

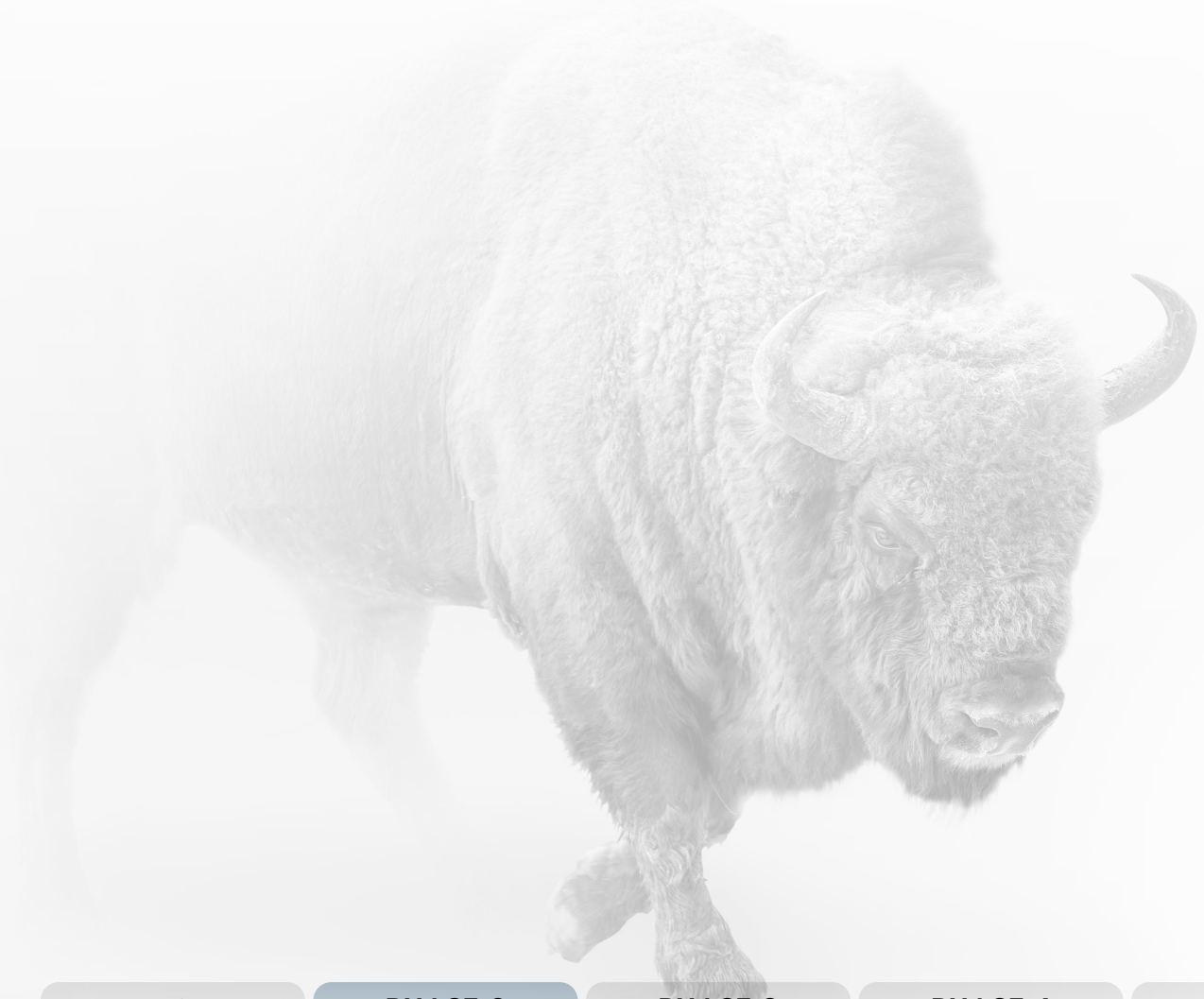


WAABISHKODA BIZHIKI

White Buffalo Report

PHASE 2: OPERATIONALIZATION

Interim Funding received in April 2023 to begin operationalization of the Act (2023-2024)



PHASE 1

Pre-Operationalization
Year 1 (2022-2023)

PHASE 2

Operationalization
Year 2 (2023-2024)

PHASE 3

Baseline Services
Year 3 (2024-2025)

PHASE 4

Capital Projects
Year 4 (2025-2026)

PHASE 5

Evaluation
Year 5 (2026-2027)



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WAABISHKODA BIZHIKI

WHITE BUFFALO REPORT

The Journey of Peguis Child and Family Services
Toward Decolonizing Child Welfare

PHASE TWO

Reported Submitted by: Leona Huntinghawk, MSW, RSW

Internal Reviewer, Peguis Child and Family Services



ACRONYMS PAGE

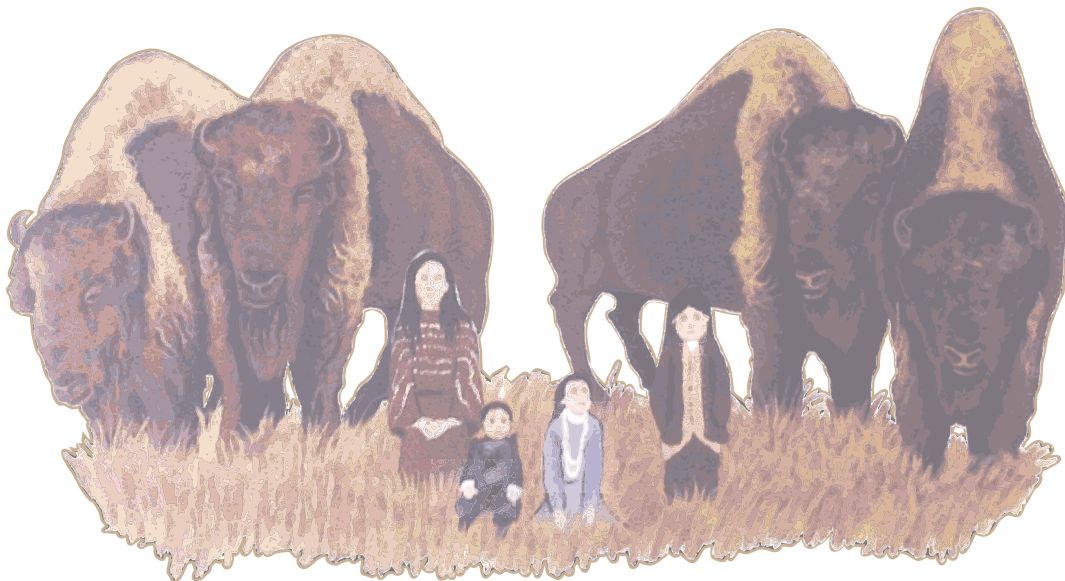
CFS	Child & Family Services
HOCFNA	<i>The Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act</i>
CSA	Children's Special Allowance
THE AGENCY	Peguis Child and Family Services
IT	Information and Technology
IGB	Indigenous Governing Body (Bodies)
CIC	Child(ren) in Care
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
AMC	Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
FAI	Framework Agreement Initiative
MACY	Manitoba Advocate for Children & Youth
PO	Permanent Order of Guardianship
SCO	Southern Chiefs' Organization
SECFS	Southeast Child & Family Services
CAS	Children's Aid Society
ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution

BACKGROUND

The Agency logo was changed in 2014 when tobacco was passed to Agency Elder Josie Bear who now sits in the Spirit World. She dreamt about buffalo gathering, they surrounded four children, encased by the circle of life with all four colors representing the four directions. As she described her vision, she reiterated it was the Agency who acts as the buffalo – protecting children and lifting up families to fulfill their sacred responsibilities as the children are gifts that must be nurtured and loved. She then, sternly reminded the Agency, we are all buffalo, we all have the responsibility to protect all our children.

NAMING THE REPORT

The *Waabishkoda Bizhiki* - White Buffalo "Report" represents Dream Knowledge from Elder Josie Bear whom our relative, the buffalo visited while she was in a sleep state that signified the healing that was to begin. Therefore, the work that has begun since this vision is acknowledged in the North that is represented by the white cloth to signify the healing. Hence, the report is named to honour the vision that guides the work – *Waabishkoda Bizhiki* - the White Buffalo Report.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OBJECTIVE FOR PHASE TWO

The internal review of Peguis Child and Family Services continues with this Phase Two Report. The objective of the internal review is to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, community responsiveness and overall service quality of Peguis Child and Family Services. The internal review aims to provide insights into performance, stakeholder satisfaction, resource utilization, and alignment with organizational goals related to the roll out of the new child welfare legislation, the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* (2022).

WHAT WAS DONE DURING PHASE TWO

Information collected include interviews and reviewing Agency reports. Phase Two of this internal review covered from the Agency going live with the new child welfare legislation, the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* to Winter 2024.

WHAT DID WE FIND OUT?

The Agency continues to fulfill its mandate in accordance with the Board of Director's governance structure. The community Elders in Peguis First Nation are pleased with the Agency's work and the senior management team at the Agency continues to remain in alignment with strategic objectives and service delivery requirements. There appears to be consistent progress on key initiatives and performance indicators.



COMMUNITY NAMESAKE - CHIEF PEGUIS

Chief Peguis was a peacemaker, visionary and notably the most powerful chief in the region of the Red River Settlement due to the friendship he demonstrated to the area's newcomers. He was often *"clad in a cotton shirt, breech clout, red cloth leggings and over all a blanket wrapped loosely about him, his hair hung in two long plaits studded with brass ornaments, his breast decorated with medals"* (Colin Inkster's Writings, 1909).

Despite his long-standing patience with the newcomers, Peguis became dissatisfied when they began using lands not surrendered by his people and he made a formal protest to the Aborigines' Protection Society. He also stated that the tobacco payment instituted in 1817 had been simply a goodwill token and that arrangements for a formal surrender of land had never taken place. He questioned the Council of Assiniboia to make any laws which affected the un-surrendered area until after a further treaty was made (Dempsey, 1976). The authorities took no action to rectify the situation until after the area was transferred to the Dominion of Canada in 1870; then Treaty No. 1 was negotiated by Peguis' son, *Mis-koo-kee-new* (Red Eagle). Chief Peguis did not live to see the treaty.

Dawn broke on the morning of September 25, 1864, to wake the still sleeping settlement of St. Peter's. With it came the sad and unexpected announcement that Chief Peguis had begun his journey to the Spirit World. The news of his death travelled quickly. When the sorrowful details reached Reverend Abraham Cowley, Missionary at St. Peter's, he made note of it in his journal. "Roused before daylight," he wrote, "by messengers bearing the melancholy intelligence that our poor old Chief Pigwys was no more. He had called for a drink of water in the night and did not speak again thus at the last his death was rather sudden."

Peguis had spent the evening before conversing with Dakota visitors who had recently arrived from the south. Communication and visiting went on late into the night. When the discussion was over, Peguis settled into his bed for a rest. After drinking his water, he went to sleep, forever as it turns out, thus closing his 90-year Circle of Life

(Sutherland, 2003).

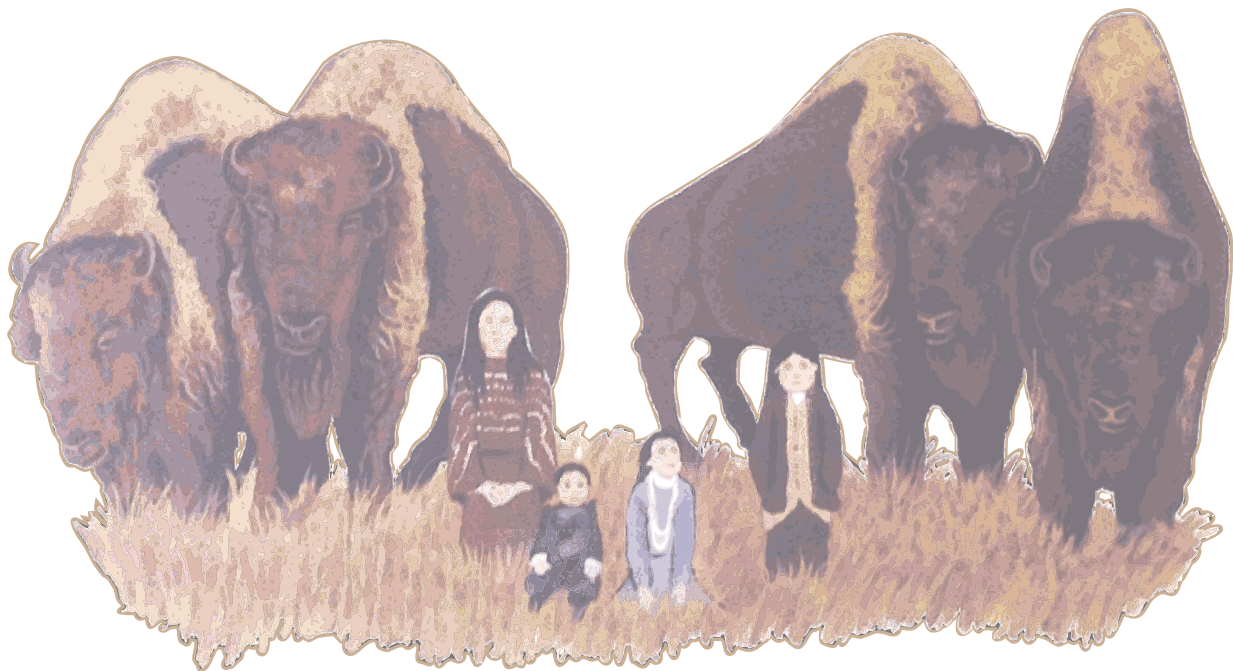
DID YOU KNOW?

There are circumstances of Peguis' legacy that do not receive much attention. One of those details is that he was abandoned as an infant. If today's terminology were to be applied, some could say that Peguis was a foster child.

He was found wrapped up in a blanket on a pile of wood chips. As a result, as a small boy, his nickname from his adoptive/kinship family was *Little Chip*. It has been suggested that Peguis' biological father was perhaps a fur trader and his mother was unmarried, so he was relinquished (Sutherland, 2023).

When grown, Chief Peguis took in a small Cree boy that had been abandoned and had nowhere to go. If today's terminology were to be applied, Chief Peguis might also be referred to as a foster/adoptive parent. He was simply following the natural laws of kinship that Indigenous people have followed for millennia.

As a standing entity in the community of Peguis First Nation, Peguis Child and Family Services continues to work in his name, inspired by his example of leadership, congeniality, unity and peace. There is a collective responsibility to protecting children and the Agency is working diligently to ensure that no child gets left behind. The resistance of Chief Peguis and his people lives on.



OVERVIEW: WAABISHKODA BIZHIKI – WHITE BUFFALO REPORT

The *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* came into force on January 21, 2022, and according to Section 14.2 of the Act, “the Agency must prepare a report on the 5-year review that sets out their analysis, conclusions and recommendations on the provisions and operations of the Act”.

Process for selection of Internal Reviewer as per RFP No.03-2023, a request for proposal was issued in March 2023 by the Peguis Child and Family Services Board of Directors. The internal review requested is a comprehensive evaluation of services with respect to and in accordance with the Act using an Indigenous perspective and tools such as the medicine wheel.

