



THE RIGHTS OF THE ANISHINAABE CHILD

There has been a shift to assuring that the rights of children be observed and respected in the practice of Indigenous child welfare. The new Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2016 (CYFSA) obliges child protection workers to demonstrate that they have reviewed the Rights of the Child. The compliance reviews for child welfare require that the Child has indeed reviewed, comprehended, and affixed their signature on a form as proof of their understanding acceptance. What does not appear in the legally mandated Compliance Formula are the Rights of an Anishinaabe Child. These are completely absent in legislation, directives, guidelines, or regulations. Indigenous Child Welfare Programs are an assertion of customary and traditional laws, practices and approaches to family well-being ascending from Tribal Sovereignty. The heart of Indigenous child welfare rests on the Rights of the Anishinaabe Child. This paper reviews the Rights of the Anishinaabe Child, provides explanation and highlights their significance to Life Space Development and Identity Formation.

DISCUSSION

Identity formation is the development of an individual's unique personality and sense of self. It is a lifelong process that is influenced by a variety of factors, including family, culture, and personal experiences. Identity formation is important because it helps us to understand ourselves and our place in the world.

For the Anishinaabe people, identity formation is also influenced by the belief that infants have personality because of the presence of the Ojjaak (the soul). The Ojjaak comes to this reality whole and it defines itself as the Abinoojii ages and grows into Adulthood. However, this social interaction changes when they reach puberty. Adolescents are then differentiated into gender roles and responsibilities. This is the most important stage in the Traditional Life Stage process because it is where the Self is refined and distinguished. The unification of the Ojjaak and the Weo (body) is fused with the Mind (Nidibaan). This integration is assured through the Rites of Passage, and Identity Formation is complete. This sacred unification is disrupted and disordered by the child welfare system.

Indigenous child welfare (and the concept of customary care and custom adoption) has been around for millenia and predates any colonial legislation or child welfare system. The goal of keeping children safe and secure are identical to the current child welfare motif of protection and permanency. There is Traditional law and Customary law that govern the practice of customary care and custom adoption much like the CYFSA. Under the articles of Traditional and Customary laws there are ascribed Rights of the Child (Abinooji).

There are thirteen Rights of the Anishinaabe Child as there are thirteen patterns on the carapace of the Snapping Turtle. The Snapping Turtle is very significant to the culture and to the Anishinaabeg in their ceremonial activities and events. The Rights of the Anishinaabe Child are as follows:

RIGHT #1

The Anishinaabe Child has a RIGHT to their Anishinaabe Name. The Anishinaabe Ishinikazowin identifies the Life Force that joined the body (Weo) and gave Life (Bimadiziwin) to the Child (Abinoojiin). The Life Force is usually referred to as the Soul (Ojjaak) that came from the Creator's side. The Ojjaak is released by the Creator to come to this realm. The Ojjaak already knows its Name, Clan, Parents and Medicine Lodge. The Ojjaak enters this reality through the womb of the mother and arrives through the Birth Canal surrounded by water (Nibi). The Anishinaabe Ishinikazowin sustains and nourishes, supports and protects, protracts the characteristics and qualities, and distinguishes and defines the Abinoojiin from the rest of Creation. Through the Welcoming and Naming Ceremonies, the Child is pronounced to all of Creation. These Ceremonies create the second social caring network which includes, the Sponsor Couple (Weekomawug) and the Name Giver (Niiwenenh). These people assume continuing customary duty and obligation to the Child. The Anishinaabe Name acknowledges and authenticates the Abinoojiin's Identity.

RIGHT #2

The Anishinaabe Child has a RIGHT to their Clan (Ododem). The Ododem is the Ensign that the Abinoojiin is ascribed after birth. The Abinoojin takes on the Clan of the father. In the Anishinaabe Clan System, membership is determined through the male lineage. The Clan Identification Ceremony confirms and secures the child to the membership of the Clan and establishes the third level of a social caring network for the Abinoojiin as they are introduced and presented to the members. Members of the Clans have authority, roles and responsibilities to each other, to their family and to the rest of the Nation. The Clan members teach the Abinoojiin everything about their Clan and the Child assumes the characteristics and qualities of the Clan Ensign and adds to the Abinoojiin's Identity.

