

Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies apologizes for harm child welfare has done to Ontario Indigenous children and families

Toronto — On October 1-3, 2017, the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) hosted a gathering at Geneva Park and Rama First Nation to acknowledge and apologize for the harmful role child welfare has played historically, and continues to play, in the lives of Ontario Indigenous children, families, and communities.

"A Moment on the Path" gathering brought together leaders from Ontario's non-Indigenous child welfare agencies with representatives, leaders, and elders from Indigenous communities and Indigenous Child and Family Services.

Indigenous participants—including survivors of the Sixties Scoop and Residential Schools—spoke about the devastating impact the child welfare system has had, and continues to have, on their communities. Chief Marcia Brown Martell, lead plaintiff in the Sixties Scoop lawsuit, Renee Linklater, and Rodney Howe all shared their experience of being apprehended by child welfare as part of the Sixties Scoop.

This morning, Mary Ballantyne, CEO of OACAS, apologized to all Indigenous children, families and communities who were impacted by the Sixties Scoop, and continue to be negatively impacted by the child welfare system in Ontario.

"We apologize to the children, mothers and fathers who have been hurt by the Sixties Scoop, which saw thousands of Indigenous children taken from their home, families and communities across Canada," said Mary Ballantyne. "The Sixties Scoop and many current practices have resulted in cultural genocide for the Indigenous people of Ontario. The words of apology and regret I share today are an acknowledgement that we must do better. We have a long path towards Reconciliation and healing of these historic injustices."

Following the acknowledgment and apology, leaders and elders from Indigenous communities across the province were invited to respond. The apology was met with strong emotion and insistence that the words be matched by action and accountability.

"It is definitely encouraging to know that OACAS has come to a place to recognize their involvement in the great harm that has come to Indigenous children of this province as a result of the Sixties Scoop," said Chief Marcia Brown.

"We recognize the good intention. It starts the wheel to apologize. At this time, I cannot accept the apology. How do you say sorry to parents who saw their child come home in a casket? I am looking forward to the process where the federal and provincial governments offer the apology, not the

children's aid societies, who deliver the government's child welfare system. I commit to working with OACAS to bring the federal and provincial governments to the table to apologize to the children and families who have been harmed," said Grand Chief Jonathan Solomon of Mushkegowuk Council.

"It is vitally important to acknowledge the memory of those that aren't with us today; as well as the families that have endured the loss of family members, at the hands of the government's discriminatory child welfare policies," said Ontario Regional Chief Isadore Day. "We know that the path that brought us here has been a painful journey; especially for those that have been directly impacted by the Sixties Scoop. By addressing this together, we possess the ability to create a better world, today and for future generations."

"It's good that OACAS recognizes the damage that harmful practices and attitudes its member societies have done to First Nations children, and are beginning their reconciliation by way of an apology. That being said, there is much work to do to change those practices and attitudes immediately or the apology won't mean a thing," said Grand Chief Joel Abram, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians.

Children's Aid Societies pledged to be held accountable and to make meaningful the words of the apology through their transformed behaviour.

"The Reconciliation pathway is an ongoing journey," said Mary Ballantyne, CEO of OACAS. "This gathering was an important moment as we acknowledge the significant work that remains."

Media contact:

Sean McGrady

Media Relations and External Communications Specialist

416.644.2497 (D) 416.806.6389 (M)

smcgrady@oacas.org

About the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies: Since 1912, OACAS has represented Ontario's Children's Aid Societies in Ontario and provided service in the areas of government relations, communications, information management, education and training to advocate for the protection and well-being of children. <http://www.oacas.org>.