The evaluation of services covers the following years below and shall consist of an overall evaluation of services and best practices for a 5-year period:

WAABISHKODA BIZHIKI - WHITE BUFFALO REPORT

Phase 1	Year 1 (2022-2023)	Act comes into force on January 21, 2022: Pre-operationalization
Phase 2	Year 2 (2023-2024)	Interim Funding received in April 2023 to begin operationalization of the Act
Phase 3	Year 3 (2024-2025)	Baseline services are established under the Act
Phase 4	Year 4 (2025-2026)	Capital Projects are projected to be completed to facilitate service delivery under the Act The Province of Manitoba does not have a mandate to provide variance funding in the amount of \$25M and continues to provide the same amount of funding under the Provincial CFS Act
Phase 5	Year 5 (2026-2027)	Evaluation of services and best practices

The *Waabishkoda Bizhiki* - White Buffalo Report and Internal Reviewer, Ms. Leona Huntinghawk was introduced at the Agency's Annual General Meeting on September 19, 2024. Ms. Huntinghawk explained the process and invited members in attendance to contact her as well as share her information with other members that were interested in being interviewed over the duration of the 5-year report.

LOOKING TO THE EAST

INTRODUCTION

This document represents Phase Two of the White Buffalo Report - *Waabishkoda Bizhiki*. This report presents new findings from a brand-new data set, as well as accumulated data from Phase One. It is not uncommon for this type of longitudinal evaluation/internal review project. When there is a considerable amount of information stemming from several interviews over a period, the information should be visited and re-visited. Peguis Child and Family Services (the "Agency") deserves no less than other research projects. If a subsequent phase of the Agency's internal review is being implemented but information from Phase One can be helpful, it will be incorporated.

The brand-new data set for Phase Two includes new interviews with the Agency's staff members, community Elders and other stakeholders. It is crucial that all voices are heard, and all opinions are documented, not just the ones that are positive or supportive.

All aspects of this organization were taken into consideration. This internal review will continue to look at the following evaluation components throughout Phase Two:

- What is this Agency about and what needs to be known?
- Is service delivery relevant and making a difference? (*i.e. impact*)
- Why does the Agency work the way it does?
- Now what? With the information gathered, what needs to be done to make the Agency better or more sustainable?

REFLECTIONS FROM PHASE ONE - INTERNAL REVIEWER

The internal reviewer was pleasantly surprised with the ease that Phase One rolled out. The information required for review by this writer (reports, statistics, etc.), the willingness of staff and community members to meet with me held no concerns. This project is of the utmost importance as the landscape of child welfare is changing in Canada. With the passing of Bill C-92 in 2019 came several new scenarios to consider. Child welfare agencies being operated within Indigenous communities are hopeful and optimistically cautious as things progress. Community members are vocal in Indigenous communities about how cfs needs to change for the better. Indigenous insights into cfs need to be heard.

Evaluation is truth telling. There is no way around that. If efficient processes and procedures are not in place at an organization, it will come out during an evaluation/internal review. Phase One did not produce anything close to this. For an agency its size and considering the immense amount of expansion and re-structuring that has taken place over recent years, Peguis Child and Family Services is a sound, stable, well-funded and well-coordinated organization based in efficiency and respectful practice. This is what Phase One discovered.

This is not to say there is no area for improvement. Every organization requires ongoing reflection and for critical conversations to be taking place. Peguis Child and Family Services will heed what they have been teaching. There seems to be a strong willingness from the Agency to pause, learn, and reflect.

Growth means setting new standards. Peguis Child and Family Services is also continuously adapting to change and systemic barriers. Not enough is said about this. We rarely speak in our society about how political child welfare jobs can be. Those in power or those seeking power will attempt to sabotage, protest or provide fabricated accounts of what they believe are Agency standards. For those seeking the truth however, the Agency continues to be transparent in its reporting and accountability.

As stated above, this internal review was commissioned by the Board of Directors at Peguis Child and Family Services and written in accordance with Section 14.2 of the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* which reads:

“The Agency must prepare a report on the 5-year review that sets out their analysis, conclusions, and recommendations on the provisions and operations of the Act”.

Let’s not confuse an internal review with an audit. Audits are mandatory, unwelcome, and often feel quite intrusive. This internal review was anticipated and encouraged by the Board of Directors at the Agency. They wish to know what is working and what is not. If there are gaps in service delivery, the Board of Directors would like to work toward addressing them. If there are strengths in service delivery, the Board of Directors would like to congratulate staff and celebrate these successes. An internal review helps in keeping the Board of Directors informed of the Agency’s practices. After review, the Board of Directors then shares this information with the community.



DATA SOVEREIGNTY

As an Indigenous scholar and researcher, there is a fine line to walk with respect to collecting data from community people. On one hand, research is important because Indigenous communities are facing real world problems and social issues. Indigenous voices need to be heard on these matters. On the other hand, we must be respectful in how this research is carried out. The research must benefit the community as a whole and all properties of any research project must belong to the community upon completion. There is no need for researchers to take this information with them. If the information is going to be shared on a public platform (*publications, conferences, workshops, podcasts, etc.*), it should be with the permission of the community only.

All research is extractive in some form. The gathering of information and stories is 'taking' from people so the only way for the research to remain ethical is that the information stays with the community afterwards. Then, the community has control over its usage. Decolonizing research is like any other system or structure that needs to be decolonized: it is directly related to self-determination. Privileging Indigenous communities' rights to their own self-determination needs recognition.

Data Sovereignty Statement:

This researcher and members of our team hold no ongoing ownership or control over the information related to this Internal Review. All materials, equipment, recordings, notes, digital components, software, devices, etc. are the property of Peguis Child and Family Services. Upon completion of this project, Peguis Child and Family Services retains all rights to all entities, including publishing permissions and control.

SERVICE SOVEREIGNTY

Indigenous sovereignty over social services is essential for achieving community health and well-being. Every Indigenous community is unique so there can be no "pan-Native" approach to this. Therefore, all solutions, services, and programs must be designed in ways that respect the healing journey, resource constraints, and sovereignty priorities of each First Nation. To achieve service sovereignty, critical deconstruction and reconstruction of Indigenous models are necessary. Critical deconstruction acknowledges the complexity of Indigenous thought and culture instead of focusing on thin differences often used in the process of Indigenousization. True reconstruction that follows the deconstruction cannot be based on Western worldviews redefined as Indigenous without the proper 'unpacking' of normative, patriarchal logic that often underlies Western programming and systems. The creation of ethical space between Indigenous and Western systems is a critical first step in this conversation and is necessary to facilitate the transfer of authority in a good way (McLeod et al., 2022).

Please keep in mind that Peguis First Nation is the 7th largest First Nation in Canada (*Indigenous Services Canada, 2024*) and Peguis Child and Family Services is going to require the necessary time, space and resources to unpack what child welfare used to be in the community of Peguis First Nation. This has been daunting. Peguis Child and Family Services is attempting to ethically reconstruct an entire paradigm, in collaboration with Peguis First Nation community members and

stakeholders, all while transforming a cfs system that was utilized to oppress Indigenous people for decades. Remember, implementing the new legislation, the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* in January 2022 was merely the first step.

WORKING AMIDST A PARADIGM SHIFT

Introducing Indigenization and Decolonization into the profession of social work is not a new idea. In 1971, the first mentions of Indigenization in social work are noted in the United Nations international survey of social work training used it to reference the inappropriateness of American social work theories in American Indian communities. Social work and its professional standards are based on Euro-western beliefs: middle-class, white imperatives that are foreign to Indigenous ways of thinking. Shifting away from Western methods of social work and (re)embracing Indigenous helping methods is a large step to take. In other words, Peguis Child and Family Services not only has the challenge of redesigning child welfare in accordance with the Seven Sacred Teachings, but they also continually ask people to think critically about social work practice as it has existed for decades.

Indigenous lawyer, Bruce McIvor, has stated openly that Canada's attempts at Reconciliation have failed or at minimum, faltered. He argues that as long as the Doctrine of Discovery (the legal principle that European countries used to extinguish Indigenous sovereignty by "discovering" us) is at the forefront of Canada law, Reconciliation will not be possible (McIvor, 2021). I argue that reconciliation cannot take place without decolonizing, so this is where our focus should be. Efforts aimed at decolonizing systems of oppression, like the cfs system, should remain a mainstay.

CHILD WELFARE & INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

The colonization of Indigenous people has proven to be a destructive force affecting their overall cultural and traditional well-being. The imperial powers that have fractured Indigenous life in the territory now known as Canada make themselves apparent in varying ways. It has been said by many that the existing child welfare structures have caused some of the greatest harm to Indigenous families and children (Blackstock, 2009; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017; Fallon et al., 2021; Richardson, 2016; Leckey et al., 2022) through the mass removal of Indigenous children from their homes and communities.

Sadly, Manitoba has one of the highest rates of removing children from their family or home environment (Macdonald & Levasseur, 2014). Peguis Child and Family Services is attempting to overturn the damage that has been done by the mainstream child welfare system, which remains embedded in racist beliefs. Reversing damage caused by systemic racism is a long-term, multi-layered process that requires action at individual, community, and institutional and policy levels. Because systemic racism is embedded in social, political, and economic structures, reversing its effects means not only ending discriminatory practices but also repairing harm and creating new systems that promote equity and justice. In other words, reversing systemic racism is not simply about fixing individuals - it is about changing systems, redistributing power, and healing relationships. It requires sustained commitment across generations.

Issued by Pope Alexander VI in 1493, the Doctrine of Discovery stated that non-Christians could not hold lands, and therefore, non-Christian lands could be taken at will by Christians without any recourse for the non-Christian owner, Papal Bull Inter Caetera

(Paul, 2022).

From the perspective of this internal review, here are some key points regarding the Peguis Child and Family Services' Framework that emerged during Phase Two:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & TRUTH-TELLING:

Historical Recognition: The long-standing governmental relations that exist for Indigenous people is a reality that Peguis Child and Family Services acknowledges, as they continue to strive for truth-telling.

Awareness: Awareness ensures that all stakeholders - staff, Elders, leadership, families see that the internal review is being done to improve services and outcomes for kids and families, not to criticize individuals.

Elder Involvement: Elders play a vital and respected role in ensuring this internal review is culturally grounded, ethical, and connected to Peguis First Nation community values.

POLICY & LEGAL REFORMS:

Dismantling Discriminatory Systems: From the perspective of this internal review, promoting social justice and embedding anti-racist, equity-based principles into every aspect of child welfare: intake, assessment, case management and permanency planning remains paramount at Peguis Child and Family Services.

Equity-Based Policies: Peguis Child and Family Services prioritizes family preservation and reunification by ensuring ALL families have equal access to services. The Agency also eliminates prejudice and bias in assessment by using the Signs of Safety tools, a known model for effective work in Indigenous communities.

Indigenous Rights: For Indigenous communities, legal reform is a matter of sovereignty. Legislation such as *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Children, Youth and Families* (2019) and the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* recognize the inherent right of Indigenous Nations to govern their own child and family services. This marks a shift from a colonial model of control to one of self-governance, cultural continuity, and community-based accountability.

REPARATIONS & REDISTRIBUTION:

Community Investment: Child welfare systems have caused deep and lasting trauma. Peguis Child and Family Services is working toward reparations and redistribution by openly acknowledging the harms of the past, restoring dignity, and rebuilding relationships with the families and community that have been negatively impacted by discriminatory systems. The Agency prioritizes culturally

grounded prevention programming, family reunification, mental health supports, hopefully leading to a community-led cfs system.

Institutional Accountability: Institutional accountability means that Peguis Child and Family Services encourages and welcomes being held responsible for their actions, policies, and the outcomes for children, youth and families. Defining institutional accountability is not only about compliance with laws and procedures, but also about ethical and community responsibility, transparency and answering to Peguis Members, especially the Elders.

Moral & Legal Responsibility: Peguis Child and Family Services dutifully accepts its moral and legal responsibility to repair the harm caused by systemic discrimination. Reparations are not acts of charity – they are obligations rooted in principles of justice and accountability. They affirm that the suffering of experienced by families in the past was not accidental, but deliberate acts of a colonial, imperialistic child welfare system

ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION:

Equity in Hiring Practices: Peguis Child and Family Services has focused on core competencies and transferable skills in their hiring practices, as opposed to more narrow approaches to career development. Also, the hiring of Peguis community members remains at the forefront. The priority lies with providing career opportunities for duly qualified Peguis Members as much as possible.

Trainings: Because transformational change requires more than procedural compliance, Peguis Child and Family Services has been focused on providing professional training opportunities to their staff. These trainings prepare supervisors and staff to model contemporary professional behavior and support those they are working with.

Independent Oversight & Review: Independent oversight bodies such as Children’s Advocates, ombudspersons or review panels have been commonly utilized for maintaining accountability in mainstream child welfare systems. In contrast, Peguis Child and Family Services remains accountable to their Board of Directors, Community Members and Elders for all matters pertaining to Agency business.



LOOKING TO THE SOUTH

METHODOLOGY - PHASE TWO

Phase Two carried on with the same methodologies employed in Phase One. Indigenous perspectives and methodologies led the way. Grounded in traditional teachings, Indigenous communities are utilizing Indigenous research methodologies that best support their nations. Indigenous research methodologies are diverse and rooted in the unique cultural contexts of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. They emphasize community involvement, relationality, and the integration of traditional Indigenous ways of learning such as storytelling.

Fostering dialogue and prioritizing the voices of Peguis First Nation took priority in Phase Two, just as it did in Phase One. Respectful ethical consideration was paramount, ensuring respect for Indigenous knowledge systems and practices, especially traditions specific to Peguis First Nation.

METHODS

A mixed methods approach to data collection was implemented. Mixed methods allow for a cross-validation of material and insights across different types of data. For this internal review, interviews were conducted, as well as careful review of Agency documents (*policy, procedures, quarterly and annual reports, etc.*). This report will be comprised of important information stemming from either source: interviews or Agency documents.

In person or face to face (*via Teams, Zoom*) interviews were felt to be the most effective method of gathering *stories*. Storytelling is an effective Indigenous research method, where information is shared during comfortable conversations between parties.

METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

There are limitations to any kind of gathering of data (stories). The limitations of this internal review are:

- The data is limited to the experience of those involved with Peguis Child and Family Services and Members of Peguis First Nation. Others may read the data and extrapolate what they can, but please remember that the information is specific to the community of Peguis First Nation.
- The information collected from Members of Peguis First Nation is based on their lived experiences. The information collected from employees of Peguis Child and Family Services is reflective of their own clinical background and education level. This information cannot be verified.

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AND DECOLONIZING RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Peguis Child and Family Services is led by First Nations women. The senior management team of the organization is 70% women identified. The governing Board of Directors is 100% women led. The theme that links together the history of the child welfare system, the residential school system, and historical and modern challenges faced by our people include *“non-empirically supported, implicit notion that Aboriginal women are ‘unfit’ parents in need of state observation, guidance and at times, intervention”* (Lavell-Harvard & Corbiere Lavell, 2006).

It is argued that settler efforts that *“specifically targeting the power of Indigenous women as life-givers, colonizers were able to disintegrate our communities and move our peoples towards genocide”* (Lavell-Harvard & Corbiere Lavell, 2006). It is worth questioning, then, the potential implications of colonial ideology on the perception and treatment of our First Nations women leaders as we challenge the norm and enact new ways of working. For this internal review, a decolonial methodology was utilized that provided for critical reflection of ideas intended to hurt us.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

For this internal review of Peguis Child and Family Services, the more information and stories were gathered, the more need there was to organize the data in a sensible, comprehensive manner. When the research team began to hear the same ideas or statements over and over, it became clear that thematic analysis was the best choice. Themes emerged from the data that the research team could not deny. Themes such as Strong, Proud Relationships, Collaboration, Prevention Over Intervention became apparent and ultimately, the basis of this internal review report.

