

**Report on an Incomplete Inquiry into Outreach Supports and Services  
in Readaptation Services**

**Conducted within the  
Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay**

**Thom Garfat, PhD.**

**Introduction**

In the summer of 2001, the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB) began to consider the development of an outreach services and support program within the Readaptation Services division. The intent of the Outreach Service, if implemented, would be to:

- Provide supports to young people and families in individual communities to prevent the placement of the young person in group living programs,
- Provide in-home support to the families of youth residing in the Reception Centre and Group Homes, with a view towards increasing the likelihood of successful re-integration of the young person, and
- Support families during the period of transition of the youth from living in group care to moving back to his/her home or community.

While there were certainly a number of models to draw on from previously developed programs, especially in 'southern' environments, the majority of those programs were developed in different cultural contexts. The CBHSSJB was not certain that the simple transposition of a program from another setting or another culture would be appropriate to the Cree communities of northern Quebec. In order to ensure that any program developed would meet the needs of those communities, and would be seen as appropriate to the families, culture, and realities of the Cree people, it was decided to make an inquiry into what supports and services would be seen and experienced as appropriate by the people who might use them; specifically the youth, families and service delivery personnel.

Unfortunately, the full inquiry was not completed due to the inability of the contracted interviewer to complete the required interviews with young people and families who were initially identified as the informants for this inquiry. Once the file reviews (described later in this report) were complete, it was necessary to complete the interviews within a reasonable period of time in order to ensure that the interview captured the participants experience while it was still considered fresh enough for recall. For a variety of reasons, the interviews were postponed a number of times and finally it was felt that this project of inquiry could not continue. This report, therefore, summarizes the process and outcome of this process of inquiry up until the time the research was cancelled in the spring of 2004. This report serves primarily, then, as a documentation of process for the records.

### **Developing the Proposal for the Inquiry**

Initially, the CBHSSJB in conjunction with Public Health developed a proposal to implement a small family outreach service based on existing models in one of the nine communities, and to evaluate the effectiveness of that service. However, after reflection it was decided that to do so would be based on the assumption that one could simply transpose a service from a different (southern) community in to the Cree culture. It was therefore proposed that before implementing any service, an inquiry should be conducted involving:

- Youth who had lived in one of the group living programs
- The families of those youth
- The youth protection workers who had referred the youth to the group living programs
- The program staff who had worked with them.
- Other key informants in the communities from which the youth came.

The purpose of the inquiry would be to investigate and identify the supports and services seen as appropriate to help Cree young people and families avoid placement and/or successfully reintegrate following placement. Consultation with the consumers of a service, and the community, before developing modifications to a service or developing new services would also be in agreement with the values of the CBHSSJB.

As a result of these considerations, the original proposal was re-designed to become such an inquiry (see Appendix I). It was also decided at the same time to design the inquiry in such a manner as to provide the organization with needed information on the population of youth and families who were referred to the group living programs, information which was, at that time, lacking in the statistical gathering of the agency.

The inquiry was to involve direct interviews with young people, their families, Childcare staff, and referring workers. As well a survey of the perceived needs as identified by Youth Protection Workers and other key informants would be included. The interviews would revolve around the following questions:

- What were the characteristics of the youth and families who were placed to the Reception Centre since its opening?
- What services *were available and were used* to support, or intervene with, the families, (in helping them to reach the goals of intervention) while the youth were in placement?
- What services or supports, *if they had been available*, would have been seen as being helpful to the youth and family, (in helping them to reach the goals of intervention) while the youth was in placement?
- What services or supports, if they had been available, might have allowed the youth to remain in the family or the community, while still reaching the goals of intervention?

The proposal called for a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Quantitative data would include information gathered from the client files using a structured format to identify:

- characteristics of young people placed in the program(s)
- characteristics of the families of these young people
- the supports and services which were available to and/or utilized by the young person and their families at the time of placement

- the supports and services available to and/or utilized by the young people and their families during the period of placement
- the supports and services available to and/or utilized by young people and their families following placement.

As all file information is recorded in English, the analysis and reporting of the file information would be in English.

