

An artistic illustration featuring several Indigenous people in traditional regalia. In the center, two individuals are shown in profile, facing each other, wearing elaborate white and black feathered headdresses with red and yellow accents. Behind them, two more figures are depicted in a similar style. The background is a textured, dark purple and red gradient with faint, stylized patterns. The overall mood is solemn and respectful.

WFS – ABINOOJII INAKONIGEWIN

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

2019/20 Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summary of themes and patterns within engagement sessions

Overall, the community engagement participants recognize that considerable work has taken place within their communities to develop a community practice. Through the dialogue, it was noted that much of the current structure and work can be adapted to support the community code. Many communities expressed frustration with previous processes where the community had provided input and either did not receive documentation and notes, or, received documentation that cannot be operationalized.

A continuous theme from the community forums was about amending Abinoojii Inakonigewin and to undertake periodic reviews of the law to ensure relevance, applicability and consistency. Most communities identified that there are unique aspects to each community in relation to practice, process, language and aspirations. This uniqueness will be reflected within each of the community codes as they are developed.

Every community was interested and eager to pursue jurisdiction and were seeking further autonomy in providing care and services to meet the needs of their community members. There were consistent comments about knowing best how to connect children and families with appropriate supports and enhanced funding. Participants were concerned with ensuring that funding continue to flow to the First Nation to support their work.

Community participants were concerned with the lack of resources available to support family reunification, addiction / treatment and housing within the communities. It is recommended that a regional strategy be developed to address the deficiencies.

Most participants had not heard of Abinoojii Inakonigewin yet were interested to discuss the potential benefits and implications for their community. Initially there was some confusion on the distinction between the Weech-it-te-win Family Services engagement process and the Grand Council Treaty 3 process, however additional documents were developed to illustrate the distinction and focus discussions.

Recommendations of where the First Nations would go from here

The landscape for child and family services has changed dramatically with the introduction of federal legislation, *An Act Respecting First Nation, Inuit & Metis Children, Youth and Families* which has taken effect January 1, 2020. This Act is innovative in that it legislatively recognizes the inherent right and jurisdiction of First Nations to make laws with respect to their children, youth and families. The federal Act provides an opportunity for communities to further develop their community code and supporting capacity to operationalize Abinoojii Inakonigewin.

All communities should consider the Abinoojii Inakonigewin Community Custom Code Checklist as a guide to transition away from provincial child welfare policy. Further community engagement should occur to obtain broader input to determine the appropriate pace and process for community transition, and the aspirations of community members.

Recommendations specific for WFS transformation

As Weechi-it-te-win Family Service communities adapt their practice to be consistent with Abinoojii Inakonigewin, the Organization will also have to transform their role and relationships. There are specific responsibilities that Weechi-it-te-win will have pursuant to Abinoojii Inakonigewin, and, the process to reconstitute the Organization must be identified for endorsement by the Chiefs and Board of Directors.

Additionally, as capacity and structures are developed at the tribal and / or Grand Council Treaty 3 level, the leadership at Weechi-it-te-win Family Services should identify what institutions are required to support community law and how these institutions will relate to each other. Concepts introduced within Abinoojii Inakonigewin such as Ka Niigaanibowe't, the Anishinaabe Board and the Anishinaabe Agency must be developed in a manner that ensures that there is no duplication and is consistent with the Declaration of Principles.

In order for the transition of Weechi-it-te-win Family Services and the member communities to be successful, there should be ample analysis and consideration on the development of a funding framework that enhances current services and promotes prevention, early intervention and family reunification. Finally, the leadership should collectively and individually consider the recommendations put forward by community members that participated in the engagement sessions.

INTRODUCTION

The Weechi-it-te-win Family Services Chiefs and Board of Directors have committed to continue on the pathway to full implementation of Abinoojii Inakonigewin in a manner that respects and reflects the vision of founding Elders, the late Joseph Big George and Moses Tom, where our children stay in their home, our families are together and the communities are intact. Weechi-it-te-win has been guided and spiritually connected through our sacred items and, our drum Maango'inini, the pipe and eagle staff for which we are grateful and will remain always committed to.

Weechi-it-te-win Family Services has been a leader in the implementation of Abinoojii Inakonigewin principles and customary care, always seeking out creative solutions aimed at family preservation, family reunification and family resilience. In partnership with member communities, services have devolved, and customary practices have been developed and encircled in community values and beliefs.

As part of the commitment to the development of a community specific and reflective practice model and governance structure, we have been at the forefront in pioneering devolution of services and administration to our communities at the pace defined by them, and on mutually agreed upon terms and conditions.

For more than 30 years Weechi-it-te-win Family Services has been the trailblazer in revolutionizing the delivery of child and family services consistent with the 'Anishinaabe way' to ensure that practice meets the needs and expectations of our communities and families to the greatest extent possible. The Weechi-it-te-win Family Services Chiefs gathered to provide advice and direction on next steps towards further implementation of jurisdiction in relation to children and families through Abinoojii Inakonigewin.

The Chiefs did unanimously reaffirm their commitment to the spirit and intent of Abinoojii Inakonigewin, however, there were several concerns expressed that cannot be overlooked. For example, the Chiefs directed that child safety is paramount and cannot be compromised. Additionally, the transition to Abinoojii Inakonigewin must compliment the progress and vision that has been charted for Weechi-it-te-win through ceremony and the wisdom of the elders. The Chiefs were clear and unequivocal that Weechi-it-te-win will, as in the past, continue to tread lightly and carefully... the steps we take in furtherance of Abinoojii Inakonigewin will be undertaken hand-in-hand between Weechi-it-te-win and the ten First Nation communities, at our pace and on our terms

How the engagement sessions came about:

In October 2005, the Grand Council Treaty 3 Chiefs formally Adopted Abinoojii Inakonigewin; an Anishinaabe law in respect of the care and protection of children and families. Once the law was Adopted there was little capacity development work undertaken in the First Nation communities and at the Treaty 3 nation level until 2010.

In 2010, Grand Council Treaty 3 began to engage the elders within their communities with regard to traditional child rearing and family care principles, which culminated in the 2012 report '*Abinoojii Omibig Igos Owin: Anishinaabe Elders Teachings on Abinoojii Caring & the Family*'.

In the winter of 2011, Grand Council Treaty 3 began to explore opportunities with the Province of Ontario through their Aboriginal Children & Youth strategy on the development and redesign of programs for children and youth. This became the platform for a renewed opportunity to develop capacity for Abinoojii Inakonigewin with detailed work plans and engagement sessions, and, eventually led to the signing of a Relationship Agreement between Grand Council Treaty 3 and the Government of Ontario in 2017. As part of the Relationship Agreement, Grand Council Treaty 3 and the then Ministry of Children & Youth Services developed a five-year Implementation Plan to expand engagement activities and to operationalize Abinoojii Inakonigewin. In 2018, the Parties entered into a Confidentiality & Without Prejudice Communications Agreement which oversees bilateral discussions.

