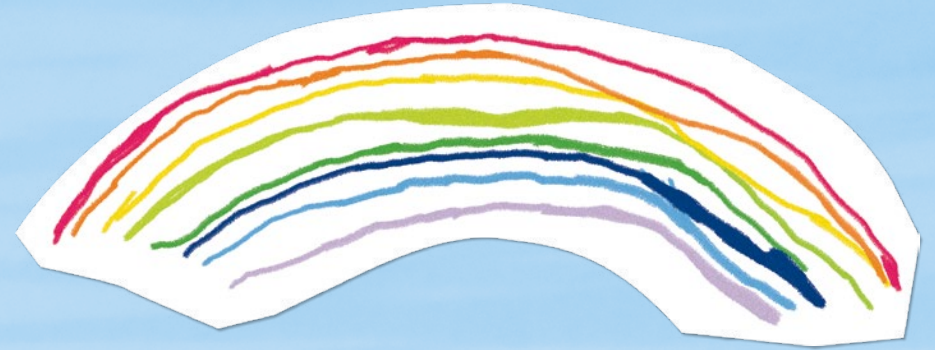




Annual Report

2024 | 2025



First Nations Child &
Family Caring Society

Some of the artwork featured in this report was created by children and youth who participate in our events and campaigns.

Please note that this annual report reflects activities from September 2024 to August 2025.

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Remembering

The Caring Society joins hands, hearts and spirits with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, and millions of caring Canadians in loving memory of the **Honourable Murray Sinclair**. In celebration and gratitude for a life well lived and his incredible contributions, Caring Society Executive Director Cindy Blackstock said: Murray Sinclair has always walked into dark places with a flashlight so we can safely follow. A beam of light that cuts through injustice and shows the way to hope. Sending prayers and gratitude to his loving family, including his beloved late wife Katherine, the Peguis First Nation and his many friends who generously shared him with all of us. May the beam of light he shone for us forever light the path toward loving justice.



Dedication

We honour and uplift the incredible **Alanis Obomsawin** as she celebrates her 93rd birthday. Through her ground-breaking films, uncompromising voice, and commitment to centering the voices, dignity and rights of Indigenous children and youth, Alanis is a force unmatched and true hero for children.

We also honour and celebrate **Raymond Shingoose** for his remarkable 40 years of service in First Nations Child & Family Services, where his leadership, commitment, and comical dad jokes have left an enduring mark. Serving as the Executive Director at Yorkton Tribunal Council Child & Family Services, Vice Chair of Yellowbird Thunderbird Lodge, and President of the Caring Society's board of directors for 20 years, Raymond has always led with integrity, wisdom, warmth, and with kids at the centre. We wish Raymond and his loving wife Trudy a joyous and relaxing retirement filled many new adventures and memories.



Honouring

2025 year marks the 20th anniversary of Jordan's Principle.

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Honouring

Alanis Obomsawin

Alexandra Champagne

Amanda Strong and Spotted Fawn
Productions

Anderson Family, Norway House Cree Nation

Atkinson Foundation

Anne Levesque, University of Ottawa

Assembly of Seven Generations (A7G)

Barbara McIsaac, McIsaac Law

Beechwood Cemetery

Canadian Paediatric Society

Carrier Sekani Child and Family Services

Carters Professional Corporations

Catherine Donnelly Foundation

City of Ottawa

City of Prince George

Claudette Commanda

Collie Historical Research

Colas

David Stern, Lewis Birnberg Hanet, LLP

David Taylor, Conway Baxter LLP

David Wilson, Conway Baxter LLP

Donate a Car

Family of Neebin Armstrong

HANSAméd

Institute of Fiscal Studies & Democracy (IFSD)

Jays Care Foundation

J.W. McConnell Foundation

Kiana Saint-Macary, Conway Baxter LLP

Kinaxis

Kinosao Sipi Minisowin Agency

Koostachin Family, Attawapiskat First Nation

Leah Gryfe Designs

Lheidli T'enneh First Nation

Lisa Howell, University of Ottawa

McGill University

Mélanie Vincent

National Film Board

National Indian Child Welfare Association
(NICWA)

Nēhiyawak Language Experience

Nicholas Ng-A-Fook, University of Ottawa

The Olive Tree Foundation (Mohamed and
Opheera Nasir Endowment Fund)

Ontario Children's Advancement Coalition

Ouseley Hanvey Clipsham Deep LLP

Pokoloko

Project of Heart

Rideau Hall

Robin McLeod, Clarke Child and Family Law

Sagkeeng Child and Family Services

Sandy Tunwell, Accountrain Inc.

Sarah Clarke, Clarke Child and Family Law

Social Sciences and Humanities Research
Council

Steam Labs

TopHat

The Exploration Place Museum and Science
Centre

The Bryce Family

The Printing House

University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education

Wahkotowin Law and Governance Lodge

Youth in Care Canada



Key Accomplishments

Reconciliation in Action

In honour of Orange Shirt Day and the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, the Caring Society partnered with Assembly of Seven Generations (A7G), Project of Heart, and Beechwood Cemetery to host **an event on September 30 in Ottawa that was attended by over 1,000 people.**



To celebrate Have a Heart Day 2025, we hosted a virtual screening of *My Voice Matters: Changing the World Through Child and Youth Activism*. The event featured **former students and included a panel discussion, attended by over 200 students and educators across the country.**

2025 marked the 20th anniversary of Jordan's Principle. The Caring Society was honoured to attend a parade to celebrate Bear Witness Day and honour Jordan River



Anderson's family in Winnipeg, hosted by Sagkeeng Child and Family Services and Kinosao Sipi Minisowin Agency. In Ottawa, Senator Francis, Senator Audette, Senator Greenwood, Senator Harder, Senator Klyne and Senator White joined with A7G and the Caring Society to host a Bear Witness Day celebration for elementary and high-school students at the Senate of Canada.

To support community participation in Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams, we collaborated with Rideau Hall to install a **permanent Heart Garden in honour of residential school survivors.**



In honour of residential school survivors and support the legacy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), over 500 hearts were planted in heart gardens across the country by schools, organizations, community centres and workplaces.

Spirit Bear and Friends

The Spirit Bear *Pawdcast* received a **Canadian Podcast Award for Outstanding Indigenous Series**. Season 3 of the Spirit Bear Podcast, *Courageous Conversations*, made its debut on Podbean.



Over **1,000 copies of Spirit Bear's 2025 calendar, Spirit Bear's Guide to Reconciliation**, were distributed to individuals, child and family service agencies, school boards, and educators across Canada.

Spirit Bear's four children's books continue to be made available for free online in English, French and some First Nations languages. **Over 2,000 copies of Spirit Bear's books** were distributed to children, youth, families, supporters, Elders, and community membears.



13 Reconciliation Ambearristers found new homes in schools and community centers across Canada!

Each hosted bear accompanies the group as they learn about and promote the TRC Calls to Action.





Big Win for the Kids

The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (Tribunal) has issued **35 non-compliance and procedural orders** since the 2016 landmark ruling, five of which were issued this past year.

The Tribunal ordered Canada, along with the co-complainants in *First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada et al. v. Attorney General of Canada*, to **move forward on national First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) long-term reform without further delay** (2025 CHRT 80).

The Tribunal issued orders on the Caring Society's non-compliance motion regarding the Government of Canada's chronic and wilful failure to adhere to binding orders on Jordan's Principle. The Tribunal affirmed the presumption of **substantive equality as a right owed to First Nations children** and emphasized it is both a right and a remedy to address discrimination and prevent its reoccurrence.

The **National Children's Chiefs Commission (NCCC)** was established by First Nations-in-Assembly to provide oversight and strategic direction on the long-term reform of FNCFS and Jordan's Principle.



Making New Friends

The Caring Society completed over **86 virtual and in-person events** in 9 provinces, 2 territories and 2 countries!

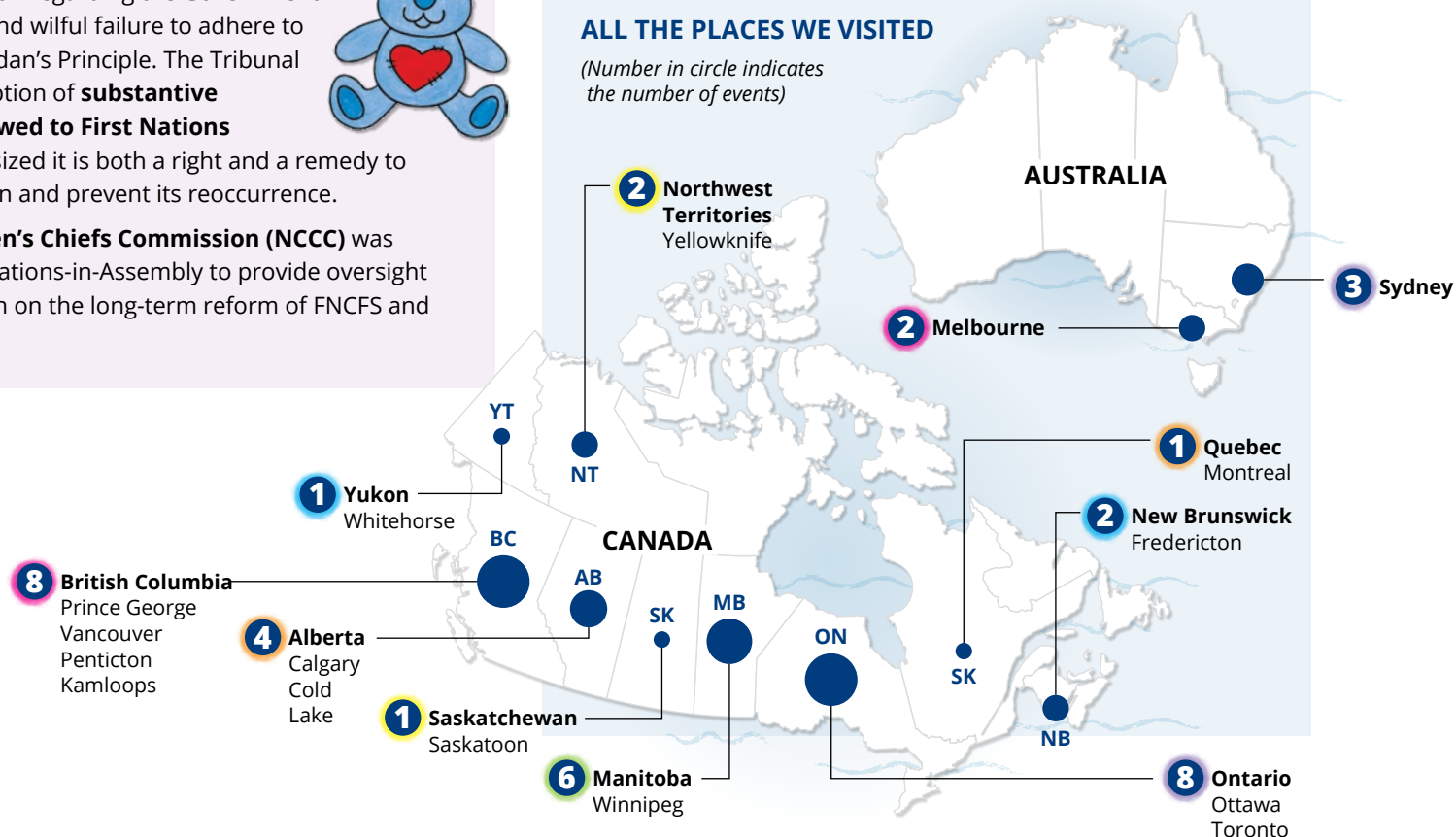
We have more than **78,000 social media friends**, gaining followers across, Facebook, Instagram and Bluesky platforms.