The systematic nature of thematic analysis promotes transparency and auditability. Researchers can clearly document their decision-making processes, analytical choices and interpretations, enabling others to evaluate the rigor and validity of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Phase Two of the internal review illustrates the key reasons behind the success of Peguis Child and Family Services:

- Engaging the right people in Peguis First Nation
- The adaptation of the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* to the needs of Peguis First Nation
- Agency Leaders and their commitment

The next section of this report will provide information that speaks to all three areas: Strong, Proud Relationships, Collaboration and Prevention Over Intervention. Interviews with community Elders, a spotlight on various Agency programs will be covered, as well as how the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* continues to positively impact Peguis First Nation. Let's begin with reviewing strong, proud relationships at Peguis Child and Family Services.

THEME #1: STRONG, PROUD RELATIONSHIPS

A STRONG, PROUD RELATIONSHIP: PEGUIS CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES' IN-HOUSE LEGAL COUNSEL, MR. EARL STEVENSON

While interviewing Earl Stevenson, In-House Legal Counsel at the Agency he shared some background to the roll out of the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act*. The Agency sat with Peguis First Nation's leadership in February/March 2020 to get Chief and Council's direction on the new legislation. Implementing the new legislation was not a unilateral decision made by Peguis Child and Family Services. It was recognized that the Nation's leadership would have valuable input in what they wanted to see for children and families. The Agency's In-House Legal Counsel prioritized communications between Peguis First Nation and Peguis Child and Family Services. Peguis First Nation Chief and Council are democratically voted in members of Peguis First Nation, and it was crucial that their thoughts were heard. This move demonstrates the respectful practices of Peguis Child and Family Services and its legal team. Peguis Leadership had an opportunity to voice concern or questions throughout the implementation process. At the same time, leadership acknowledged the technical expertise that the Agency held along with the "arms-length" relationship between the Agency and Peguis Leadership. This allowed for apolitical decisions to be made. This convention has been in place since Agency inception in 1999.

In May and June 2020, an environment scan was conducted to see what (if any) child welfare legislation was already in existence in Indigenous communities across Turtle Island. Environmental scans are important to any decision-making process. They can be valuable in locating existing external resources and provide an organization or program with shaping its goals and strategies (Jones, 2022).

It is important to note that Earl Stevenson wrote the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act*, in consultation with community members, Agency managers and supervisors. Service delivery personnel provided feedback on the practicality of the proposed legislation and provided information on various strengths and weaknesses. Community Elders also provided guidance to Mr. Stevenson.

By January 2021, the draft legislation, the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* was reviewed line by line with Peguis First Nation's Chief and Council and it was blessed in the lodge on January 19, 2021. The very next day, on January 20, 2021, the draft legislation was sent to Manitoba and Canada, initiating the Coordination Agreement stage. After years of planning, Peguis Child and Family Services no longer wanted to wait. Earl Stevenson had shared with the internal reviewer during his interview that the main objectives of his position of In-House Legal Counsel was to provide more culturally relevant services to kids and families. the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* was a major first step.

In March 2021, Peguis Child and Family Services met with Canada to officially begin the Coordination Agreement phase, however, it appeared that Canada was not ready to meet with them. There was a lack of direction and 'next steps' analysis on Canada's end. This was discouraging to Peguis Child and Family Services. By May 2021, meaningful discussions had begun with Canada but not the Province of Manitoba. The Provincial authorities did not attend the Coordination Agreement meetings with Canada, Peguis First Nation and Peguis Child and Family Services, despite being invited. Valuable discussion between the Agency, Peguis First Nation and Canada continued to unfold, regardless. Peguis Child and Family Services and Peguis First Nation refused to be deterred.

Mr. Stevenson shared during his interview that this lack of preparedness was not surprising, given that there was no model or framework to be followed. In this writer's opinion, a gracious approach to the idea of a cfs agency having to wait for its partners to play 'catch up' on an issue as important as Bill C-92. I assert that Peguis Child and Family Services displayed a high level of respect, poise and tact when many others would not have. But this level of graciousness was a common theme during Mr. Stevenson's interview. He used the words, "we" and "us" when describing the implementation process, never taking credit for it himself. He continuously talked about how the frontline service delivery workers, supervisors and managers at the Agency schooled him in the intricacies of child welfare and he was grateful for this tutelage in social work practices.

As well, he pointed out how all the children in Manitoba have benefitted from the good work happening at Peguis Child and Family Services. In their legislation, the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act*, Peguis Child and Family Services removed the ability of social workers to seek a Permanent Order of Guardianship (PO), which removes all the rights of the biological parents until a child reaches the age of 18. Not long afterward, the Province of Manitoba's Child Protection Branch and other cfs authorities began to follow this same way of thinking. Permanent Orders are no longer sought at the rate that they used to be. If some agencies seek POs, they are sought for specific reasons, like Age of Majority case planning. Other agencies have stopped the usage of POs altogether (*Personal Communication, SECFS and Sagkeeng Child and Family Services, 2026*).

In conclusion, Earl Stevenson has been an integral part of how Peguis Child and Family Services has changed the face of child welfare in Manitoba. The writing and implementation of the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* was his effort, knowledge, time and skillset.

Mr. Stevenson was interviewed on CBC Radio in February 2024 where he shared his views on Indigenous child welfare. Here is an excerpt:

Interviewer: "Peguis First Nation, with your help, took matters into its own hands long before this decision (Supreme Court decision to uphold Indigenous child welfare law). Why did the First Nation want to do that, and not wait for this?"

Earl Stevenson: "There is a humanitarian crisis in the Indigenous child welfare forum. We wanted to get our children out of the provincial system as soon as possible so that we can enact our own system in a culturally relevant way, and in more of a responsive way, that acknowledges our community's strengths and as well as our community's needs."

CBC Interviewer: "What kind of changes have already come through?"

Earl Stevenson: "Back in December 2019, there were about 452 children in foster care, under our Agency's provincial mandate. We've been implementing our law for the past two years now. And as of October 31, 2023, we only have 214 children in care. So, there's been a substantial decrease in that number."

(CBC Radio Canada, 2024)

Earl Stevenson continues as the In-House Legal Counsel for Peguis Child and Family Services. In front of one of the Manitoba Justices one day, he heard praise coming for the Agency, when the Justice emphatically declared, *"Peguis Child and Family Services is the only agency in Manitoba right now that is doing things correctly!"* Hopefully this level of praise from a Justice confirmed for Earl that his hard work paid off. It is impressive to see the level of change that one person can implement. As stated earlier however, Earl refuses to take sole credit. He gives due respect to his mentor; Dr. John Borrows, and legal expertise credit to Mr. Hafeez Khan.

Throughout the interviews with Agency staff members there was much reverence shown for Mr. Stevenson's candor, honesty and intelligence. The staff members at Peguis Child and Family Services trust him and are proud to have him as their In-House Legal Counsel.

A STRONG, PROUD RELATIONSHIP: OUR BLACK RELATIVES

Colonial systems have historically oppressed both Indigenous and Black people in Canada. Did you know that Black Africans were segregated in a city called Africville (north of Halifax, Nova Scotia) beginning in the mid-nineteenth century? (Tattrie, 2025). Just as the *Indian Act* (1876) caused the segregation of Indigenous people, causing us to be on the periphery of Canadian society. Colonial systems have caused great harm to Black and Indigenous families. Today, both Black and Indigenous children are overrepresented in child welfare systems across Canada. Both communities experienced efforts to suppress culture but developed strong traditions of resistance and resilience.

Peguis Child and Family Services has been fortunate to hire several social workers of African descent. Originally from the continent of Africa, during an interview, one social worker shared that the parallels of colonization are familiar, just as experienced in his home country of Kenya. Globally, colonization and its facets is the daily experience of black and brown people. Having brought this knowledge and respect to Peguis Child and Family Services, our African relatives are cognizant of what it means to break barriers of oppression and discrimination. They view the lives of Indigenous people in Canada as parallel to their own struggles. Therefore, they have special appreciation of the white supremacy that Indigenous people in Canada are up against. As this internal reviewer has observed, Peguis Child and Family Service has only benefitted from this strong kindred relationship.

A STRONG, PROUD RELATIONSHIP: PEGUIS ELDERS

In Phase One, it was mentioned that the Elders being interviewed did not have to be "experts" in cfs because Elders are responsible for community wellness. This is where their expertise lies. But what about the Elders who *are* experts in various fields? In Phase Two, there was a plethora of information from retired professionals who now identify as Elders, in their later stage of life. One Elder that was interviewed during Phase Two was a policy analyst for years. Child welfare and its known barriers is an issue that this Elder had been studying, analyzing and deconstructing for much of her career. Other Elders were retired business keepers or retired child protection workers. What an honour it was to hear their groundbreaking stories. They fought in systems back when Indigeneity was not discussed or acknowledged at all.

Far beyond sharing their experiences, the Elders *validated* the stories of Peguis Child and Family Services. Because they hold the knowledge of the past, Elders are in a unique position of guiding us on the correct path today. One Elder agreed that everything that Peguis Child and Family Services is currently doing, is good. If someone needs help, they can go to the Agency and talk to them. She shared that she herself was in foster care, so she spoke from personal experience. Her parents were struggling with emotional issues, and all the kids were removed from their care. This was understandably painful as she shared her story. Ultimately, she wished that a place like Peguis Child and Family Services was available back when her family could have used the help.

This Elders generation fought the battles that could not be won at the time. The days of the Children's Aid Society were known to be grim for many Indigenous families. This Elders older sister would have been capable of caring for the younger siblings but instead, they were all removed and placed in the system. Their family would have required family supports and valuable resources like groceries. However, back in those days, this was grounds for apprehending kids. In today's context, Peguis Child and Family Services would have recognized that groceries are an addressable issue and NOT a sole reason for apprehending kids. Instead, the Children's Aid Society put their mother in a psychiatric facility, their father in jail for child neglect and placed all of the kids in white foster homes.

When we say that Elders are survivors, this is not an exaggeration. Nobody should be punished for having mental health issues or not being able to feed their family (*i.e. living in poverty*). This Elder's story was a powerful reminder of how far we have come in community engagement.



THEME #2: COLLABORATION

“Make your supervisor’s job easier, not harder. Bring solutions, not problems. Handle things before they’re asked. Anticipate needs. Most employees create work. Be the one who reduces it. The person who makes life easier always has a job. Be helpful, not just skilled.”

- Scott D. Clary, Leadership & Success Specialist

COMMUNICATE LIKE A LEADER

Great leaders understand the power of words. It is not just what you say, it is how and when you say it. Well-delivered communication strategies are apparent at Peguis Child and Family Services. From Board of Directors’ directives to frontline service delivery, there is honest and direct communication happening every day. As there should be. The roll out of the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* has been well underway for over three years and this coordination could not have been easy. Communication would have been key.

During the Summer 2025 Agency gatherings, the internal reviewer took note of what a ‘well-oiled machine’ Peguis Child and Family Services is. There were dozens of activities occurring at once, participants to listen to, mishaps to be avoided, and planning to be coordinated. I noticed more senior staff at the Agency providing clear instructions to junior staff members. I saw people asking questions when they were unsure of answers. I saw staff members trying hard to address any needs that participants may have had. The community gatherings held for Elders, Youth, women, and men held hundreds of participants at any given time. There would have been nothing but chaos if not for the communication skills of the staff members of Peguis Child and Family Services.

As Peguis Child and Family Services continues on with this journey, implementing the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act*, staff members are very committed to high-value communication. During the interviews of staff members, they spoke openly about how the new legislation was rolled out and how they were told about the progress each step of the way. The communication is healthy, respectful and clear within the Agency.

A Tip for Other Agencies: When implementing your own child welfare legislation, the Agency and leadership of your nation will have to notify all other cfs agencies and provincial authorities in your region when the law will become live, especially if you are no longer providing designated intake and emergency services to any non-band members. Peguis Child and Family Services, for example, respectfully notified all Manitoba agencies and authorities of this change in October 2021, providing them with adequate planning time. Peguis Child and Family Services was going to no longer be under the reach of the *Manitoba Child and Family Services Authorities Act* as of January 21, 2022.

The *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* is federal legislation, providing for Peguis First Nation band members wherever they might live, not just within the province of Manitoba. As federal legislation, any new laws being enacted are a heavy responsibility. Communication will be crucial.

TRUE LEADERSHIP

Inspires: A leader motivates by setting an example and creating a shared vision.

Empowers: A leader gives their team autonomy to make decisions and grow.

Listens: A leader values team input, fostering trust and collaboration.

Build Relationships: A leader connects with their team and encourages a supportive environment.

Collaborates: A leader works with their team to solve problems and make decisions.

Takes Responsibility: A leader owns both successes and failures, learning from mistakes.

Focuses on Growth: A leader prioritizes long-term development for both the team and the organization.

DIGNITY UNDER STRESS & DISORDER

Even fractured relationships hold an opportunity for learning and growth. On June 16, 2025, there was a planned, staged protest targeting the Peguis Child and Family Services' Main Office. A small group of protesters trespassed on to Agency property to share their political and personal views. Peguis Child and Family Services staff members were not allowed to enter the building even though it was a workday. This demonstration was confusing and upsetting to people, because who would deliberately prevent essential social service workers to enter their workplace, placing kids and families at risk?

The local RCMP intervened and requested that the protesters move to the main road in front of the Peguis Main Office. As the Canadian Constitution² dictates, demonstrations are not illegal, but protesters do not have the right to be on private property. Peguis Child and Family Services is located on private property.

The group of protesters obliged but not before one of the protesters physically assaulted the Executive Director of Peguis Child and Family Services. No employee in the province of Manitoba deserves to come to work and be assaulted. We have strict workplace safety and health standards in our province that protect the well-being of all paid employees. Main office staff members were also understandably upset by this event. No employee in the province of Manitoba deserves to come to work and be emotionally or psychologically traumatized either.

²Peaceful protest is protected in Canada primarily in Section 2 (b) freedom of expression and 2 (c) freedom of peaceful assembly, of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Canadian Constitution Foundation, 2025).

The following day, June 17, 2025, it must be noted that there were Peguis community folks at the Main Office ready to come to the defense of Agency staff. Word had gotten out about the unwarranted protest and other community members came by to ensure that Agency staff members were not placed in harm's way again, with another unwarranted attack. This rallying around the Agency by protective community members is a strong indicator that Peguis Child and Family Services holds the respect of the majority and this small group of protesters are in the minority.

Peguis Child and Family Services' Human Resources Department and Management team promptly (same day) advised all Agency staff of the following:

At this time the Agency Management Team would like to reassure all Agency employees that there is no cause for concern regarding the protest that occurred earlier today. The safety and well-being of our employees remain our top priority, and we are monitoring the situation closely. Please continue your excellent work as usual. If you experience any disruption to your work or services as a result of today's events, notify your immediate supervisor without delay so appropriate support can be provided.

-(Memorandum from Human Resources, 16 June, 2025)

This notification reassured staff members in feeling safe, knowing that management and Human Resources were well aware of the situation. As well, that supports were available to anybody in need; staff members or families affected by this protest.

Strong mental, emotional and spiritual resilience, courage and competence were demonstrated by staff members of Peguis Child and Family Services. The staff at the Peguis Child and Family Services' Main Office in particular, displayed a high level of dignity and professionalism during this incident. By staying composed, the Agency staff members demonstrated an exceptional level of emotional intelligence and self-control. This is to be commended.

Poise under pressure is not easy. Becoming a full member of a profession is a hard-won achievement, with high expectations. Being professional implies high-quality work and strong ethical standards. It also implies healthy, calm expertise where the professional person is in control of both the situation and their own emotions. The internal reviewer was impressed with the grace shown by employees at the Agency.

Internalized colonialism can take many forms, with political violence being one of the main forms. Mohawk scholar, Taiaiake Alfred (2005), shared that our traditional Indigenous ways can show us the way toward recovering dignity and regenerating ourselves. He reminds us that anger and hatred can be overcome and replaced with courage and determination, but we have to do the hard, emotional work.

