Community Health Survey on the health status, health behaviours and health care utilization of the Aboriginal population living off reserve in cities and towns across the country. These findings indicated that urban Aboriginal people were in poorer health than the non-Aboriginal population.²⁸ We heard that the health and well-being of children is closely related to the health and well-being of parents, emphasizing the need to look at holistic programs which address the needs of parents while providing services to foster healthy development in their children.

Child Welfare

The child welfare system generally refers to the public social services which protects children from neglect, abuse, and exploitation and promotes the well-being of children. This includes measures such as prevention programs, and voluntary and forced removal of children at risk. We heard that Aboriginal children are significantly over-represented in the child welfare system. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) estimates that Aboriginal children are four to six times more likely than their non-Aboriginal counterparts to come into the care of child welfare. Of greater concern is the fact that the number of Aboriginal children in the care of child and family services continues to increase dramatically. A report released by the DIAND indicates that rate of on-reserve registered Indian children in care increased from 4% in 1994-1995 to 6% in 2000-2001.²⁹

It is widely accepted that we are witnessing the intergenerational affects of past interventions in Aboriginal families, including the residential school system and the large-scale apprehension of Aboriginal children by the child welfare authorities beginning in the 1950s. We heard that this has resulted in an erosion of parenting skills, particularly those based on traditional knowledge and culture. Witnesses told us that there are not enough prevention programs to support urban Aboriginal parents or to prepare families for reunification with their children; that specialized services available to children in foster care are not available to them when they live with their biological parents; and that there are not enough services available for those who voluntarily seek support to avoid situations of abuse.

Expressing frustration with the lack of financial support for prevention services, one witness noted:

²⁸ Statistics Canada, *The Daily*. August 27, 2002.

²⁹ Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. *Basic Departmental Data 2001*, p. 41.

*If we continue to try to deal with the issues of Aboriginal children and youth by simply dealing with the services that manage symptomatic versus etiological causes, we'll be sitting here in another 30 years with those tragic numbers before us.*³⁰

We heard about prevention programs which must turn aside teenage single mothers in crisis because they do not have the staff resources to provide support. Staff from a group foster home told us that they do not have enough resources to work with parents to help them build the necessary skills to be reunited with their children. We heard that children are being placed in child welfare services in order to access specialized disability support services which are not funded for biological families. One witness who works in the foster care system noted:

*In terms of the counselling, you can put a child into care and they get counselling immediately, but when a biological parent is looking for those sources or that funding to maintain their own family and keep it together, it's not available to them.*³¹

Generally, the federal government funds child welfare services for Aboriginal children on reserve while the provincial and territorial governments provide funding for off-reserve services. Although there has been a shift over the past decade toward Aboriginal control of child welfare services on reserve, resulting in over a hundred First Nations Child and Family Service agencies, these services must comply with federal and provincial statutes. In an effort to make child welfare services increasingly culturally appropriate, there has been mounting pressure to recognize First Nations governance and jurisdiction over child welfare services.

The Subcommittee was pleased to hear that some First Nations Child and Family Service agencies are gaining jurisdiction in urban areas. In some cities, fully delegated urban Aboriginal child and family services agencies are being incorporated. The Child Welfare Initiative being undertaken by the province of Manitoba will soon allow urban Aboriginal families in that province to be served by an Aboriginal family service agency. The province will authorize a First Nations child welfare agency to provide child welfare services off-reserve for First Nations families, and recognize the authority of a province-wide Métis child welfare organization to provide services to its constituents.

Some Aboriginal children are sent outside of their reserve communities in foster care services. The Subcommittee heard that preventative early childhood development services on-reserve can provide the necessary support to on-reserve families to prevent Aboriginal children from being placed in foster care:

³⁰ SCYR, *Evidence*, Ms. Cindy Blackstock (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada), March 26, 2003, (1540).

³¹ SCYR, *Evidence*, Ms. Claudette DeWitt (Ben Calf Robe Society), March 19, 2003, (1610).

