

HELPING FAMILIES, HELPING CHILDREN

Manitoba's current child welfare restructuring initiative has many of us within the Aboriginal community and here at the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre feeling renewed optimism about the changes taking place for children and families. With a new system that will see Aboriginal agencies providing service to Aboriginal families across the province, it is encouraging to see our leadership come together as never before to support the growth and development of our community.

These are definitely exciting times, as we witness history in the making. The expansion of services delivered by First Nations child and family service agencies to off reserve areas, and the creation of Metis child and family service agencies province-wide has the potential to positively impact Aboriginal children and families as never before. **And yet, it is important to recognize that the expansion of mandates alone will not keep our children safe.** We must also recognize that **to help children, we must first help families and communities.**

Since 1984, the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre has worked to support families to better care for children by creating meaningful opportunities for family and community involvement. **We believe that strengthening families is a worthy investment in the future.** By focusing on the positive and building upon individual strengths, we have helped our families make tremendous strides in their ability to nurture and provide secure environments for their children.

As a voluntary non-mandated Aboriginal service provider and leader in community-based care, our philosophy is rooted in the belief that ***the entire community has responsibility for the healthy development of future generations.*** While we are encouraged by the positive changes taking place to better serve children and families in conflict with the child welfare system, we eagerly anticipate the opportunity to join in this important work to ensure a child and family services system that strengthens our community's capacity for self-care and self-responsibility.

By recognizing the importance of reciprocal relationships with the community in building healthy families and communities, we have witnessed the positive impact that community driven services have in empowering families to help themselves. Through non-adversarial, preventive and supportive programs and services that build upon individual and family capacity, Ma Mawi has built strong relationships with the community we serve - ultimately becoming much more than a social service agency, but rather the safe place that children and families count on for meaningful support. It is through such relationships that we can support and enhance the service delivery objectives of the new system.

The current child welfare restructuring initiative has the potential for greatness. **Involving the community in the care of its children and families is the first step.** Ensuring that services will keep children within their own families and communities, with a greater emphasis on the delivery of culturally relevant, preventive based programs is next. We know there is no substitute for strong families to ensure that children grow up as capable adults, and that the ability of families to raise children is inextricably linked to

conditions in their communities. Working together we can ensure a system that is community-centred and responsive to family needs. **The clock is ticking and the community awaits.**

In Friendship,

Dilly Knol, Chair
Board of Directors
Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata