

## First Nations Child & Family Caring Society (Caring Society)



### About the Caring Society

A national non-profit organization based on unceded Algonquin territory in Ottawa, the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada (Caring Society) advocates for culturally based and intergenerational substantive equality for First Nations children, young people, and families. Using a reconciliation framework that addresses contemporary hardships facing First Nations families in ways that uplift all Canadians, the Caring Society provides public education, policy guidance, research, advocacy, and support to communities in ways that promote the safety and well-being of First Nations children and young people, so that they grow up safely with their families, be healthy, get a good education, celebrate their languages and cultures, and feel proud of who they are.

The Caring Society also creates opportunities for children and young people of all backgrounds to collaborate, think creatively about the future, and inspire one another to lead social change. In partnership with compassionate children, youth, educators, researchers, communities, and allied organizations across Canada and around the world, the Caring Society is building a movement where the landscape is one of honour and possibility for First Nations children and their families.

### History

In the 1980s, First Nations established First Nations Child and Family Service (FNCFS) agencies to reassert jurisdiction over their children and deliver culturally appropriate child and family services. However, the lack of adequate funding and Canada's flawed funding formula limited the ability of FNCFS agencies to provide culturally appropriate and equitable child and family services. To address these concerns and provide research, policy, professional development, and networking support, FNCFS agencies sought to

establish a national organization dedicated to this work. At a national meeting at the Squamish First Nation in 1998, delegates created the Caring Society, and at a second national meeting in Kingsclear First Nation in 1999, delegates approved the plan and elected an interim board of directors.

### Key Achievements

- In 2007, along with the Assembly of First Nations, the Caring Society filed a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission that led to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (Tribunal) [ruling in 2016](#) stating that the Canadian government is racially discriminating against 163,000 First Nations children by providing flawed and inequitable child welfare services and by not properly implementing Jordan's Principle. The ruling marks the first time in history that a government has been held accountable for its treatment of First Nations children.
- The importance of the Caring Society's trailblazing work for social justice-based reconciliation is reflected in the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), released in June 2015. The TRC placed First Nations child welfare as the first Call to Action and Jordan's Principle as the third, and acknowledged the Touchstones of Hope as a promising approach to reconciliation in child welfare.
- The Canadian Senate recognized May 10 as Bear Witness Day (2026).
- The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba passed a bill proclaiming May 10 of each year Spirit Bear Day in Manitoba (2019).
- Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director of the Caring Society, was honoured with the World Children's Prize for the Rights of the Child by millions of

voting children for her work combatting discrimination against First Nations children (2023).

- The [Spirit Bear and Children Make History](#) exhibition premiered at the Exploration Place Museum & Science Centre in Prince George, BC, where the Mayor gave Spirit Bear a key to the city and declared September 6 Spirit Bear Day (2024)
- The [Spirit Bear Virtual School](#), an online resource to support educators in teaching the Caring Society's campaigns and initiatives for social justice and reconciliation, launched in 2023.
- The Caring Society was awarded a national research grant to study impacts of the Caring Society's social justice-based reconciliation campaigns on elementary students (2018).
- The [Spirit Bear Podcast](#) won the Canadian Podcast Award for Outstanding Indigenous Series in 2024 and continues to share accessible, insightful discussions with a wide audience.
- [Bear Shares](#), a 3D digital educational resource that invites children to learn and connect with Spirit Bear in a fun and interactive way, was launched in 2024. In 2025, the Caring Society and co-creators received a Canada Council for the Arts award to further develop the game.
- The Caring Society, in association with Project of Heart, released [My Voice Matters: Changing the World Through Child & Youth Activism](#), a film featuring young people who participated in the Caring Society's campaigns as elementary and secondary students (2024).
- [Spirit Bear's book series](#), written by Cindy Blackstock and illustrated by Spotted Fawn Productions, received four different awards (2018-2021).
- Launched [Spirit Bear TV](#), where viewers can watch all of Spirit Bear's films for free (2023).

## Ways to Make a Difference

The Caring Society invites people of all ages to join reconciliation campaigns that help advance equity for First Nations children, young people, and families.

The [I am a Witness](#) campaign invites people to learn about the Tribunal case on First Nations child welfare and Jordan's Principle and to decide for themselves whether or not they think there is discrimination against First Nations children, youth, and families.