What we've been able to see in the research I'm doing is that some of the children who might have gone into child protection services and been moved off-reserve into foster homes temporarily or indefinitely have been able to stay in the community because of the ladder of services that are available through the elaboration of an ECD (Early childhood development) as-hub model.³²

Thus, the quality of child and family services on reserve has impacts on the number of children who must leave their reserves to be placed in foster care outside their communities. Several witnesses have stressed the need to strengthen preventative measures in order to curb the increase in the number of Aboriginal children in care. This observation was also noted in the final report of the *First Nations Child and Family Services Joint National Policy Review* conducted by the Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Child and Family Service (FNSFS) Agency representatives and the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.³³ As FNCFS agencies build capacity, with some of their mandates expanding to urban areas, and sensitive to the devastating impacts of previous disruptions of Aboriginal families,

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Subcommittee reiterates the recommendation in the *First Nations Child and Family Services Joint National Policy Review* that the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) funding formulas to First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) agencies be reconsidered in order to recognize the importance of preventative services, alternative programs, and least disruptive/intrusive measures for children at risk. It is further recommended that the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development seek funding to support such programming as part of agency funding.

Education

Early childhood education services for Aboriginal children in urban areas is provided through Health Canada's Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities. While the federal government is responsible for funding First Nations schools on reserve, approximately 40% of on-reserve Aboriginal children attend provincial schools outside the reserve. The federal government transfers funding to the provincial schools for these services. Aboriginal children who live off-reserve are the responsibility of the provincial school system without reimbursement from the federal government.

The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada (DIAND) established a National Working Group on Education to take an in-depth look at the state

³² SCYR, *Evidence*, Ms. Jessica Ball (University of Victoria), April 9, 2003, (1645).

³³ McDonald, Dr. Rose-Alma and Dr. Peter Ladd, et. al. *First Nations Child and Family Services Joint National Policy Review Final Report*. Assembly of First Nations/Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. June 2000, p. 120.

of First Nation education in Canada in 2002. The Working Group submitted its report, *Our Children-Keepers of the Sacred Knowledge* in December 2002. While the majority of recommendations pertained to DIAND's Elementary/Secondary Education Program, some of the issues identified also have bearing on the education of urban Aboriginal children. These include a marked under-representation of Aboriginal people in the teaching profession, racism in schools, and the marginalisation of First Nations people in the school curricula.

In urban areas, accommodations for the needs of Aboriginal children in the school system vary widely between cities. While some jurisdictions have established Aboriginal schools, and some have implemented initiatives to create more positive learning environment for Aboriginal children, others have no special provisions for their Aboriginal students. There are no guidelines in place, at present, to provide Aboriginal-specific services in off-reserve schools where these might be warranted by high levels of enrollment by Aboriginal children.

Maintaining Cultural Identity

The Subcommittee heard repeatedly that maintaining the cultural identity of urban Aboriginal children and their families is key to promoting self-esteem, particularly in the context of a society where their culture is not validated. Many witnesses raised the need for culturally appropriate programs, delivered by Aboriginal service-providers in areas such as child and family services, early childhood education, and recreational supports.

... very few of those targeted prevention services delivered to Aboriginal children and youth are culturally based or culturally appropriate despite the high, disproportionate numbers of Aboriginal children and youth in the care system. It's critical that these programs be designed and run by people who understand the languages, culture, and traditions of those they are helping.³⁴

Disability

The rate of disability for Aboriginal people is twice as high as for non-Aboriginal Canadians. For youth between 15-24, the rate is three times that of non-Aboriginal youth.

There are estimates that the rate of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is between three and thirty times higher among Aboriginal children than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Witnesses have told the Subcommittee that not all jurisdictions recognize FAS as a disability, thus making it impossible for some children with FAS to access support services.

The challenges facing Aboriginal children with disabilities have been identified in the past yet continue to exist. The 1996 Federal Task Force on Disability noted that "the

³⁴ SCYR, Ms. Cindy Blackstock (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada) March 26, 2003, (1540).

lack of disability-related services available on-reserve often forces Aboriginal peoples to abandon their communities in search of supports. Once off-reserve, Aboriginal persons with a disability face jurisdictional barriers in accessing these supports and services.” This Subcommittee has also heard that many Aboriginal children with disabilities are placed in child welfare services in order to access supports which are not available to their biological families.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS SUPPORTING URBAN ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

Witnesses spoke very highly of federal government programs which are providing services to urban Aboriginal children, including the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities program, the Community Action Plan for Children (CAPC) and Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP). They urged us to recognize the value of programs that support the physical, educational, cultural and spiritual development of Aboriginal children throughout their childhood.

Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities

Initiated by Health Canada in 1995, Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities is an early intervention program for Aboriginal children aged zero to six and their families. The program centres on preschool projects that include components of culture and language, education, health promotion, nutrition, social support programs and parental involvement. We heard that this program meets only a small proportion of the need for Aboriginal preschool children, currently providing spaces for 3,500 children across the country. A funding increase in the 2003-2004 fiscal year will result in an additional 1,000 spaces in this program, however this will still fall far short of the demand in most Western Canadian urban centres.