The leadership and Board of Directors of Weechi-it-te-win Family Services have always been committed to the implementation of Abinoojii Inakonigewin. To support and operationalize Abinoojii Inakonigewin, a comprehensive engagement process with the ten member First Nations was embarked upon to ensure wide-spread understanding and appropriate capacity development that reflects community values and protocols.

The Weechi-it-te-win Family Services Chiefs met three times to provide direction and advice on the roll-out of the Abinoojii Inakonigewin engagement process. The Chiefs met on November 1 and 2, 2018, August 6 and 7, 2019 and on October 21, 2019.

The WFS-AI work plan as approved by Chiefs in August 2019:

In order to undertake a comprehensive engagement process with each of the member First Nations, the Chiefs approved engagement with the following:

- Each First Nation and First Nation Service Providers,
- WFS Board of Directors,
- WFS Chiefs minimum two times,
- Children in care 12-16,
- Youth in transition 15-24,
- Parents of children in care and caregivers.

Additionally, the Chiefs will consider how Weechi-it-te-win Family Services can be reconstituted as an agency operating pursuant to Abinoojii Inakonigewin. This will include the identification of key steps and milestones with timelines and assigned responsibilities and drafting a readiness checklist.

How the Community Engagement Guide was formed (see appendix ‘A’ – Community Engagement Guide):

The engagement guide is comprised of background information and documents intended to provide session participants with a basic understanding of AI and the required contextual history of events along with the importance to the development of Abinoojii Inakonigewin in order to inform next steps for communities and Weechi-it-te-win Family Services.

Prior to the start of the community engagement sessions, the draft engagement guide was vetted through the Board of Directors and the Weechi-it-te-win Family Services Elders Council. The Elders Council met on October 16, 2019, and advised that the engagement process must follow community protocols, that the community should lift their pipe at the outset of every engagement session, that the process utilize an Elder for each session and that our Anishinaabe names and clans will be very important to use throughout this process.

The engagement guide includes the following documents:

- WFS Community Engagement Process Summary
- Abinoojii Inakonigewin, full text
- Abinoojii Inakonigewin, overview
- Weechi-it-te-win Family Services, ‘Taking the Lead; Exercising Our Responsibility’ PowerPoint presentation
- Weechi-it-te-win Family Services Chiefs ‘Declaration of Principles’ Background information sheet
- Weechi-it-te-win Family Services Chiefs ‘Declaration of Principles’; Jurisdiction for the Well-Being of Our Children and Families
- Implementation Checklist for Community Custom Code
- Community Engagement Evaluation Sheet
- Community Engagement Process Map – Addendum to Engagement Guide
- Chronology of Inakonigewin vs Canadian laws for children and families – Addendum to Engagement Guide

How engagement sessions were structured:

Weechi-it-te-win Family Services provides a note-taker and a budget for every community session. The budget includes Elder honorarium, venue rental, catering and door prizes. Each of the community engagement sessions were unique and participants consisted of CCP staff, Chief and Council, Elders, community members and community staff. The community forums evolved based on comments from participants and as such additional informational documents were drafted and materials were updated.

Community sessions typically began with an explanation of the engagement process and an overview of Abinoojii Inakonigewin with questions and answers. Next information was provided on the many potential implications of transitioning to Abinoojii Inakonigewin and what impacts this would have on the community and Weechi-it-te-win Family Services. The Weechi-it-te-win Family Services Chiefs’ Declaration of

Principles was shared with participants to show their aspirations of transitioning away from provincial Child and Family Services but maintaining community capacity that has been developed consistent with community practice. Finally, the community code implementation Checklist is reviewed in detail. After the first Community Engagement Session at Seine River First Nation, a Community Engagement Survey was developed to ensure that every person that attends the sessions have equal opportunity to participate and provide feedback. This survey was circulated and collected at every remaining engagement session. The survey is included in appendix “A”.

Explanation of Grand Council Treaty #3 and Weechi-it-te-win Family Services pathways for Abinoojii Inakonigewin:



Questions that each First Nation was asked:

While the discussions varied from community to community, generally the following questions were asked of the participants:

- 1) How will your community Code be structured?
- 2) How will be decisions be made?
- 3) How will services be provided to children and families?
- 4) What is needed for your community to be ready to transition to Abinoojii Inakonigewin?

Community Engagement Schedule:

Community	Date
Seine River First Nation	November 13, 2019
Ojibways of Onigaming	December 7 and 16, 2019
Mitaanjigamiing	December 9, 2019
Lac La Croix	December 10, 2019
Rainy River First Nations	December 12, 2019
Couchiching First Nation	February 22, 2019
Nigigoonsiminikaaning	February 24, 2019
Naicatchewenin	February 28, 2019
Big Grassy First Nation	March 11, 2020
Anishinaabeg of Naongashiing	September 8 th , 2021

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

SEINE RIVER FIRST NATION- November 13, 2019

Participants:

Participant list is on file at WFS and can be accessed through the Special Projects Coordinator

Discussion:

Seine River Elder Rosie B. opened the meeting. The meeting began with roundtable introductions followed by an overview of the purpose, process and content of Abinoojii Inakonigewin to establish a foundation for dialogue.

Community members asked what work had been done since the adoption of Abinoojii Inakonigewin in 2005 and wondered why there wasn't more awareness of the law. In the past several years Weechi-it-te-win Family Services has begun an engagement process with their member communities to develop capacity supporting Abinoojii Inakonigewin. At the Grand Council Treaty 3 level, a process was established with the Province of Ontario to implement Abinoojii Inakonigewin.

Participants had questions about the distinction between the Grand Council Treaty 3 process and Weechi-it-te-win's process on Abinoojii Inakonigewin. Concerns were raised that previous forums where community input was provided had been lost, and their information not recorded and presented back to them. Participants were concerned about how the process ended, and they cautioned that this should not happen again. The Declaration of Principles and the Community Code Checklist was reviewed.

Overall, the community participants raised many questions about the transition process and the future state of their community code and the future relationship to Weechi-it-te-win Family Services and Abinoojii Inakonigewin. They recognized that eventually Weechi-it-te-win Family Services will also transition in a manner that is consistent with Abinoojii Inakonigewin and the community codes.

How will your community code be structured?

It was suggested that Seine River would review and adapt existing structures within the community that have been developed for Customary Care.

How will decisions be made?

The community will develop their structures for governance and decision-making utilizing existing committee's and possibly including community elders. There is much work to be done on the changes that are required to implement A.I. in Seine River First Nation. The community will require training to ensure the necessary capacity. A Seine River First Nation Elders Committee could be considered to work with the community board.

How will services be delivered to children and families?