Following the Tribunal's 2016 ruling that found Canada is discriminating against First Nations children and families, Canada initially 'welcomed' the finding and committed to doing better for First Nations kids. However, since 2016, the Tribunal has issued more than 30 orders, many of them non-compliance orders against Canada for failing to end the discrimination.

The Caring Society makes all documents relevant to the case available to the public on [fnwitness.ca](http://fnwitness.ca), including the only full timeline of the case, information sheets, and other resources.

[Jordan's Principle](#), named in loving memory of Jordan River Anderson of Norway House Cree Nation, is a child-first legal rule that ensures First Nations children can access the supports they need, when they need them, without denial, delay, or disruption. In 2007, the House of Commons unanimously supported fully implementing Jordan's Principle, but Canada applied it narrowly until the Tribunal ordered full implementation in 2016.

Since then, Jordan's Principle has positively impacted thousands of First Nations children, though continued pressure is needed to ensure that Canada fully fulfils its duty to implement Jordan's Principle in a way that reflects the needs of First Nations children, upholds their right to substantive equality, is grounded in the best interests of the child, considers distinct community circumstances, and ensures access to culturally relevant services.

[Shannen's Dream](#), created in loving memory of Shannen Koostachin from Attawapiskat First Nation, unites people to advocate for safe, comfy schools and culturally based, equitable education for First Nations children.

With the support of Shannen's family, friends, and community, Shannen's Dream was created in Shannen's honour after she tragically passed away in 2010 at age 15. Shannen believed deeply that all children deserve to go to a good school, and Shannen's Dream serves as a reminder for all people in Canada to continue to hold the federal government

accountable for providing safe and comfy schools for all First Nations children and youth.

The [Touchstones of Hope](#) is a reconciliation philosophy grounded in truth-telling, acknowledging, restoring, and relating. It promotes grassroots approaches to caring for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children and respectful collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Guided by five principles—Self-Determination, Culture and Language, Holistic Approach, Structural Interventions, and Non-Discrimination—the Touchstones are meant to be adapted by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities to reflect their unique needs. Caring Society staff are available to assist organizations in starting on the Touchstones of Hope path.

The [Reconciling History](#) initiative invites people to learn the true and complete history of Canada, in the spirit of the TRC and its Calls to Action. Created through a partnership between the Caring Society, historian Dr. John Milloy, TRC Commissioner Marie Wilson, Project of Heart, Assembly of Seven Generations, KAIROS, and Beechwood Cemetery, the initiative highlights key figures connected to the residential school system and provides balanced accounts of their actions through historically accurate plaques, walking tours, and educational resources. Its materials show how decisions made more than a century ago continue to affect First Nations children and families today.

## Spirit Bear

[Spirit Bear](#) was gifted to the Caring Society by Carrier Sekani Family Services in 2008, and has since become a cherished symbol representing the 165,000 First Nations children affected by the child welfare case at the Tribunal, as well as the many young people who support reconciliation and culturally based equity. He attends all Tribunal hearings, received an honorary “Barrister” degree in 2017, and continues to play a central role in the Caring Society’s child and youth engagement and reconciliation education efforts.

Spirit Bear has published [four children’s books](#) written by Cindy Blackstock and illustrated by Spotted Fawn Productions. Each book is based on true events that teach young people about reconciliation and the power of making a difference. The books and learning

guides are available in multiple languages, including Indigenous languages, and can be downloaded for free. All four stories have been adapted into [stop-motion films](#) voiced by Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, youth, and adults, and can be viewed on [Spirit Bear TV](#). The [Spirit Bear and Children Make History exhibition](#) brings these stories to life with puppets and sets from the films, interactive features like the [Bear Shares](#) digital experience, and archival material from the human rights case and the broader movement for culturally based equity.

In 2023, the [Spirit Bear Virtual School](#), launched in partnership with the University of Ottawa and regional educators, offering learning guides, videos, [and Spirit Bear’s Beary Caring Curriculum](#) to support education on social justice and reconciliation. Spirit Bear’s work also includes the [Reconciliation Ambearristers](#) initiative, a national network of relatives who help students and community groups build relationships with local First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities while supporting the TRC Calls to Action. The Caring Society also hosts the [Spirit Bear Podcast](#), which features conversations with experts and advocates on the wellbeing of, and justice for, First Nations children and families.