We participated in over **50 media engagements**, appearing in both Canadian and International media.

We published **4 newsletters featuring over 35 articles**. We distributed newsletters to over 250 First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies, Caring Society members and educators.

ALL THE PLACES WE VISITED

(Number in circle indicates the number of events)



About Us

History, Today, Mission

Building on the interest of First Nations child and family services leaders to create a national networking organization, the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada (the Caring Society) was developed at the Squamish First Nation in 1998 at a national meeting of First Nations child and family service agencies. Meeting delegates agreed that a national non-profit organization was required to provide research, policy, professional development, and networking to support First Nations child and family service agencies in caring for First Nations children, youth, and families. An interim board was elected, and the plan was approved at a second national meeting at Kingsclear First Nation in 1999.

The Caring Society works to ensure the safety and well-being of First Nations youth and their families through education initiatives, public policy campaigns and providing quality resources to support communities. Using a reconciliation framework that addresses contemporary hardships for First Nations families in ways that uplift all Canadians, the Caring Society champions culturally based equity for First Nations children and their families so that they can grow up safely at

home, be healthy, achieve their dreams, celebrate their languages and culture and be proud of who they are. The Caring Society proudly works with our partners in Canada and around the world to promote the rights of Indigenous children.

The Caring Society Board of Directors

Raymond Shingoose, President

Kenn Richard, Vice-President

Judy Levi, Treasurer of the Board

Elsie Flette

Arlene Johnson

Koren Lightning-Earle

Jessica Saunders

Mary Teegee

André Bear

Kelly Provost

The Caring Society Staff

Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director

Melisa Brittain, Policy and Research Coordinator

Harmony Eshkawkogan, Administrative Assistant

Daxton Rhead, Administrative Support

Jennifer King, Special Advisor

Stephanie Wellman, Director of External Affairs, Programs and Operations

Brittany Mathews, Director of Reconciliation and Strategic Policy

Jessica Raby, Education and Public Engagement Coordinator

Laurence Allard, Reconciliation and Policy Associate

Tammy Morgan, Finance and Human Resources Manager

Sunny Mathews, Reconciliation Dog



Spirit Bear and Friends!

This year, Spirit Bear was especially busy, working alongside his colleagues and friends, far and wide, to come up with new reconciliation education resources. From his stop motion animated films, children's books, a podcast and his 3D interactive experience, Bear Shares, all of Spirit Bear's resources are available for free on the Caring Society's website, and on social media where thousands of his friends follow along on his learning journey.

Spirit Bear

fncaringsociety.com/SpiritBear

A member of the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, Spirit Bear represents the 165,000 First Nations children impacted by the First Nations child welfare case as well as the thousands of other children who have committed to learning about the case and have taken meaningful action in support of reconciliation and equity. In 2008, Spirit Bear was gifted to the Caring Society by Carrier Sekani Family Services and has since been bearing witness to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal case to serve as an important reminder that the case is centered around our most sacred gift, children. Spirit Bear has been awarded an honorary "Berrister" degree from Osgoode Law School and was officially admitted to the "Bear" by the

Indigenous Bar Society in 2017. Now that he's an official *Berrister*, when he sees something wrong, he learns about it and tries to help!

From his humble beginning in a huckleberry patch in Carrier Sekani, Spirit Bear continues to inspire young people and adults to stand up for the fair treatment of First Nations children. He believes children can change the world, because he's already seen it happen!

Spirit Bear Virtual School

fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear/spirit-bear-virtual-school

First Launched in August 2023, the Spirit Bear Virtual School (SBVS) is an online resource to support learning about the Caring Society's campaigns and initiatives for social justice and reconciliation. While the resources created for the SBVS are specially designed for elementary educators, they are adaptable for older learners and accessible to everyone.

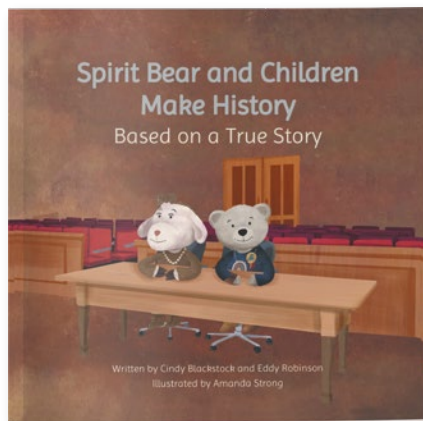
Along with housing resources created especially for the SBVS, the website also links visitors to all of Spirit Bear's educational resources, including his children's books and films, along with their learning guides.

The SBVS was created in response to findings from the [Just Because We're Small Doesn't Mean We](#)

[Can't Stand Tall](#) research project. Research findings showed that teachers who used the Caring Society's social justice-based reconciliation campaigns in their elementary classrooms found the campaigns useful for teaching about the impacts of ongoing colonialism in Canada in ways that are age-appropriate for children of all grades and backgrounds. Educators also found the campaigns effective for teaching about these topics in respectful ways that strengthen the classroom community and said they would benefit from resources designed specifically for teaching the Caring Society's campaigns.

The Caring Society and research team responded by creating the SBVS and the many resources housed there, including [Spirit Bear's Beary Caring Curriculum](#), which is grounded in five guiding principles known as the "Touchstones for Learning," adapted from the Touchstones of Hope reconciliation process of truth-telling, acknowledging,





restoring, and relating. Another key resource is the [Jordan's Principle Learning Guide](#), which invites everyone to learn about the case on First Nations child welfare and Jordan's Principle, and to participate in ending discrimination against First Nations children and youth. The curriculum and learning guide are available in both English and French.

The virtual school also houses [video interviews](#) with early years educators Dr. Michelle McKay and Klara Redford, who discuss their use of the Caring Society's campaigns and resources in their Kindergarten classrooms, the enormous capacity young children have to understand love, fairness, and justice, and how learning about historical and ongoing injustices must start in kindergarten. This past year, in collaboration with [Project of Heart](#), we launched our new film on the SBVS website: *My Voice Matters: Changing the World Through Child & Youth Activism* (see page 33 to learn more about the film.).

Visit the Spirit Bear Virtual School and find the resources listed above, plus much more.

Spirit Bear's Pawblishing Services

Spirit Bear, the Caring Society and our friends pawblished some amazing reconciliation books and resources this past year! There are few Canadian books for younger children linking reconciliation with social justice in the spirit of the TRC and its Calls to Action. Spirit Bear's resources address this gap in education. In addition to Spirit Bear's books and annual calendar, more than 150 of Spirit Bear's TRC Calls to Action booklets were distributed to classrooms and school libraries across the country.

Spirit Bear's Guide to Reconciliation Calendar

Spirit Bear's Guide to Reconciliation Calendar saw yet another successful year of distribution. In 2025, the Caring Society sold the highest number of calendars to date! Overall, nearly 2,000 English and French calendars were distributed to individuals,

English and French covers of Spirit Bear's four books.

child and family service agencies, educators, and school boards across the country. The Caring Society was also able to donate a portion of the calendars to groups or individuals who would otherwise not have the means to purchase them.

This year, all of the images selected for the calendar came from Spirit Bear's fourth stop-motion animation film, *Spirit Bear: Echoes of*



the Past. Alongside the beautiful imagery, each month of the calendar highlights a different way individuals, families and communities can take meaningful action to support reconciliation. As with past years, we were thrilled to offer a free activity book offering drawing and writing activities for kids to learn about their place in reconciliation in fun and meaningful ways. The activity book and a PDF version of the calendar are available on our website for free year-round.

Spirit Bear Animations

fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear/films

On November 1, the Caring Society celebrated one year of Spirit Bear TV! Spirit Bear TV is home to all of Spirit Bear's films, animations, and other short videos, available for free on vimeo.com/spiritbeartv. Festival showings and educational distribution remained available through our colleagues at the Winnipeg Film Group and McIntyre Media.