Research in early childhood education and care has consistently demonstrated that quality programming is strongly correlated to the wages, education, and retention of staff. The Subcommittee was concerned to learn that funding for the Aboriginal Head Start program was not indexed, resulting in erosion in real value of funding over the funding period.

In terms of a prioritization of the money, our first priority and certainly the major priority of our Aboriginal advisory committee is to stop the rust-out of the existing programs. They haven't had increases for a number of years. Inflation is eating away at their ability to pay rent, to pay for utilities, to pay and attract staff, and to keep staff in these programs.³⁵

The combined effects of high population growth and inflationary pressures has resulted in a slow erosion of the Aboriginal Head Start Program. We consistently heard

³⁵ SCYR, *Evidence*, Mr. Gary Ledoux (Health Canada) January 29, 2003, (1640).

praise of the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities program, however we are concerned that the need is not being met by current funding. Although the recently announced increase is commendable, it will still meet the needs of only a small proportion of the urban Aboriginal child population.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Recognizing the value of the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities Program in promoting culturally-relevant early childhood development, we recommend that:

- 1. funding for the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities Program be increased, particularly in those urban areas where current programs have lengthy waiting lists.**
- 2. funding for the existing Aboriginal Head Start programs be indexed to inflation so that these programs may have the capacity to maintain a consistent level of service throughout the lifespan of the project.**

Community Action Plan for Children (CAPC) and Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP)

Delivered through Health Canada regional offices, the Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) funds community-based coalitions to establish and deliver services that address the developmental needs of at risk children (0-6 years). Many provinces have allocated CAPC funding specifically for Aboriginal children.

Health Canada also provides the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP), a comprehensive community-based program that supports pregnant women who face conditions of risk that threaten their health and the development of their babies. The Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program is especially designed to meet the needs of those pregnant women most at risk for poor birth outcome, including Aboriginal women.

We heard from organization funded through these programs that they are unable to meet the demands for their services. Given the importance of the early years for future health and well-being, the lack of available support to young children and their families is particularly problematic. Therefore,

RECOMMENDATION 6

We recommend that funding for the Community Action Plan for Children (CAPC) and Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) be increased, particularly in urban areas which have high levels of urban Aboriginal people.

Gap in Services for Children Between the Ages of 6-12

It is widely accepted that the age period from 6-12 is one where children move toward social relationships outside the family unit. As a result, it is important to provide children in this age group with the necessary resources to engage in positive recreational activities outside the home.

Several witnesses noted that there was no national funding program for the recreational needs of Aboriginal children between the ages of 6 and 12. A highly successful program for this age group run by the Government of Ontario until the mid-1990s, the Little Beaver Program, was referred to on several occasions. This program was developed to address the special needs of Aboriginal children living in urban settings, recognizing that they tend not to participate in mainstream programs such as Boy Scouts or Girl Guides. The program was designed and modified over the years to produce a culturally oriented guidance and development program for children between the ages of 5 and 16. Witnesses noted the importance of this program in fostering leadership among urban Aboriginal youth, and spoke eloquently to the notable difference in the engagement of young people who have grown out without this support.

We now have programming within the Head Starts, and the CAPC programs, and the CPNP programs that will cover zero to six³⁶. Then we have our UMACs, the youth centres which cover from 13 to 24. We have absolutely no programming in any of the friendship centres of the urban areas from six to 12. That gap, that program used to be a prevention program, and it used to help to keep our kids off the street. It used to teach them how to stay away from the things that would interrupt their lives such as drugs and alcohol. Now there's a gap in that six-to-12 age group where they have no programming whatsoever within our friendship centre. It's become a definite problem.³⁷

The Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centre Initiative (UMAYC) is a five year initiative, funded through the Department of Canadian Heritage to provide Aboriginal youth with projects and activities that are culturally relevant and based in the Aboriginal Community. The goal of the UMAC initiative is to support and assist Aboriginal youth between 15-25 in enhancing their economic, social and personal prospects. Witnesses spoke highly of the impacts of this program. We would like to ensure that the benefits of cultural and recreational programs be expanded to children in the ages between the preschool programs and the UMAC.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Recognizing the importance of the middle childhood years (6-12) and the gap in programs targeted to urban Aboriginal children in this age group, we recommend that a program be developed by the

³⁶ Note that CAPC programs in Manitoba and Quebec, through a memorandum of understanding, have expanded the eligibility for the program to include services for children between the ages of 6-12.

