

The logo for Osgoode Hall Law School at York University, featuring the word "OSGOODE" in white capital letters on a red rectangular background.

OSGOODE HALL LAW SCHOOL  
YORK UNIVERSITY

## **Call for Proposals**

### **Re-imagining Child Welfare Systems in Canada**

### **A Symposium, October 21, 2016**

Race intersects with the over-representation of particular groups of children in varying ways and degrees. It is often rooted in the unique historical and structural disadvantages affecting particular communities manifesting in deep poverty, trauma and addictions. These factors are leading reasons why children are reported to child welfare authorities and placed in alternative care.

Aboriginal children are dramatically over-represented at every stage of child protection intervention across Canada. The degree of over-representation grows as child welfare interventions become more intrusive resulting in Aboriginal children being 12 times more likely to be placed in child welfare care than other children (Canadian Incidence Study on Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2008). The key drivers are poverty, poor housing, and substance misuse related to multi-generational trauma. Research suggests race is a factor in child welfare authority decision-making as it remains significant even after clinical factors such as the dramatic over-representation of Aboriginal children living in deep poverty are controlled for. A compounding disadvantage for First Nations children is the discriminatory child welfare funding regimes on reserve and in the Yukon that yield significantly fewer family support services despite the higher needs of families owing to the multi-generational impacts of residential schools and colonization (*Caring Society* decision, Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, 2016).

The present-day removal of children from Indigenous families and communities occurs within a historical context of Canadian governments removing Aboriginal children from their families during the Indian Residential Schools system, the Sixties Scoop, practices of cultural genocide (Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015), and on-going racial discrimination.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and UNICEF have joined First Nations, Métis and Inuit organizations in repeatedly calling attention to the urgent need to address the dramatic over-representation of Aboriginal children in care. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has called us to action, naming adequate resources, the resolution of jurisdictional disputes, the education of social workers, the creation of national standards for Aboriginal child apprehension and custody, and the gathering of data as measures that are essential to reconciliation.

Unfortunately there is a lack of national data on the situation of African Canadian children in Canada. Reports from Ontario have noted the over-representation of African Canadian children and youth, particularly within large urban centers, and systemic racism in that region (Because Young People Matter, 2016). The Because Young People Matter panel has also called for fundamental change, emphasizing the importance of good data and research to inform the reform process. The source of the systemic racism, however, appears to be different than for Aboriginal children. Data from the Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (2013)

reveal that African Canadian children are 40 percent more likely to be over-represented among reports to child protection authorities. This over-representation decreases as child welfare interventions become more intrusive with African Canadian children being 13 percent more likely to be placed into care than other children. Analysis suggests that the over-representation is accounted for by the over-representation of African Canadian children living in poverty.

The level of overrepresentation of African Canadian children in care has led the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, based on the report of the African Canadian Legal Clinic, to express concern about this phenomenon (2016). Here too, current realities need to be grounded in historical context -- including that of slavery -- the creation and persistence of a white settler nation, and contemporary practices of anti-Black racism that stigmatize African Canadian families.

As these two examples show, race influences the over-representation of particular groups of children to different degrees and to different levels. It can manifest at the structural level culminating in disadvantage that predisposes families for child welfare intervention as in the case of Aboriginal and African Canadian children and may also manifest in the decision-making within the child welfare system. New approaches to child welfare that acknowledge the effects of race in child welfare within the context of the histories and institutional racism experienced by different groups in Canada are urgently needed. Recognizing this need for new approaches and for action as well as good data, the Journal of Law and Social Policy (JLSP), Osgoode Hall Law School, the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, and the African Canadian Legal Clinic are pleased to host a symposium, "Re-imagining Child Welfare Systems in Canada." The symposium will be held at Osgoode Hall Law School, York University on Friday, October 21, 2016 from 9:00 a.m.-3:30p.m.

The goal of the symposium is to bring together academics, practitioners, community-based organizations and those with lived experience to foster conversation, deepen analyses, and re-imagine radically different child welfare systems. We invite you to submit a proposal for a presentation at the symposium. Presenters will be encouraged to submit their work for publication in a special volume of the JLSP. The Journal publishes both peer-reviewed academic articles (maximum 12,000 words) and much shorter "Voices and Perspectives" pieces that can take a number of forms (first person narratives, poetry, reflections on an organizing campaign, artwork, a transcription or recording of an interview, etc.). The JLSP seeks to support the publication of works by new authors and to include voices often excluded from traditional academic publications. To this end, the Journal offers writing, research, and editing supports throughout the process, from proposal-writing to final publication.

Proposals could address any number of topics and issues relating to child welfare in Canada. For example: understanding our histories and their impact on child welfare policies and practices; exploring anti-colonial, anti-racist and anti-oppressive frameworks and principles to ground new policies and practices; rendering visible manifestations of racism within child welfare systems and practices; examining advocacy strategies, such as child and youth engagement and the role of litigation and of social movements; and identifying knowledge and data gaps.

#### Details for Proposals:

- proposals should include a brief summary (max. 500 words) of the topic and form or medium for your presentation
- proposals should be submitted to Janet Mosher ([jmosher@osgoode.yorku.ca](mailto:jmosher@osgoode.yorku.ca)) by July 25
- 8-12 proposals will be selected by the organizers and authors will be notified by August 8
- the authors of selected proposals will be asked to submit a draft of their paper or other work by October 1
- all presenters are encouraged to submit their work for publication in the JLSP's special volume on child welfare; final works will be due January 16, 2017
- additional information about the JLSP is available at <http://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/jlsp/>; if you would like to discuss an idea for a proposal or have any questions, please contact Janet Mosher at [jmosher@osgoode.yorku.ca](mailto:jmosher@osgoode.yorku.ca).