



Circles for Reconciliation Gathering Theme

The Sixties Scoop and the Child Welfare System

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The effects of the “Sixties Scoop” and the child welfare system that we know today are tied to the history of the residential school system in Canada.

The failures of the residential school system influenced some changes in the late 1950s and 1960s. One major turning point occurred after changes to the *Indian Act* in 1951 when more power was transferred to the provinces to remove children from their families. Increasingly, children were still being taken from their homes, often without notice and apprehended by social workers inside the provincial child welfare systems.

In 1951, there were twenty-nine Aboriginal children in provincial care in British Columbia. By 1964 that number had risen to 1,466. Aboriginal children, who had comprised only 1 percent of all children in care, came to make up just over 34 percent.

In the 1960s, the child welfare system did not require, nor did it expect, social workers to have specific training in dealing with children in Aboriginal communities. Many of these social workers were completely unfamiliar with the culture or history of the Aboriginal communities they entered. What they believed constituted proper care was generally based on middle-class non-Indigenous values. For example, when social workers entered the homes of families who were subsisting on a traditional Aboriginal diet, and who didn't have their home stocked in a typical settler fashion, the social workers often assumed that the children were not being adequately provided for. Additionally, upon seeing the social problems reserve communities faced, such as poverty, unemployment, and addiction, social workers felt a duty to protect the local children. In many cases, Aboriginal parents who were living in poverty but otherwise providing caring homes had their children taken from them with little or no warning and absolutely no consent. In fact, it was not until 1980 that the *Child, Family and Community Services Act* required social workers to notify the band council if an Aboriginal child was removed from the community (Hanson, 2019).

Thousands of Indigenous children were adopted out of their homes, and in many cases ‘scooped’ without any prior notice to the parents or families. Children were often adopted out of the province and into the United States. There are continuing efforts today to reunite family members who were ‘scooped’ away into adoptive families. The ongoing impacts of forced separation from their parents and families continue to impact individuals and extended families today.

Many adoptive families and parents loved and cared for the children ‘scooped’ from their homes in the 1960s, 70s and 80s ‘Scoop’. There are also countless cases of children who were abused, exploited and discriminated against in their adoptive homes. While the treatment of children varied from family to family, the children are united in the shared impacts on their connections to culture, identity and languages. In addition, the Sixties Scoop and the present-day child welfare system for First Nations and Aboriginal children is a story of a deeply broken system. A system that is quite like the residential schools, regularly underfunded with a dangerously low level of support for children, workers and families. It was a system designed to fail. Presently, the number of children currently in foster care far exceeds the number of children who attended the residential schools at the height of the schools’ operation.

In 2016, following a 10-year legal battle, the First Nations Caring Society won a case in front of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. The Tribunal found that the child welfare system for First Nations children living on reserve is clearly discriminating against First Nations children in care especially, but also when it comes to providing health care for First Nations communities. While the operation of the child welfare system has experienced changes since the 1960s, it remains a critical failure in upholding basic rights, support for health and for the well-being of Indigenous children in Canada.

Please see the First Nations Caring Society for additional resources and information on their advocacy work on behalf of First Nations and Indigenous children in care.

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