Treatment programs need to be available and offered within the community. This is a fundamental shortcoming for community members needing support.

Community members recommend that a paradigm shift must occur where children and families are supported to stay together and not separated or removed from the community due to poverty or other social conditions. The community code must focus on helping community members instead of dragging them down. The funding model should be based on keeping children with their family.

Children should only be removed from their parents as a last resort, and the immediate family should be notified so that the children can stay within the community. Instead of birth apprehensions, the community will focus on prevention and early intervention to avoid causing “trauma”.

How will your community be ready?

The community requires additional meetings to review current practices and determine a path forward. Procedures and infrastructure will have to be developed such as a Grievance procedure, an appeal process, family records, etc., specific to a Seine River model reflecting community values and aspirations.

The participants were clear that Seine River should have their own community code and not operate under provincial child and family legislation. A Seine River specific governance structure and service delivery model will be finalized. A challenge will be to meet as a community and collaborate to develop our code.

Lessons learned

There were questions about potential implications of the new federal First Nation Children, Youth and Family legislation. Consultants responded by developing a fact sheet for inclusion within the Community Engagement Guide. The Consultants also noticed that there was also some confusion about potential overlap in the Grand Council Treaty 3 and Weechi-it-te-win Family Services processes for Abinoojii Inakonigewin. The Consultants responded by drafting a chart to distinguish the two processes and added this document to the Community Engagement Guide.

Community Principles

- A Code of Ethics should be developed and included in Abinoojii Inakonigewin and on the Community Code Checklist
- Children should not be taken out of the home because of poverty.
- Children should only be removed from family as a last resort.
- Immediate family should be notified so that the children can stay within the community.
- There should be a community advocate to ensure that community members know their rights and to provide advocacy if necessary.
- Community Codes and Abinoojii Inakonigewin must be reviewed regularly.
- Community specific grievance procedure and appeal process must be developed.

Recommended follow up action

- Community input, including meeting notes into the development of the Community Code belongs to the community and must be kept at the community.
- Identify the future roles and relationship between Seine River First Nation and Weechi-it-te-win Family Services.
- Community members need to know their rights and should have someone available if their rights are not being respected.
- Identify the transition plan and role of Weechi-it-te-win Family Services throughout this transition process.
- A second meeting was requested to continue the community code development process.

There is no analysis of evaluation forms for this session at Seine River, as the evaluation survey was not yet developed during this stage of the engagement process.

OJIBWAYS OF ONIGAMING – December 7th and 16th, 2019

Participants:

Participant list is on file at WFS and can be accessed through the Special Projects Coordinator

Discussion:

The meeting was opened following the community protocol. The purpose of the engagement forum was explained, and an overview of Abinoojii Inakonigewin was provided.

There was a discussion about the potential impacts of the new First Nations federal law *An Act Respecting First Nation, Inuit & Metis Children, Youth & Families*. It recognizes that First Nations have our own laws and that new principles in child welfare will come into effect. The 10 Chiefs agree with the intent of Abinoojii Inakonigewin however each community will develop their community code differently. It was recommended that an information session be held with all community care team supervisors to ensure that they understand Abinoojii Inakonigewin.

The Onigaming Community Care Program went through ceremony to receive an Anishinaabe name for the program. The name and ceremonies help to ensure that our children and families are looked after. Unfortunately, the staff of the community care program are not in agreement with Abinoojii Inakonigewin. Onigaming will start from scratch beginning with the elders.

Participants indicated that Weechi-it-te-win Family Services is a security blanket for the community program if the community is ever in a bind. Weechi-it-te-win Family Services and the elders will have a role in the community. For the community law to be successful more people need to understand it.

Elders had asked for Abinoojii Inakonigewin to be explained in the language and recommend that preparation take information be shared prior to the meeting.

It was recommended to meet with CCP supervisors before going into communities.

How will decisions be made?

Elders worked on governance through the Onigaming Community Care Program and came up with the following principals.

Community Principles:

- Grandmothers were the decision makers
- All women have a role and Children should be kept with family
- Our children are gifts, and they are our responsibility

OJIBWAYS OF ONIGAMING – December 16th, 2019

Participants:

Participant list is on file at WFS and can be accessed through the Special Projects Coordinator

The purpose for community engagement was shared and an overview of Abinoojii Inakonigewin was provided. There were several recommendations that additional engagement sessions should occur.

Discussion:

There was concern expressed regarding the care and supervision of children in care from Onigaming with a recommendation that community team workers should meet and visit with children, following an apprehension.

When considering our community code, we should go back to basics and follow the stories of the elders. It is critical that the elders be brought together to teach us because our children are confused. When Anishinaabemowin is utilized it is very important that we are accurate in the terminology. The community and elders need healing from the trauma of the residential schools and supports to relearn parenting skills.

Concerns were raised about the level of funding to operate the community laws and that the federal government funds at a much lower rate than the province, for example with community education.

How will your Code be structured?

Participants recommended that transparency and accountability be built into the Community Code. It was also recommended that a Repatriation Policy be developed to form part of the community code and/or community practice.

The session was cut short due to the fact that it was a part of a general band meeting

There is no analysis of evaluation forms for this session at Ojibways of Onigaming, as the evaluation survey was not yet developed during this stage of the engagement process.

MITAANJIGAMIING FIRST NATION – December 9th, 2019

Participants:

Participant list is on file at WFS and can be accessed through the Special Projects Coordinator

The session began with the community protocol. There were introductions and an explanation about the purpose of this meeting and an overview of Abinoojii Inakonigewin, its' development process and timeline.

Discussion:

There were questions raised around the funding for the development and implementation of the community codes. The community will need to engage community members to complete the community code which will impact their budget. The community noted that a consultant was hired to get the community code in place in collaboration with community elders, however this process was not fully completed. There was a lot of discussion and questions about the capacity to support the Community Code once developed.

The community discussed the importance of their Traditional protocols and that the rites of passage for youth to adult should be brought back. The youth have difficulty understanding and speaking Anishinaabemowin and steps must be taken to bring back the language as a priority. Teachings are not being passed down to the youth.

Community members need to open their homes to children in order for children to maintain their connection to the community.

Concepts within Abinoojii Inakonigewin such as the Abinoojii Agency and Ka Niigaaniibowet must be clarified. This includes the scope of the role as well as the selection criteria and process. The selection should not proceed until the Chiefs have completed the developmental work. The implementation of Abinoojii Inakonigewin and development of community codes must be done properly.

How will community code be structured?

The participants were very clear that the community traditions must be included in the code. The preference was to not follow the mainstream laws. The community code should address privacy and confidentiality of children and families. Weechi-it-te-win Family Services will have to transition in order to align with the community code.

How will services be delivered?

Services will be delivered in a manner that respects the teachings, rites of passage, the language and connection to children and families. Participants wanted to ensure that even when children must be placed outside of the community, they will maintain a connection.