Qualitatively, using an approach grounded in phenomenological inquiry (Chambers, 1993; Garfat, 1998), interviews and conversations would be conducted with young people, families and service providers to elicit:

- their experience and descriptions of the services they received
- their descriptions of services which, in their experience, would have been helpful either to avoid placement or during the period of placement

### **Developing an Approach to the Interviews**

While the revised proposal defined a focus for the inquiry and an outline of an approach, an opportunity presented itself to define and pilot test an approach to gathering the qualitative information. The CGHSSJB had for a number of years been offering an MSW program for many of its workers and small group of those students, who were also working Cree professionals, needed to complete a make-up course in research. It was decided that the course, as well as teaching about research and research methodologies, would also include a limited research experience. Specifically, the students would review the proposal, design the research questions and approach and pilot test the questions and interview approach with a small group of young people and families. The intent of the pilot was to test the interview approach and to revise the approach for further use.

As Mishler (1986) has indicated, interviews are essentially speech events, “particular types of discourse regulated and guided by norms of appropriateness and relevance that are part of a speakers’ shared linguistic competencies as members of a community”

which should allow for “the joint construction of the discourse by interviewees and interviewers” (p. 137). Such an approach allows for the definition of required services and supports to be defined in the experiential language of the persons interviewed and avoid the pitfalls inherent in pre-conceived checklists of services. The resulting data is, therefore, grounded in the lived experience (van Manen, 1990) of the participants. Thus, the intention was that the interviews, while addressing the question areas identified above, would strive to be conversational; a discourse between members of a shared community. All interviews and conversations would therefore be conducted taking in to consideration cultural and social customs and expectations. Because the students were themselves Cree speaking, the interviews would be conducted in the Cree language and then translated in to English for the purpose of analysis and reporting. This would allow for the maximization of cultural comfort and relaxation for all participants.

In the end, three female student professionals interviewed a total of 4 young people, 3 parents and a group of 5 Youth Protection Workers as a part of the development of the design for the inquiry. These interviews, as well as providing information for final revisions to the proposed inquiry, also helped in ensuring that the approach itself was appropriate for the culture within which the inquiry was to occur.

As a result of this process, the initial questions for the interview were redefined as follows. The reader will observe how the questions had become more ‘conversational’ in nature as a result of this process of consultation with students, who were also members of the communities to be surveyed. The more formal language of the initial questions was determined by the students to be likely to close, rather than open, the doors to conversation.

- When your child was in placement, what was that like for you?
- Did you get any help or support for yourself or your family while (your child) was in placement?
- If yes, what kind? From where?
- Are there things (supports/services) which would have been helpful to you or your family while (your child) was in placement?

- Are there things (supports, services, programs) which would have helped (your child) stay at home or in the community instead of going in to placement?

The students, in conjunction with the supervisor (author of this report), also designed a basic approach to the process of the interviews as follows:

- First Contacts (feeling the rightness of time and place)
- Introductions (self, other, research, rights, confidentiality, research)
- Settling In (making connections, relaxing in to the conversation, assessing willingness, being with the participant)
- Starting the Conversation (the questions)
- Being Real and Present (sharing, reacting, attending)
- Staying on Track (using this outline)
- Dealing with Whatever Comes Up (Using skills and knowledge)
- Ending the Conversation (creating closure)
- Follow-up (touching base, referral, data writing)

### **The Pilot Interviews: Preparing for Collecting the Quantitative Data**

As mentioned above, three female student professionals interviewed a total of 4 young people, 3 parents and a group of 5 Youth Protection Workers as a part of the development of the design for the inquiry. Like any qualitative interviewing, these interviews, or conversations as they were finally defined, provided more information than was initially expected. It was common, for example, for participants to want to share more of their experiences than was sought by the initial questions. Some participants also were stimulated by the discussion to share details of their own history and experiences of the residential schools, and had difficulty in focusing on their recent experience of the residential placement of the youth. This was true for family members, and professionals interviewed during the pilot study. For some of the adults, for example, memories of their own experiences of residential schools surfaced, thoughts about the changes in their culture and community were evoked, and feelings as a parent were revealed. Such is the experience of an inquiry of this nature.