"If you want to be sovereign, act sovereign."

-Standing Rock Dakota Scholar, Vine Deloria Jr.

TRICKSTER ABOUNDS

The Elders teach Anishinaabe Laws through stories of a character known as Trickster, or some people refer to him as *Nanabush*. Trickster offers insights through encounters that are simultaneously altruistic and self-centered. In his adventures, Trickster roams from place to place and fulfills his goals by using strange contradictory behaviors such as being charming and cunning, honest yet deceptive, kind but with mean tricks up his sleeve. Lessons are learned as Trickster engages in actions that look like he is protecting the people but really, he is only protecting himself (*Borrows, 2002*). As Indigenous people, we learn how to spot him as he takes different forms around us. He makes promises yet breaks them. He says that he loves the people yet criticizes and denies their needs.

During the compilation period of the Phase Two report, a time of great political unrest came to be. This internal reviewer spent some time at the Old Stone Church in Selkirk, MB sharing tobacco and a few song notes. Guidance was needed as cfs, an easy target for the game of politics, was taking hit after hit. As a former foster child, the Children's Aid Society (*having morphed into today's Child and Family Services*), has been a part of this writer's identity forever. But I take solace in knowing that only those who have lived it can comment on it factually. The rest is conjecture. Those of us who have been wards of the state or those of us who have worked within its constraints. Standing on the shoulders of foster kids for your own political gain is for the weak. Join us in the circle and ask us what the system is truly like. We will tell you.

TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY AT PEGUIS CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

There have been recent concerns that as an Indigenous governing body, there is "no entity" that the Agency is accountable to. This conversation even made its way into the floor of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, being debated back and forth between the Progressive Conservatives (Opposition Party) and the New Democrats with the Honourable Minister, Nahanni Fontaine, encouraging the opposition to sit and read Bill C-92 while also stating:

"I take great exception to what the Member is getting up in the Chamber to assert. She is using colonial language that necessarily ensures that folks distrust First Nations and Métis leadership from re-asserting control over child welfare. It is a ploy to undermine what is a historic moment across Canada and that every jurisdiction is navigating right now. I support First Nations and Métis in re-asserting jurisdiction over child welfare and families. We are going to be seeing transformative change here in Manitoba and across the country."

In the construction and establishment of Indigenous laws, there is consultation with youth, with Elders, with Matriarchs, with those that are on the front lines, with ALL citizens within that Nation. There is consultation and partnership with Canada, there is consultation and partnership

with Manitoba, there is consultation and partnership with those who have been on the front lines of child welfare, in the establishment of Indigenous law. It's so unfortunate and tragic that Members Opposite are so desperate to cling on to a colonial system. We on this side are stepping in partnership to decolonize child welfare once and for all."

-Manitoba Families Minister, the Honorable Nahanni Fontaine

According to some, there is no metric or measure to ensure the "safety" of Manitoba children. This seems to be at the forefront of some politicians' minds. During a conversation with the Agency's In-House Legal Counsel, Earl Stevenson, he reported that a Child Advocate was purposefully excluded from the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act*. There appeared no need to replicate the colonial system of Manitoba's Child & Family Services system. As much research shows, the colonial system of Manitoba's Child & Family Services Act does not work for Indigenous communities due to its oppressive practices, outdated language and overt focus on domination and power.

As many people are aware, the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (MACY) is an independent office of the Manitoba Legislature that advocates for the rights and interests of youth, children and adults. Their mandate is defined by *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act and Regulation (Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, 2025)*. But the pattern of having bureaucrats overseeing child safety has been brought into question in recent years. Peguis Child and Family Services decided against it and has instead left the oversight of the Agency to Peguis First Nation Members and Elders. The Agency remains open to hearing from anybody who has concerns with its policies or procedures. The Quality Assurance Coordinator can be reached at (204) 632-5404, (204) 645-2049 or toll-free at 1-877-777-2049.

As Peguis Child and Family Services persists in their roll out of the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act*, they see little value in seeking recognition from the state or state structures. From the perspective of this internal reviewer, this is part of what has made the implementation of the new legislation successful. Let me break it down: recognition from outer sources of power and control (*especially in child welfare*) has often been a requirement for Indigenous-run cfs agencies. Whether it is related to funding, policy oversight or political alliances, agencies have been ruled and overruled by mainstream power players i.e. "Authorities" designed to oversee cfs. In other words, for agencies to operate in peace, these "Authorities" had to be satisfied. However, as Indigenous Constitutional Law expert John Borrows states, "*the preservation of Indigenous self-government entails that we have the spiritual and legal authority to govern ourselves without requiring an external delegation of power.*"

Peguis Child and Family Services has shifted away from these "Authorities" and have brought what used to be state control back to the community of Peguis First Nation. Today, instead of control, power and dominance, there exists a relationship of Balance/Non-Balance. If there are concerns from Peguis Members, the Agency listens to the concerns and regains balance by addressing said concerns. The recalibration of families can be direct: families go into crisis when they are struggling with mental health, poverty or child-rearing. Those are the three most common stressors for parents. Secondary effects like alcohol or drug abuse/neglect/child abuse are all related to familial circumstance. Families require support and there is no shame in asking for resources. One of the key differences in the overall approach to service delivery that Peguis Child and Family Services remains focused on prevention and family/community empowerment. What can be done

with families before a crisis even hits? As it turns out, there is plenty that can be done to assist families prior to the matter becoming a child protection issue.

One community Elder that was interviewed for Phase Two stated that she believes the Agency is the exact right path. She has been impressed with how Peguis Child and Family Services has been working with families and not against them. This Elder has had a lengthy career in policy reform, dating back to the days of when Grand Chief Phil Fontaine attempted the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs Framework Agreement Initiative (FAI) during the 1980s. The FAI was an initiative rooted in self-governance but unfortunately did not make it past discussion tables. The Elder shared that the idea is the same, however. Sovereignty is sovereignty. Therefore, she truly believes that what Peguis Child and Family Services is doing will work as long as community politics “*stay out of the administration*” process. She shared this perspective as a Kokum and as someone who has seen cfs fail Indigenous people.

This Elder has never believed in the delegation of provincial authority. She shared that many Indigenous people thought that these systems were our systems, but they are not. Just because there were “*brown faces carrying out a provincial act*”, this had nothing to do with self-government or sovereignty. She asserted during her interview that she had major problems with any system where the province is in control.

This Elder wants to see the old ways; how our mothers and grandmothers used to take care of children. Our families were better off utilizing our traditional ways, according to her. We have shifted away from traditional ways and the resulting colonial systems have proved to be harmful and toxic. Reaching back to our teachings, and she realizes that it will be a very far reach for some people, will be the only way out of this mess. When our communities had safe homes where kids could go, where every home in the community had a role in looking after children, and everybody made sure that kids were safe, fed and loved.

“When it comes to policy reform, starting off with our children and families is one of the most important steps we can take.”

-Peguis Elder

Further, when it comes to the issue of accountability, Peguis Child and Family Services releases an overview of Financial Statements each year. Every Peguis Member has the right to question any detail of these financial statements. To this writer’s knowledge, after a careful audit of Peguis Child and Family Services’ financials, MNP Accounting Firm based out of Winnipeg released the following:

“In our opinion, the accompanying financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Organization as at March 31, 2025, and the results of its operations and its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations”

(MNP LLP, July 2025, Peguis Child and Family Services Financial Statements 24/25).

It appears that Peguis Child and Family Services takes their responsibility to report their activities, outcomes and overall use of resources very seriously. Like all not-for-profit organizations, the community at large plays a vital role by asking questions and ensuring ethical practices. Phase Two of the internal review found that Peguis Child and Family Services continues to use their funds effectively to advance the mission of the Agency and the needs of families are being addressed.

SUPPORTIVE PARTNERSHIPS: THE BILL C-92 SOLIDARITY NETWORK

Despite political misjudgments and missteps happening elsewhere, the Agency continued to do their work. In June 2025, a Bill C-92 networking meeting took place at Maamawibiway with Peguis Child and Family Services as the host. Chiefs, council members, technicians, and lawyers attended.

The Bill C-92 meetings have been taking place for a few years now as other First Nations are striving to learn directly from the leadership at Peguis Child and Family Services. How did the Agency implement their own child welfare legislation? What barriers and challenges are to be anticipated? Peguis Child and Family Services is willing to sit and answer questions, explain procedures, and provide friendly warning to other organizations about what they can expect. This is the way things were always done. As Indigenous law scholar John Borrows (1992) states, *"On our land, we administered the complex relations of our internal community and entered into agreements and diplomatic relations with external communities."* Our nations have always shared knowledge with other nations. The strength of the Indigenous collective is what mattered.

Here is a list of some of the supportive relatives that have attended the Bill C-92 Solidarity meetings hosted by Peguis Child and Family Services:

- Carrier Sekani Family Services
- Norway House Cree Nation
- Gull Bay First Nation
- Garden River First Nation
- Thessalon First Nation
- Mississauga First Nation
- Sagamok Anishinawbek
- Atikameksheng Anishinawbek
- Serpent River First Nation
- Sioux Valley Dakota Nation
- Tsilqot'in National Government
- Moose Cree First Nation
- Taykwa Tagamou Nation
- Tsqescen First Nation
- Binche Whut'en First Nation
- Muskeg Lake Cree Nation
- Boston Bar First Nation

THEME #3: PREVENTION OVER INTERVENTION

In response to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) Order 8 (2022), Canada was ordered to immediately fund preventative and least disruptive measures, and to maintain this funding, adjusting annually for inflation, until the full implementation of the reformed First Nations child and Family Services (FNCFS) Program was achieved. This funding is based on \$2,500 per First Nations person residing on-reserve and is allocated to FNCFS Agencies and First Nations to provide preventative services that support community wellbeing (*Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, 2022*).

As regulators across Turtle Island witness increasing numbers of children in care, and where these costs are high both financially and more importantly to family wellbeing, efforts are being centered on preventative services. In 2018, the United States of America Congress passed the Family First Prevention Act, federal child welfare reform that combines two policy goals: *“(1) reforming child welfare financing to allow federal dollars to be used for prevention services and (2) limiting federal financial support for placement of children and adolescents in group care”* (Lindell, Sorenson & Mangold, 2020).

Child welfare prevention services are intended to address the risks associated with child maltreatment and strengthen the factors that protect families and communities. Risk factors that can impact families include poverty, inadequate housing, intergenerational abuse or neglect, mental health challenges, violence and lack of family or community connection and support. Families and communities have many strengths, and these factors protect and strengthen healthy experiences for children. These protective factors include having our basic needs met, meaningful employment, access to supportive services, and being surrounded by strong supports and good role models (*Trocmé, Sullivan & Lefebvre, 2024*).

Prevention programming for kids and families is designed to ensure kids live in an environment that maximizes their healthy development and well-being. As children and as parents, we see that it takes a community to raise a child. We all face hardship and stress. As First Nations people, we have also experienced the intergenerational impact of policy and practice that was not developed by us, for us, or with our best interests at heart. These colonial structures have aimed to erode the protective factors that were woven into our way of being.

Too often, our families and communities experience the compounded impact of intersecting risk factors, contributing to a continual state of crisis and crisis response. Historically, child welfare services have focused on crisis response and child protection action. Insufficient preventative and early intervention services perpetuate this state of emergency response (*McCalman et al., 2025*).

When we consider who may benefit from prevention services, a whole community approach is preferred. As we think about the impact of our experiences as First Nations people, we can see that we are all at risk. The foremost goal of prevention services is to prioritize primary prevention, which is community centered. This whole community approach is intended to strengthen and support healthy community living, including connectedness, belonging, and a strong understanding of how we care for our children in our way.

This is where Peguis Child and Family Services are targeting most of their resources to. From what this internal reviewer has observed, the Agency intends to *“meet people where they are at”* as the first step. The Agency also tries hard to honour every family’s needs. The focus is no longer on perceived *“risk”* but rather, what does a family need? What does the family say that they need? Peguis Child and Family Services is listening.

As many Peguis Members have noted, Peguis Child and Family Services has taken action to design programming that is culturally responsive and centered on strengthening community wellbeing:

1). Reclaiming Our Ways

Reclaiming Our Ways is a term used to help community members reclaim the ways of our culture and to engage in a way of healing to prevent children from coming into care by addressing the needs of the child and family. This program has 2 major goals: to promote family well-being by responding early to the needs of the child, youth, and their families and the implementation of prevention programming aimed to empower and educate families while on their healing journeys. Such examples of Agency programming include: child-minding, cultural activities, budgeting workshops, domestic violence awareness, and grief and loss supports and resources. In the reporting period of April 1, 2024, through March 31, 2025, there were 19,200 engagements that occurred between the Agency and community kids and families. This is what prevention looks like. Healthy workers providing healthy opportunities for kids and families to thrive. Investment in the future of kids and families remains an important goal of Peguis Child and Family Services.

2). Debinan Youth Program (Ages 7-11; Ages 12-17)

The Debinan Youth Program at Peguis Child and Family Services is a prevention-focused youth program designed to support children and adolescents through culturally grounded, community-based activities. The core purpose of the Debinan Youth Program is to:

- Strengthen youth well-being BEFORE a crisis occurs.
- Reduce the likelihood of children entering care.
- Support identity, belonging, and cultural connection.

This program operates alongside other prevention initiatives that collectively form a community safety net for children, youth and families.

3). Raising Children in Troubled Times

This parenting program is designed to support caregivers while they navigate parenting under stress, trauma and social pressures. The program also helps in strengthening the relationship between parent and child, all while building an emotional skillset. The program is rooted in the realities of colonization, Residential Schools and intergenerational trauma. Peguis Child and Family Services explicitly acknowledges that these histories disrupted parenting knowledge and practices (www.peguiscfs.ca).

4). Ogichidaa Men's Group

The Ogichidaa Men's Group at Peguis Child and Family Services is a culturally grounded support and healing program for men, designed to strengthen identity, responsibility, and wellness within families and the community. "*Ogichidaa*" is our word for "*warrior*", but it can also encapsulate provider, protector, and helper. The program helps to redefine masculinity through cultural teachings, accountability and healing.

The Ogichidaa Men's Group is part of the Agency's broader prevention and family strengthening approach. Its goals include:

- Supporting men in their roles as fathers and partners.
- Addressing the impacts of colonization and trauma.
- Promoting healthy relationships.

- Strengthening family stability to reduce cfs involvement.

5). Sacred Rhythm Program

The Sacred Rhythm Program at Peguis Child and Family Services is a culturally grounded wellness and engagement program that uses music – particularly drumming – as a pathway to healing, identity development and connection. Sacred Rhythm is designed to reconnect participants to culture and identity, support emotional wellness, provide a positive outlet for emotions, and strengthen community connections. The drum is often referred to as the heartbeat of our Nations. Through drumming, participants can express themselves freely, build focus and discipline and experience a sense of belonging.

6). Gatherings:

- Men's Gathering.
- Women's Gathering.
- Elders Gathering.
- Youth Gathering.
- Two Spirit Gathering.

These programs are available to all Members of Peguis First Nation. Through taking this approach, Peguis is truly implementing service that is centered on prevention. This is a significant shift from traditional child welfare system approaches to crisis and protection intervention. Instead, Peguis Child and Families Service is shifting to center service on the front-end of family experiences.

Child welfare prevention services are intended to address the risks associated with child maltreatment and strengthen the factors that protect families and communities. Prevention programming for kids and families is designed to ensure kids live in an environment that maximizes their healthy development and well-being.