Spirit Bear's newest film, *Echoes of the Past* (2024), continued its run on the festival circuit and was selected for three festival screenings during the reporting period, including the Toronto Animation Arts Festival International! Community and curated screenings of all films in the Spirit Bear series continued as well. For example, Gitanmaax in Northern British Columbia held community screenings of *Echoes of the Past* throughout September 2024. *Fishing for Knowledge, Catching Dreams* (2022) was selected by The Cinematheque in Vancouver, BC, for a curated program for World Children's Day in November 2024,



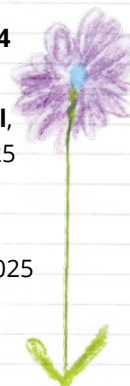
and by Ociciwan Contemporary Art Centre in Edmonton, AB, for a curated program of short films for children, youth and the young at heart in July 2025.

***Echoes of the Past* Festival Screenings September 2024 to August 2025**

Available Light Film Festival,
Whitehorse, YK, February 2025

International Festival of Winter Cinema,
Edmonton, AB, in February 2025

Toronto Animation Arts Festival International,
Toronto, ON, April 2025



Lastly, the Caring Society was thrilled to see the sets and puppets brought to life once again as the center of the Spirit Bear museum exhibition, *Spirit Bear and Children Make History*, which ended a fantastic first run at The Exploration Place Museum and Science Centre in Prince George, BC, in November 2024. Read more about Spirit Bear's Museum Exhibition in the section below.

Find all of Spirit Bear's films on Spirit Bear TV at
vimeo.com/spiritbeartv.

- *Spirit Bear and Children Make History* (2020)
- *Fishing for Knowledge, Catching Dreams* (2022)
- *Honouring Memories, Catching Dreams* (2023)
- *Echoes of the Past* (2024)



Spirit Bear and Children Make History Exhibition

fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear/spirit-bear-and-children-make-history-exhibition

The *Spirit Bear and Children Make History* exhibition had a wonderful first-run at the The Exploration Place in Prince George, B.C., from June 21 to November 11, 2024. This child-friendly, multi-media exhibition features hand-made puppets and sets from Spirit Bear's four



stop-motion animated films by award-winning Indigenous studio Spotted Fawn Productions. The exhibition also showcases archival material from the landmark human rights case for First Nations child welfare and Jordan's Principle, the Shannen's Dream campaign, and the broader movement for culturally based equity for First Nations children.

The exhibition was developed in partnership with Carrier Sekani Family Services (CSFS), Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, Spotted Fawn Productions, and The Exploration Place. During its first run, the exhibition had over 12,000 visitors, including 14 school groups. CSFS recruited and trained local Indigenous youth to host and guide visitors through the exhibition, offering visitors a rare opportunity to learn from Indigenous young people the links between residential schools and contemporary injustices, along with actions they can take in the spirit of meaningful reconciliation.

On September 6, Spirit Bear was honoured to receive a key to the City of Prince George from Mayor Simon Yu, who said: "As I learned more about Spirit Bear during my visit to the exhibition, I wanted to do something on behalf of the City to acknowledge this amazing symbol that is Spirit Bear, and that he spreads such an important message in a gentle way for children." Mayor Yu then declared September 6 Spirit Bear Day in Prince George ([Press Release, City of Prince George](#)). In her response, Cindy Blackstock highlighted Spirit Bear's role as a symbol of the sacredness of children and Spirit Bear Day in Prince George as an honouring of "all children who stood

with First Nations people to achieve what the late Elder Courchene called 'loving justice.'"

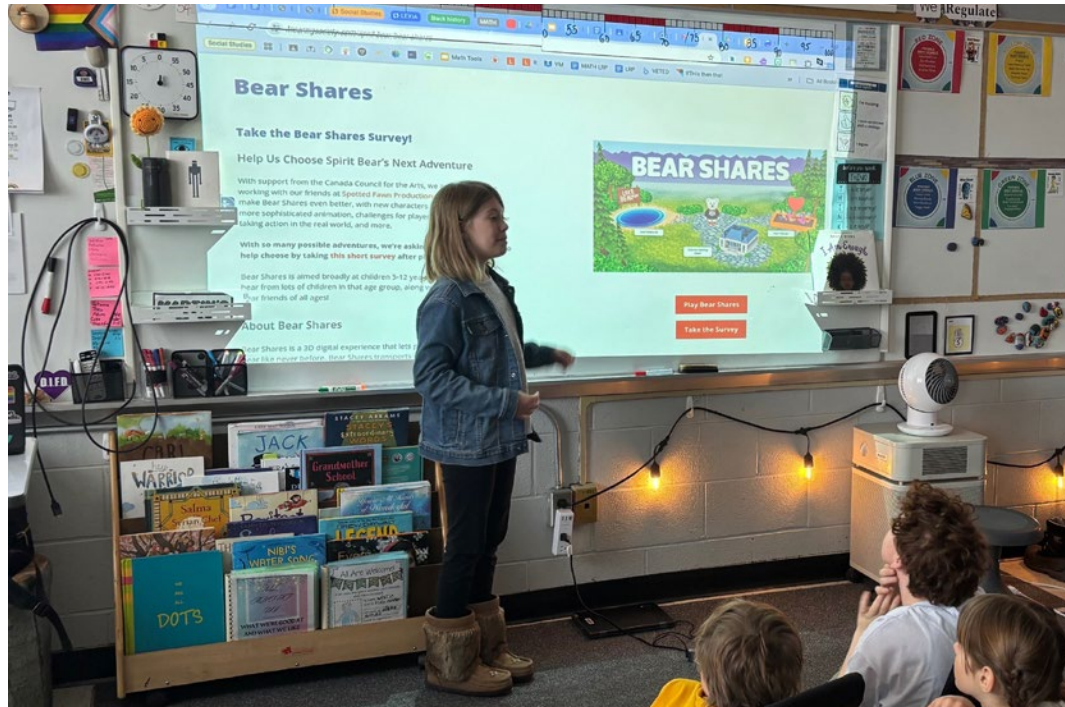
We are grateful for the amazing partners who co-developed and hosted the first run of Spirit Bear's exhibition, to the youth guides for hosting visitors and sharing Spirit Bear's story, and to the City of Prince George for honouring Spirit Bear.

Future plans for the *Spirit Bear and Children Make History* exhibition involve further developing the exhibition for both large and small venues across Canada. Stay tuned for



Above: Cindy Blackstock holding Spirit Bear at the opening event of the Spirit Bear and Children Make History exhibition. Left: Mayor Yu handing Spirit Bear the Key to the City.





Student at Regina Street Alternative School explaining Bear Shares Survey to fellow classmates.

future opportunities to visit the exhibition in your region.

Bear Shares II: Bear Shares is getting an upgrade!

fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear/bear-shares

Bear Shares is a 3D digital experience that teaches about culturally based equity and reconciliation through Q&A with Spirit Bear.

Launched in June 2024 as part of the Spirit Bear museum exhibition, Bear Shares invites

players to visit Spirit Bear at three locations from his books and films. Each location features different questions that players can choose from for Spirit Bear to answer.

Bear Shares was developed to add a “hands-on” element to the exhibit, and to trial the possibility of expanding our Spirit Bear work to make interactive digital resources. Following the success of the Spirit Bear exhibit, the Caring Society was thrilled to receive a grant from the Canada Council for the Arts to partner again with Spotted Fawn Productions and SteamLabs (a non-profit organization that specializes in

technology and education experiences) to explore possibilities for expanding Bear Shares into a more robust digital experience. Possible directions include new characters and environments, challenges for players to complete, ideas for taking action in the real world, and adding subtitles in French and an Indigenous language. With so many possibilities for Bear Shares II, we knew we needed some expert advice. Throughout February and March, the Caring Society sought feedback through a short, kid-friendly survey about possible new characters and storylines, and to identify general improvements we can make to Bear Shares. We were thrilled to receive over 100 responses, mostly from kids aged nine to eleven. Stay tuned for developments about Bear Shares in Spring 2026.

In the meantime, we invite learners of all ages to join in the fun by exploring Bear Shares in its current iteration on the Caring Society website.





Spirit Bear Podcast

fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear-podcast

Spirit Bear Podcast is back with Season 3, focused on courageous conversations, making good decisions on the ground for children, youth and families, and how we can keep ourselves accountable to children, youth and families. This year the Canadian Podcast Awards recognized the Spirit Bear Podcast and was awarded Outstanding Indigenous Series.

Season 3 kicked off with a two-part episode with Dr. Cindy Blackstock, Amber Crowe and Dr. Barbara Fallon to discuss new and emerging data from the

Ontario Incidence Study on the overrepresentation of First Nations children, youth, and families in the child welfare system in Ontario. On the second two-part episode Dr. Cindy Blackstock, Amber Crowe and Dr. Barbara Fallon were joined by Dr. Ashley Vander Morris to discuss the complex mental health needs for First Nations children, youth and families in Ontario. Season 3 also featured Gabrielle Fayant and Alyssa Carpenter for a courageous conversation on the TRC Call to Action 66 and the important work to call upon the federal government to establish multiyear funding for community-based youth organizations to deliver programs on reconciliation.

Keep an eye on our social media and website for more Spirit Bear Podcast episodes coming soon, including special youth-led episodes.



Reconciliation Ambearrister Initiative

fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear/reconciliation-ambearristers

This year, we saw many Ambearristers participating in Orange Shirt Day events, Bear Witness Day picnics and gatherings, and events. We were especially thrilled to partner with Pierre Elliot Trudeau Schools' elementary students who looked after Spirit Bear's sister, Memengwe. Over the course of several months, students included her in their daily activities, school lessons, and even brought her to Bear Witness Day at the Senate! We look forward to welcoming many more Reconciliation Ambearristers to the growing community of people (and bears) working toward reconciliation.



Memengwe



Child- and Youth-Led Campaigns

First Nations children have a right to grow up safely with their families, go to good schools, and be healthy and proud of who they are. These rights are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The Canadian government has ratified the UNCRC and, in 2021, passed the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, which requires the Government of Canada to take all measures necessary to ensure the laws of Canada are consistent with UNDRIP. The Caring Society works to ensure the realization of the rights of First Nations children and youth and their families.