While it is impossible to draw specific data information from such a limited pilot interview experience, there are some factors which appeared in common across the various interviews, and they are mentioned here, not because they represent valid ‘data’ for the purpose of this incomplete inquiry, but rather because of how they might have been used to shape the final interview sequences. Of particular note were the following:

- A number of participants felt that the system they had encountered was more formally structured than was necessary. The implication seemed to be that the ‘system’ was structured according to ‘southern’ values which did not always reflect the realities of the Cree culture. The ‘system’ felt foreign to them.
- A number of participants indicated that had they had greater opportunity to ‘talk’ about things – i.e., their family situation – especially with those considered elders in their communities, the situation might have been resolved, or at least easier to deal manage.
- The parents interviewed felt disconnected with their young person while they were in placement.

The information from this pilot project did not so much provide data for the inquiry, as much as it provided information to help shape the approach to the inquiry. The fact that so many memories and feelings of personal issues arose for the students suggested that the inquiry interviews would be difficult for the interviewer and the interviewer(s) would therefore need to be a person able to deal with her own business as it arose (In fact one of the students was unable to complete the interviews because of the nature of personal issues which arose). The fact that the participants to the pilot study felt that the ‘system’ was too formal, and not structured according to Cree values, spoke to the way in which the interviews would need to be approached. As one of the students commented, it would often not be possible on the first meeting to ask the questions of the inquiry, because such a direct approach would be experienced as culturally inconsistent by the parents and youth. The interviewer, then, would need to be prepared to visit participants more than once in order to allow time for a relationship of such a disclosing nature to be developed.

Because the parents had experienced disconnection with their young person while she/he was in care, the interviewer would need as well to be prepared to deal with the issues of anger and disappointment which would arise.

Thus, we see that the experience of interviewing people, especially the parents, about the issues of having the young person in placement, would have been a very powerfully personal experience for both the participants and the interviewer(s). In a culture in which so many lives were so seriously impacted by the experience of the residential schools, talking about the placement of young people in ‘residential centers’ raises much history.

### **Collecting the Quantitative Data**

In the fall/winter of 2002, a review was conducted of the files of young people who were admitted to the Reception Centre program between December of 1999 and October of 2002. For the purpose of data collection two standard forms were developed; one for information about the youth and one for information about the youth’s family. These forms were modified from those used by Garfat & Charles in their previous research in to provincial residential care systems in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island (Garfat & Charles, 2001, 2002). The intention was to develop a general profile of the youth who had been referred for placement, and who were therefore representative of the youth and families who might benefit from an outreach service. While 51 files were reviewed, 2 files were excluded from the final tally because of a lack of information in them, resulting in data from 49 youth and families who received services from the Reception Center during this period.

*Table 1* and *Table 2* show the distribution of files by gender, age and previous domicile (where the young person was living prior to admission to the Reception Center).

**Admissions By Gender, Age, and Previous Domicile**

**Table 1: Males**

*N* = 29

	Home	Foster Home	Other
<b>Under 12</b>			<b>1</b>
<b>12</b>			
<b>13</b>	-	<b>1</b>	-
<b>14</b>	-	-	<b>2</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>3</b>		<b>6</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>5</b>		<b>5</b>

**Table 2: Females**

*N* = 22

	Home	Foster Home	Other
<b>Under 12</b>	-	-	-
<b>12</b>	-	-	-
<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>17</b>	-	-	<b>3</b>

*Table 3* provides information, extracted from the files, about the presenting problems of the youth. The question was simple: Is there information in the files that suggests that the young person did, or did not, demonstrate this characteristic prior to admission? A ‘yes’ response indicates that there was evidence in the file (Social Work Report, Court documents, Assessment form, etc) to indicate that this characteristic was present, prior to admission. A ‘no’ response simply means that there was no evidence in the file to support the assumption that this characteristic was present.

**Table 3: Identified Issues at Time of Admission**  
*(n=49)*

<i>Presenting Problems at Admission</i>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Developmental Delay</b>	4	45
<b>Physical Developmental Disability</b>	1	48
<b>Significant Health Concerns</b> <i>FAS; Substance induced mood disorder; Developmental delay; Obesity</i>	7	41
<b>Substance Abuse</b>	48	1
<b>Depression - Anxiety</b>	36	13
<b>Suicidal</b>	37	12
<b>Self Mutilation</b>	33	16
<b>Negative Peer Involvement</b>	32	17
<b>Violence Towards Others</b>	35	14
<b>Running Away</b>	31	18
<b>Involvement in Prostitution</b>	1	48
<b>Age Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour</b>	30	19
<b>Mental Health Concerns</b>	8	41
<b>YOA Involvement</b>	23	26
<b>Special Education Needs</b>	31	18
<b>Irregular School Attendance</b>	38	11
<b>Language Speech Concerns</b>	23	26
<b>Extreme Defiance/Oppositional</b>	39	10
<b>Verbally Abusive</b>	42	7
<b>Street Activity</b>	47	2
<b>Severe Parent-Child Conflict</b>	32	17
<b>Severe Sibling Conflict</b>	27	22