RIGHT #3

The Anishinaabe Child has a RIGHT to a Medicine Lodge. At the time of leaving the Creators side. The Ojjaak is provided with four gifts including which Medicine Lodge that they will be entered and ordained. Not every Ojjaak is commanded by Creator to become a member of a Lodge. These person are Saagamaawin (they already sit and are cradled in the Creator's Hand). There are four Medicine Lodges in the Anishinaabe cultural systems. The Medicine Lodges each occupy the four cardinal directions or Doorways. They are: the Ogimawigiwam (Leadership Lodge) to the East, Midewigaan (Midewin) to the South, Shugabaasowin (Sun Dance) to the West and Wabanowin (Northern Lights Lodge) to the North. A child maybe have been decreed to be a member of one of the Lodges. Membership establishes the fourth level of a social caring network for the Abinoojiin as they are introduced and presented to the Lodge members. Lodge members have authority, role and responsibilities to each other as family. The Lodge members teach the Abinoojiin everything about their Lodge and the Child assumes and portrays the customary duties and obligations of the Lodge and adds to the Abinoojiin's Identity.

RIGHT #4

The Anishinaabe Child has a RIGHT to their Family (Gutsiimug, Giniigigoog, Onodeziwin and Ondadisuk). The Family as defined by the Anishinaabe is absolutely necessary for functional Life Space. Access to and being with Family is critical for Life Development and Identity Formation. Belonging to and living with your Family affirms the Abinoojii's sense of affinity and kinship. Every child needs a place where they need to feel safe and secure. This sense of sanctuary and haven is with their Family which includes: nuclear, extended, marital, Clan, community, Nation and Universal Families. No other out-of-home or out-of-cultural placements will ever replace nor replicate this sense of psychospiritual contentment - only the Family can assure this for the Anishinaabe Abinoojiin. Do everything to preserve and protect this union of the Anishinaabe Child and their Family.

RIGHT #5

The Anishinaabe Child has a RIGHT to their Culture and Anishinaabe Healing (Anishinaabe Ishitoowin (nun). The Anishinaabe Ishitowinun are the cultural components and complexes that form the integrated cultural system of the Anishinaabeg. Access to and participation in such activities are essential for Life Development and Identity Formation of the Abinoojii. Culture provides the opportunity for the Abinoojii to understand their existence, their worldview and place in the universe, establishes social relationships and bonding, cues to social interaction and behavior and loyalty (Culture and People). It provides the Abinoojii with a cultural system that they will require and necessary for their formative development in their Life Space through the Rites of Passage and Medicine Lodge Initiation Ceremonies. Culture endorses their uniqueness as Anishinaabeg and the healing practices provides them with healthy Life Space choices and access to genuine Anishinaabe methods of healing that affirms their Anishinaabe Identity.

RIGHT #6

The Anishinaabe Child has a RIGHT to their Language (Anishinaabemowin). Anishinaabemowin is our VOICE. It is our sound within the Universe. It distinguishes us from any other languages and peoples. It is an expression of us and our verbal visage of our world. It is how we communicate with each other, how we relate with one another, consolidate our relational bonding and manifest our place in humanity. Our language is the VOICE of Creation. Anishinaabemowin transmits our worldview, our place in Creation and defines our Identity and every Abinoojii needs access, to acquire and be taught to speak our tongue.

RIGHT #7

The Anishinaabe Child has a RIGHT to a Good life (Minobimadizwin). Minobimadizwin is living a zestful and purposeful Life. The Abinoojii needs to be happy and accept their place, status and position in Life. The persons completely and unwaveringly accepts their Life Space and nothing threatens them. They are comfortable with themselves, can spend time completely alone and they have unconditional positive Self-regard. The Abinoojii is living Life in accordance to the Ojjaak and radiates this energy to others and to Creation. Each Anishinaabe Abinoojiin is born in this loving and Sacred Energy State and they need to remain in this state without interference from anybody or anything. Life is not meant to be a struggle but an expression of the Ojjaak as it embraces, encapsulates and engulfs the full Human Potential - Anishinaabe Self Actualization. Take a good look at the Abinoojiig and see how pure the are- we must do everything in our power to preserve and protect this Sacred Energy State.

RIGHT #8

The Anishinaabe Child has a RIGHT to their Identity. Anishinabewin is crucially, critically and fundamentally vital for Life Space formation and functioning. Without it, the Abinoojiin is continuously searching, wandering, angry and at a complete state of loss called- Identity Crisis. The Abinoojii needs to know who they are, where they came from and to whom they belong. It is so fundamental and primary that it means the difference between Minobimadizwin (Good Life) and Bishigwadizwin (Purposeless Life). The Child needs to develop a distinct Anishinaabe Identity for human wholeness. The Axiom of Identity are: A sense of Personal Importance, Continuity of a person's Life (Bimadizwin) Experience, Solidarity with Family, Community and Nation, access to Anishinaabe, Community and Family History, Enculturation and Socialization. These dimensions constitute the FORMULA FOR INDENTIIY FORMATION. Without such access to these and involvement with Nation, Community and Family the Abinoojii with not develop TRUST and CONFIDENCE.