As a child and youth-focused organization, the Caring Society believes strongly in the power of children and young people to bring about positive change. Our yearly campaigns invite children and youth from across the country to use their voices and participate in social justice movements for the rights of First Nations children and young people. Here is a snapshot of some of the latest accomplishments and activities to come out of our child and youth-led campaigns this year.



Jordan's Principle

fncaringociety.com/jordans-principle

Jordan's Principle is a child-first principle and, as of 2016, a legal rule that ensures First Nations children can access the supports they need, when they need them. It is named in loving memory of Jordan River Anderson, a young boy from Norway House Cree Nation who was born with multiple complex medical needs who spent most of his life in the hospital while the federal and provincial governments fought over who would pay for his at-home care. In 2005, Jordan passed away at the age of five, never having spent a day in a family home. His family gifted his name for a child-first principle to ensure that what happened to Jordan would not happen to other kids like him.

In its landmark ruling on the matter (2016 CHRT 2), the Tribunal found Canada's implementation of Jordan's Principle to be discriminatory and ordered Canada to take immediate measures to implement the full and proper scope of Jordan's Principle. Since then, the Tribunal has issued 35 procedural and non-compliance orders against Canada.

Jordan's Principle Non-Compliance Motion

In December 2023, after having exhausted all other available measures to ensure that Canada's implementation of Jordan's Principle was aligned with the needs and best interests of kids and in keeping with substantive equality, the Caring Society filed a non-compliance motion with the Tribunal.

Hearings on the matter were held in September 2024, with Canada opposing the Caring Society's motion and having filed its own cross-motion. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) opposed most of the Caring Society's motion and requested that all relief sought by the Caring Society be dismissed or be interim in nature, subject to a final settlement agreement or an expiry date of March 31, 2025. As interested parties, the Chiefs of Ontario (COO) and Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) did not take a position on the motion, and the Canadian Human Rights Commission broadly supported the motion. The First Nations Leadership Council was granted interested party status and broadly supported the motion.

The Tribunal's Orders

In November 2024, the Tribunal issued a summary ruling, granting both the Caring Society's non-compliance motion and Canada's cross-motion in part. The Tribunal



issued its full reasonings in January 2025 (2025 CHRT 6). The Tribunal issued orders and provided guidance on a number of issues outlined below.

- **Backlogs:** The Tribunal ruled that backlogs of requests and reimbursements are inconsistent with the Tribunal's orders and ruled that Canada must immediately tackle the backlog of Jordan's Principle requests, prioritizing urgent cases and reporting back with a detailed plan and data. For families stuck in the backlog, the Tribunal ruled that Canada must communicate with those with undetermined urgent requests and take interim measures to prevent foreseeable harm to children.
- **Back-to-Basics Approach:** The Back-to-Basics Approach was implemented in 2022, when the Parties agreed that a "back-to-basics" approach to Jordan's Principle was required to get ISC closer to compliance with the Tribunal's orders. In its ruling, the Tribunal confirmed that certain aspects of the Back-to-Basics Approach are aligned with the Tribunal's orders and should be maintained, while other aspects are not. The aspects in line with the Tribunal's orders that must be maintained include:
 - > presumption of substantive equality;
 - > minimal supporting documentation; and
 - > identification of urgent requests by qualified professionals.

- **Urgent requests:** The Tribunal confirmed that there are two levels of urgent requests that it has previously ordered on the consent of the Parties. The two levels are:

- 1 Urgent requests involving foreseeable harm (requiring an immediate response); and
- 2 Other urgent requests requiring action within 12 hours.

The Tribunal confirmed that the following cases are considered urgent:

- life-threatening cases;
- cases involving end-of-life/palliative care;
- risk of suicide;
- risk to physical safety;
- a child with no access to food or other basic necessities;
- risk of child entering the child welfare system;
- caregivers and children fleeing from domestic violence; and
- certain time-sensitive cases.

The Tribunal agreed that bereavement is a sacred time for First Nations children and that some requests relating to the passing of a close family member may be considered urgent, while others may be considered time-sensitive (not urgent). The Tribunal agreed that access to cultural ceremonies is in keeping with substantive equality.

- **24-Hour Jordan's Principle Call Centre and other contact mechanisms:** The Tribunal confirmed that, consistent with its previous orders, Canada must provide National and Regional contact centres with the capacity to put in place immediate compassionate interventions when a request is placed for urgent services.
- **Referral of Jordan's Principle requests to other services, including First Nations and First Nations-authorized organizations:** The Tribunal confirmed that its orders already enable Canada to consult with First Nations and professionals when reasonably necessary without engaging in service delays due to administrative case conferencing, policy review, service navigation, or any similar administrative process before the recommended services are approved and funding is provided.



The Tribunal confirmed that Canada can refer requestors to First Nations, but Canada is ultimately legally responsible for the proper implementation of Jordan's Principle.

Where Canada funds First Nations or organizations to take on various aspects of Jordan's Principle services, Canada must fund that First Nation or organization to meet the needs of the children they serve. Insufficient resourcing would be like the systemic discrimination found, and would likely be considered a transfer of Canada's legal obligations.

- **Determination timelines:** The Tribunal ordered that the timeline for determining urgent requests will be maintained (12 hours for individual requests and 48 hours for group requests). At this time, the Tribunal will not order changes to the non-urgent timeline (48 hours for individual requests and 1 week for group requests) and has rejected Canada's "without unreasonable delay" standard as it is vague and is not aligned with the best interest of the child.
- **Reimbursements:** The Tribunal confirmed that, as previously ordered, Canada cannot delay paying for approved services or supports in a way that creates hardship by imposing a burden on families and risks delay or leads to a child's needs going unmet.

- **Complaints mechanism:** The Tribunal ordered that a national, independent and effective complaints mechanism be implemented.

- **Coordination of federal programs:** The Tribunal found that Canada has not evaluated its federal programs to respond to First Nations children's needs and address gaps in services. The Tribunal reaffirmed its previous orders from as early as 2016 that Canada must close gaps and coordinate its federal programs so that children do not experience gaps, delays and denials in services

- **The *Financial Administration Act* (FAA):** The Tribunal reaffirmed that its orders are to be read harmoniously with the FAA, and in the event of a conflict, the Tribunal's orders have primacy over the FAA.

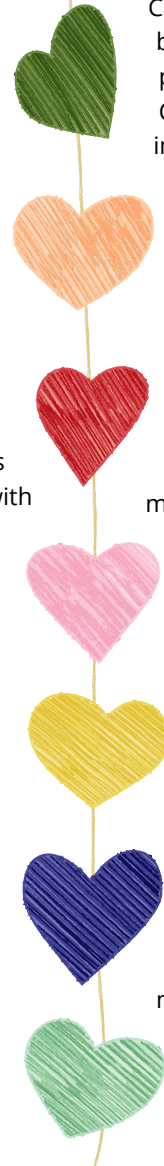
The Tribunal also ordered the Parties to return with consent orders (positions mutually agreed upon by the Parties) or alternative positions on additional matters, including solutions to eliminate the backlog, criteria and guidelines for identifying urgent requests, and options for non-urgent determination timelines. In January 2025, the Parties began Tribunal-assisted mediation.

ISC issues Jordan's Principle Operational Bulletin

On February 10, 2025, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) issued a Jordan's Principle bulletin on changes to operating procedures without consulting the Caring Society or the other Parties involved in active mediation on directly related matters. The Caring Society views the bulletin as a significant deviation from the Tribunal's orders on Jordan's Principle and has asked ISC to withdraw the bulletin immediately.

The bulletin's impact on First Nations children and families has been immediate and far-reaching, with many children now experiencing delays and disruptions in services or facing outright denials, with no alternative services that can meet their needs.

The Caring Society has raised concerns with ISC about their unilateral application of the bulletin to the backlog of requests; we view this as procedurally unfair to the children waiting several months or longer to receive a determination on their request. The Caring Society has also raised concerns with ISC's requirement that each request must demonstrate how the child has experienced gaps, delays, or denials in government services before ISC



considers the request for support. These changes are a recycling of ISC's discriminatory conduct by presuming that the needs of First Nations children can be satisfied by existing services, and then foisting the responsibility of identifying and coordinating such services onto First Nations service providers and families, even though the Tribunal found no evidence that ISC has evaluated its own programs to respond to children's needs.

Ultimately, Jordan's Principle is not a government program; it is a legal obligation with no end date. Canada has been ordered to properly implement Jordan's Principle to ensure that First Nations children can access the services, supports and products they need, when they need them, without experiencing jurisdictional disputes.

Jordan's Principle at Federal Court

This past year, many First Nations families have bravely stood up to Canada's non-compliance and sought judicial review of denied Jordan's Principle requests. Judicial review is a legal process in which the Federal Court examines whether a decision was fair, reasonable, and made in accordance with proper procedures. It does not re-evaluate the facts of a case, but instead looks at whether the decision-maker acted within their legal authority.

Cully v. Canada: In June 2025, the Federal Court dismissed ISC's appeal denial of a young First Nations child's request for full-time Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA)

therapy and returned the request to ISC for reconsideration in accordance with the Federal Court's reasons. The decision is an important step forward in affirming that Jordan's Principle must be applied broadly and in a manner that respects substantive equality, cultural appropriateness, and the best interests of First Nations children. The Federal Court also ruled that the Tribunal's orders limit ISC's discretion when determining Jordan's Principle requests and that ISC cannot create blanket exclusions based on whether a service is part of a special or targeted program.



Powless v. Canada: In July 2025, the Federal Court quashed ISC's decision to deny, on appeal, a First Nations grandmother's Jordan's Principle request, made on behalf of her two granddaughters in her care. After medical evidence showed the children's asthma and health were being profoundly worsened by the presence of mould in their home, the Grandmother placed a request

to Jordan's Principle for mould remediation and temporary housing. After quashing ISC's denial, the Federal Court returned the matter to ISC for redetermination in accordance with its reasons.

