

National Aboriginal Day Provides Opportunity for Reflection and Recognition of Important Work Ahead

“We have described for you a mountain. We have shown you the path to the top. We call upon you to do the climbing”.

Justice Murray Sinclair

As we recognize and celebrate National Aboriginal Day on June 21st, these words spoken by Justice Murray Sinclair Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada resonate with many in the field of child welfare. The mountain is high, the path to the top will be long and at times arduous, but we are beginning the climb and we will be reaching out to our Aboriginal partners for their support and guidance along the way.

The 94 Calls to Action contained in the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission come as a result of many years of hard, and often emotional work, to “bring to light stories of our collective past” that will help to shape relationships of the future. We thank all of those individuals involved for their important contributions towards making change happen in our country.

Ontario's Children's Aid Societies are enriched by our contact with the First Nations, Inuit and Métis families that we travel beside and we are working to support and collaborate with Aboriginal communities to better the health and well-being of Aboriginal children in our province.

There are several initiatives currently moving forward in child welfare in support of truth and reconciliation including local agency commitment to implementing strategies from an agreed upon Reconciliation Framework, participation in a provincial acknowledgement and apology to Indigenous people, engagement of Indigenous youth, identification and data collection including the development of three performance indicators related to Aboriginal services and ongoing advocacy.

Locally, Highland Shores Children's Aid (HSCA) is privileged to have a strong and collaborative working relationship with the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte and Alderville First Nation which includes Memorandums of Understanding as well as appointees to the Society's Board of Directors and Aboriginal Advisory Committee.

The Society understands the responsibility it has to raise awareness around Truth and Reconciliation not only within its own staff group, but also to members of the broader communities it serves. As a beginning step in this process, representatives of the HSCA Aboriginal Advisory Committee have organized several Aboriginal history training sessions for the staff of the Society to be held in both the Tyendinaga and Alderville communities. Representatives from each of these communities have also attended HSCA Board meetings in order to share information about the rich history, culture and traditions of local Aboriginal peoples.

Our climb has just begun but we look forward to a journey filled with both respect and learning.