Table 4 was designed to gather information on some of the characteristics of the families of the youth. Again, this information was gathered based on the file information and again the question was simple: Is there information in the file (Social Work report, Admissions Report, Court documentation, etc.) which indicates that this characteristic was present at the time of the youth’s admission to the Reception Center. Again ‘yes’ and ‘no’ simply refer to evidence present in the file.

**Table 4: Characteristics of Youth Family History**  
(n=49)

<b>Characteristics of Family History</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Sexual Abuse in Family</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Physical Abuse in family</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Neglect in Family</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Emotional Abuse in Family</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Family Violence</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Family Break-down</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Significant Medical Concerns in Family</b> <i>Brain injury; Parent anxiety attacks,</i>	<b>3</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Family Mental Health Issues *</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Family Substance Abuse</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Family Criminal Involvement</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Multi-generational History of Abuse in Family</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Multi-generational History of Involvement in System</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>* Other: Severe grieving</b>		

Notes regarding the file reviews:

1. The file review was conducted by a research class student under the supervision of the Project Supervisor. A random second file review was conducted by the Project Supervisor to ensure information reliability. No errors in file information documentation were found during this second review.

2. It is important to note, however, that while the file information indicated that the characteristic was present, the characteristics were not necessarily the reason identified for admission.
3. A further review of the files from the Group Home programs was intended but was not done due to the cancellation of the project.

**A Note on the Incomplete Nature of this Inquiry**

While the foregoing provides some information which might be of interest, or of use, for future studies, the original intention of this inquiry was not realized. Once the initial pilot project was completed, and while the file data was being collected, an interviewer was contracted to conduct the interviews with parents, youth, staff and other professionals across the Cree communities. A variety of issues kept interfering with the interviewer's ability to conduct the interviews and after several attempts to 're-start' the interview process, it was decided by the project coordinator and the Public Health representative that too much time had passed to allow for the successful conclusion of the inquiry, even should a different interviewer be contracted. Families had moved, Youth Protection personnel had changed positions or, in some cases, even left the agency and the Childcare staff had also changed. As well, numerous changes within the Reception Centre, now meant that the 'lived experience' of the Childcare workers was dramatically different. Accordingly the project was terminated at this stage.

Respectfully Submitted,

Thom Garfat, PhD.  
garfat@videotron.ca

**Bibliography**

Chambers, C. (Oct. 1993). Love medicine: Facing ourselves in the act of remembering. Paper presented at the Fifteenth Conference on Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practice, Dayton, Ohio.

Garfat, T. (1998). The effective child and youth care intervention. Journal of Child and Youth Care, 12(1-2), 1-168.

Garfat, T. & Charles, G. (April, 2000) Too Important to Ignore: A Review of the Residential Child-Caring System of Nova Scotia and a Proposal for Renewal and Redesign. Report prepared for the Department of Community Services, Province of Nova Scotia. Halifax: Nova Scotia.

Garfat, T. & Charles, G. (April 2002) A Review of the System of Resources for Children and Youth in Health and Social Services. Report prepared for the Government of Prince Edward Island. Charlotte: PEI.

Mishler, E. G. (1986). Research interviewing: Context and Narrative. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

van Manen, M. (1990). Researching lived experience: Towards an action-sensitive pedagogy. London, Ontario: Althouse Press.

## **Appendix I**

### **Refocusing the Project Regarding Intervention with Families**

(Revised May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2002)

#### **Focus of the Project**

The project would be re-focussed from being a pilot project based on a review of the literature. Instead the focus of the project would be on the collection and analysis of data useful for a potential future intervention project.