This ruling reinforces that Jordan's Principle is to be interpreted broadly, rather than narrowly. Jordan's Principle requests require individualized and child-focused determinations that are in keeping with the substantive equality rights and the best interests of children, rather than rigid interpretations. The Federal Court also found it unreasonable for ISC to deny Jordan's Principle requests due to "comparable services," "ameliorative programs," or "no existing government services." Lastly, this ruling affirmed that the amount of funding requested is not a valid reason to deny a Jordan's Principle request.

While Canada filed an appeal of the Federal Court's decision to the Federal Court of Appeal in August 2025, the decision remains an important precedent, affirming that Jordan's Principle requests must be assessed through a substantive equality lens and in consideration of the best interests of the child. The hearing at the Federal Court of Appeal was heard in the Fall of 2025, and the Caring Society is an interested party in the case.

Public Education

Public education remains a key part of our work on Jordan's Principle. In light of the non-



compliance motion and Canada's ongoing non-compliance with the Tribunal's orders, the Caring Society issued information sheets, hosted a webinar, conducted a social media campaign and provided presentations at community gatherings and conferences, all with the aim of providing evidence-based and timely information to a broad audience, including First Nations young people, First Nations families, Jordan's Principle Service Coordinators, First Nations, First Nations-authorized organizations, professionals and service providers.

The Caring Society also conducted a widely shared social media campaign in March 2024, tackling some of the most pressing questions about Jordan's Principle and debunking common misconceptions.

Learn more about the Caring Society's public education efforts on page 31.



Shannen's Dream

fncaringsociety.com/shannens-dream

Shannen Koostachin, a youth education advocate from Attawapiskat First Nation in Ontario, had a dream: safe and comfy schools and culturally based education for First Nations children and youth. Shannen and her peers in Attawapiskat First Nation fought for a new school after a diesel spill contaminated their school, making the students and

teachers sick. Shannen sadly passed away in 2010 at the age of 15 and never saw the new school, which was finally built in 2014. With the support of her loving family, friends and community, Shannen's Dream was named in her honour and is a campaign to make sure all First Nations children across Canada have "safe and comfy" schools and receive a good quality education that makes them proud of who they are.

Many First Nations schools receive less funding per student than provincial and territorial schools. Many also do not provide a safe and appropriate learning environment. Shannen worked tirelessly to try to convince the federal government to give First Nations children a proper education. Shannen remains an important role model for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and young people who continue to carry her dream for safe and comfy schools for all First Nations children in Canada.

The TRC calls on Canada to provide culturally based education for First Nations children and calls on individual Canadians to learn more about Indigenous peoples in Canada as a starting place for meaningful reconciliation. In this spirit, the Caring Society continues to provide updated education resources for learners and teachers of all ages to take part in activities that foster reconciliation and culturally based equity for Indigenous children and youth.



In celebration of Shannen's Dream, the Caring Society hosts the annual event; School is a Time for Dreams. This event invites people from all over the country to support equitable education for First Nations and all young people in Canada.

I Am a Witness: Canadian Human Rights Tribunal

fncaringsociety.com/i-am-witness

In January 2016, the Tribunal ruled in a landmark human rights case that the Canadian government is racially discriminating against 165,000 First Nations children by providing flawed and inequitable child welfare services to First Nations children and their families and failing to implement Jordan's Principle to ensure equitable access to services.

It has been over nine years since the Merits Decision (2016 CHRT 2) and much has been accomplished. Since September 2024, the following developments have taken place:

National long-term reform of FNCFS: In October 2024, First Nations-in-Assembly passed resolutions directing a reset of work towards long-term reform and rejected the July 11, 2024, settlement agreement negotiated with Canada, AFN, COO, and NAN.

- Through collective decision-making, First Nations-in-Assembly passed resolutions directing Chiefs to be restored as the



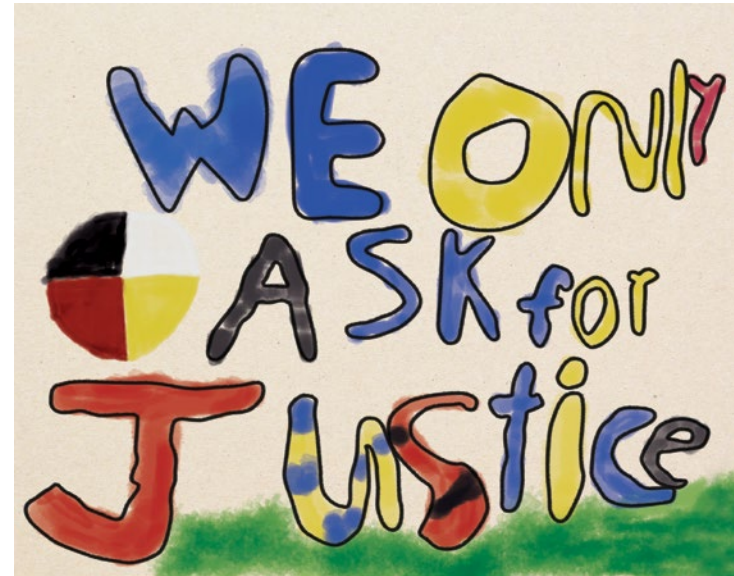
key decision-makers on long-term reform and directed the AFN Executive Committee to establish a National Children's Chiefs Commission (NCCC) with representation from all regions to oversee and provide strategic direction on long-term reform, ensure governance structures and amendments processes uphold the sacredness of children, youth, and families, is transparent, open, and accountable to First Nations, preserves First Nations decision-making, and includes the guidance of youth, youth in care and formerly in care, and First Nations child and family service experts.

- Following the October 2024 direction from First Nations rights holders to not approve the Draft FSA, as it did not achieve the purpose of the draft FSA, namely to eliminate the discrimination found by the Tribunal and prevent its recurrence, Canada refused to return to the negotiating table to discuss long-term reform of First Nations child and family services outside of Ontario.
- In response to Canada's refusal to negotiate a national path to ending its discrimination in FNCFS, in January the Caring Society filed a motion with the Tribunal seeking orders to compel Canada to return to the negotiation table.
- On August 20, 2025, the Tribunal issued 2025 CHRT 80, ordering Canada, along with the co-complainants to the case (the Caring Society and the AFN), to

move forward on national FNCFS long-term reform without further delay. The orders contain general direction on the long-term reform of FNCFS, while emphasizing that Canada must stop its discrimination and ensure it never happens again.

- The Tribunal also provided orders for the Caring Society, the AFN, the NCCC, First Nations Chiefs, experts, and those who have filed for interested party motions to develop an evidence-based, comprehensive national FNCFS long-term reform plan and requested remedies outside of Ontario. The Tribunal encouraged Canada to return to the negotiation table and listen to the NCCC and co-complainants. However, if Canada decides against this, the Tribunal will hear Canada's plan separately and choose between the two long-term reform order requests. The plan(s) must be filed to the Tribunal by December 22, 2025. The Caring Society and the NCCC will commence engagement throughout the fall.

Ontario-specific Agreement on long-term reform of FNCFS: On January 7, 2025, Canada, along with the COO and NAN,



announced they intend to reach a FNCFS long-term reform final settlement agreement that is only for Ontario First Nations.

- COO and NAN entered into an agreement to reform the FNCFS Program in Ontario (Ontario Final Agreement), as well as a Trilateral Agreement respecting the 1965 Agreement. The agreements were ratified by the NAN Chiefs and the Ontario Chiefs-in-Assembly on February 25 and 26, 2025 respectively. In March 2025, COO and the NAN filed a joint motion for approval of the Ontario Final Agreement, which Canada has supported.
- In 2025 CHRT 80, Tribunal clarified that the legal proceedings for the OFA motion will run separately to the proceedings on



the long-term reform of FNCFS; one legal process will not have an impact on the other. The Tribunal also disagreed with Canada's submission that, if approved, the OFA could serve as a precedent for the National long-term reform agreement.

Interested Parties: Canada, in its March 17, 2025, letter to the Panel, indicated that "the outcome of the joint motion [the Ontario Motion] is likely the path forward in these proceedings, including the use of the dialogic approach and the completion of the long-term remedial phase of Ontario."

- Eleven motions (Chippewas of Georgina Island and Taykwa Tagamou Nation, AMC, the Confederacy of Treaty Six Nations, CYFN, FSIN, Mi'gmaq Child and Family Services of New Brunswick, Tobique First Nation, OCOW, Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta and Ugp'i'ganjig First Nation) and two joint motions (FNQLHSSC and AFNQL) are filed seeking interested party status in response to the Ontario Motion. On July 24, 2025, Southern Chiefs Organization (SCO) also filed for interested party status.
- Consistent with AFN Resolution 90/2024, the Caring Society supported the motions by the remaining moving parties that either represent, or will present, the perspectives of over 650,000 First Nations peoples located in their respective regions.

Jordan's Principle non-compliance: To learn more about the proceedings at the Tribunal regarding the Caring Society's non-compliance motion on Jordan's Principle, see page 15.



Reconciling History

fncaringsociety.com/reconciling-history

The Reconciling History initiative invites people to learn from the past in the spirit of the TRC and its Calls to

Action by learning about Canada's treatment of Indigenous children and families in ways that link lessons of history to contemporary injustices. By learning about the complete and accurate story of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, we can all have a better understanding of how we can contribute to reconciliation in meaningful ways.

The Caring Society was honoured to partner once more with A7G and Beechwood Cemetery to host our fourth public education event in honour of Orange Shirt Day and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30. Read more about this year's activities on page 27!



Touchstones of Hope

fncaringsociety.com/touchstones-hope

Touchstones of Hope continues to be an important

philosophy for communities, organizations, institutions, and anyone wanting to learn about and commit to reconciliation in their lives and work. Though its origins come from child welfare, Touchstones of Hope has made its way to a wide range of settings and contexts. The Caring Society continues to use the Touchstones of Hope philosophy to guide our work and provides Touchstones of Hope sessions to organizations by request.