Peguis Child and Family Services are restoring traditional systems of care. Relatives, Elders, and professionals are working together to collaborate in reaching out to families in need of support. Prevention services are being used to reduce risks and children can be sent home to their families or most importantly, prevention services are being utilized so that kids do not enter the foster care system to begin with. This is where Peguis Child and Family Services are targeting most of their resources to. From what this internal reviewer has observed, the Agency intends to *"meet people where they are at"* as the first step. The Agency also tries hard to honour every family's needs.

This approach to Indigenous child welfare service delivery is the most appropriate. The community-centered approach being taken by Peguis Child and Family Services focuses on human relationships, not bureaucracy. It focuses on Indigenism, not clinical style Western approaches. The local socio-cultural realities are taken into strong account by Peguis Child and Family Services while they are designing and implementing their programming. As Jaswal & Kshetrimayum (2023) share, *"keeping culture in the center allows for self-reflection, critical appreciation and critical consciousness"* to take place at Indigenous organizations. Culture leads the way.

MATRI-CULTURE AT PEGUIS CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

As referenced in the Phase One report, the matriarchal impact within this Agency still stands strong. There are women and those who identify as women who conduct much of the planning and coordination of services. And there are strong men and male relatives who follow the paths set down by women, showing great humility.

The matri-culture at Peguis Child and Family Services is a symbol of its organizational success. Success, as you know, comes from an effort-driven mindset where focus, intensity, bargaining and decision-making are non-negotiables. However, what is observed at Peguis Child and Family Services is a *softness* that underlies all communication. Women bring this softness. Please do not confuse softness with weakness. If you were to challenge the 80-year-old Board of Directors Chair to a battle of the wits, you would lose. And she is just one example of strong female leadership at this Agency.

Recognition from across Indian Country has become apparent in recent months and this is a positive sign of respect and reverence. Take this public notice issued by the Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) in September 2025 after the Peguis Child and Family Services' Men's Gathering:

"For two full days this month, hundreds of men descended on Maamawibiway (Our Gathering Place) in the Peguis First Nation for the third Annual Men's Gathering. The event featured keynote speakers and entertainers, along with a number of self-care and recreation options.

Most importantly, it offered participants the chance to gather in a welcoming and safe space, to explore their own physical, mental and emotional wellness.

The Southern Chiefs' Organization salutes the Peguis Child and Family Services Team and in particular, Reclaiming Our Ways Coordinator Michelle Wilson, for providing this wonderful opportunity and ultimately creating improved health and well-being for your entire Nation."

The salute to Michelle Wilson by the Southern Chiefs' Organization is an indicator that word is getting out there. Peguis Child and Family Services has reformed child welfare services by placing their focus on prevention. Michelle Wilson is well deserving of this shout-out, given the hours that she puts into designing gatherings that support and heal. She is a non-stop force who quietly yet strategically puts kids and families first.

LOOKING TO THE WEST

While thanking Clemene Hornbrook and her staff at the 2025 Child Abuse Conference, an Elder pointed at the ceremonial buffalo hides on the ground and stated:

“This is what guides her and her team. So, what could ever go wrong?”

THE SEVEN TEACHINGS

Having love, respect, honesty, truth, wisdom, courage, and humility is the start of your story, your life, your inspiration to others. To have these teachings within our lives we can do all things to help our young people push on and not be afraid what is ahead of them in life. They have seen how you have overcome many obstacles in your life to get where you are today. Remember you are here for a purpose, and that is to help one another.

This section will review examples and illustrations of actions, behaviors, policies, protocol, etc. that exist within Peguis Child and Family Services that support the Seven Sacred Teachings. The examples are not exhaustive, there are dozens of observations that could have been included but in the name of being concise, the internal review report could simply not include everything.



RESPECT-Carried by the buffalo. The buffalo gave every part of his being to the Red people. Treat others the way you want to be treated; respecting who they are as a person.

Illustrations:

- During an interview with representatives from the Peguis Child and Family Services' Human Resources Department, it became apparent that HR leads with respect as their main traditional teaching. Human Resources and their staff engage in relationship-building by centering *relations* in the work that they do. This alignment is reflective of the Agency's commitment to all its employees. As well as supporting organizational goals, HR fosters employee engagement, and maintains a compliant and productive workplace (*Peguis Child and Family Services' Annual General Report, 2025*). When discussing the Bill C-92 Solidarity Network for example, it became apparent in our conversation that Peguis Child and Family Services is demonstrating respect to other Nations who hope to implement their own child welfare laws. By hosting other Nations and answering questions, Peguis Child and Family Services is not trying to remain secretive.
- The Agency is also not downplaying how much work the last 5 to 6 years has been. There remains a mentorship role with other Nations where the Agency is warning them of possible roadblocks or cautionary tales. This '*lessons learned*' approach will respectfully assist other Nations in their trajectory toward sovereignty where child welfare is concerned.
- Observing the work that Peguis Child and Family Services is doing with the younger generations in collaboration with the older generations, it is apparent that Respect as a teaching remains very important. The Agency's Youth Services team is continually demonstrating Community Connectedness by receiving knowledge from both the youth and the Elders. The youth are consulted to generate ideas for programming and other Agency endeavors, and Elders are asked for guidance during roll-out. One Elder that was interviewed for the internal review referred to this partnership stating, "*we need each other!*" and it warmed her heart to do work with this generation's young people. Elders share their lived experiences and play a key role in decision-making meetings, providing recommendations and advice. We must remember that those who have lived experience have already survived government-run systems, like cfs. They have deep personal knowledge of what this is like. Peguis Child and Family Services remains committed to bringing together all experiences and insights to ensure safe, community-based programming for Peguis' Youth. This collaborative partnership between Youth and Elders supports cultural identity, teaches responsibility and models healthy intergenerational relationships.

LOVE - Love is carried by the eagle. Eagle flies closest to the Creator and helps us by carrying our prayers. Eagle reminds us that we must love ourselves first to be able to love.

Illustrations:

- During the CSA Settlement Meetings, much thought was given to how to best support the claimants through this difficult process. Being a claimant part of a class action suit can be exhausting, from an administrative and emotional perspective. Peguis Child and Family Services provided care to claimants by hosting the events at central locations, having spiritual care providers nearby, banking institutions for financial literacy questions and presentations by Agency staff members, including Legal. This is what acts of love look like. Foster kids and former foster kids deserve to know the ramifications of the mainstream cfs system and how the Province of Manitoba purposefully and illegally withheld funds from them. Peguis Child and Family Services provided a warm, safe learning environment with food, knowledge sharing and resources to help the kids with financial decisions and future planning.

- Board Chairperson, Louise McCorrister reminds us that what Peguis Child and Family Services is trying to do is give people their voices back and this is what love looks like. According to Ms. McCorrister, our people have not had a say in how to do things with our own families, and it is time for this to change. The *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* helps with giving people a voice because unless it's law, other people won't listen. And it's all about families. Getting families together and keeping them together (Video, www.peguiscfs.ca).
- Louise McCorrister and the other Board of Directors' Members, Rhonda McPherson, Winnie Bair, Irene Madison, and Sharon Mann all display love in their roles as a working board. The Board Members take part in Agency's activities and gatherings, as well as provide a strong governance structure for Peguis Child and Family Services. They hold the ultimate responsibility for the Agency and have demonstrated that they can handle complex challenges and make difficult decisions all while watching the Agency grow. Through their wisdom, love and guidance, Peguis Child and Family Services continues to make transformational changes to the landscape of child welfare.

HUMILITY - Understanding others' strengths, knowing our own limitations and an ability to ask for help

Illustrations:

- Under the traditional teaching of humility is where the role of the After Hours team will be profiled. The After Hours program at Peguis Child and Family Services provides emergency services to families outside of regular Agency hours: evenings, nights, weekends and holidays. If there are requests for services from other agencies or if providing direct requests for support from Peguis parents, grandparents and children, the After Hours team is responsive. Their coordinated efforts must be very organized because their work eventually makes its way to dayside employees for follow up. Partnership is an important teaching tool and the After-Hours team demonstrates it every day. They also demonstrate effective assessment skills, incident response, and a calm approach to safety planning when needed. This skillset is essential to any child welfare agency. To prevent harm from escalating, the After-Hours team has to be decisive, well coordinated, all while supporting the integrity of families. Humility is the key to their success. Indigenous parents and families can be 'overpoliced' in different systems, but the After Hours team at Peguis Child and Family Services continues to provide equitable access to service, support and resources. All while the rest of us are sleeping.
- Celebrating All Beliefs: During Agency gatherings, spiritual ways of being and knowing are acknowledged through Ceremony and Faith-Based/Pastoral Services. Beliefs are beliefs. Lodges in attendance at Agency gatherings are as follows:

1.) Faith Based Services: Wilfred Smith and James Thiessen

2.) Elder Services: Sunlodge Village - Dwayne "Sunman" McCorrister

3.) Spirit Rock Lodge - Joann Hamrlik & Garnet Stevenson

4.) Elder Services - Ernest Stevenson & Patricia Stevenson

5.) Elder Services - Floyd & Fayleen Sutherland

6.) Elder Services - Glen Cochrane

7.) Elder Services - Rainbow Lodge

Scripture has detailed what to do as an Elder: "That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience"(Titus, 2:2)

"The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things"(Titus, 2:3)

- Humility is consistently demonstrated at Peguis Child and Family Services. Humility is deeply relational and it is recognized by the Agency that all relationships are important. Humility carries a lot of responsibility with it. Not only do you have to honour yourself, but you have to honour others and use your gifts to better the lives of others.

WISDOM - Knowing *"who you are"* by sharing your knowledge and learning from others

Illustrations:

- One interviewee shared that during the Bill C-92 Solidarity meetings, he observed much appreciation coming from the other Nations who were visiting Peguis First Nation. He enjoyed that the other Nations were offering their support, words of wisdom and they were *"full of appreciation"* for what Peguis Child and Family Services has accomplished. This interviewee is a contractual employee of the Agency, so his perspective was unique. He has been privy to the new direction due to the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* but he is not a Peguis Member. He reported feeling proud of the work that the Agency has done over the past 3 years.
- Training and Professional Development: It is recognized at Peguis Child and Family Services that staff development is crucial for enhancing employee skills, maintaining job satisfaction, and driving overall organizational success. Whether it is improving current skills or learning new ones, Peguis Child and Family Services ensures that they are meeting their responsibilities for their employees to have access to professional development opportunities. This is their way of celebrating their staff members.

TRUTH - Be accountable and recognize truth as an opportunity to grow

Illustrations:

- Peguis Child and Family Services' Executive Management team shared the 2024/25 Annual General Report, the 2024/25 Financial Statements (and Summary Statements), and the White Buffalo Report, Phase One with the Office of the Manitoba Premier, the Chief and Councillors of Peguis First Nation and the Federal government officials on September 25, 2025. It remains important to Peguis Child and Family Services to openly share pertinent information about the Agency's overall management, and the Executive Management team and Board of Directors' are open to discussion about any concerns or questions. Any opportunity for growth and knowledge sharing seems to be welcomed by Peguis Child and Family Services. The Agency's website at www.peguiscfs.ca can be visited for any of the latest Peguis Child and Family Services' reports.
- Members of the internal review research team visited SunLodge Village during Phase Two. We were greeted with curiosity, kindness and openness. Stevenson family members proudly showed us around and told us the history of SunLodge Village, recognizing all who supported its growth and implementation.
- Peguis Child and Family Services holds a proud partnership with SunLodge Village as a

resource for helping families. SunLodge Village's mandate of spiritual wellness is their most notable attribute. SunLodge Village began as a grassroots, community-led initiative focused on claiming and reclaiming spiritual ways of being. It has been developed over decades by Peguis Members working to retrace the footsteps of their ancestors and restore traditional knowledge systems. Living our truth as Indigenous people can be difficult at times in the Western world. Healing places like SunLodge Village act in a protective manner, shielding us from harmful outside influences.

COURAGE - To be honest and speak up for what you believe in, moving forward

Illustrations:

- During his interview, one Agency employee shared that in his view, Peguis Child and Family Services is courageous for being the first mandated Agency in the province to enact their own child welfare legislation. *"Running the show on their own"* must come with its difficulties, risks, challenges and learning and this employee expressed both awe and recognition. He noted that there is no jurisdictional scan to see how this is being done elsewhere so he felt that the accomplishment of the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* is quite extraordinary.
- Another interviewee shared that he sees the Agency being *"not afraid to move fast and swiftly"* under the strong leadership of Clemene Hornbrook and her team. Acting and doing, as opposed to just talking. This particular interviewee works for a 3rd party in contract with Peguis Child and Family Services. He enjoys this work and has been witness to the immense change and expansion that the Agency has gone through in the past 3 years. There is no *"grass growing underneath their feet"* because the Agency is innovative enough to want to try new things. Given the political climate of Child and Family Services in this Province for the past several decades, the fact that this Agency is now moving in another direction is a very positive step and it takes courage to do this.

HONESTY - Be transparent, clear, open, and act with integrity

Illustrations:

- In October 2025, the FAM Care Manager sent out an Agency wide memorandum advising that FAM Care will no longer be the case management database of Peguis Child and Family Services as of April 1, 2026. This demonstrated honest, clear communication with Agency staff, providing plenty of time for this transition to begin and roll out. The staff members were provided with ample notice that a big change was coming. A transition period was set, and everyone knew what to expect.
- One interviewee shared that the roll out of the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* went very smoothly. As a manager, she always knew what was happening. There were no surprises. As daunting as the roll-out was, she was kept informed about every decision which naturally brought anxiety levels down. She was appreciative of how the senior management and Executive team handled the roll out. It seems like a very long time ago and now the way that families are being serviced (with Prevention at the forefront) is the way that the Agency has always strived for.
- During his interview, an Agency supervisor spoke about difficult conversations. He relayed that he and his team of social workers do not back away from being honest if there are some concerns that need to be addressed. They welcome discussions with family members and collect the family's perspectives on how services can be best delivered. This skill is not easy, and many social workers will actively avoid having direct conversations lest they upset the family.

However, this can be a disservice because families deserve honest and direct communication. At the Agency, honesty is valued and direct, sometimes difficult conversation are seen for what they are: a *'breakthrough'* moment in any working relationship.

"SUCCESS" IN CHILD WELFARE - IS IT MEASURABLE?

It has proven difficult at times to measure whether kids and families are better off as a result of the actions of Peguis Child and Family Services. But did this mean that it would be impossible to measure the impact that Peguis Child and Family Services is having on the community of Peguis First Nation? No, it does not. The internal reviewer had interviews from community people and Agency staff members to rely on. As well, the internal reviewer had statistics and numbers to examine. Community members voluntarily participating in events hosted by the Agency provided a great deal of information on how well the Agency is being received. This data was undeniable in its relevance.

Peguis Child and Family Services carefully documents all attendance and participation numbers at gatherings, workshops, programming and activities designed to provide support, health, information, connection, and a sense of belonging. Adapting from the Collaboration Assessment Tool, proposed by the Prevention Institute, the following areas of effectiveness were examined and provided with a score of 1 through 5 (5 being the highest score). The interviewees shared their stories and through these stories, they provided valuable feedback on what Peguis Child and Family Services is doing well and where they could improve and of course, the participation statistics and numbers spoke for themselves.

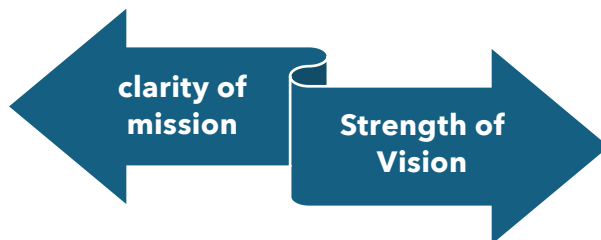
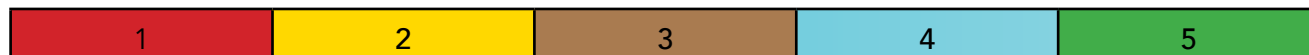
For Phase Two, there were 5 identified areas where Peguis Child and Family Services could be measured for overall effectiveness:

- 1.) Clarity of mission/strength of vision.
- 2.) Communication/link to others .
- 3.) The collaborative environment .
- 4.) Building capacity.
- 5.) Overall coordination.