RIGHT #9

The Anishinaabe Child has a RIGHT to their History (Debaachimoowin). Debaachimoowin as understood, told and interpreted by the Anishinaabeg is essential for social and cultural continuity and well-being. Debaachimoowin connects people to a common Life Space experience and establishes connectedness amongst individuals. A Child needs to be free to explore their Family, Community and Nation's history. Abinoojiig should have unrestricted and unconstrained access to their history because it defines and distinguishes them to a Family, Community and Nation. Debaachimoowin relaxes, pacifies and comforts the Ojjaak. Through story-telling a fifth level of a social caring network for the Abinoojiin is confirmed to the members of the common ancestral history. Members of the have the authority, role and responsibilities to teach each other, teach their family and teach the rest of the Nation. The members need to teach the Abinoojiin everything about their history and the Child absorbs the history which adds to the Abinoojiin's Identity.

RIGHT #10

The Anishinaabe Child has a RIGHT to their Land Anishinaabe Akikaang. Anishinaabe Akikaang is the section of land where we grow up, dropped our tears, uttered our laughter, left our foot prints, processed our pain and it is part of our most fundamental relationships, next to that of Creator. There are no words that can describe the sacrosanct relationship that the Anishinaabe has with the Land. This relationship shapes us, effects and affects us, influences and defines us. We are the people of the Land. The more we are removed from the Land the more aggressive our behavior becomes. If you want to know the state of Life for the Anishinaabe then examine and take a good look at the condition of the Land. Anishinaabe Abinoojiig need to set foot on, sit on, play on, lay on and eat from our mother-the Aki.

RIGHT #11

The Anishinaabe Child has a RIGHT to their Lifestyle (Anishinaatisiwin). Anishinaatisiwin is the expression of one's self through the performance of actions, activities and accomplishments in their Life Space. Each Nation has its own doings that are unique to themselves and to their locale. Amongst the Anishinaabeg, we are Fishers, Hunters, Trappers, Farmers, Gatherers, Horsemen and Warriors. Each settlement or community has their form of Anishinaabechigewin that sustains them through the use of their knowledge, skills and strategies. These are transferred from one generation to the next. Each Abinoojiin needs to acquire and have access to this knowledge, skills and strategies because this is who they are- it defines their purpose and prepares them for Bimadiziwin.

RIGHT #12

The Anishinaabe Child has a Right to Education (Kinamaadiwin). The teaching, modeling and educating (Kinamaadiwin) Abinoojiig is extremely imperative for their Life Space Development. This means transmitting traditional and customary knowledge, transferring traditional and customary skills and performing activities that sustains Bimadizwin. This includes contemporary training and education that prepares the children for a functional Life Space and become a contributing member to Anishinaabe society and culture. But it does not mean asking the Child to divorce or separate from their community, Family, Nation, and Identity or forgo their Culture. It means to embrace cultural and contemporary education and each Anishinaabe Abinoojiin needs to be exposed this this knowledge.

RIGHT #13

The Anishinaabe Child has a RIGHT to safety and security. Traditional child care (Shawentasoowin, Ganawentasoowin and Nabiingondiwin) have existed in the Anishinaabe Nation, Communities and Families for a long time. Customary Care and Custom Adoption predate any child welfare system in this province, Country or in the Americas, for that matter. It is an ancestral form of keeping children safe and secure. It is a social caring system that involved the exercise of Customary Law, Leadership, and Persons of cultural wisdom, Family (as understood by Anishinaabeg), men and women. We have to refrain from romancing the idea that during our old times we were free from child maltreatment. We must acknowledge and accept the fact that Abinoojiing were being hurt and treated horribly by others including their Family. Customary systems exist because our children were not liberated from maltreatment. These traditional systems of child care took care of, secured and kept our children safe and held offenders accountable. Such systems still exist amongst the Anishinaabeg but they may not be easily detected due to historic deconstruction and cultural loss. Abinoojiinwug are entitled to such systems.

CONCLUSION

There has been a shift to assuring that the Rights of children be observed and respected in the practice of child welfare. What does not appear in the legally mandated Compliance Formulas are the Rights of an Anishinaabe Child. These are completely absent in legislation, directives, guidelines or regulations. Indigenous Child Welfare Programs are an assertion of customary and traditional laws, practices and approaches to family well-being ascending from Tribal Sovereignty. This paper reviews the Rights of the Anishinaabe Child, provides explanation and highlights their significance to Life Space Development and Identity Formation. It is critically imperative that Indigenous Child Welfare Programs and Agencies advance the Rights, insist on cultural competency and congruence and implement traditional and customary child caring practices as the model for Indigenous families. The 13 Rights of the Anishinaabe Child are based on the 13 parts on the carapace of the Snapping Turtle.