In 2024/2025, the Caring Society had follow-up conversations with counsel for the Inquiry into the Treatment, Experiences and Outcomes of Innu in the Child Protection System in Newfoundland and Labrador about Touchstones of Hope philosophy as it relates to the work of the Inquiry. The Inquiry was established by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Innu Nation, and the Touchstone principles are included in the Inquiry's 2022 Terms of Reference.

The Caring Society was also pleased to deliver, for the second year, training to the student guides at Rideau Hall on reconciliation. Rideau Hall is the official residence of the Governor General of Canada. The training looked at Canada's patterns of



colonialism and how they inform current realities for First Nations, as well as the TRC and its Calls to Action, and emphasized that true, meaningful reconciliation is more than apologizing for past harms, but action to redress harmful systems and changing behaviours to relate in a new and just manner. The training was delivered as part of the Caring Society's collaboration with Rideau Hall to install a permanent Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams Heart Garden on the grounds. To learn more about the permanent Heart Garden at Rideau Hall, see page 27.

Regarding future directions, with conversations about Indigenous jurisdiction over children's services ongoing nationally, the Caring Society is interested in how Touchstones of Hope can support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations, communities, and agencies in the development of culturally specific visions to inform legislation under Bill C-92. With its holistic approach to thinking about child wellbeing, Touchstones of Hope can be used to inform frameworks for legislation through a process of community visioning. For Nations, communities and agencies that are in the

beginning stages of exerting control over legislation for children's services, it is essential to start with a vision: a starting point and an end goal. What does child wellbeing mean to your community/Nation? What does it look like when children are healthy, happy and living in dignity and respect? The Caring Society welcomes First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations, communities, and agencies to contact us to learn more about Touchstones of Hope resources to assist in the visioning process.



Resources and Public Engagement

Small Agency Study

fncaringsociety.com/publications/study-budget-needs-and-funding-amended-draft-agreement-long-term-reform-fncfs-program

The Caring Society contracted EngageFirst Management Consultants to analyze the budget needs and funding available for small First Nations under the Draft Final Settlement Agreement (FSA) for long-term reform of the FNCFS Program. EngageFirst conducted the study between September 2024 and May 2025, gathering information from online research and consultations with five small FNCFS providers, who also contributed data to the study.

For this study, a small First Nation is one with a total (on- and off-reserve) population below the median total population of all First Nations in Canada, which is 1,054 members. The median on-reserve population for all First Nations in Canada is 454 members. The median total population of small First Nations is 504 members, and the median on-reserve population for small First Nations is 194 members.

Key Findings

- The Draft FSA provides a guaranteed funding amount of \$75,000 to First Nation affiliated with a FNCFS agency, which is

insufficient. The minimum operational staffing and funding needed to serve any size of population is about six to seven full-time equivalents and approximately \$1.2 million in annual operating budget.

- The categorization and separation of prevention and protection services and funding thereof, primarily for the purposes of managing resources and data, is not aligned with the way many FNCFS providers intend to serve their people.



A block funding approach for prevention and protection services better conforms to First Nation's traditional world views, where the safety and well-being needs of children, youth, families and communities are interconnected and not separated into arbitrary categories for administrative convenience.

- The funding for prevention in the Draft FSA is based on on-reserve population. Members who reside off-reserve would not

have access to prevention services from their own First Nation. Given that most First Nations intend to provide services to members living off-reserve, adequate funding to support off-reserve delivery and well-articulated and well understood reciprocal service delivery agreements between Provincial/Territorial governments and FNCFS providers are crucial.

- The baseline funding as defined in the Draft FSA would be better structured to incentivize keeping children at home and reducing the number of children in care. As defined in the Draft FSA, the baseline funding is not actually a baseline since it is not a minimum funding available for the FNCFS agency; rather, it is funding that is available only as long as children are in the legal care of the agency. FNCFS providers who are successful in reducing the number of children in care to zero are destined to lose their baseline funding and top-up funding. The structure of the baseline funding therefore, disincentivizes keeping families together and keeping children at home.

New Resources

To keep up with the legal proceedings at the Tribunal this past year, the Caring Society released a variety of new resources

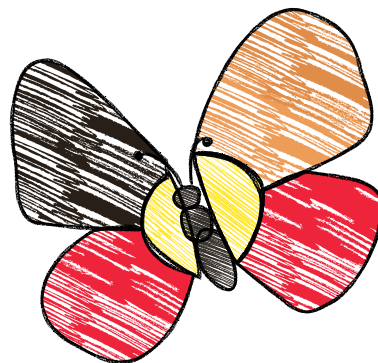


simplifying and streamlining critical information for readers. These resources included new information sheets, briefing notes, reports, guides, webpages, and infographics. Education resources are always made available for free on our website in both English and French. All of the Caring Society's information sheets can now be found on our new webpage under the Knowledge Portal tab. In order to keep all of our resources related to the case in one place, we created a "Resources" tab on our I Am a Witness webpage.

Another exciting addition to the Knowledge Portal is a webpage devoted to resources on the Rejected Draft Final Settlement Agreement on the long-term reform of the FNCFS Program. Leading up to October 2024 when the First Nations-Assembly voted to reset negotiations on the Draft FSA, the Caring Society released ten information sheets and infographics about the important information contained in the Draft FSA. Resources included a review guide, the Caring Society's positions on the long-term reform of FNCFS, a report card, information sheets on the dispute resolution process, myths and realities and much more.

With the release of the Tribunal's orders on the Caring Society's December 2023 non-compliance motion on Jordan's Principle and Canada's cross-motion, we released numerous resources related to the ongoing proceedings and federal court decisions on Jordan's Principle. This included:

- An information sheet with general information, key questions and positions on the Caring Society's non-compliance motion.
- An information sheet on 2025 CHRT 6 speaking to the Tribunal's orders and corresponding timelines that Canada must respond to.
- Our much-loved information sheet on Canadian Human Rights Tribunal orders on Jordan's Principle was given a refresh.



- An information sheet on remedies for denied and delayed Jordan's Principle requests outlining various legal avenues available to families with Jordan's Principle requests stuck in the backlog or that have been unreasonably denied.
- An information sheet on the Federal Court's decision on *Cully v. Canada*, which illustrates the impacts the decision will have on cases who have received a denial rationale citing the *Charter* and the

Canadian Human Rights Act, specifically ameliorative programs.

Additional information sheets on a variety of other important topics included:

- A guide to intervening on motions before the Tribunal, including when to intervene, required criteria and eligibility.
- An information sheet outlining the multiple legal actions before the Tribunal related to FNCFS and Jordan's Principle.
- A briefing note on the Supreme Court of Canada Decision on *Quebec (Attorney General) v. Pekuakamiulnuatsh Takuhikan*.
- An information sheet on the study of budget needs and funding for small First Nations in the Amended Draft Final Settlement Agreement for long-term reform of the FNCFS.
- An information sheet titled *The Breath of Life: First Nations Knowledge*, which contrasts how we think about First Nations ways of knowing and being to western-based theories and colonial ways of thinking.

The Caring Society was thrilled to hear from technicians, leadership, representatives, families and individuals who shared how helpful these resources have been.



Events



Have a Heart Day

fncaringsociety.com/events/have-heart-day

The Caring Society celebrated Have a Heart Day 2025 with a panel discussion and virtual screening of [My Voice Matters: Changing the World Through Child & Youth Activism](#). Produced as part of our SSHRC-funded research into the impacts of the reconciliation-based education, *My Voice Matters* asked young people to reflect on their experiences with the Caring Society's social-justice based campaigns as elementary and secondary students. We were thrilled to have several of the young people in the film join us for a live panel discussion after the screening. Their stories, insights, and passion for advocacy made for an meaningful

afternoon. Thank you Melika, Hope, Henry, Harmony, and Daxton for spending Have a Heart Day with us! To learn more about *My Voice Matters*, see page 33.

Nationally, people of all ages and backgrounds celebrated Have a Heart Day through community events, letter-writing campaigns, baking, and social media contributions. First Nations organizations, elementary and secondary schools, community service organizations, church groups, universities and other groups organized events that sent thousands of Hearts to elected officials.

The Caring Society extends warm thanks to everyone from across the country who celebrated Have a Heart Day in 2025 with meaningful conversation and action. While progress has been made since the first Have a Heart Day in 2012, more work is needed by Canada to uphold the rights of First Nations children. Learn more about the human rights case for First Nations kids and other initiatives in the Child and Youth-led Campaigns section of this report.



Elderbeary Day

fncaringsociety.com/elderbeary-day

March 20 marked the Caring Society's seventh annual Elderbeary Day! Elderbeary Day invites people of all ages to honour and celebrate the contributions of our Elders, who do so much to help teach and raise our children and youth. Participants can choose to thank their Elders in whichever way they prefer, whether that be through acts of service, spending quality time together, or expressing gratitude through letters or drawings. We were so thrilled to see so many classes, organizations, and individuals across the country sharing how they chose to honour and appreciate the contributions of their Elders by using the hashtags **#ElderbearyDay** and **#JournéeOursonAîné** on social media platforms.





Bear Witness Day

fncaringociety.com/bear-witness-day

On May 10, people from across the country gathered to celebrate Bear Witness Day and honour Jordan River Anderson. This year's celebrations were especially joyous as 2025 marked the 20th anniversary of Jordan's Principle. We were so thrilled to see caring individuals, organizations and communities across the country hosting events with their teddy bears and stuffed animal friends to use their voices to raise awareness of Jordan River Anderson and equity for First Nations kids like him.

This year, the Caring Society partnered with Senator Francis, Senator White, Senator Audette, Senator Harder and A7G to host a Bear Witness gathering at the Senate. Over

Left: The Anderson family and Jordan's Principle supporters. Below: Students, educators and their teddy bears at the Senate.