The internal reviewer remained focused on community engagement and collaboration as key domains. Let's review the areas where effectiveness was evaluated:

Legend of Scores:



Statement		Statement	
Community Members and Agency staff lack a clear understanding of what Peguis Child and Family Services' mission and vision is.	or	Community Members and Agency staff have a clear understanding of what Peguis Child and Family Services' vision is.	4
Peguis Child and Family Services engages in actions not related to their mission or vision.	or	Peguis Child and Family Services engages in actions directly related to their vision.	5
Peguis Child and Family Services has defined its mission and vision narrowly to carry out only 1 activity.	or	The vision of Peguis Child and Family Services is comprehensive and looks at the 'big picture'.	5

For a reminder, here is the vision of Peguis Child and Family Services:

Our mission is to provide Child Protection and Family Services to Peguis First Nation membership.

The Agency works to empower families to support their children in their homes and communities.

The Agency practices a strengths-based approach, recognizing that families and community are partners in this collective work.

The Agency is committed to supporting families in reaching their fullest spiritual, mental, emotional and physical capacity in ways that recognize and respect all cultures.

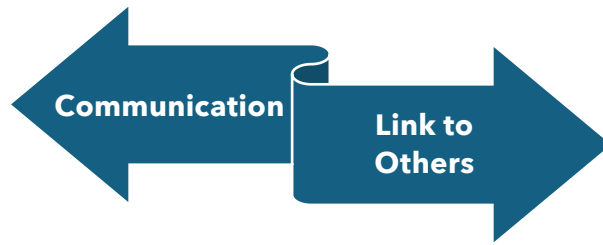
The reasons why the Agency scored a 5 are as follows:

Statistics Being Prioritized: Executive Director, Clemene Hornbrook, is a staunch proponent of statistical analysis. She stays regularly informed and up to date on Agency statistics because they are indicative of future funding projections. She also believes that Agency statistics need to be openly reported and explained to Peguis Members, as related to the mission and Agency vision. If the Peguis Members can receive information about the Agency's funding model, they can have a better understanding of what direction the Agency is going. This remains a high priority for Executive Director Hornbrook.

Information and Technology (IT) Policy & Procedures: In the area of IT for example, Peguis Child and Family Services had a strong vision of where they wanted this organization to go. IT is foundational to any organizational structure but let's be honest, what do social workers know about Information & Technology? A strong partnership between the Agency and an IT company had to be formed. Peguis Child and Family Services chose Campfire Technology Incorporated, a Premium Technical Partner of Apple Computers to deliver managed software services.

Signs of Safety Integration: Opportunities for relationship-building, community-building, and centering children, youth, families and community by integrating Signs of Safety as an alternative approach to colonial understanding/perceptions of safety and well-being for kids and families. Peguis Child and Family Services has adopted Signs of Safety – a risk assessment framework known for focusing on the needs of families. Then, the family is prioritized in any decision making, not the social worker. The Agency knows that even the smallest decision needs to have family input.

Score of 4: During Phase Two, there were interviews with various community folks who are unsure at times of what the Agency's most recent updates are. Some folks still rely on paper communications and have been reluctant to use online platforms such as social media or peguiscfs.ca (*the site received 32,028 visitors in '24/'25 regardless*). This leaves some community members confused about important events or dates or gatherings that the Agency might be hosting. Elders especially, want to be informed of what Peguis Child and Family Services is up to. They have a vested interest in participating and providing feedback.



Statement		Statement	
Peguis Child and Family Services works largely in isolation of the community.	or	Peguis Child and Family Services' work is effectively integrated with the community, including meaningful participation by the constituency being served.	4
Peguis Child and Family Services' efforts do not translate into meaningful influence in the larger community.	or	Peguis Child and Family Services' work influences key decision-makers, government agencies, and other organizations.	5
Peguis Child and Family Services is seen largely as self-serving or irrelevant.	or	Peguis Child and Family Services has successfully maintained or increased its credibility to the majority of people living in Peguis.	5

The reasons why the Agency scored 5's are as follows:

Peguis Member Hires Remain the Priority: During any capital projects related to the expansion of Peguis Child and Family Services, Peguis Members are prioritized for hiring and contracts. This is the Agency's way of including Peguis Members in their growth and success. As well, financially contributing to the well-being of Peguis Members through reciprocity. This type of effective integration remains a priority to Peguis Child and Family Services.

Meaningful Conversations: Individual agency units would hold stakeholder sessions to receive feedback on new policy. For example, in September 2025, the Youth Services Team held a 2-day work session in Winnipeg with Elders, Cultural Service Providers, the Agency's In-House Legal Counsel, the Agency's Internal Reviewer, etc. to review and revise important policies and procedures regarding youth. This type of panel discussion provides an opportunity for stakeholders to read and critique the Traditional Independent Living Program, while fostering dialogue and sharing diverse perspectives.

Participation Increase: Since the first year of implementation of the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act*, the annual participation rate in prevention services has increased by 150%. Compared to annual participation rates prior to the implementation of the Peguis Act. The participation rate in prevention services has increased by nearly 952%, reporting on March 31, 2025, members accessed prevention services through 26,635 points of service. Peguis Child and Family Services has seen an exponential growth in prevention programming participation.

By establishing trust and providing a safe and nurturing environment through the provision of child and family services, there has been a steady growth in participation in prevention services and culturally appropriate services: 6,436 children, youth and families accessed services as of March 31, 2025. The combined participation for prevention and culturally appropriate services in 2024/25 was 33,071 points of service (*Peguis Child and Family Services, 2025*).

All Manitoba Children Are Benefitting: During the interview with the Agency’s In-House Legal Counsel, it became apparent the profound effect that the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* has had on all children, not just Peguis children. Refusing to engage in Permanent Orders of Guardianship, the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* held powerful influence over the Manitoba cfs act which now also discourages the use of permanent orders, which effectively take away all rights of the biological parents. In a conversation with Executive Director, Clemene Hornbrook, provincial authorities thanked her for this work. They had wanted to disband the use of permanent orders and gratefully followed Peguis Child and Family Services’ footsteps. Children and families in the province of Manitoba are now encountering a less punitive cfs system, thanks to the trailblazing efforts of Peguis Child and Family Services.



Statement		Statement	
Staff members at Peguis Child and Family Services are unmotivated and lack inspiration.	or	Staff members at Peguis Child and Family Services are motivated and inspirational in their actions.	4
Staff members at Peguis Child and Family Services distrust one another and leadership.	or	Staff members at Peguis Child and Family Services have an honest and open working environment with clear lines of communication.	5
The organization of Peguis Child and Family Services allows conflicts to go unresolved.	or	The organization of Peguis Child and Family Services effectively addresses and resolves conflicts.	5

The reasons why the Agency scored 5’s are as follows:

Comprehensive and Complete Case Management Policy: Peguis Child and Family Services’ Case Management Service Delivery Policy and Procedures Manual is a 276-page document that thoroughly explains policy parameters for everyday situations in a cfs setting. This document serves as a foundation for consistency, accountability and clarity within Peguis Child and Family Services. A solid policy and procedures manual also mitigates risk for an organization. It not only

takes into consideration law, regulations, and standards pertinent to child welfare, it acts as a key resource for workers and staff members.

Accountability in the Traditional Independent Living Program: Director of Youth Services Leann Lippens shared that they are open and transparent with the Youth in this program. There are heavy responsibilities that the young adults (18-26) need to adopt as they transition to adulthood. For instance, every young person needs to sign a Participation & Occupancy Agreement prior to their living/housing/occupancy at Maamawibiway. The Participation & Occupancy Agreement is a comprehensive 12-page document that outlines the responsibilities of program participation and home ownership, code of conduct expectations, and general community standards. Nothing is held as a surprise. The youth are involved in planning and coordination from the beginning. The youth's investment in their own life journey is important to the Agency and there are orientations and Sharing Circles that are mandatory before the Youth can move into their own tiny home, for instance. If they do not engage in orientation or the Sharing Circles, then their move-in date can be delayed a bit.

Staff Intramurals at 500 Madison Office: To fully utilize their new office space at 500 Madison, there are now staff intramurals being implemented where staff members can take a break, have some fun and do some teambuilding. Competitive, yet entertaining activities are arranged to help support Agency staff members and redesign the workplace. The workplace does not have to be a place of dread, stress or urgency. The workplace now counts as a place where most of us spend over 40 hours per week. Our coworkers play a significant role in our sense of belonging, friendship, and camaraderie. Working has to be balanced with play, or there could be detrimental effects on our mental and physical health. Staff intramurals are being introduced to stay active and relieve workplace stress.

Out of Office Replies and Coverage Plans: This is nothing new to organizations, but its significance is worth noting. The respectful practice of managers and supervisors at Peguis Child and Family Services of providing coverage plans is a clear sign of how much reverence they have for each other and the families they are providing service to. Maintaining business continuity remains important to the manager and supervisors. And coverage plans ensure timely responses for kids and families by delegating responsibilities to a trusted colleague. The coverage plans that are disseminated are clearly written, with out-of-office dates noted and who can be contacted in the case of a crisis.

A Joint Effort: In one interview, an Agency Supervisor reminded me that the implementation of the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* was a joint effort. It could not have happened without the support of Chief & Council to the Agency's Executive Management Team and Board, it could not have happened without the support of the Agency's legal team and the front-line delivery teams, etc. The level of pure collaboration is spectacular when you think about it. This particular employee has moved on to new career opportunities, but Peguis Child and Family Services was fortunate to have him for the years that they did.



Statement		Statement	
Peguis Child and Family Services recruits volunteers and staff haphazardly.	or	Peguis Child and Family Services recruits based on the goals of the Agency.	5
Peguis Child and Family Services seems to be controlled by just a few people.	or	Peguis Child and Family Services encourages inclusion and participation to help empower all.	5
New staff or volunteers are uncertain about how to integrate themselves into the collective.	or	Peguis Child and Family Services welcomes and effectively orients new volunteers and staff members.	4
Peguis Child and Family Services does not draw on the specific abilities, capacity and perspectives of its staff and volunteers.	or	Peguis Child and Family Services develops specific roles and responsibilities for staff and volunteers based on their resources and skills.	5

The reasons why the Agency scored 5's are as follows:

Recruitment of Potential Employees: One employee spoke of a required essay that was part of their application/hiring process to the Agency. This is an effective hiring technique where not only does the employer gain insight into the potential employee's writing skills, but the employer can also gauge to see if this potential hire has aligning values and philosophies. This technique of having potential employees write an essay is commonly seen at cfs agencies. Peguis Child and Family Services are staying competitive and 'raising the bar' while recruiting potential staff members.

Encourages Inclusion and Participation: Hiring committees at Peguis Child and Family Services are comprised of several staff members. This brings a diversity of perspectives while also mitigating any personal or professional biases. Hiring committees hold heavy responsibilities such as identifying screening criteria and sifting through piles of applications and candidates.

Score of 4: During one interview for Phase Two, there was a noted concern that Orientation/ On Boarding for new Agency staff members could be longer, with more details provided. There was a concern noted that the Agency's Human Resources team has limited staff members and the question was posed if HR might expand at some point? This decision is ultimately with the Agency's Executive Management team.



Statement		Statement	
The administrative structure of Peguis Child and Family Services is unclear.	or	There are clear roles, responsibilities and procedures at Peguis Child and Family Services.	5
Deadlines are rarely met, and staffing is insufficient to meet goals.	or	Activities, staffing and deadlines are effectively coordinated to meet the Agency's goals.	5
Meetings, events, gatherings organized by the Agency are perceived as unproductive.	or	Meetings, events, gatherings organized by the Agency have clear objectives that meet the needs of Peguis First Nation.	5

The reasons why the Agency scored 5's are as follows:

Role, Responsibilities and Procedures: While reviewing FAM Care and Quality Assurance, it was evident that the clear roles and responsibilities of these two components of Case Management and Service Delivery were being prioritized. FAM Care is the Agency's database where all relevant CIC information is stored and accessed. The system of having records, documentation and files is historically colonial so the FAM Care Manager reported pushback from staff members. However, for the safety of children and overall accountability of the Agency, the FAM Care Manager also stresses the need for Peguis Child and Family Services to have a substantial, reliable, modern database to store information. Even if it is not FAM Care, meaning that the current Manager is working on designing such a database from scratch that will be Peguis-specific. There is a heavy sense of responsibility on this Manager's shoulders as they realize that every intake or phone call to the Agency is about a person, not a case file. As a result, FAM Care, which was designed in the States for health care workers, will be eventually replaced with a system that is Peguis-distinct. This is what will help the Agency meet their targeted goals of reducing the number of children in care. And most importantly, this is what decolonizing aspects of colonial case management looks like. Every Nation should be designing their own systems to meet the needs of their kids and families. **During the release of the Phase Two report, the Agency is now transitioning to a brand new Case Management database.**

Community Gatherings: During an interview with a community Elder, it was brought up that the gatherings have proven to be positive events for community folks to attend. This Elder shared that she and her husband have been happy to take part and have been duly impressed with the work

that the Agency has been doing. Kids and families are benefitting from the gatherings.

Another Elder shared her appreciation for the gatherings because they provide a healing aspect for her generation. She loves being able to connect with other Elders during the Agency gatherings and she feels welcomed and appreciated by Peguis Child and Family Services.

Another Elder interviewed shared that she appreciates the fact that Peguis Child and Family Services acknowledges her time as valuable. There are often honorariums for the Elders participating in community meetings/gatherings. This is a sign of respect that the Elder noticed. She was grateful for the financial assistance, as the honorarium helped her out with travel costs and meals.



KITCHENUHMAYKOOSIB INNINUWUG FAMILY LAW & PEGUIS FIRST NATION'S HONOURING OUR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND NATION ACT: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

To conclude our discussion on “*measuring*” success, let’s do a comparative analysis between two First Nation communities who have implemented their own child welfare law: Peguis First Nation in Manitoba and Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) in Ontario (*also known as Big Trout Lake First Nation*).

This section will examine two First Nations child and family governance laws developed under the framework of *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families* (C-92). Provincial child welfare systems remove First Nations, Inuit and Métis children from their communities at disproportionate rates. This Act affirms the inherent right of First Nations peoples to exercise jurisdiction over services for their children and families through the creation of a federal framework for First Nations communities to develop culturally grounded systems of care for their people. Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug and Peguis First Nation are early in the implementation of their laws.

These two laws follow a movement in which First Nations are rebuilding authority over children and families through their own legal orders. Both texts explicitly ground themselves in inherent jurisdiction, Section 35 constitutional protection, and the federal framework created by *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*. KIDO frames this primarily through *miinikozowin*, Creator-derived authority, and KI legal-social orders predating European arrival, while Peguis frames its authority through inherent rights, Treaty 1, Section 35, UNDRIP, and a formal legislative structure compatible with contemporary Canadian public law.

That makes the comparison important: the two laws pursue the same broad project—reclaiming jurisdiction over child and family services—but they do so through different legal and institutional strategies. KIDO is more explicitly community-constitutional and culturally internalist in orientation. Peguis’ *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* is more explicitly institutional, rights-articulated, and administratively codified.

This overview respects the distinct heritage, experience, priorities and needs of each Nation. The purpose of the overview is to examine and learn from the different ways in which community child and family laws are developed as our First Nations communities work to improve outcomes for their people.