³⁷ SCYR, *Evidence*, Mr. Rick Lobzun (Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres), February 5, 2003, (1545).

Department of Canadian Heritage for urban Aboriginal children between the ages of 6-12. Providing continuity with early childhood programs, this program should provide culturally oriented guidance and development services which provides children with experiences to develop strong personal character, a sense of accomplishment and respect, and an appreciation of Aboriginal heritage and values. This could be based on the successful Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centre (UMAYC) Initiative in the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAS/FAE) Initiative

Initial studies suggest that the rates of FAS/FAE in some Aboriginal communities may be significantly higher than in non-Aboriginal populations. The Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAS/FAE) Initiative strives to prevent FAS/FAE and to reduce its significant effects in children, families and communities. This is done through developing prevention and early intervention programming, enhancing training for service providers, developing practical screening tools and improving parent/caregiver supports to families affected by FAS/FAE.

Witnesses expressed concern that the recent funding increase for this Initiative does not put aside funding for urban Aboriginal service-providers, forcing these to compete with non-Aboriginal programs for funding to the general population. This, once again, speaks to the importance of considering the cultural relevance of programs to children in the general population, particularly where their measures of well-being lag behind those of other children.

AREAS OF JURISDICTION

RECOMMENDATION 8

The Subcommittee recommends that all the measures examined in this report be considered in light of the areas over which the provinces have direct jurisdiction, in order to confirm that they comply with the various agreements signed between the provinces and the federal government, and to ensure that there are negotiations on any future measures, such as the consolidation of children's services in daycares or schools or any negotiations concerning municipalities, that are planned by the federal government.

It is important that the federal government honour all the agreements it has already reached with the provinces and that it obtain the co-operation and the approval of the provinces, through bilateral or other types of agreements, on any future measure that might affect a provincial area of jurisdiction.

The Subcommittee would like to emphasize that the implementation of the measures addressed in this report by the federal and provincial governments must be governed by the agreement on the Social Union, signed on February 4, 1999, except in the case of Quebec which is not signatory to this agreement.

CONCLUSION

Over all, witnesses expressed a high level of appreciation for the value of federal government programs for urban Aboriginal children. The main challenges we need to confront are the adequacy of these programs, the breaking down of silos between government departments and between levels of government, and the recognition that urban Aboriginal children require programs that recognize their socio-economic and cultural realities.

The Subcommittee is heartened by the hope, strength and dedication of the urban Aboriginal community as they creatively work towards a brighter future for their children. We recognize that the federal government needs to play an important political and administrative leadership role in providing the supportive environment in which urban Aboriginal programming for children and families can flourish. The recommendations in this report are based on this premise. We give the final word to the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, who told us:

Our population is young and growing. Our children represent the workforce of tomorrow, the leaders of tomorrow, the entrepreneurs, innovators, and captains of industry. Canada's future is tied to the well-being of our children. We cannot leave them caught in a web that we designed and that we allow to exist. The well-being of our children, their children, and Canada's future hang in the balance.³⁸

³⁸ SCYR, *Evidence*, Chief Matthew Coon Come (National Chief, Assembly of First Nations), February 12, 2003, (1525).

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

Building on the present Urban Aboriginal Strategy, and recognizing the federal government's commitment to Aboriginal children, the Subcommittee recommends that:

- 1. the federal government should identify a government department to take responsibility for providing policy and organizational coordination among all federal departments with programs for Aboriginal people (both on and off reserve) in order to better collaborate with provincial/territorial governments and, where appropriate, municipalities¹;**
- 2. Aboriginal organizations, both political and those representing Aboriginal service-providers, be invited to take a proactive participatory role in such an initiative; and**
- 3. a key output of this initiative be the creation of an integrated federal policy and program framework for the development of young Aboriginal children, both on and off reserve, from the prenatal period to age twelve.**

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Subcommittee recommends that all federal government departments with programs for urban Aboriginal families and children ensure that urban Aboriginal service-providers are consulted in program development, implementation and evaluation.

RECOMMENDATION 3

We recommend that steps be taken to build a pilot project around services for children in the Urban Aboriginal Strategy pilot projects.