300 students, adults, and teddy bears in the Ottawa-Gatineau area came together to "Bear Witness" and celebrate the 20th anniversary of Jordan's Principle. Students came dressed in their blue t-shirts, rocking their bear crowns and friendship bracelets, ready to share their heartfelt letters and collages that highlighted the importance of the full implementation of Jordan's Principle and what it means to "Bear Witness." We were especially honoured to have students from Kitigan Zibi elementary school travel over two hours to join the celebration. We are grateful for Kokum Shirley for opening the event in a good way and for the youth drummers from Kitigan Zibi and Nimkeehns Wemiquwans who shared several songs while guests took part in the biggest round dance to ever take place at the Senate. Many thanks to all the students who shared their thoughtful letters and to our amazing emcees Raiyah and Cece.

Over in Winnipeg, the Caring Society was also honoured to attend a Bear Witness event hosted by Sagkeeng Child and Family Services and Kinosao Sipi Minisowin Agency. The family of Jordan River Anderson collaborated on the day's events and were honoured guests. Led by Parade Marshals Angel, a youth leader, and Cindy Blackstock, children, families and supporters walked from The Forks to Memorial Park. At the park, young people and leaders spoke to the crowd,

and enjoyed lunch and an afternoon of fun activities, including bouncy castles, face painting, and magic shows! Leading up to the event, Premier Wab Kinew delivered a statement in the Manitoba Legislature in Cree honouring Jordan River Anderson, Jordan's family, and Jordan's Principle. The Caring Society extends our warmest thanks to everyone involved, especially the incredible people at Sagkeeng Child and Family Services and Kinosao Sipi Minisowin Agency.

In addition to the many events that took place across the country, we were equally thrilled to see great engagement on social media again this year. To honour Jordan River Anderson and his family, children and youth wrote letters to decision-makers calling for them to fully implement Jordan's Principle.





Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams

fncaringsociety.com/honouring-memories-planting-dreams

Throughout May and June, Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams invites people from across the country to honour residential school Survivors and their families, learn about the residential school system and its legacy, and commit to meaningfully advancing reconciliation. Each year, individuals and groups are encouraged to plant heart gardens as physical representations of their commitment to reconciliation.

Heart gardens come in all different shapes and sizes! Some groups create visual gardens on a board in their classroom or plant wildflowers and grass seeds native to their region, while others affix paper hearts on sticks and write down their commitments to reconciliation directly on them. We've even seen heart gardens in the form of potted flowers! The act of planting a heart garden is similar to reconciliation in that it requires ongoing attention and care to prosper. We saw many heart gardens planted across the country this year and people also shared

photos of their gardens with us on social media using the hashtags **#HeartGarden** and **#HonouringMemoriesPlantingDreams**.

This year in particular marked 10 years since a wooden Heart Garden was planted by students and Elders at Rideau Hall at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Closing Ceremonies. Over the years, the Caring Society and the staff of the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General have been working together to create a permanent Heart Garden on the grounds. Building on the paper Heart Garden created at Rideau Hall last year, native plants were installed in a permanent Heart Garden at Rideau Hall this spring! This garden is located next to the Visitor's Centre and includes butterfly milkweed with cheerful orange summer blooms, golden alexander, which blooms yellow in the spring, and New England aster, which is a vibrant purple in the fall. In total, 16 species were planted, all of which are native to this region and will support local wildlife. An art installation in the Heart Garden by an Indigenous artist is forthcoming!

Orange Shirt Day

fncaringsociety.com/orange-shirt-day

The Caring Society was privileged to partner once more with A7G and Beechwood Cemetery to host our fourth annual public education event in honour of Orange Shirt Day and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. This year's agenda included the following activities:



Top: Student shows their rock illustration to be placed in the Children's Sacred Forest.
Bottom: Members of the public gather for Reconciling History Tours at Beechwood Cemetery.



- **Reconciling History walking tours at Beechwood Cemetery and throughout Downtown Ottawa.** Young people from A7G led the tours, which were an opportunity to learn about the key figures involved in the residential school system, the role the federal government and bureaucracy played, and how we can learn from history to address contemporary injustices experienced by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.
- **Showings of the fourth Spirit Bear film, *Echoes of the Past*.** Attendees of all ages learned more about reconciliation by watching Spirit Bear's fourth big-screen adventure.
- **Art and letter-writing at the Action Tables.** Back again for another year, the Action Tables provided a space where people of all ages could demonstrate their commitment to reconciliation through art and letter-writing to elected officials, calling on them to fully implement the TRC Calls to Action.
- **Special honouring at 2:15 pm.** Participants gathered at the Children's Sacred Forest to honour the children who passed away at residential schools and their families. The Children's Sacred Forest and accompanying plaque was unveiled in 2023 with the guidance of Claudette Commanda and Marie Wilson, and is meant to serve as one of many places of honouring and remembrance.

We were thrilled to also host a special education event at Beechwood Cemetery on the morning of September 30 for students from Ottawa-based schools. Students watched *Echoes of the Past*, had a Q&A with some of the film's voice actors and Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce's family members, went on a special edition of the Reconciling History tour, and painted rocks to demonstrate their commitment to reconciliation.

Every day of the year, we invite people to learn about Canada's past in the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its Calls to Action through our campaign.

School is a Time for Dreams

fncaringociety.com/school-time-dreams

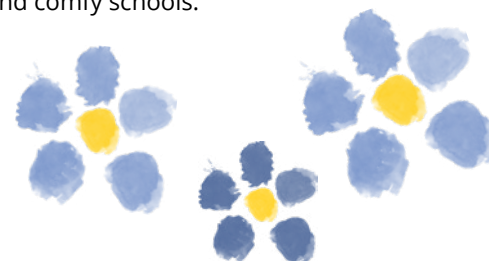
Celebrated annually every March and April, children, youth, organizations, schools, and communities across Canada participate in School is a Time for Dreams in support of equitable education for First Nations young people in Canada. It's also a time to honour Shannen Koostachin and her dream for all First Nations kids to attend safe and comfy schools.

This year we were thrilled to see so many school groups take up the campaign and really make it their own! The Caring Society was honoured to virtually meet with Grade 4/5 students from St. Kateri school who shared how they teamed up with the ReconciliACTION team at Sacred Heart school. Together, students hosted a Shannen's



Dream Day where they set up learning and activity stations around the school. Students also raised funds to support the safety and wellbeing of First Nations children. The Caring Society is grateful to the students at St. Kateri and Sacred Heart for their continued dedication and for the educators for uplifting the voices of these young leaders.

On social media, the Caring Society saw many letters and messages from kids sharing what they want to be when they grow up. Many students also mailed letters to their elected officials demanding equitable access to quality education for First Nations kids. Year after year, it remains clear that young people are inspired to continue Shannen's advocacy until all First Nations children can attend safe and comfy schools.



Annual Caring Society Gala

fncaringsociety.com/events/annual-caring-society-gala

The 14th Annual Caring Society Gala took place on January 17, 2025 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Hosted by Kinosao Sipi Minisowin Agency (KSMA) for the third year, over 600 people of all ages came out to enjoy an evening of music, dancing, art, and fashion in support of equity for First Nations children. It was humbling to see a full house of friends, despite the winter storm!

We at the Caring Society know organizing the Gala is a huge undertaking. Thank you to the many volunteers who helped make the evening so much fun and such a success. The Caring Society Gala is an annual fundraiser hosted by the First Nations child welfare agencies of Manitoba to support equity for First Nations children.



Awards and Scholarships



Jordan's Principle Scholarship

fncaringociety.com/awards-scholarships/jordans-principle-scholarship

Named in loving memory of Jordan River Anderson and in partnership with Jordan's family, the Caring Society was proud to present the eighth annual Jordan's Principle Scholarship for First Nations students to Leah Bodnar-McLeod, Meagan Girard, Pamela Angees and Sheanna Bannon.

Two \$5,000 scholarships and two \$2,500 scholarships were awarded to assist First Nations youth with post-secondary education costs this year. This scholarship is awarded to First Nations students studying children's holistic health and wellbeing. May they always hold Jordan River Anderson in their hearts and minds, and remain champions for Jordan's Principle and equity for all Indigenous children.

We are grateful to the contributions HANSAmEd and Caring Society donors for their generous contributions to the Jordan's Principle Scholarship.

One of the \$5,000 scholarships is made in memory of Joan Glode. Joan was a fierce advocate for First Nations children.

Spirit Bear Award

fncaringociety.com/awards-scholarships/spirit-bear-award

Spirit Bear proudly presented the seventh annual Spirit Bear Award this year. The Spirit Bear Award recognizes groups of young people who demonstrate a commitment to reconciliation and the implementation of the TRC Calls to Action. Three prizes of \$500 were given to children and youth and the prizes can be used toward their continued work toward reconciliation or as the group of young people sees fit. Thank you to the Olive Tree Foundation (Mohamed and Opheera Nasir Endowment Fund) for generously donating \$1,000 towards the award! Three groups were awarded the Spirit Bear Award in recognition of their hard work:

- Kindergarten Care Bears
- St. Monica's Grade 1/2 Class
- Oak Bay High School Campus Cousins

Two additional groups were selected for an honourable mention:

- Ava Bendick, Sorrow Donkin, and Mya White from Fort Saskatchewan High School



- CP Blakely Elementary School

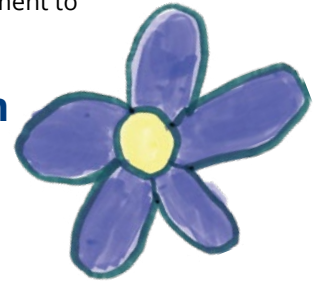
Congratulations to these young people and all who were nominated for the Spirit Bear Award. Spirit Bear appreciates everyone's continued dedication and commitment to reconciliation!

Shannen's Dream Scholarship

fncaringociety.com/awards-scholarships/shannens-dream-scholarship

The Shannen's Dream Scholarship is named in loving memory of Shannen Koostachin from Attawapiskat First Nation who sparked a national movement for safe and comfy schools for First Nations students. The fourth annual Shannen's Dream Scholarship was awarded to Mercedes Stemm, Zoe Quill, Syndel Thomas Kozar, Ruby O'tennadzahe, Shem Mattinas, and Kalianna Goforth.

