I attended the hearings in the morning on both days. My overall perception is that Canada has no platform to stand on and there were contradictions. I noticed that Canada was just dragging out the topic. I'm left assuming that Canada has no justification for trying to get out of its responsibilities. I want to say that when I first started the process of "being a witness", I only learned about one side of the story...the First Nations' children's side. After witnessing both days of the Tribunal hearings, I realize that there IS NO OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY.

From: Shannara Nafe, Elizabeth Wyn Wood student, June 2&3, 2010, Ottawa

I was at the Tribunal to witness something that's of relevance to the whole community, not just to me or them. A part of me was feeling angered that I had to hear the the lawyers for the AFN and the FNCFCS have to defend and champion their cause without even the guarantee of evidence being heard. The bureaucracy (Canada) has tried to approach this human tragedy with sterile indifference, as if it weren’t a Human Rights

Plan to attend the 3rd Annual Manitoba Indian Child Welfare Gala scheduled for Wednesday, October 27th (4:30 pm to 10:00 pm) at the Victoria Inn, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

All proceeds to the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada. Last year, the Gala event netted more than $30,000.00 in art auction and ticket sale proceeds for the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society. Membership fees also totalled several thousand dollars. This year, we hope to top last year's amount. But to do so, we need your help. For tickets and information contact Mary-Lou Olson at Southeast CFS at 204-947-0011.

Congratulations to Nicholas McHaffie, Mel Hogg and Sarah Clarke of Stikeman Elliott, LLP for winning the platinum medal in the "Change Agent: First Nations and/or Metis" category of the Lexpert Zenith Awards. Stikeman Elliott is being honored for their pro bono work in federal court on the First Nations child welfare tribunal.
Another summer has come and gone but during that time, many exciting things have happened with the Touchstones of Hope movement. Here are just some of the things that were accomplished during the summer as well as a look forward into our activities planned for the fall.

From July 27-29, 2010, the Touchstones team, including Advisory Committee members, and Dr. Michael Saini, assistant professor at the University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work, partnered with the three First Nations child and family service agencies that hosted Touchstones community workshops to design and begin implementing a qualitative evaluation of the Touchstones project to capture key learnings and themes to inform policy change and touchstones evaluation. Nezul Be Hunuyeh Child and Family Services Society, Carrier Sekani Family Services and Northwest Inter-Nation Family and Community Services Society, community members and the individuals from the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) were consulted as part of the evaluation process. Dr. Saini met with each agency to explain the Participatory Action Research (PAR) method and to provide tools and resources so that the communities are empowered to participate in the research process. As Dr. Saini noted, research data collected to date has come strictly from the participants and facilitators of the Touchstones gatherings. He will be conducting interviews with key informants over the next few months to enrich the data collected to date. Dr. Saini’s role is to facilitate and guide the research which is community driven. He stressed the importance of the research coming from the community since in the past, research regarding First Nations peoples and communities has been seen as negative because it has often been done about First Nations rather than with them.

Many Elders, community members and others who attended Touchstones community workshops, have been engaged to gather workshop data and to collect more information (i.e. interviews from participants) in order to ensure the fullest record of community vision and planning for child and family safety and wellbeing. In doing this, the research will provide a more accurate description of the immediate impacts of the Touchstones of Hope and whether or not there have been longer term impacts measurable at the level of children and their families stemming from the Touchstones movement. As active participants in the Touchstones of Hope movement, we have seen firsthand collaborations, such as newly developed relationships, which have developed since the first gathering in Prince Rupert in October of 2008. We are truly excited for the outcomes of this community driven research!

Over the next few months, two more Touchstones community sessions will occur; one at Nisga’a Child and Family Services on October 6-7, 2010 and Haida Child and Family Services on November 2-3, 2010. There will also be a community session with Gitksan Child and Family Services in the new year.
Never GIVE UP:
Remembering a Children's Education Action Hero
SHANNEN KOOSTACHIN

On May 31, 2010, Canada lost a national treasure – she was 15 years old. Shannen Koostachin from Attawapiskat First Nation lead the largest child lead rights campaign in Canadian history demanding that all children in Canada, including First Nations children, get safe schools they can feel proud of. Thousands of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children sent letters to the Canadian Government demanding a chance to learn in safe and proper schools. Shannen went to school in a series of broken down portable trailers set beside the old abandoned school that had been contaminated by thousands of gallons of diesel fuel. Three Ministers of Indian Affairs had promised the over 400 children in Attawapiskat a new school and failed to deliver. Shannen was 13 years old when Minister Strahl delivered the news that the children would not get a new school any time soon – government could not afford it. Shannen and the other grade 8 students cancelled their graduation trip to Niagara Falls and used the money to send three youth leaders, including Shannen, down to see Minister Strahl to ask in person for a new school. As Shannen said “I looked at the rich room he sat in with all of his staff and I told him I wish we had a classroom as nice as his office every day.” Minister Strahl went on to say his government could not afford it. Shannen told the Minister she would never give up and she never did.

Shannen often spoke of the love and moral teachings her family gave to her and how these were a source of strength as she reached out to many non-Aboriginal school children and adults to help them understand that the federal government provides less elementary and secondary funding for children on reserves than other children receive from the provinces. Something the Auditor General of Canada noted a decade ago. Member of Parliament Charlie Angus was with Shannen as they toured a non-Aboriginal school and he found that she was lingering in the classrooms as he walked down the hall. He walked back to ask her what was wrong and she said “I wish I had my life to live over again just so I could go to a nice school like this.”