- 1. Recognizing that pilot projects are community driven, we urge the Privy Council Office to engage representatives of children's services to preliminary meetings in cities where the pilot projects have not yet been defined. These would include, among others, Child and Family services, early childhood development services, and schools.**
- 2. Acknowledging the difficulties confronted by many urban Aboriginal parents in moving between areas of federal and**

¹ The Subcommittee recognizes that municipalities fall under provincial jurisdiction, and chooses not to be prescriptive in defining when it might be appropriate to involve the municipalities in urban Aboriginal intergovernmental collaboration.

provincial jurisdiction, we further recommend that the evaluation of the Urban Aboriginal Strategy pilot projects include indicators of increased collaboration on jurisdiction and resourcing issues related to programming and funding for children with complex needs, such as children with disabilities and children with emotional and/or medical needs. We also recommend that evaluation of the pilot projects examine to what extent the funding results in concrete, meaningful outcomes for urban Aboriginal families.

3. The Subcommittee has heard about the importance of ensuring that collaborative projects remain community-based and work toward outcomes defined by communities. We would therefore urge the Privy Council Office to ensure that community partners in the Urban Aboriginal Strategy pilot projects play a key role in defining the strategy and outcomes upon which the pilot projects will be evaluated.
4. The Subcommittee urges the Privy Council Office to work with its federal government partners to adopt, at a national level, the collaborative practices between federal government departments which might emerge from the pilot projects.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Subcommittee reiterates the recommendation in the *First Nations Child and Family Services Joint National Policy Review* that the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) funding formulas to First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) agencies be reconsidered in order to recognize the importance of preventative services, alternative programs, and least disruptive/intrusive measures for children at risk. It is further recommended that the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development seek funding to support such programming as part of agency funding.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Recognizing the value of the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities Program in promoting culturally-relevant early childhood development, we recommend that:

1. funding for the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities Program be increased, particularly in those urban areas where current programs have lengthy waiting lists.
2. funding for the existing Aboriginal Head Start programs be indexed to inflation so that these programs may have the capacity

to maintain a consistent level of service throughout the lifespan of the project.

RECOMMENDATION 6

We recommend that funding for the Community Action Plan for Children (CAPC) and Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) be increased, particularly in urban areas which have high levels of urban Aboriginal people.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Recognizing the importance of the middle childhood years (6-12) and the gap in programs targeted to urban Aboriginal children in this age group, we recommend that a program be developed by the Department of Canadian Heritage for urban Aboriginal children between the ages of 6-12. Providing continuity with early childhood programs, this program should provide culturally oriented guidance and development services which provides children with experiences to develop strong personal character, a sense of accomplishment and respect, and an appreciation of Aboriginal heritage and values. This could be based on the successful Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centre (UMAYC) Initiative in the Department of Canadian Heritage.

RECOMMENDATION 8

The Subcommittee recommends that all the measures examined in this report be considered in light of the areas over which the provinces have direct jurisdiction, in order to confirm that they comply with the various agreements signed between the provinces and the federal government, and to ensure that there are negotiations on any future measures, such as the consolidation of children's services in daycares or schools or any negotiations concerning municipalities, that are planned by the federal government.

It is important that the federal government honour all the agreements it has already reached with the provinces and that it obtain the co-operation and the approval of the provinces, through bilateral or other types of agreements, on any future measure that might affect a provincial area of jurisdiction.

The Subcommittee would like to emphasize that the implementation of the measures addressed in this report by the federal and provincial governments must be governed by the agreement on the Social Union, signed on February 4, 1999, except in the case of Quebec which is not signatory to this agreement.

APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

Associations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Department of Health	29/01/2003	4
Richard Budgell, Manager, Division of Childhood and Adolescence, Aboriginal Childhood and Youth, Centre for Healthy Human Development, Population and Public Health Branch		
Suzette Jeannotte, Programs Coordinator, Quebec Children Unit, Quebec Region, Population and Public Health Branch		
Gary Ledoux, Regional Director, Manitoba/Saskatchewan Region, Population and Public Health Branch		
Kelly Stone, Director, Division of Childhood and Adolescence, Population and Public Health Branch		
Statistics Canada		
Doug Norris, Director general, Census and Demographic Statistics		
Congress of Aboriginal Peoples	05/02/2003	5
Deborah Wright, Consultant		
National Association of Friendship Centres		
Rick Lobzun, President		
Judith Moses, Executive Director		
“Regroupement des centres d’amitié autochtones du Québec inc.”		
Jocelyne Gros-Louis, Director General and Secretary Treasurer		
Assembly of First Nations	12/02/2003	6
Matthew Coon Come, National Chief		
Canada West Foundation		
Calvin Hanselmann, Senior Policy Analyst		
Métis National Council		
Audrey Poitras, Interim President and National Spokesperson		
Pauktuutit (Inuit Women’s Association)		
Veronica Dewar, President		
Department of Health	19/02/2003	7
Kelly Stone, Director, Division of Childhood and Adolescence, Population and Public Health Branch		