As a pay-it-forward scholarship, recipients must make a fair and measurable contribution to the Shannen's Dream campaign or related First Nations initiative as a condition of receiving the award. The Shannen's Dream Scholarship is made possible with the support of Canadian EdTech company TopHat and generous Caring Society donors.



FNCARES



About Us

fncaringsociety.com/fncares

The First Nations Children's Action Research and Education Service (FNCARES) was established in 2012 by Dr. Cindy Blackstock with the support of the University of Alberta. FNCARES draws on well-established research on the structural drivers of disadvantage for First Nations children, youth, and families to develop community-based solutions to ongoing discrimination and inequities. We respect and support First Nations self-determination and are committed to engaging communities, including children and youth, as partners and co-researchers in all stages of each project.

FNCARES works with community partners to organize and host public events each year, including lectures, workshops, panel discussions, film screenings, book launches, and other educational events that are free and open to the public. We also develop resources to educate about the structural drivers of disadvantage and encourage discussion and actions that promote culturally based equity and justice for First Nations children and youth.

In the Spring of 2025, FNCARES ended its long and productive partnership with the University

of Alberta and is now supported full time by the Caring Society. We are extremely grateful for the collaboration and support provided by the Faculties of Education and Extension, and to the University of Alberta community, who gave us a home for the first 12 years. FNCARES will continue to work with partners on research and education initiatives to address the structural inequities impacting First Nations children and families.

Activities Carried Out This Year

Education and Engagement Events

Jordan's Principle and Canada's Non-Compliance

On August 29, 2024, FNCARES hosted an information webinar on Jordan's Principle and Canada's non-compliance with the Tribunal orders to fully implement Jordan's Principle and end its discriminatory treatment of First Nations children. The main purpose of the webinar was to provide background information on Jordan's Principle and the most recent non-compliance motion, and to let viewers know what to watch for during the September 10 to 12, 2024, Tribunal hearing on the matter.

During the webinar, Brittany Mathews (Caring Society) and David Taylor (pro bono counsel for the Caring Society at the Tribunal) provided a history of Jordan's Principle, including previous non-compliance orders, explained what non-compliance motions and orders are, and reviewed the Agreement in Principle and multiple efforts to get compliance from Canada. They also discussed what relief the Caring Society is requesting, the positions of the other parties, and the implications for long-term reform (regarding both the draft FSA and the forthcoming Jordan's Principle FSA).

You can watch the [Jordan's Principle and Canada's Non-Compliance webinar](#) on YouTube, where you will also find a list of resources posted during the webinar.



Know Your Rights Under Jordan's Principle

For the 20th anniversary of Jordan's Principle, the Caring Society hosted a [webinar](#) on May 27, 2025, on the rights of children and families under Jordan's Principle, remedies for denied or delayed requests, and how to hold Canada accountable.

Host Brittany Mathews of the Caring Society welcomed attendees and introduced the speakers, beginning with Dr. Cindy Blackstock (Caring Society), who opened the presentation by honouring Jordan River Anderson and his family. Dr. Blackstock reminded us that Jordan's Principle is not a program, option, or recommendation, but rather a legal obligation for Canada to provide the health, education, and social supports First Nations children need, when they need them. Despite this, she says, we are currently seeing broad-based non-compliance of Jordan's Principle by Canada at an unprecedented level.

Jessica Raby from the Caring Society provided details on the rights of First Nations children and families under Jordan's Principle. She summarized key issues families are experiencing when making Jordan's Principle requests, outlined the Tribunal's legal orders regarding Canada's non-compliance, and clarified what services are eligible under Jordan's Principle based on the Tribunal's

orders. She also debunks Canada's allegations of misuse of Jordan's Principle by families.

David Taylor, an Ottawa-based lawyer who has served as pro bono counsel for the Caring Society in the Tribunal complaint since 2014, discussed existing measures for challenging Canada's decision making regarding Jordan's Principle applications, including ISC's internal appeal system and mechanisms available through the Federal Court.

Naomi Metallic from the Listuguj Mi'gmaq First Nation, a lawyer and Associate Professor of Law at Dalhousie, concluded the panel

presentations with a discussion of a report she co-authored titled, [Doing Better for Indigenous Children and Families: Jordan's Principle Accountability Report](#). The report explains how to hold Canada accountable through ombuds-like functions. A lively Q&A session hosted by Brittany Mathews capped off the webinar.



Research and Resource Development

***My Voice Matters* film launched on Spirit Bear Virtual School website**

On September 10, 2024, we launched our new film, *My Voice Matters: Changing the World Through Child & Youth Activism* on the Spirit Bear Virtual School website. The film was also featured in our online *Have a Heart Day* event in February 2025. To date, it has over 1,500 views on YouTube.

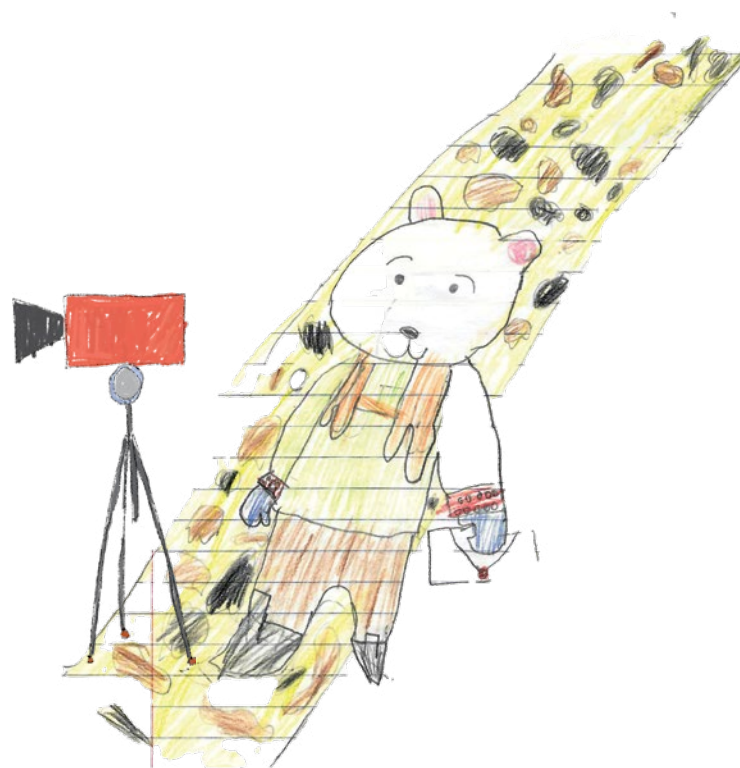
The film was created as part of our SSHRC-funded research project [Just because we're small doesn't mean we can't stand tall](#), which wrapped up in March 2024. The film documents one of the main findings of this research: children and young people who learn about discrimination towards First Nations children and their families in Canada often feel empowered to learn more and to stand in solidarity with First Nations to ensure the discrimination ends.

To create the *My Voice Matters*, we asked young people who had participated in the Caring Society's social-justice based reconciliation campaigns as young students to look back on their experiences and

reflect on how they felt when they first learned about Canada's discrimination against First Nations children, how it felt to take part in activities that were part of a larger social-justice movement, what impact their work has had, and how participating as young students has impacted their own lives. The insights offered by the young people in the film are invaluable, making the film an important resource for anyone interested in learning about the many benefits of young people's involvement in social justice initiatives. Early reviewers of the film called it "beautiful," "unbelievably wonderful," "captivating and meaningful." Another reviewer wrote, "[the film] took my breath away. Those former students are SO articulate."

Special thanks to the former students who shared their wisdom and experiences: Melika Summer Bisson, Hope Hamilton,

Fatima Chenier, Henry Morris, Raiyah Patel, Shannara Nafe, Daxton Rhead, and Harmony Eshkawkogan. We are also grateful to behind-the-camera interviewer Lisa Howell and co-producers Sylvia Smith, Warren McBride, Shannara Nafe, and Lisa Howell. The film would not have been possible without [Project of Heart](#).



Future Directions

Our vision of Canada is one where all First Nations children are loved, respected, and honoured. We know just what to do to make that vision a reality and it will require the education and active engagement of caring Canadians and organizations to make it happen. Over the next year, we look forward to making the following visions a reality:

- Continue working with the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, Parties and the Government of Canada to achieve non-discrimination for First Nations children, now and forever, in Canada's provision of First Nations child welfare and implementation of Jordan's Principle.
- Support First Nations in developing, implementing and advancing child and family services programs and upholding Jordan's Principle by providing independent, evidence-based policy guidance, technical advice, and free resources.
- Continue working with partners to further develop the Spirit Bear exhibition into a first-class travelling exhibition.
- Further promote Spirit Bear's stop motion animated films and children's books to new audiences and engage educational distributors.

- Continue expanding the Reconciling History project to truthfully portray Canada's collective past in order to honour reconciliation.
- Support First Nations child and family service agencies, governments, and stakeholders' engagement in the Touchstones of Hope movement.
- Expand the Touchstones of Hope Reconciliation in Canada and Reconciliation + Children and Youth platforms to include more of the Caring Society's initiatives.
- Expand the tools we use to share information and resources, including videos, webinars, and our podcast.
- Develop more educational resources for Shannen's Dream, Jordan's Principle and the promotion of children's engagement in research and positive social change.

- Expand the available educator resources and make these resources more accessible.
- Host School is a Time for Dreams, Have a Heart Day, Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams, Elderbeary Day, and Bear Witness Day for another year!

A warm thank you to our members, volunteers and the many thousands of caring people of all ages who have joined the effort to ensure culturally based equity for First Nations children, youth, and their families.



Want to Make a Difference for First Nations Kids?

Go online to fncaringsociety.com to learn more and join the movement for culturally based equity for First Nations children, young people, and families. You will find seven ways you can make a difference for Indigenous children and youth, as well as information and resources to make it easier for you to participate in these campaigns in your community, school, workplace, or home! Think about supporting the Caring Society by becoming a member at fncaringsociety.com/what-you-can-do/become-member or making an online donation at fncaringsociety.com/donate.



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