How will decisions be made?

The community will identify their governance structure as well as the roles, responsibilities and accountability. Traditional value systems are important and should be part of community decision making. It was recommended that the whole community be involved when a child is removed from their parents.

What is needed to be ready?

The community has built its community practice but will re-examine for consistency with the Community Code. The community will require capacity and resources such as housing to support children remaining within the community.

Community Principles:

- The child is entitled to be connected to the community.
- Families should be supportive of each other.
- Traditional values are important.
- We have our own ways such as traditional adoption.

Recommended follow up action

- Weechi-it-te-win Family Services should identify community capacity development funding for communities to develop their Community Codes.
- The community requires capacity to develop resources to keep the children within the community.
- Weechi-it-te-win must determine how it will transition to be consistent with the community code and Abinoojii Inakonigewin.
- Determine what the options are for liability insurance when the Community Code is developed.

Evaluation Sheets – Data Analysis

There were 14 Evaluation Sheets collected at this Engagement Session. The most common themes are listed below.

How was the information session helpful about AI?

- Found the session very informative.

- It clarified goals and processes of AI.
- It gave a better understanding of the processes and how community policies will be important.
- It updated the community on what is happening with AI.
- It was a general overview, but more sessions are needed.
- Funding is needed to elaborate on community codes.

What is your biggest worry about transitioning to AI?

- How conflict of interest will be dealt with.
- That WFS will dissolve.
- Funding short falls for the governing structures required.
- Younger generations are not taught the importance of traditional knowledge and customs.
- Not implementing or practicing the codes, what features will be in place to ensure the children's best interest are looked after.
- The amount of time it will take to transition.
- Harmonizing our teams with the law, harmonizing our codes with the law, ensuring the community works together toward this.

What advantages are there in transitioning to AI?

- Children will remain attached to who they are and their community.
- Transitioning gradually is very important.
- Implementing our own laws and policy instead of adhering to outside laws and regulations. No more intrusive practices.
- It has always been there, and it gives us good direction in moving forward.

What advice do you have about AI?

- For some, this was the first-time hearing about AI, it's amazing.
- Ensure it keeps children in the family.
- Helpers/Workers needs healing and teaching too.
- Families should be able to access prevention without worrying about intrusive response.
- Do not rush the process, make sure it is done properly. We need to be careful in what we put on paper.
- Clarify Ka Niigaaniibowet.
- Bring laws and codes to the community for ratification, to make sure the community is ready.

LAC LA CROIX FIRST NATION – December 10th, 2019

Participants:

Participant list is on file at WFS and can be accessed through the Special Projects Coordinator

The session began with the traditional community protocol. Introductions were made and an explanation was provided about the purpose of this meeting along with an overview of Abinoojii Inakonigewin.

Discussion:

The elder spoke in Anishinaabemowin and reminded the consultants to ensure they give tobacco and a gift for these meetings. It was also recommended that the sections of the Consultation Guide should be numbered and distributed to the Elders within the community.

In May 2019, Lac la Croix assented to Abinoojii Inakonigewin at the Grand Council Treaty #3 National Assembly, based on the community law that was developed in the 1990's. Chief and Council have not yet finalized the community law, it is still in draft format. Participants identified an ongoing need for community consultation and involvement. The community aspires to develop a document that Elder's, youth, everyone should see and understand. It will be a living document, and as time changes, there should be an amending aspect to that. The draft community law has not yet gone through the cultural protocol process, ceremony.

Funding for child and family services should continue to flow to the community, no one should take a percentage. In fact, there was a suggestion that a penalty be applied should another entity attempt to hold back funding such as administration fees. We should not duplicate the colonial system. Anishinaabe people are not punishment orientated but need to support parents and not focus on apprehensions. The community elders always shared stories and teachings and now children stand strong.

Weechi-it-te-win Family Services must transition to support communities. Abinoojii Inakonigewin was always the vision of the elders and it was the foundation to start Weechi-it-te-win Family Services when the ten (10) First Nations decided to take over child welfare. We are proud to be following the original vision of the elders.

Participants held differing views on whether the community codes should be shared with other First Nations and/or Organizations or not. It was clear that the participants felt that the codes were not ready to share at this time. The community will eventually make that determination.

Participants recommended that service delivery and compliance with Ministry regulations should be measured based on our standards. Following a transition process within the agency and what that could potentially look like. Once our community is ready, we will follow a different track of services, not the Ministry track.

How will your community code be structured?

Lac la Croix has already developed a community code that is currently still in draft form.

How will decisions be made?

The community will put alternative dispute resolution into practice, we have our own way of resolving conflict. An appeal process should be developed, and the community will determine if a separate process is required for employees and one for families that receive services. For example, in a family case the process would follow a service complaint procedure.

How will services be delivered to children and families?

As Anishinaabe we understand and use the holistic model.

We also follow the clan system and continue to utilize our spiritual names.

Our service delivery will focus on keeping our families together. A funding formula will have to be identified to determine how much it will cost to help children and families.

How will community be ready?

The community has a draft community code that requires additional community engagement. Communication needs to go out to all community members about our draft code for education and feedback. The community will have to identify funding requirements to support implementation and a service delivery model consistent with our code.

Community Principles:

- Our children are a loan from the Creator.
- Anishinaabe must decide for themselves how to look after our children.
- Anishinaabe children are very different.
- Must consider our Anishinaabe Way and our worldview.
- Must focus on our ancestral laws.

Recommended Follow-up action

To facilitate the implementation process for AI and the community codes, Weechi-it-te-win Family Services should identify when they will become involved with the community process and what are the steps.

There were no evaluation sheets collected at this session. Most people had already left the session when evaluations were to be handed out and collected.

RAINY RIVER FIRST NATIONS – December 12th, 2019

Participants:

Participant list is on file at WFS and can be accessed through the Special Projects Coordinator

Discussion:

Participants' stated that moving away from Weechi-it-te-win Family Services would be beneficial because of onerous administrative policies and procedures which causes delays in meeting the needs of children and families, and, it is an obstacle to community growth. Processes can be developed where the Supervisor has more authority on day-to-day items, such as 'Out of District' travel. Rainy River First Nations can decide what is best for their community members with their rules. The community is ready and capable of being autonomous.

When you look at Abinoojii Inakonigewin, an agency will be reconstituted and a community assents to the law at national assembly. Weechi-it-te-win would have to reconstitute itself. The agency should be reducing its' role and not be delivering services. Participants noted that Rainy River First Nations is not so protective of Weechi-it-te-win as stated in the Declaration of Principles while another stated that the agency requires an over-haul. The relationship between the ten First Nations and Weechi-it-te-win will change.