The Cree Board has been discussing the possibility of a community based support and intervention service (service externe) connected in some manner to the Readaptation Services. The service externe would probably be at least partially focused on those youth and families who are referred typically for placement in Readaptation Services. These youth and families come from all the communities served by the CBHSSJB. There are two issues here that might be investigated by a re-focussed project:

1. Typically there is limited support for, or intervention with, families when the youth are placed in the Readaptation Services programs. The literature to date suggests that the involvement of, and with, families increases the possibility of successful outcome of placement, and the successful re-integration of the youth person back in to their family and community.
2. The literature also suggests strongly that many young people who have historically been placed in treatment centres and group homes could have managed to stay at home, or in their own community, had services been available to support the family in their own community.

The proposal here, then, is to re-focus this project to investigate what kinds of supports and services, if they had been available, would have been of use to the families and youth that have been referred to Readaptation Services. The value of the re-focused project is that it will provide data and information of direct relevance to possible future program development. The project will be 'transferred' to become a project of the Readaptation Services. The rationale for this 'transfer' is found in the section on 'confidentiality' later in this proposal.

#### **The Research Population**

In order to make the project manageable, the research would only focus on those families who had youth placed in the Reception Centre program of Readaptation Services. It may be preferable to include youth that were placed in the Group Home in Mistissini as well but we will know better once we have looked at the numbers involved. Research subjects would come from Mistissini, but also from other communities served by the CBHSSJB.

## The Questions

The researchers would investigate the following:

1. Who were the youth and families who were placed to the Reception Centre since its opening? (Nominal data, identified characteristics at the time of admission, reason for referral, etc. – obtained through file review in Readaptation Services)
2. What services were used (or available) to support, or intervene with, the families, (in helping them to reach the goals of intervention) while the youth were in placement? (Obtained through file review in Readaptation Services, and discussions with referring workers)
3. What services or supports, if they had been available, would have been seen as being useful to the youth and family, (in helping them to reach the goals of intervention) while the youth was in placement?
4. What services or supports, if they had been available, might have allowed the youth to remain in the family or the community, while still reaching the goals of intervention?

Data to address questions 1 and two would be drawn from the client files at the Reception Centre. Data to address questions 3 and 4, would be drawn from conversations and interviews, by phone and in person form:

1. the youth themselves
2. the families of the youth
3. the referring workers in the community of origin
4. respected informants from those communities
5. Reception Centre staff who worked with the youth or families

The methodology would allow for a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in collecting and analyzing the data. The primary theoretical basis for the qualitative aspects will be based in phenomenological inquiry.

## Roles

The **researcher coordinator** will oversee the students work, the validity of process and outcome, and the final report summary. The researcher will be responsible for ensuring that the research is grounded in the literature, the questions are reliable in terms of the desired outcome, the students are practiced in the methodology before commencing the interviews, and the data analysis is consistent with accepted research practice.. The research coordinator will hold responsibility for ensuring the successful completion of the project, including the production of a final report.

The **students** will participate in the file reviews, designing the research questions, conduct interviews, participate in the analysis of the data and, time permitting, participate in writing the final report.

The **research committee** will have responsibility for approving the project in terms of ethics, process and confidentiality.

The students' **university supervisor** will have responsibility for approval for the students to participate in the project, the supervision of students in terms of other aspects of Social Work practice, student confidentiality, access to literature and other aspects of the Social Work program.

### **Other Identified Issues**

**Confidentiality:** Because the families and the students come from small communities there is the probability that the students will be familiar with some of the families in the research. There is also the question of 'approval for contact' between the students and the youth or families involved. Perhaps if this project is re-defined as a project of the Readaptation Services, the Director of Professional Services for CBHSS can give clients of the organisation 'approval for contact', as the youth and families were/are already clients of the organisation.

**Access to Literature:** The students appear to have limited access to literature due to the fact that they are in a small community. Access will have to be arranged through the University, the internet, book purchases and available literature. This could have the effect of limiting the degree of literature review possible.

**Time Frames:** Due to the limited time available for students, the project will collect data during the three months of their placement only. The breakdown will be roughly:

- First month: Literature review, question construction, interview training, participant contact.
- Second month: participant contact, telephone and in-person interviews.
- Third month: data analysis, report drafting.

**Project approval and co-operation:** This project would have to be approved by the Director of Professional Services for CBHSSJB, the University Supervisor, the Director of Readaptation Services and the original project proposal committee. Participation will have to be solicited from referring workers, so that support and approval will also have to be obtained.

Thom Garfat, PhD

[www.cyc-net.org/transformation](http://www.cyc-net.org/transformation)

450-430-4455