

# Transitional plan needed for changeover of child protection services

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The lack of planning for the changeover of child protection services from the Brant Children's Aid Society (CAS) to Six Nations is a sore point for the Brant CAS's Executive Director, Andrew Koster.

Koster and Sally Rivers, head of the Native Services Branch, attended the March 12 meeting of Elected Council to ask that a six-month interim protocol agreement, outlining the relationship between the CAS and Six Nations be extended to one year.

Council was considering rescinding an in camera motion made on April 3, 2012 to end its agreement with Brant CAS effective April 1, 2013. However, because Six Nations is not ready to take over the delivery of child protection services, the temporary interim protocol was created. Rivers and Koster were not able to convince elected council to extend the agreement to April of 2014.

Koster explained in a telephone interview why he and Rivers wanted the extra time. "We just wanted to make sure that the transition occurs in the best interests of the kids and families."

Koster would like to see a transition plan worked out to minimize the amount of stress the kids in care will experience as a result of the change. He said the offer to help Six Nations establish a transition plan was rejected.

"We've got kids in foster homes, they're in certain foster homes with certain workers," Koster explained. "And we're just worried. Among other things, what happens if those kids don't have the same worker? It may be that they won't, but give us enough time to prepare. Because some of the kids are pretty troubled."

Some of the Clan Mothers attending the March 12 meeting called for the Brant CAS to be off the territory immediately.

The attitude held towards Brant CAS also bothers Koster. Brant CAS has had a history of working with Six Nations, Koster said. He said that during the 60's scoop, where many First Nations children were scooped away from their homes, "We worked with Six Nations to prevent the 60s scoop. We worked with Harvey Longboat and Wilma General to prevent that."

"Our concern is that not everything has come out," he

said. "We've had a very positive relationship over a long period of time. As well, from time to time, we've had situations where some people are not happy. That's the nature of our work."

"We felt Part A of the designation was skewed because comments were recorded and the report touched on the criticism of Brant CAS." Koster said "There's all kinds of positive reasons why First Nations should take over" child protection services, and said the report "paints a picture that most people want us off the reserve."

"Have we made mistakes," asked Koster. "You bet. But there are only 65 [Six Nations] kids in care [of the Brant CAS]." Last fall, Six Nations band representatives said there were over 500 Six Nations children in care across Canada and in the United States.

The fate of the 22 Six Nations members who are currently working as case workers at the Native Services Branch is another issue that Koster would also like to see resolved as part of the transition plan. "In 1978 we were asked through a band council resolution to have an office right on Six Nations and the

purpose was to help train staff for the time when they could take over. So one of our worries now is we've done that, but there's no indication that the staff we've trained will move over to the new agency."

Those Six Nations case workers "all have their proper qualifications, they've all gone to school to get the right degrees, and they're trained in the Six Nations way of doing business." Koster said, "It's hard for us to understand why they wouldn't be given positions in the new agency."

Koster said all his staff are dedicated to the children in their care, but for those at the Native Services Branch, not knowing if they will be hired by the new Six Nations agency, might motivate employees to seek other employment. And that would impact the children in their care.

A transitional plan would map out ways to reduce stress for the children in care, and would allow time to work out alternate arrangements

for foster care, should current foster care providers not consent to transfer to Six Nations. Koster pointed out that individual families also have to consent to the transfer.

Koster said it was also possible that having to pay a severance to the current workers at the Native Services Branch could cut into the funding for the Six Nations service, and impact the children in care.

"We have a \$600,000 deficit because we provide care to Six Nations," Koster said, emphasizing that his concerns are not based on how much money he gets from Ontario to provide the service to Six Nations.

A transition plan will also allow for readjustments to service planning, said Koster. "We don't know ourselves which services will be transferred. Their report talks about Haudenosaunee. Does that include other First Nations?"

Because Six Nations is still in the second phase of the process of obtaining its child pro-

tection designation, on March 12, Elected Council approved the interim protocol agreement with the Brant CAS until October 1, 2013.

The steps towards obtaining a Six Nations child protection designation are:

a. Consultation with community;

b. Develop and demonstrate organizational service delivery capacity (documentation);

c. The developed documentation is then reviewed by a Capacity Review Team appointed by the Minister of Children and Youth Services;

d. If approved, Six Nations will receive a designation to provide child protective services.

e. A final stage consists of a review and evaluation of the services provided by Six Nations.

Several attempts were made to reach Arliss Skye, the Director of Six Nations Social Services Department, for her comments on the issue, but she did not respond.