

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

Once a month, we will profile a different program of the Metis Child, Family and Community Services (MCFCS) Agency, an MMF affiliate. This month, we look at the agency's differential response programming.

Recognizing that children do best when their family is strong, the Metis Child, Family and Community Services Agency has implemented a differential response pilot project in Winnipeg, with another scheduled to start in the Parklands region in the new year.

"It's a pretty exciting time in Metis child and family services," says differential response coordinator Bill Nadurak. "When we saw some of the concepts of differential response, we thought it was a natural fit for the direction the agency is going, and it was consistent with our principles and values around the work we're doing with families."

Differential response changes the way in which families are approached following a report of child maltreatment 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 Nadurak.

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

Another component 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."

The circles also expand families' access to other support networks. "Our cultural worker is connecting families to community resources in the Metis communities and teaching them some traditional ways around family functioning and living," he says.

Over the past year, a strength needs assessment tool was also developed to help identify families' strengths and individual needs, as staff recognize that change occurs on building on those strengths. On the same note, the agency's Red River Cart Interactive Tool empowers families by actively engaging them in identifying and reflecting on their strengths and areas they want to develop.

"We're really hoping our families working with the differential response projects feel supported, and perhaps more importantly, feel that they have a strong voice and they're an integral part of the planning," he continues. "It's really a team effort, with the family being at the centre and part of the team."

For more information, visit the agency's website at www.metiscfs.mb.ca. Watch for another feature about an MCFCS program in the next edition of *Le Metis*!