Associations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<p>Department of Human Resources Development</p> <p>Ethel Blondin-Andrew, Secretary of State (Children and Youth)</p> <p>Aron Spector, Senior Analyst, Strategic Policy Group</p> <p>Privy Council Office</p> <p>Allan MacDonald, Director, Federal Interlocutor for Metis and Non-Status Indians Division</p> <p>As an Individual</p> <p>Hon.Ralph Goodale, Minister, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians</p>	19/02/2003	7
<p>Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre Inc.</p> <p>Josie Hill, Executive Director</p> <p>Diane Redsky, Director of Programs</p> <p>Odawa Native Friendship Centre</p> <p>Jaime Koebel, Board Member</p> <p>Clifford Summers, Executive Director</p> <p>Vancouver Native Health Society</p> <p>Lou Demerais, Executive Director</p>	26/02/2003	8
<p>Ben Calf Robe Society</p> <p>Claudette DeWitt, Program Manager</p> <p>Susanne Gudmundson, Program Coordinator</p> <p>Canadian Council on Social Development</p> <p>John Anderson, Vice-President</p>	19/03/2003	9
<p>BC Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents</p> <p>Leslie Nelson, Community Coordinator</p> <p>First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada</p> <p>Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director</p> <p>Mother Bear Consulting</p> <p>Virginia Blackplume, Assistant Executive Director</p>	26/03/2003	10
<p>BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society</p> <p>Robert Harry, Executive Director</p> <p>June Wylie, Assistant Executive Director</p> <p>University of Victoria</p> <p>Michael Prince, Lansdowne Professor of Social Policy</p>	02/04/2003	11
<p>Amiskwaciy Academy</p> <p>Phyllis Cardinal, Principal</p>	09/04/2003	12

Associations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
First Nations Education Steering Committee Christa Williams, Executive Director		
University of Victoria Jessica Ball, Coordinator Alan Pence, Director		
Marymound North Kelly Ostrowski, Director	30/04/2003	13
Rainbow Youth Centre Nadine Egler-Wiome, Co-facilitator Kim Wolbaum, Coordinator	30/04/2003	13

APPENDIX B LIST OF BRIEFS

First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to the report within one hundred and fifty (150) days.

Copy of the relevant Minutes of Proceedings of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (*Meeting No. 36 which includes this report*) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Judi Longfield, M.P.
Chair

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Monday, June 11, 2003
(Meeting No. 36)

The Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities met *in camera* at 3:23 p.m. this day, in Room 209, West Block, the Chair, Judi Longfield, presiding.

Members of the Committee present: Eugène Bellemare, John Finlay, Monique Guay, Ovid Jackson, Judi Longfield, Gurbax Malhi, Larry McCormick, Raymond Simard, Monte Solberg and Larry Spencer.

Acting Members present: John Godfrey for Diane St-Jacques, Reed Elley for Jim Gouk and Sébastien Gagnon for Suzanne Tremblay.

Other Member present: Wendy Lill.

In attendance: From the Library of Parliament: Chantal Collin, Kevin Kerr, William Young and Julie Cool, research officers.

The Committee resumed consideration of its draft report on literacy.

It was agreed, — That the final report on “Building a Brighter Future for Urban Aboriginal Children” be adopted as the Fourth report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

It was agreed, — That the Clerk be authorized to make such editorial and typographical changes as necessary without changing the substance of the report.

It was agreed, — That the Chair be authorized to table the report in the House.

It was agreed, — That the Committee print 350 copies of its report in a bilingual format.

It was agreed, — That, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee request that the government provide a comprehensive response to this report within one hundred and fifty (150) days.

It was agreed, — That the final report on “Listening to Canadians: A First View of the Future of the Canada Pension Plan (Disability) Program” be adopted as the Fifth Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

It was agreed, — That the Clerk be authorized to make such editorial and typographical changes as necessary without changing the substance of the report.

It was agreed, — That the Chair be authorized to table the report in the House.

It was agreed, — That the Committee print 550 copies of its report in a bilingual format.

It was agreed, — That, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee request that the government provide a comprehensive response to this report within one hundred and fifty (150) days.

It was agreed, — That a letter be sent to Minister Stewart regarding recommendations for Main Estimates.

It was agreed, — That the press release as amended on the literacy report be adopted.

At 3:45 p.m., the Committee adjourned to the call of the Chair.

Danielle Belisle
Clerk of the Committee