It was stated that RRFNS Chief signed the Declaration of Principles because he does not support the process or the Ka Niigaanibowe't and does but it cannot be interpreted that RRFNS wants the current structure/model to remain. RRFNS wants to deliver child welfare services independent of Weechi-it-te-win. Ka Niigaanibowe't is based on the white man system that is the equivalent of a Minister. It was stated that, at Grand Council Treaty 3 forums, only the comments that they need to support their process are recorded in their reports, other important details are ignored. The community will utilize their own note taker for this engagement session based on that experience. RRFNS CCP has not always been consulted on decisions. Example: choosing youth to attend a workshop in Thunder Bay. At times this team has felt that they are dictated to by WFS. Some participants view Weechi-it-te-win as a mainstream system. RRFNS are confident that they know the needs of their children and will make good decisions based on that knowledge.

There was discussion on how services and expectations will change on January 1, 2020, with the new federal First Nations legislation. There will be an expanded role for the community as a result of the new principles and opportunity to develop community law. For children currently in the system, there is an ongoing requirement to assess the placement and justify why the children cannot be returned to family.

Participants inquired about available funding to develop community codes given that the federal Act was rolled out without funding attached. Participants were also concerned that the capacity required to support the Grand Council Treaty 3 structure will take away from the children, families and communities. The

proposed structure should be reconsidered. Funding meant for communities should not flow through the Grand Council Treaty 3 Executive Council.

It was strongly recommended that a comprehensive review of Abinoojii Inakonigewin be undertaken to determine if amendments should be made to align with Anishinaabe law as opposed to the provincial system. It is not problematic to be cautious.

How will your community code be structured?

Community members stated that they would like to see more family circles and traditional healing, the community needs services now. The community has the capacity to work with their children and families, and they are their own experts. The community will likely opt out of the Offences provisions of Abinoojii Inakonigewin. Children are being abused and this must be addressed and not put on the back burner.

How will decisions be made?

The community will determine their internal structures for oversight and decision-making.

How will services be delivered to children and families?

Members of the community are best equipped to determine what services and supports children and families require, including out of home placements. Rainy River First Nations utilizes an integrated services model where staff come together to address concerns because all staff are committed to helping families.

When you practice the Anishinaabe way, it will cost more. It costs more to keep families together than it does to separate them. Funding must reflect this.

How will your community be ready?

Rainy River First Nations sees a role and responsibility for Weechi-it-te-win Family Services to assist the community in the transition to full devolution and control of services. The agency has the capacity and funding to help the community teams develop their community codes consistent with community engagement principles.

Community Principles:

The child is first and foremost.

The child should not be separated from the family.

Children should be supported within the family and not only when out of the home. The family must be supported.

Recommended follow up action

Rainy River First Nations needs resources and capacity within the community, such as a transition home and safe homes.

Weechi-it-te-win should be a part of the transition to Abinoojii Inakonigewin. It is their responsibility to ensure that the communities have the support and resources to proceed with full devolution and control of services. WFS should help and they require funding to proceed with assisting communities with this process.

Evaluation Sheets – Data Analysis

There were 6 Evaluation Sheets collected at this Engagement Session. The most common themes are listed below.

How was the information session helpful about AI?

- Very good overview of AI and goals.
- This information should be shared with every household.
- Better understanding and awareness.
- Neutral presentation.
- Potential for new and better ways to implement AI and F.N. legislation.

What is your biggest worry about transitioning to AI?

- First Nation individuality must be respected, but we must remain united as a treaty territory.
- Empowering community members to learn about AI and accept it.
- Funding must be ensured for transition and capacity readiness. We have to phase out WFS and develop codes according to federal standards.
- Fear of the present structure and future structure.

What advantages are there in transitioning to AI?

- Power of declaration to transform WFS and empower First Nation.
- We can learn to do this for ourselves the way the ancestors wanted.
- No outside interference.
- We can develop and set up our own structures.

What advice do you have about AI?

- Need less interference from Agency in our management of Child Welfare.
- First Nations need to have sole control of AI. No agency to oversee or dictate, no micromanaging.

COUCHICHIING FIRST NATION – February 22, 2020

Participants:

Participant list is on file at WFS and can be accessed through the Special Projects Coordinator

Chief Brian P. opened the session in the Traditional manner. The session began with roundtable introductions by participants and facilitators, with an overview of the session purpose and process highlights to date.

Discussion:

There was discussion about the scope of a community code and its' relationship with Abinoojii Inakonigewin. As with other sessions, initially there was confusion about potential duplication of processes as well as an unclear perception of the interplay between the role of community codes or community laws and AI. For example, one participant felt that it would be confusing and conflicting for each community to have their own code since Treaty 3 already has a law.

The WFS Community Engagement Process map clarified the role and focus of each community (or group of communities) in relation to AI. There are many aspects of AI that each community must determine for itself, this is the purpose of today's discussion.

Participants then had questions around the role and relationship between their community and Weechi-it-te-win once transitioned to AI with their community code. There were questions around the ability of Weechi-it-te-win to override community decisions once the community code was in place. It was noted that the communities and Weechi-it-te-win would continue to work collaboratively, however, the responsibilities and powers would differ from today.

To date, each community Chief, as a collective, and, community engagement participants have said that Weechi-it-te-win must evolve, and as such its' role will change. There were some comments from participants about the length of time it has taken to develop community codes, membership codes, services and capacity. Participants then focused on the ways in which the community has begun to develop their jurisdiction and evolve their services.

It was agreed that more community members should be engaged to provide input into jurisdictional matters such as the scope of the community code, who does it apply to, how does it apply to members living elsewhere, will it apply to citizens of the community who are not members, what about blended families, etc. There are many items for the community to decide in relation to how services are developed to fit the needs of members and how member will be connected to the community.

As with other communities, there was concern about certain concepts within AI and how to make amendments. Once the community code is completed there could be a regular review period set in. Couchiching has its' own way of doing things, specific to the community. A benefit to implementing the community code is that the community has decision making authority.

How will your community Code be structured?

Our community Board will oversee the community care program. The Board should be comprised of community members such as an Elder, youth, foster parent, a person that has lived experience and the portfolio holder from leadership, for example. Community care program staff as technicians only. As a community we will identify if the planning committee or board will be utilizing a western view or an Anishinaabe lens. This committee should be a sounding board for the CCP team.

How will decisions be made?

All community people should have the opportunity to collaborate on this initiative and bring this back to the general membership for final ratification. Participants recommended the establishment of a working group to get the process started. It was stated that the process to develop the community code will require people to think outside of the western paradigm to make sure it is done right the first time.

How will services be delivered to children and family?

The goal will be to keep the children with their parents, keep families together and to preserve this. A homemaker could be placed within the home to provide support. Instead of children being removed from their home, the parents could be moved out and extended family and other supports can be provided to ensure the stability for the child(ren).

