

Take over of C.A.S. services expected in 2013

By Donna Durie
Writer

Six Nations is one step closer to taking over Children's Aid services, as it moves into the design phase of its child welfare plan.

Six Nations moved to take over child protection services after years of complaints from local parents about the Brant Children's Aid Society/Native Services Branch.

This past spring, advocates of a child welfare takeover completed an overview of what it would take to create the service after getting \$500,000 in funding from the province.

Tom Goff, a consultant hired to help implement the takeover, headed a poorly-attended meeting last Thursday in the Social Services gym meant to gather community input on the project.

He said now is the time for community members to have input on the child protection program design and development, Six Nations Social Services hopes to have the model completed by December.

Goff said two key questions need to be answered: how those running the program be held accountable, and what services the program

should provide.

He said there should be a focus on prevention, rather than protection.

"It would be nice if we could eliminate the need to involuntarily protect a child but that's probably never going to happen. There are some communities that have set up their own programs and they've very significantly reduced the cases in which protection is necessary. That could happen here, as well, depending on how we set up the program," he said.

Parents last year complained that the Brant CAS, Native Services Branch too

often took children from Six Nations and placed them in non-native foster homes off the territory, said Goff.

"One of the biggest complaints about the CAS was that staff don't always work with the extended family," he said.

Six Nations traditionally protected its children through extended family members and the clan system, he said, and that needs to be brought back.

"Before CAS involvement, children were protected," said Goff. "The question is, how were they protected? There was a system in place to deal with that. How can

you marry that with modern social work practices?"

This is the second time Six Nations has attempted to create its own child protection services on the territory. In 1994, Six Nations had signed a funding agreement with Ontario to create an independent child protection unit but the newly-elected Mike Harris government of 1995 abruptly nixed the deal.

Some of the values outlined in the child welfare takeover plan include harmony, equality, respect, generosity and that a non-judgmental, non-punitive approach be taken when making deci-

sions about abuse prevention and healing families.

The plan also focuses on embracing traditional child-care models by drawing on the support and expertise of particular community members, such as clan mothers, runners, spiritual healers and elders.

Goff says the child welfare designation team hopes to get a draft design in place by the end of the year, with a Six Nations-run child protection unit in place by April 2013.

The takeover will cost about \$750,000 in start-up costs and another \$3 million for yearly operating costs.