

Keeping the Sash Around the Family: A Look at Metis Child, Family and Community Services

Metis Child and Family Services, in an ongoing effort to strengthen families in the Metis community, have designed/developed various programs to help meet the needs of our Metis children and families. In previous issues of *Le Metis*, we have profiled the different programs that the Metis Child and Family Services Agency have to offer. We now offer a recap of those programs and a preview of the future plans of the MCFS.

Bernice Cyr, Chief Executive Office of Metis Child and Family Services Authority is enthusiastic about the successes of the agency. "From creation to delivery, the services provided by the MCFCFS have been influenced by Metis culture. Now more than ever, our programming is tailored to meet the unique needs of the Metis families living in Manitoba. By building on the established methods of the Metis people, MCFCFS has affected the type of positive change needed by so many young Manitobans."

For most people, involvement with child and family services ends when they turn 18. But the staff at the Metis Child, Family and Community Services Agency recognizes that when youth transition into adulthood, it does not mean that they no longer require help and guidance.

The Metis Spirit Program provides services to young adults aged 18 to 21 who have aged out of the care of the MCFCFS but still need some direction and support. The program provides them with the resources they need to be sustainable in day-to-day living, by teaching them how to set and achieve goals for the future.

Some services they offer young adults include ongoing life skill development, emotional support, support in managing critical incidents and crises, advocacy, assistance with accessing community resources and the development of support networks. The Metis Spirit Program also helps them find employment and encourages the pursuit of further educational opportunities.

"Whether they need help with housing, employment or education, we'll be there to assist them," says Dianne Cross,

the agency's Metis Spirit Worker. "The program doesn't do the work for them, but it will guide them. Some need us to walk beside them and others, to walk behind them so they know that we're there. Each person is different and their needs are very unique."

A lot of youth, not just Metis youth, have a difficult time transitioning from teenagers into young adults. This program is in place to help them acquire and develop the skills needed to progress with their lives as adults in the near future. Some people need a small push, some need a little more time to fully comprehend that there are certain responsibilities when becoming an adult.

The Metis Child, Family and Community Services Agency recognizes that children do best when their family is strong, that's why they have implemented a differential response pilot project in Winnipeg.

Differential response is changing the way in which families are approached following a report of mistreatment towards a child. And, allows the staff to provide supportive services that focus on the overall needs of the family and the wellbeing of the children. "A real benefit of differential response is that it recognizes that every family is unique and therefore, the agency's response (to each family) has to be unique as well," says Differential Response Coordinator Bill Nadurak.

Differential response takes a strength-based approach, focusing on families' specific strengths, collaborating with extended family and identifying available resources and areas parents may want to work on. "It's a different approach to providing outside assistance," says Nadurak. "We are really focusing on the importance of extended family and are looking at ways of involving them in the planning process."

Another element of the agency's differential response programming are its family unity circles, which allow families and staff to collaborate in developing helpful, meaningful case plans for the family. "Our cultural worker brings families together in circles, following some of the traditional ideas of what a

sharing circle looks like and bringing together all of the important people in someone's life," says Nadurak. "Everyone is equal and has a chance to share what is important to them and what is needed for the children."

Differential response realizes that it's not always the parents that are the main influence in a child's life. By using all the information made available to the program and the child through extended family and in some cases friends of the family. Working with any and every possible resource that they can find to help out a child, and that child's family.

The Family Enhancement Program is an innovative plan that provides an alternative way to return children to their parents. When the parents have rehabilitated their lives and made the necessary changes that help demonstrate their new found capability to parent.

The program returns children to their parents in a supported living environment, matching them with a specialized foster parent with whom they will live and who will provide support, coaching and mentoring. "The foster parent essentially assists them in learning to parent again," says Ingrid Inglis, the agency's Residential Resource Development Coordinator.

Joined by the Program Coordinator and a Treatment Worker, the foster parent and the biological parents attend weekly support sessions together, allowing the parents to actively participate in parenting decisions. During the support sessions the parents receive the additional aid they need to make the changes necessary to resolve their parenting issues, and build on their existing strengths. They will also attend several workshops and training sessions together, learning about issues that are specific to their circumstances.

Metis Child, Family and Community Services is addressing tough issues surrounding the children and families in their care. Through countless hours of dedication and hard work, the MCFCFS has brought some needed stability and support to the people they care for. No matter what the struggles Metis children, youth and families are facing, MCFCFS and their specific programs hope to support them in achieving the best possible outcomes for their futures.

Le Metis, the MMF and Metis Child and Family Services hope to delve even deeper into programs offered by the MCFCFS in future months, supplying information including more articles and video posted on the MMF website. ▲



MMF Minister of Economic Development helps out at Metis Days in Selkirk by flipping burgers for a hungry throng.