It will be vital to ensure that our children maintain their identity, that they have life skills and the ability to move beyond trauma. We do not want any more children to slip through the cracks, we want them to have a place to go when they age out of care.

All community programs that have an interest in children and families could work together. We could look at removing the silos, a team of all our programs, focusing on the same families. There needs to be a strong working relationship together within the community. We can review and see where we can strengthen community programs and services because ultimately, this is more than just the community care program team.

How will your community be ready?

If this is what the community wants, we will have a community code / law. We will define and establish criteria for a family services board or committee. Everyone will have an opportunity to join this, we will establish a committee, ensure there is a communication strategy and will design a fair process and have a fully informed community.

We will look at what we have and build from that with knowledgeable people in the community. We are ready to take this to the next step. We are ready to switch gears and put prevention and preservation up front, protection in the back. It will take time, but we have already begun to be develop within the community.

Community Principles:

- Prevention and family preservation is the paramount focus.
- The community has all the tools required to undertake this work.
- All community members must have an opportunity to participate.
- We want a better future for our children, a future where they know who they are, that they have a community and that they are loved.
- This will be a community driven process. The foundation is there for us to expand on.
- We need to come up with our own based on our own values and traditions.
- The process must be transparent.
- It's good that we have AI, but we will make it work for ourselves fitting under this law.
- We need to remember the original vision.
- We need to ensure that we are funded appropriately and that our workers are compensated for the work they are doing.

Recommended Follow-up:

- To support prevention, participants recommended to examine troubled areas for youth and identify ways to support them before they get mixed up in the justice system.
- It will be better to do this under our own jurisdiction, the way we do these things, out of love, not legislation. We have been ready to take the next steps for a while. WFS has been starting to transition for some time. It is both powerful and remarkable, how this will help our families and children. They are our future.
- This information needs to put this on the WFS website.

Evaluation Sheets – Data Analysis

There were 9 Evaluation Sheets collected at this Engagement Session. The most common themes are listed as follows:

How was the information session helpful about AI?

- The session was very informative, and participants appreciated the knowledge that was shared. Many had a better understanding after the session.
- It was a lot of information to take in.
- Some already knew about the AI but found it helpful to hear perspectives from other members.
- The session clarifies the AI and information on the new Federal law
- We need to get moving on our codes
- I have been through this process before, but I always learn something new.

What is your biggest worry about transitioning to AI?

- The appointed power given to the Grand Chief. Decisions should be spread over a committee or a board not just one person
- Funding, the chiefs have all the power over funding. The funds being distributed evenly, laws or codes being implemented without the community knowing etc.
- Getting lost in the maze of a “mega agency” and having a new bureaucracy to manage through. Don’t want another ministry like corporation coming into our community and telling us what to do.
- A need for community people to get involved. Don’t want a reduction of staff on board and communities.
- Will we get less funding through AI?
- Lack of community engagement. Want more community members and elders at these sessions.

What advantages are there in transitioning to AI?

- Hearing the community say how we are going to help children and families.
- A few will be getting our identity back, giving us back our power, becoming a more cohesive community and caring for our children.
- We already do a lot of this. Its more than transitioning, its realizing that we are already doing AI to some degree. We just need to move away from CYFSA.
- Primary of First Nations is very important. Checklist is great.
- Governing ourselves in accordance with our laws, values, and practice.
- Everyone working on the same page.

What advice do you have about AI?

- We are ready to move ahead building our codes.
- More community consultations at a more central venue.
- It’s a good document, but each FN will have their own way of carrying it out. As someone said: the law needs to be able to change, to reflect, life and the changes that happen in life.”
- Move forward to our own law, give assent, start community meetings to develop codes. Ideas to grow on, integrated, best interest, build a strong community plan.
- More consultation, engagement with community, better advertising when the sessions happen.

NIGIGOONSIMINIKAANING FIRST NATION – February 24, 2020

Participants:

Participant list is on file at WFS and can be accessed through the Special Projects Coordinator

Community Elder Nancy J. started the session in the Traditional manner. There were roundtable introductions and a brief overview of the meeting purpose.

Discussion:

There are unaddressed community issues such as addictions, which arise from events that have occurred in the past. It is recommended that the community work with the youth while they are still young so that they can be healthy adults. Further, the community considers what is causing the children to be removed from their families, and then address the root causes. Community members have been impacted by the Residential school legacy, so there is an understanding of the trauma from separation. Participants do not want their grandchildren to encounter that separation.

In 1982, the ten (10) Chiefs passed a Resolution as an interim step, yet after forty years' there is still a lot of intrusion. Weechi-it-te-win was intended to be an interim measure and should be phased out. Time to move towards another step. It is always about the provincial way, the Weechi-it-te-win way. What about Nigigoonsiminikaaning way?

The A.I. is a reflection of Ministry laws. This community had our own system and our families were cared for, free of punishment. We forget that because we are influenced by the existing system. Our laws are not written. It showed in the actions that we took, maybe that should be the starting point.

This community is trying to set its own path and have more control of way in which services are delivered. The community has begun hosting meetings on community codes, its slow going but people are having discussion on how to best to take care of children and families. The community is following an inclusive process, engaging elders, and reflecting on the values and traditions for children and families.

The community has established an Elder's committee that will eventually present to the community as a whole. The committee has recommended changes that have been implemented and they are creating the solid base we need going forward. The community is not against traditional law and see that this is the key to direct control and delivery of services. Participants know they have always had their own laws but find that it is a real challenge to put on paper.

How will your community code be structured?

The existing system does not allow for an appeal process and people under that system feel trapped. Participants suggested that there could be an appeal to council. If the community worked by consensus there would be no need for an appeal process, once this is incorporated.

The elders remind us about how children should be raised. Our own code should include non-band members that live in our community, that's the way we do things, we recognize them and provide services to all. The community uses the circle, not a hierarchy.

We need all the tools to make this happen, we need our own court system our people speaking the language, from the one doing trial, judge or lawyers, childcare workers that are involved in that kind of system. We can do our own ways, own laws and own thinking.

How will decisions be made?

Work together to resolve issues sometimes using sharing circles, and we always aim for consent. Traditionally, when there were disputes the families would have sharing circles, for example, when there was a dispute, a perpetrator or offender was taken for four (4) days, after those four (4) days an elder would start to visit this person to help with their journey to correct that wrong doing.

How will services be delivered?

There is currently a lot of community driven prevention services to keep families intact. The community has a collective responsibility to ensure that parents are educated about the needs and ceremonies for their children. Foster parents also need to be aware and ensure that children know their identity. Not everything should fall to the community support services team.

Confidentiality and conflict of interest were never an issue in the past, these concepts come from the mainstream system and they interfere with the implementation of our laws. We are all related and we help each other, there was no such thing as conflict of interest.

What is needed for your community to be ready?