KITCHENUHMAYKOOSIB INNINUWUG FAMILY LAW (ABBREVIATED AS KIDO)

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) is an Oji-Cree community, also known as Big Trout Lake First Nation. It is in Treaty 9 territory in Northwestern Ontario. This is a remote access First Nation community located in Northwestern Ontario that is accessible by aircraft and winter road. The membership population includes approximately 1,300 people.

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug Family Law was ratified by community referendum in 2019 and came into force in 2023. It establishes a culturally grounded system based on Anishinini legal traditions, language, and community responsibilities for raising children.

Its service model, *Maamao Dibenjikewin Kanawaabajikewin*, reflects the traditional practice of collective child-rearing.

PEGUIS FIRST NATION - THE HONOURING OUR CHILDREN, FAMILY AND NATION ACT (2022)

Peguis First Nation is an Anishinaabe and Cree community in Treaty 1 territory. This is a road accessible community located outside its original homeland due to an illegal land transfer. Peguis First Nation is one of the largest First Nations communities in Manitoba with a membership population of approximately 11,500 people.

The *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* was enacted through community engagement, ceremony and the endorsement of Community Leadership, and the law came into effect in 2022. The law establishes a formal statutory framework governing the Peguis Child and Family Services agency. The Act also integrates Canadian legal frameworks such as the Charter, UNDRIP, and child rights conventions.

FOUNDATIONAL AUTHORITY

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inniuwug Family Law's theory of authority is rooted in the community's own cosmology and legal order. Its preamble and background materials place the source of law in the Creator, treaty relationship, KI sovereignty, and KI's right to maintain and revitalize language, customs, and spiritual teachings. Its jurisdiction is said to flow from "original creation and occupation of the land and waters" and from legal and social orders that pre-date European arrival. The law presents itself not as delegated legislation, but as a contemporary expression of a pre-existing KI legal order.

Peguis First Nation also asserts inherent jurisdiction, but it does so through an intersecting public-law framework. The *Honouring our Children, Families, and Nation Act* ties authority to First Nations legal traditions, customs and governance, but expressly references Bill C-92, Section 35, Treaty 1 history, UNDRIP, the Canadian Charter, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Canadian Human Rights Tribunal jurisprudence. Peguis uses a hybrid legitimacy model: First Nations legal order remains primary, but the law is drafted to be legible and defensible within Canadian constitutional, administrative, and human-rights discourse.

This is one of the key differences between the two laws - KIDO reads as a law seeking to re-center First Nations normative authority and only secondarily coordinate with Crown law. Peguis' reads as a law seeking to exercise First Nations authority through a carefully articulated governance statute that can operate across environments that currently hold power and authority in our society, which are based on settler ways of knowing and doing.

WRITING STYLE

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Innuuwug Family Law's drafting style is conceptually detailed, language-based, and relational. It uses extensive Anishininiimowin terminology, embeds First Nations concepts directly into operative parts of the law, and defines family in expansive relational terms, including church family, community family, clan family, inter-Nation families, same-sex families, and multi-generational families. This indicates that KIDO is not just regulating child welfare; it is also reconstructing the legal meaning of family in KI terms.

In Peguis, the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* is drafted in a more conventional legislative style. It has numbered sections, explicit interpretation clauses, mandatory/discretionary language, defined institutional roles, detailed funding and governance provisions, transitional provisions, and linked regulations. The Peguis materials also show supporting regulations for intake and emergency services, complaints and appeals, and other implementation areas. That gives Peguis the function of a full statutory regime rather than a single core law.

This difference suggests contrasting implementation risks. KIDO's strength is normative coherence and cultural legitimacy; its risk is that operational interpretation may depend more heavily on training, lived community knowledge, and memory. Peguis' strength is administrative clarity and systematization; its risk is that formalization can sometimes pull First Nations systems toward state-like bureaucracy if not continually grounded in community practice.

RESPONSIBILITY TO THE CHILDREN

Both laws place children within a broader family and community matrix, but they do this differently.

The Kitchenuhmaykoosib Innuuwug Family Law situates the child within a collective moral universe in which all members of the family and community hold responsibility for care, safety, teaching, and the passing on of culture. Its "best interests" concept is tied not only to happiness, security, and development, but also to teaching KI values, customs, language, and spiritual teachings. The child is therefore understood as relationally embedded, culturally constituted, and community accountable.

The *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* is also relational, gives more direct articulation to the rights of the child. Its preamble lists rights to spirit name, clan, parents, family, cultural and ceremonial practices, language, education, land, protection, and membership. It also codifies the best-interests principle, cultural continuity, substantive equality, non-discrimination, and specific attention to disability, gender identity, and participation rights. This creates a more rights-explicit framework.

Overall, KIDO is community-ethical in its orientation, whereas Peguis is more rights-based. Both protect the child, but KIDO does so by embedding the child in reciprocal obligations and cultural resurgence; Peguis does so by embedding the child in a structured framework of rights, standards, duties, and reviewable processes *i.e. Child as Center*.

JURISDICTION

Both laws assert jurisdiction beyond reserve boundaries, but they handle scope differently.

The Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug Family Law applies to KI children, youth, and families regardless of residence, and also includes non-member children with a KI parent and children descended from KI members who identify through family relationships. It further requires consultation with another First Nation where a child connected to another Nation resides in KI. This is a relational and identity-sensitive jurisdictional model.

The *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* applies to members, their children, youth, and family whether they live on reserve or elsewhere in Canada. At the same time, Peguis includes an eligibility confirmation process, in which persons entitled to appear on the band list must provide family history and may require Elders Council review before services are confirmed. Peguis therefore appears more administratively formal in determining jurisdictional eligibility.

KIDO's jurisdictional logic is broader and more kinship-responsive; Peguis' is broader territorially but more procedurally mediated. KIDO's model may better reflect First Nations kinship realities; Peguis' model may provide stronger administrative defensibility when jurisdiction is challenged by outside systems.

GOVERNANCE

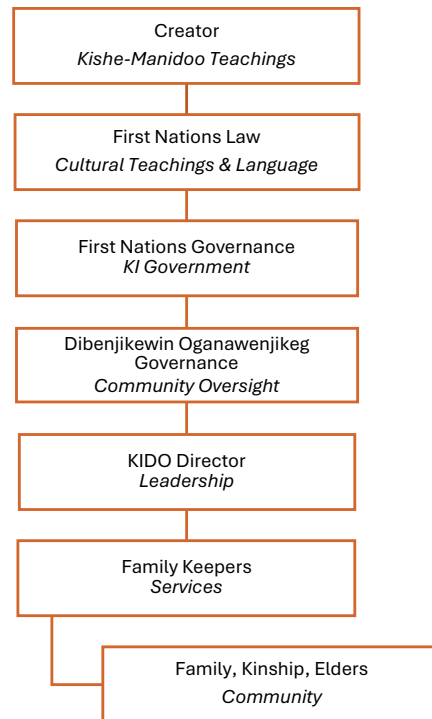
The Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug Family Law's governance model keeps ultimate authority with Chief and Council, but service delivery is organized through culturally named roles such as *Dibenjikewin Oganawenjikeg* (Family Keepers), helpers, supervisors, and decision-makers. Family meetings are central. The role descriptions show high-contact, home-visit practice, frequent family engagement, collaborative safety planning, and use of family meetings as the main planning mechanism. KIDO also recognizes Tikinagan Child and Family Services as its agency to assist in specialized services, indicating an interdependent rather than fully separate implementation model.

Peguis establishes a non-profit corporate agency, led by an Executive Director who directs employees, and who is governed by a Board of Directors where the parties are bound by policy manuals, governance policies, reporting structures, funding rules, indemnification clauses, confidentiality provisions, and institutional powers to negotiate agreements, manage infrastructure, and represent the Nation in courts and tribunals. This is a highly developed organizational governance design.

KIDO is a community-driven restorative jurisdiction model, whereas Peguis looks more like a Nation-owned agency model. KIDO's strength is its proximity to families and cultural practice. Peguis' strength is organizational durability, role clarity, and readiness for responding to legal and jurisdictional challenges.

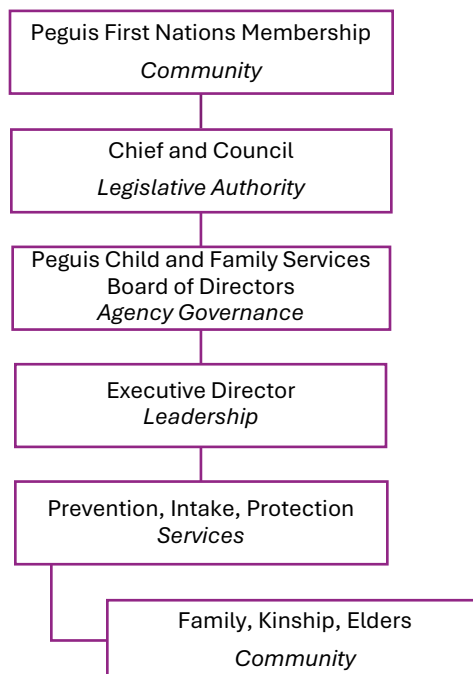
Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwig Family Law Governance Model

Community-Centered Family Governance System



Peguis Governance Model - The Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act

Child and Family Services Governance System



SERVICE PHILOSOPHY

Both laws prioritize prevention, reunification, and culturally grounded services. This is a major point of convergence. Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwig Family Law explicitly says services should try to prevent harm, avoid bringing children into care, build on family strengths, and support parents in caring for children. The Maamao Dibenjikewin Kanawaabajikewin service model is about love and compassion, prevention, frequent relational contact, family support, and short-term safety placements.

In Peguis First Nation, the *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* also gives prevention priority but codifies it with more programmatic specificity. It defines prevention services, early intervention services, prenatal services, family enhancement, community circle of care, family sharing circles, customary care, and voluntary guardianship tools. It expressly states that preventative services are to be given paramount consideration before more intrusive services, and prenatal services are to be prioritized to prevent apprehension at birth.

The difference is that KIDO's intervention logic is relational and practice-centered, while Peguis' is service-component and regulatory-centered. KIDO tells practitioners how to orient themselves toward families. Peguis tells the system what tools, steps, and standards it must have. KIDO is stronger as a statement of healing methodology; Peguis is stronger as a statement of system architecture.

ROLE OF EXTENDED FAMILY, KINSHIP, AND COMMUNITY

Both laws reject the narrow nuclear-family assumptions common in mainstream child welfare.

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwig Family Law's definition of family is expansive and includes extended, blended, clan, community, inter-Nation, same-sex, foster, and multi-generational forms. Family meetings are central, and the law is saturated with the idea that family and community are collectively responsible for supporting parents and protecting children.

The Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act also centers family, but does so through defined mechanisms: customary care, kinship homes, family sharing circles, community circle of care, customary acceptance, and alternative-to-court processes. It preserves family and community roles through formal tools that can be documented, regulated, and potentially defended in disputes.

The two laws differ in how kinship is operationalized. KIDO operationalizes kinship through a culturally-based way of being and community decision-making. Peguis operationalizes kinship through explicit legal mechanisms and recognized service pathways. The first is culturally immersive; the second is administratively functional.

CHILD REMOVAL AND INTERVENTION

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwig Family Law is prevention-oriented and emphasizes not removing a child prior to following the *Maamao Dibenjikewin Kanawaabajikewin* process and working with external providers. It describes short-term places of safety and continuing advocacy during agency transfers, but the materials provided are less specific about apprehension than Peguis.

Peguis provides a more explicit ladder of intervention. The *Honouring our Children, Family and Nation Act* codifies when a child is in need of intervention, defines neglect and emotional injury, authorizes voluntary agreements, allows access agreements, requires best efforts for culturally appropriate kinship placement, and only permits apprehension once prevention services have been exhausted and apprehension is the only alternative. It also requires notice of apprehension and informs parents of rights, including the right to identify a safe person, receive culturally appropriate services, seek family preservation supports, and choose court or alternative dispute options.

Peguis' law is more procedural and closer to a full substitute child-welfare code. KIDO appears more focused on reconstructing the social field in which intervention happens. That may reflect not only drafting choice but also different implementation stages and community needs and goals.

BEST INTERESTS, CULTURAL CONTINUITY, AND SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY

Both laws reject assimilationist child welfare logic, but Peguis articulates the replacement standard more explicitly.

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug Family Law's best-interests approach is embedded in its definitions and principles: the child's happiness, security, mental health, emotional development, and grounding in KI values, language, and teachings are integral to sound decision-making. Prevention, family support, and collective responsibility are central.

Peguis codifies an extensive modern best-interests framework. It makes best interests the paramount consideration, details factors for decision-making, codifies cultural continuity, requires that services not contribute to assimilation or cultural destruction, and includes a substantive-equality section addressing disability, gender identity, non-discrimination, participation rights, and prevention of service gaps due to jurisdictional disputes.

KIDO expresses cultural continuity as a lived, Nation-specific value structure. Peguis expresses it as both a lived value and a justiciable standard. For research or policy transfer purposes, Peguis may be more easily cited in administrative or court settings; KIDO may be more effective at preserving the integrity of local legal meaning.

DISPUTE RESOLUTION AND THE COURTS

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug Family Law appears to favor community-centered resolution. Family meetings are central, decision-makers are identified where agreement cannot be reached, and staff are expected to explain KI dispute resolution and decision-maker processes to families. The law's materials emphasize dialogue, planning, and internal relational resolution.

Peguis expressly builds a dispute system. The *Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act* recognizes dispute-resolution authority, and the supporting regulations provide complaint, appeal, mediation, ADR, arbitration, and court-related processes. Peguis also explicitly recognizes Manitoba courts and any First Nations tribunal or court that may be established. Parents have protections in proceedings, and council has representation rights.

Peguis has built a more complete legal structure: First Nations dispute processes can coexist with

court. KIDO is more internally community-governed and less explicit in relation to external forums. That gives KIDO high cultural coherence but Peguis greater clarity in interface with other systems.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug Family Law's background materials show long-term community development beginning around 2007, community consultation through open houses, door-to-door visits, and radio programs, a 97 percent referendum acceptance rate in 2019, and implementation work leading to force in April 2023. KIDO has built a service model, defined worker roles, and negotiated coordination arrangements, but its materials also show ongoing dependency on relationships with Tikinagan and vulnerability to unstable fiscal agreements.

Peguis, by contrast, appears highly institutionalized. The core Act is supplemented by regulations; the Agency structure predates the law; transition provisions set out jurisdictional assumption rules; and operational areas such as intake, complaints, appeals, and service delivery are formalized. In implementation research terms, Peguis shows a stronger degree of regulatory completeness.

The implication is that KIDO may depend more on cultural leadership, workforce development, and stable resourcing to maintain coherence in practice, while Peguis may depend more on organizational management capacity, policy consistency, and regulatory maintenance. Both are demanding, but in different ways.

FUNDING DESIGN AND FISCAL RISK

The two laws appear to be funded differently.

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug Family Law's publicly available materials identify a fiscal relationship agreement with Canada worth \$93.8 million over four years but also include a later press statement warning that unstable federal funding and only a two-year extension threaten implementation, staffing, planning, and the long-term viability of KI's jurisdictional system. This is an example of the gap between formal recognition of jurisdiction and actual fiscal sustainability.

Peguis' materials describe a three-year, \$319 million federal commitment and, more importantly, include detailed statutory funding protections: direct federal and provincial funding, capital and infrastructure support, prohibitions on diverting agency funds to First Nation debt reduction, ability to access additional programs, and borrowing restrictions to protect agency independence.

Peguis treats financing as part of constitutional implementation and organizational autonomy. KIDO's materials expose structural risk facing First Nations jurisdiction generally: formal law without stable, long-horizon funding can produce uncertainty, staffing instability, and implementation fragility.