The [Spirit Bear Plan](#) is a five-part plan to end inequalities in public services for First Nations children, youth, and families. It calls on Canada, Parliament, government departments, and all public services to address gaps in federally funded programs and to eliminate discriminatory ideologies, policies, and practices across government.

## Child and Youth-Led Events

It is a point of pride for the Caring Society that children and youth are our largest group of supporters. Engaging and uplifting children and youth in culturally based equity and social justice movements gives young people meaningful opportunities to raise awareness and speak out on issues that matter to them. Their voices are valuable, and working together with organizations, communities, and schools helps ensure all children and youth can think creatively about the future and have the same opportunities to succeed.

Watch [My Voice Matters: Changing the World Through Child & Youth Activism](#) to learn more about how engaging in the Caring Society's social-justice-based reconciliation campaigns has impacted young people.

[Have a Heart Day](#) is a child and youth-led reconciliation event that brings together caring Canadians to advocate for First Nations children's rights to safety, education, health, and pride. Each February 14, people across the country raise awareness by hosting activities, writing letters or Valentine cards to elected officials, and sharing messages in their schools and communities, and online.

Each year on March 20, we honour [Elderbeary Day](#) as a time to celebrate the contributions of our Elders, who do so much to teach and raise our little ones. We encourage people of all ages to show their care by spending time with Elders, asking questions, and offering support in meaningful ways.

Each November, people across the country take part in [School is a Time for Dreams](#) to advocate for equitable education for First Nations children and youth by learning about Shannen's Dream, hosting gatherings, and encouraging elected officials to ensure all First Nations children can live their dreams and access quality, culturally relevant education.

As a legacy to the work of the TRC, and to honour residential school survivors and the children who did not make it home, people of all ages are invited each May and June to take part in [Honouring Memories](#), [Planting Dreams](#) by planting a heart garden with paper hearts or real plants.

## Awards and Scholarships

The Caring Society proudly recognizes individuals and groups, including children and youth, who advance the rights and wellbeing of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children through [seven scholarships and awards](#):

- The Jordan's Principle Scholarship for First Nations students studying children's holistic wellbeing;
- Neebin's Music Fund to support Indigenous youth in the arts;

- The Peter Henderson Bryce Award for exemplary leadership in promoting safety, health, and wellbeing;
- The Shannen's Dream Scholarship supporting First Nations youth in post-secondary education;
- The Spirit Bear Award for groups of young people working to advance the TRC Calls to Action;
- The Mary Teegee Caring Award recognizing a frontline social worker who exemplifies courage, respect, cultural grounding, and dedicated support for children and youth in care;
- The Raymond Shingoose Leadership Award honouring a respected leader whose long-standing service, innovation, and advocacy have strengthened First Nations child and family services.

## Knowledge Mobilization

One of the strategic directions of the Caring Society is to create and curate evidence-informed resources on the structural drivers of child, youth, and family disadvantage and related interventions. This involves addressing the causes of disadvantage for First Nations children and youth by building on cultural strengths and solutions that support the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This work also involves research and knowledge mobilization with partners and institutions to deepen understanding of the issues affecting First Nations children and youth, and to identify sustainable solutions that respect and uplift their rights.

The Caring Society also mobilizes knowledge by creating [information sheets](#) and maintaining a free online [publications database](#) featuring a wide range of accessible resources related to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children, youth, and families. And between 2004 and 2024, the Caring Society published [First Peoples Child & Family Review](#), an open-access, interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed journal honouring the voices and perspectives of First peoples and non-Indigenous allies and supporters. All issues are available online for free.

Through the [First Nations Children's Action Research and Education Service](#) (FNCARES), we draw on well-established research on the structural drivers of disadvantage to support community-based solutions rooted in First Nations self-determination, engaging communities—including children and youth—as partners in every project.

Each year, the Caring Society delivers webinars and presentations across the country, including keynote addresses, workshops, trainings, and school-based education, with many posted on our [YouTube channel](#).

### **Additional Ways to Support**

To support the work of the Caring Society, you can [become a Member](#), participate in annual events, and stay up-to-date on current issues by reading our [Newsletters and Annual Reports](#), visiting our [website](#) regularly, and following us on social media.

We are also grateful for all [donations](#) we receive. Each donation helps to support equity for First Nations children and young people as well as reconciliation activities for all children in Canada.