Participants felt that having decision making about program money would be beneficial and more useful. All people need to be trained about the community ways. The community should reclaim a process based on how we used to do things here and how to prevent moving children from their families. Currently, parents are punished for having their child removed and are given 101 steps to follow in order to get their children returned. This system is good at producing hoop dancers! There should be more understanding of the language and the sacredness of the child.

The community has begun a process working with the elders and establishing how we will take care of our children. They will also need to consider how to implement the direction from the elders and what tools need to be put in place. It would be great when Nigigoonsiminikaaning re-establishes their own law and practice and is no longer obligated to follow the Provincial law. The whole community should get on board.

Community Principles:

- We will work with families to ensure that children are not lost to the system.
- We will follow our own ways. Anishinaabe law that comes from within.
- Children must have an Anishinaabe name and know their identity, their clan and the language.
- We do not utilize punishment.

- The community elders will guide this process.
- Community and family members step-in.

Recommended Follow-up:

- What about jurisdictional overlap and potential grievance with other First Nations?
- Need to identify a funding model to support community services.

Evaluation Sheets – Data Analysis

There were 3 Evaluation Sheets collected at this Engagement Session. The most common themes are listed as follows:

How was the information session helpful about AI?

- Very good, well presented, good open questions, provides direction.

What is your biggest worry about transitioning to AI?

- Ensuring that everyone in the community understands this idea and it would be nice to have AI in our community.
- I wonder if the Government would accept our service models.

What advantages are there in transitioning to AI?

- Training would be suited for our workers and families, and we would take ownership of our own program for our people.

What advice do you have about AI?

- Nigigoonsiminikaaning is a very unique community and we would want more family involvement.
- Use AI to work toward a happy, healthy community.
- We need to speak our Anishinaabe language, that is our way of life.
- AI should be taught to community members, to bring awareness.

NAICATCHEWENIN FIRST NATION – February 28, 2020

Participants:

Participant list is on file at WFS and can be accessed through the Special Projects Coordinator

The session began with a traditional opening by the community drum. There were roundtable introductions and a summary of the meeting purpose.

Discussion:

The participants began with concerns about the additional funding required to support twenty-eight (28) grandmothers and all the additional costs, for new managers and administration in the structure proposed by Grand Council Treaty 3. They also asked how Weechi-it-te-win would be impacted by the structure, and if it would be downsized and relocated to Kenora. People can say it isn't about the money, it is. First and foremost, it is about money.

Participants stressed the importance of their children staying within the community and spoke of the challenges to meet the Provincial housing standards resulting in children being moved outside of the community. The underlying focus of service delivery should be early intervention and family preservation.

The community inquired about the timelines for implementation, what options they had for jurisdiction and the process for determining the path forward. The community prefers to work with people that understand the law and that the community has the capacity to be decision makers.

There was concern with the power of Ka Niigaanibowe't in that it could pull the plug on the community program and take over service delivery displacing the community infrastructure. Participants were apprehensive about this because the community knows their children and families best. Concerns have been raised at the Treaty #3 forums with no response to date.

How would your community code be structured?

Language and culture must be at the forefront of what this becomes. Participants said that their code development process would require that the leadership, frontline workers and grass roots are all included and informed. Participants recommend proceeding cautiously to avoid getting locked into a scenario that does not evolve with the community needs.

Right now, all community boards are appointed by Chief and Council through band council resolution. It was proposed that a Traditional selection for the community Board be an option for community members to be involved.

How will services be delivered?

The community has talked about a safe home, as well as removing parents where there are concerns instead of removing the children. It was mentioned that the community is trying to get away from apprehension and placing children away from family and community. Participants see that the community needs to develop services aimed at helping the parents that are struggling.

To be successful, we need to bring more awareness to people who will be working with our families. Participants also recognized the need to bring awareness to community members because many do not necessarily understand the impacts. Children continue to be traumatized unnecessarily. Community staff can also be traumatized and are sometimes confronted.

How will decisions be made?

The community will review and understand the needs and decide what must change, keep what works and let go of those things that do not work. Participants were comfortable that the community would come up with new ideas, new strategies, new solutions for their members. Utilizing our young people, they are our future

What is needed to be ready?

Continuing the relationship with Weechi-it-te-win. The community has a fairly good relationship and acknowledge the role that Weechi-it-te-win has played in the development of their community care program. Access to capital dollars will be key to establishing the community infrastructure such as a safe home, half-way homes, treatment programs and service delivery facility.

Moving forward it will be very important to get input and advice from the community elders. Within the First Nation, unity will be required in order to keep moving forward in a positive way. Participants noted that ongoing action needs to be taken to build the relationships so the progress to date does not become a stand still.

To be successful, the community really does have to think about the younger children. A participant working with the CCP was struck seeing the emotional side of what happens to parents losing the connection with their child and noted how hurtful it was to see that happen. As a community we need to talk about how to develop based on our own needs.

Community Principles:

Early intervention and family preservation are vital.

Support parents that are struggling.

Utilize the language and the elders.

Always be mindful we are talking about the lives of children and families, always.

Include everyone.

Importance of taking care of our children, takes a whole community.

Ask people what we need to act and build the relationships.

This session was closed due to time and therefore, follow up recommendations were not covered in this session.

Evaluation Sheets – Data Analysis

There were 9 Evaluation Sheets collected at this Engagement Session. The most common themes are listed as follows:

How was the information session helpful about AI?

- The session was helpful to increase understanding of AI, its legal concepts. Some people knew nothing about it and found it very interesting and it was explained very well. It was also helpful to look at things that work and don't work. The session provided clarity and shows how AI can positively impact the community.

What is your biggest worry about transitioning to AI?

- I worry about having a zero caseload once AI is in place.
- A holistic approach must be used that ensures our children/families are consulted on AI.
- Having enough time to make informed decisions.
- Where is the funding going to come from for the programs?
- That our people won't take the initiative to learn the basis of this process and that our community members will not fully understand AI.
- The biggest worry is for our future generations to do the transition, and how to keep this going and running well.

What advantages are there in transitioning to AI?

- Not having an agency of the government controlling our communities. It moves us closer to being self-governed.
- Unity.
- Services more focused on preservation, more preservation positions.
- To follow our own law rather than depending on the provincial/federal government; taking back our power and independence.

What advice do you have about AI?

- Develop this AI with community input to call our own.
- More awareness in the community for children, youth, families and elders.

- The AI should be able to grow, change, adapt for the people of the past, present and future. Be mindful, respectful, and aware – we are talking about the lives of children, families, community.
- To empower and encourage community members, program workers to fully understand and carry AI forward. Help them see that AI works.
- Accountability, making sure community members are aware of what AI is all about. Prevention, preservation, protection.
- Continue to have these information sessions in each community so no community is left out of the loop.
- A language translator would help the older generation to better understand and to gain their input.