RELATIONSHIP TO PROVINCIAL CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwig Family Law openly emerged to take over services from mainstream Children's Aid Societies (CAS) and continues to work alongside Tikinagan for specialized services. Staff are expected to manage transfers from CAS or other agencies and advocate as band representatives during that process. KIDO appears to be constructing jurisdiction through a managed transition and coexistence model.

Peguis also anticipates coexistence and overlap, but in a more structured way. Other First Nations and non-First Nations agencies are required to inform Peguis of intake involving Peguis Children, Youth, or Families, and transitional sections address children already in care in other jurisdictions, ongoing matters, and phased use of culturally appropriate assessment tools.

This suggests a broader distinction: KIDO is building a First Nations way of serving their members that is culturally distinct and relational, in their way based on their way of knowing and being, while not considering legacy systems, while Peguis is building an First Nations system that is highly aware and responsive to the current realities of provincial and federal systems.

STRENGTHS OF EACH MODEL

KIDO's major strengths are its cultural depth, linguistic integrity, community legitimacy, and non-colonial framework of care. It demonstrates a clear worldview, a relational service philosophy, a strong prevention ethic, and a model that appears designed to restore family and community responsibility rather than adapting provincial child welfare practice. Its strong community ratification also strengthens its legitimacy.

Peguis' major strengths are its institutional completeness, governance clarity, rights articulation, operational detail, and preparedness for navigating current systems to protect its people. It addresses funding, staffing, board governance, dispute resolution, transition, service components, confidentiality, and equality in a way that makes the system easier to administer, defend, and scale.

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS OR CHALLENGES

KIDO's likely implementation challenge is that culturally rich law still requires durable institutional infrastructure. The available materials show dependence on trained Family Keepers, active family meeting practice, coordination with outside systems, and stable funding; if any of these weaken, the law's practical consistency may also weaken. The funding instability language in the KI materials points directly to this concern.

Peguis' likely challenge is the inverse: institutional sophistication can create bureaucratic density. When a law is supported by formal regulations, governance manuals, appeals, ADR, intake rules, and court interfaces, there is always a risk that proceduralizing can begin to resemble the systems First Nations laws were meant to replace, unless ceremony, community practice, and cultural accountability remain central in implementation. The text itself tries to resist that through Elders participation, family-centered circles, cultural rights, and healing language, but the language used throughout is a visual representation of walking in two worlds.

REFLECTIONS

These two laws represent two sophisticated but distinct models of First Nations child and family jurisdiction. They answer different questions. KIDO asks: How do we restore our own legal order around family and child wellbeing? Peguis asks: How do we build a fully functioning First Nation child and family governance system that can stand institutionally alongside or in place of provincial systems? Both laws demonstrate First Nations jurisdiction is not a single model. It can be pursued through different combinations of cultural resurgence, statutory form, institutional capacity, and intergovernmental strategy. Together, they map two pathways in the rebuilding of First Nations family jurisdiction in Canada.



LOOKING TO THE NORTH

RECOMMENDATIONS

One helpful way that an internal review can contribute to an organization's well-being is to provide a few recommendations to consider. Phase Two heard from several interviewees who had amazing ideas on how Peguis Child and Family Services might improve services. To conclude this report, let's review three recommendations that came directly from stakeholders, community folks or Agency staff:

RECOMMENDATION #1: THE AGENCY SHOULD CONTINUE SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS MEN

Not a lot of attention gets directed toward the plight of indigenous men. The economic and social conditions that affect their lives are rarely discussed. The dichotomy of privilege becomes askew because there is a belief that they should hold privilege on the mere fact that they are men. However, being Indigenous brings them racism and discrimination.

This is not by error. There is simply no political 'will for change' when society sees Indigenous men struggling or being excluded. As men, they are left to their own devices to address any shortcomings and the systemic barriers they face are not acknowledged. As Innes & Anderson (2015) ask in their impactful book called Indigenous Men and Masculinities, "Who is walking with our brothers?"

One systemic barrier that needs to change for Indigenous men to prosper is how they are often treated by the child welfare system. Cfs has a way of excluding all fathers, but the situation is worse for Indigenous fathers. cfs systems work directly with mothers, who are viewed as the Primary Caregiver. She becomes the case reference for any family file, not the father. From the Intake process and onwards, fathers are left out of the familial equation.

Fathers are to be included in all aspects of families. They also deserve to know their rights as parents, so they are fully informed of what their role is. At Peguis Child and Family Services, it appears that the important role of all parents, including fathers, has been carefully considered. For instance, in Section 8.15 of the Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act, the Parents Bill of Rights is outlined:

- (a) Can identify a safe person to care for their Child(ren).
- (b) Can bring their own supports when meeting with Agency representatives.
- (c) Can receive services in a culturally appropriate way.
- (d) Can receive help and resources to support family preservation, if it is in the Best Interests of the Child.
- (e) Can attend court proceedings and provide input to the judge regarding their Child; and

(f) Can provide input on their case plan and receive notification pursuant to Section 6.6 and 8.14(a) of this Act.

Guest speaker Dakota House at the 2025 Men's Gathering spoke many truths. He spoke of the important role of the warrior in today's society, and the responsibility of being men. He provided practical strategies of maintaining a strong, healthy, Indigenous masculinity energy, through breath work, long hugs, and saying the words, "I love you." He provided reminders about the power of our words and having the power of regulating and controlling our emotions.

Knowledge Keeper Dwayne "Sunman" McCorrister and the Loud Eagle Singers are present at almost every Agency gathering providing teachings through words or songs. It is this collective that provides a strong circle for men's healing to take place.

When discussing about how men realize a good life, author Elizabeth Comack (2023) shares that men require care and support of a collectivity, whether this takes the form of a loving partner, family, community. If men have a network of people in their corner, they can be unstoppable. The interviewee who provided this recommendation is proud of the work that Peguis Child and Family Services is already doing to provide suitable services to Indigenous men. They hope to see it continue.

"THE MOST MASCULINE PEOPLE LEAVE A LEGACY OF SURPLUS VALUE FROM A PLACE OF KINDNESS, GENEROSITY AND STRENGTH. THEY GIVE MORE LOVE THAN THEY GET BACK."

-Professor Scott Galloway, 2025

RECOMMENDATION #2: GATHERINGS - PEGUIS CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES SHOULD CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON INCLUSIVITY OF OUR TWO SPIRIT RELATIVES AND CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

The numerous gatherings that Peguis Child and Family Services hosts every year represent a powerful message to the community members of Peguis First Nation: we support you. One interviewee mentioned however, that a gathering celebrating our Two Spirit relatives would be nice to see. This interviewee shared that for an organization to meaningfully support gender-fluid, and broader LGBT community folks, it must move beyond symbolic inclusion toward real structural change. Policies could recognize non-binary and gender fluid identities (not just male/female), as an example, HR policies could allow chosen names, not just legal names with a legal name change document requirement.

It is important to recognize that while this report was being released, Peguis Child and Family Services announced their upcoming schedule of 2026 Gatherings. A Two Spirit Gathering will take place at Maamawibiway in June 2026.

Recommendation Continued:

In Canada, the Canadian Human Rights Act includes gender expression as a protected right for all

citizens. Organizations are encouraging pronoun sharing in email signatures, introductions, sharing circles, etc. Ongoing self-identification is becoming a welcome feature in many organizations, businesses and companies.

The Agency could invest in ongoing, applied training and diversity workshops. These trainings could include understanding gender as a spectrum, the realities of gender-fluid experiences (invisibility), and how personal biases can show up in the workplace (example: during the hiring process).

The Agency could create an advisory group that includes 2SLGBTQIA+ members to ensure the emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual needs of 2SLGBTQIA+ kids in care and staff people are being met. This advisory group could provide suggestions and feedback when needed. If there was a complaint or concern, the advisory group could also assist. Microaggressions against members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community can take place at any organization and need to stop. Peguis Child and Family Services can be proactive in addressing these harms with the implementation of an Inclusive Community Advisory Committee, if they so choose.

RECOMMENDATION #3: PEGUIS CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES' ARCHIVES & COLLECTIONS

This was an interesting recommendation from a person interviewed during Phase Two. The Agency could set up their own archives collection to ensure all relevant materials during the roll out and implementation of the Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act are not forgotten or lost. The implementation of HOCFNA is grounded in the name of the next 7 generations so does an archive collection make sense? Yes, it does. An archives collection is not just storage; it is a strategic organization asset that could support the identity of Peguis Child and Family Services. As the first cfs agency to implement and follow through with their own legislation, Peguis Child and Family Services is making history. It is a strong idea to document the process to preserve:

- Historical actions taken by Leadership.
- Decisions, processes and development.
- Past successes and failures.
- Agency knowledge that could be lost with staff turnover.

By starting an archives collection, Peguis Child and Family Services can define who the organization is, what they stand for, and how it has evolved. The expansion in staff members at the Agency in itself is outstanding. While onboarding new staff members, an archives collection could be useful for training and orientation purposes.

When it comes to decolonizing child welfare, Peguis Child and Family Services has already emerged a leader. An archives collection is important because it can help the Agency:

- Remember (memory and identity).
- Prove (accountability and protection).
- Learn (evaluation and improvement).
- Influence (storytelling and advocacy).

The impact that Peguis Child and Family Services is making on child welfare has been established

over the past several years, especially since the Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act has been implemented. It may be time to start an official record of this incredible journey.

Peguis Child and Family Services is meeting all reporting requirements to Peguis First Nation, Canada and Manitoba. The Honouring our Children, Families and Nation Act is working effectively and impressively.



CONCLUSION - PHASE TWO

Any aspirational transformation like overhauling a community child welfare system is going to take time, effort, resources and community-driven support. Peguis Child and Family Services has been focusing on the immediate reform of child welfare concerning the community of Peguis First Nation. The Agency is aware of the damage that has been done in the past. There were systemic limitations that were in place for a long time concerning how cfs were to operate. As well, there were miscalculations made by people formerly in charge. The current staff at Peguis Child and Family Services acknowledges this and continue to work hard to correct it.

Mainstream society often views child protection as a liberalist or capitalistic project, whereas Indigenous communities are more concerned with the social relations aspect of cfs. Regardless, both views have valid points arguments to them: families and kids continue to suffer at the hands of child welfare. Alleviating the hardship that families face and working collaboratively with Peguis community members is at the forefront of the new type of service delivery at Peguis Child and Family Services. Curbing the impact of colonialism and the powerful system of cfs, as it was once designed, remains a key focus of the Agency.

Evaluating and re-evaluating has long been a tradition of Anishinaabe people. Leanne Simpson (2013) tells us the story of many moons ago when the Hoof Nation removed themselves from among us because we were taking them for granted:

After some negotiation, the People learned that the Hoof Clan had left their territory because the Nishnaabeg were no longer honouring them. They had been wasting their meat and not treating their bodies with the proper reverence. The Hoof Clan had withdrawn from the territory and their relationship with the Nishnaabeg. They had stopped participating.

So, with no choice and being faced with a world without the Hoof relatives, the Nishnaabeg had to listen. Sit quietly and listen to what the Hoof Clan shared. Then, evaluation had to occur. What were the Nishnaabeg going to do differently moving forward?

When you listen to grievances, examine errors that you have made, then you can do better. Evaluating ourselves is responsible practice and it is how we remain fair and consistent in our dealings with others. This is what an internal review is all about. From an Indigenous perspective, it's also how to be a Good Relative: sitting in circle with each other, listening, sharing, and collaborating toward common goals.

Peguis Child and Family Services continues to develop new modalities of knowledge pertaining to child welfare. This Agency strives to deliver a new model of preventative child protection where families are assisted, not resisted. This fundamental shift continues to take time to roll out but if the past four years is any indication of what is to come, hope remains on the horizon. cfs has been a political issue for far too long. Peguis Child and Family Services strives to bring family matters back to the community of Peguis First Nation, where they belong.

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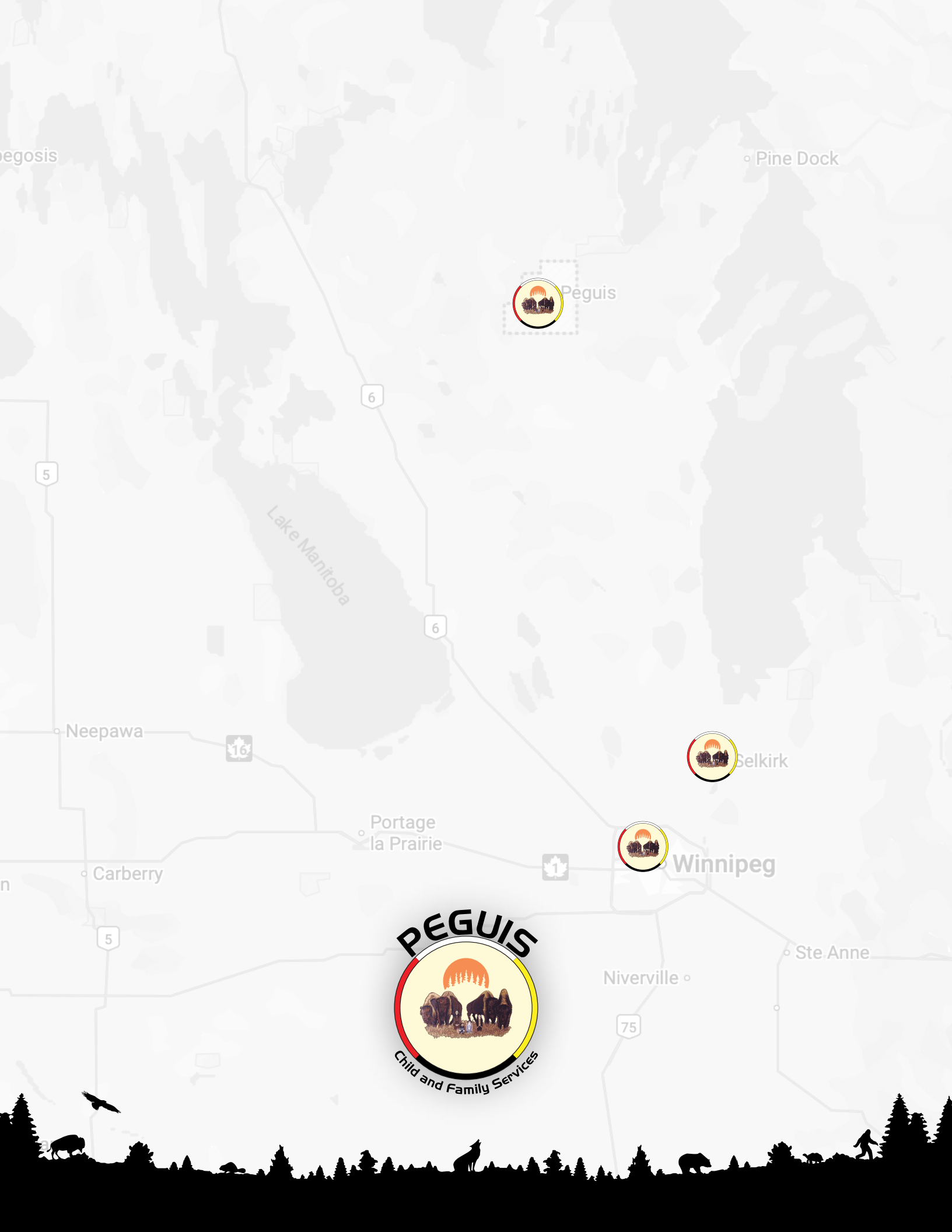
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Pegosis

Pine Dock

Peguis

Lake Manitoba

Neepawa

Selkirk

Portage
la Prairie

Winnipeg

Carberry

Niverville

Ste Anne