In 2008, Shannen was one of only 45 children in the world to be nominated for the International Children’s Peace Prize given by the Nobel Laureates. She viewed the nomination as one honoring the work all of the children, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, had done together to stand up for the right to learn and the right to proper schools. She wrote that “well the three or four things I would like people to know about me is. One, I do not like broken promises. Two, I do not like seeing my siblings going to school in washrooms. And three, I would like them to know too that I AM NOT GIVING UP.

In December of 2009, Minister Strahl promised the children of Attawapiskat a new school but there are hundreds of First Nations children across the country going to run down schools that are poorly funded. Conditions are so bad that only one in four First Nations children graduate from high school. All First Nations children have dreams – to be doctors, cooks, dancers, carpenters and some, like Shannen, want to be lawyers so they can make sure all children have a chance to succeed in Canada. Shannen never lived long enough to see a proper school built in Attawapiskat so all Canadians must make sure the Government of Canada delivers on its promise and provides equitable funding for children’s services on reserves in her memory.

If Canada can spend billions on security for wealthy nations around the world, it can spend a fraction of that on safe schools that all children in the country can be proud of. To find out more on how you can help go to www.fncaringsociety.com

In related news, the Caring Society has been collaborating with Kids Help Phone (KHP) to deliver a workshop using the Touchstones of Hope as a basis for cross-cultural learning. KHP helps to improve the well-being of Canadian children and youth by providing them anonymous and confidential professional counselling. There were three workshops in August: two in Toronto and one in Montreal. The goals of the workshops were to empower KHP staff to learn more about First Nations peoples and communities and brainstorm ways to improve engagement strategies with Aboriginal youth and children. Participants were introduced to the Touchstones principles, Self-Determination, Holistic Approach, Culture and Language, Non Discrimination and Structural Interventions and discussed how these principles could guide KHP strategic planning and practice. The Caring Society looks forward to this collaboration with Kids Help Phone and looks forward to the possibility of future collaboration opportunities!

Lastly, the Caring Society has been collaborating with the Ombudsman and Child and Youth Advocate’s office in New Brunswick. One of the recommendations of their report titled “Hand in Hand: A Review of First Nations Child Welfare in New Brunswick”, was to promote collaboration between Mi’kmaq and Maliseet peoples in New Brunswick and Voluntary Sector organizations. After meeting with us in June 2010, they will be utilizing the Caring Across the Boundaries curriculum and will be hosting five two-day workshops in the communities. We are excited to be involved in this initiative and we wish them the best of luck!
Amnesty International and Chiefs of Ontario versus the Attorney General of Canada representing the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

INFORMATION (reports, court documents and time line): www.fnwitness.ca

There are more First Nations children in child welfare care today than at the height of residential schools. First Nations children are driven into foster care at 6-8 times the rate of other children by poverty, poor housing and substance misuse. The good news is that these factors respond to services, the bad news is that according to leading experts, the Auditor General of Canada (2008), the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (2009) and INAC’s own documents, the federal government provides inequitable child welfare funding to address the problems. According to INAC, its child welfare program effects 160,000 First Nations children on reserves including at least 8,000 children in foster care.

This historic case marks the first time that the federal government will be held accountable for its current treatment of First Nations children and families before a legal authority with the power to make enforceable orders. The precedent could help address other inequalities for children on reserve in areas such as education, health and other social services.

The federal government is trying to avoid a public hearing on the merits using legal loopholes. The federal government argues it only “funds” the child welfare services to the First Nations children while others “provide” the services and thus their “funding” no matter how inequitable, is not a service as defined in the Canadian Human Rights Act. Fortunately, Canada has already lost two efforts in Federal Court to derail the tribunal on the funding is not a service issue but, apparently desperate to avoid a hearing on the facts, Canada filed a motion to dismiss on the same grounds at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and this was heard on June 2, 3, 2010 in Ottawa. People from across Canada came to Ottawa to witness the hearing first hand as Canada has tried to block media from broadcasting the hearing.

YOU CAN HELP: Join over 6300 caring individuals and organizations who have committed to follow the tribunal by registering at www.fnwitness.ca making this case one of the most formally watched legal cases in history. It is free and takes under 2 minutes!

Building Canada’s Community of Innovators for Social Change, Ashoka announces 7 new Canadian Fellows bringing the Fellowship to 34

Seven social entrepreneurs were recently elected as Ashoka Fellows, all with systems-changing solutions for major social challenges in Canada. The new Ashoka Canada Fellows are: Anil Patel, Brent Kopperson, Cindy Blackstock, Claudine Labelle, Eva Marszewski, Sandrine Faust and Usha Tamba Dhar. They join a network of more than 2,500 Ashoka Fellows in 70 countries worldwide.

Congratulations to Cindy Blackstock on being named one of 7 new Canadian Ashoka Fellows! Cindy is the first Aboriginal Fellow in Canada. The Ashoka Fellowship is an important recognition of the Caring Society’s shared work to ensure First Nations children grow up healthy and proud of who they are.

For more detailed profiles for each Fellow, please visit: http://www.canada.ashoka.org