BIG GRASSY FIRST NATION – March 12, 2020

Participants:

Participant list is on file at WFS and can be accessed through the Special Projects Coordinator

The opening prayer was given by a community elder, the name was not recorded in the minutes. Roundtable introductions were made and the purpose of the forum was explained.

Discussion:

Community members had questions about the definition of ‘reconstitute’ in relation to AI. They also sought clarity on their options and potential implications and the process to complete this work as well as funding sources and options. Participants were concerned about the current lack of resources and service delivery capacity but were hopeful that through the development of their own law, the community would have an opportunity to negotiate a service agreement that would support enhanced services.

Participants raised concerns with the placement of children outside of the community specifically with non-indigenous families. It was mentioned that sometimes those foster parents abuse our children and it seems that nothing happens, its’ hidden. Within the community it is difficult to find open homes because the housing is inadequate in relation to family size, and people do not want the extra responsibilities. Workers stated that it is very tough and worrisome to place children in non-indigenous homes but the best that they can do is to keep monitoring.

There was discussion about how to keep the children home. Participants recommended establishing a Centre to keep the children within the community; a Mother’s Centre. Another idea was to have a home in the community that is just for children in care with family there that they can live with. Other options were mentioned such as adding extensions to homes through funding from Jordan’s Principle.

The development of a community customary code was viewed as an advantage so that the community could follow their own standards and work more closely to address the needs of community members, such as grandparents who want to care for their grandchildren. Further, it was noted that the standards in this community are different and at times workers will not open a home because of the housing within the community.

How will your community code be structured?

Participants recognized that they would require a Board and recommended that people with a background in social services and mental health along with Elders and knowledgeable community members be recruited. A youth representative who has transitioned out of care would be a valuable part of this board.

It was recommended that the development and delivery process be inclusive of community members. Initiating these kinds of opportunities would give people a reason to come home and participate because

we don't always have the chance to become involved. There was concern about funding and the potential that their program and services budgets could be reduced.

How will decisions be made?

Participants stated that decisions about service complaints adhere to policy and procedures, and the community staff should stay away from those decisions. Clients do have the choice of filing a complaint to either Weechi-it-te-win or to the community administration because the staff are Big Grassy First Nation employees. When the complaint cannot be resolved within the community then it can be referred to Weechi-it-te-win.

Decisions about the community law and service design and delivery will have to be developed. Currently it is very difficult to get community members involved because of the stigma against family services. This stigma is also impacting the manner in which services are delivered because community members don't want to open their doors to visits because they're afraid their children will be apprehended, instead staff resort to texting or phoning.

How will services be delivered?

Participants thought that it would be important to target the youth and elders and bring them together. Services would also extend to members residing outside of the community. There would have to be a determination on a confidentiality policy to ensure information is not shared unnecessarily.

It was recommended that the scope of services be expanded to support extended family members who struggle financially or require ongoing assistance to attend appointments, for transport or respite for example. Participants could see that operating under a community code would be preferred so they could work more extensively with family. Community services would focus on prevention and family preservation. Participants mentioned that there are many grandparents in the community who want to raise their grandchildren however they are unable to financially. The community could keep more children at home with parents or extended family if they could provide the same supports to the parents as they do caregivers.

How will your community be ready?

There was considerable apprehension to envision the community operating by their own community code. Some participants were overwhelmed and suggested that more education and information sharing was required, others thought that the developmental work would be difficult and there may not be a fall back plan.

Participants mentioned distrust within the community as well as with the CCP team and felt that they would need to find a way to get well in order to work together and be on the same page. It was suggested that the CCP not be included in the process in order to encourage more community members to contribute.

Community Principles:

- Children must remain with family as a priority.
- Children should be placed within the community.
- Parents should be provided supports and resources so that their children can remain at home.
- Grandparents capable of caring for their grandchildren should be supported to do so.
- The community needs healing in order to work together.

There were no follow up recommendations recorded for this session.

Evaluation Sheets – Data Analysis

There were 4 Evaluation Sheets collected at this Engagement Session. The most common themes are listed as follows:

How was the information session helpful about AI?

- The session brought about awareness, participants were not aware of what was happening until the engagement session.

What is your biggest worry about transitioning to AI?

- Not having strong communication in the community and getting everyone on board and in support of moving forward.
- Having the community work together and move forward.
- Financial accountability.

What advantages are there in transitioning to AI?

- Developing a new board to oversee AI.
- Indigenous sovereignty continues and having control and decision-making ability in regard to homes and childcare.

What advice do you have about AI?

- Increasing resources at the community.
- Assistance to develop boards.
- More information, more community engagement sessions.
- Clarify roles. Build trust within the community. Address the stigma for whoever is the head of development.

ANISHINAABEG OF NAONGASHING – September 8th, 2021

Participants:

Participant list is on file at WFS and can be accessed through the Special Projects Coordinator

Josie Wood opened with a traditional prayer. Dianne Kelly acknowledged the traditional territory and thanked Josie. The purpose of the forum was explained. Roundtable of introductions was done and below is a list of comments taken from those introductions:

- Positive change needed within the system
- Clean house - get rid of toxic staff
- Community members to be involved with the new process
- Negative impacts of colonization such as alcohol, childhood trauma, shame, violence – do not want our children today to see what we saw growing up

Discussion:

Dianne Kelly explained there are two separate processes in place. One engagement/information process is being undertaken by WFS and one with GCT3 – they are two separate processes. WFS is focussing on the community part of the process. This engagement process started with the Chiefs in 2005. WFS were given direction to reconstitute themselves – an agency reconstituted under AI as the law of the nation and to be considered as a resource bank.

Feedback from community:

The community expressed how women play an essential role in childcare. It was explained the roles for mindimowewag should be emphasised. Women used to be expected to provide guidance for all children in the community. Participants expressed how parents are sometimes offended by this practice now.

It was discussed how Grand Council Treaty #3 has a process map which includes a grandmothers' circle with one Kokum from each of the 28 communities. This group would provide advice to Kaa'Niigaanibowe't. Such committees will be at the community level and it is up to the communities how they organize and how they operate.

Concerns were raised about the technicalities within Abinoojii Inakonigewin in such as bureaucratic similarities but painted with Anishinaabemowin terminology. This was compared to the consideration that Kaa'Niigaanibowe't is the equivalent to an Executive Director. Participants interpreted many similarities to a government structure.

The Declaration of principles was set out by the 10 local First Nation Chiefs needs to be adhered to. The Chiefs stressed that communities will not/can not receive less money than they receive now. WFS will be exploring funding models to support communities with options.

The community wonders if the funding will continue to flow through WFS. There were concerns raised about community needs being known and how governing bodies have determined this on the communities behalf in consideration to releasing funds and ensuring transparency. The community emphasised the need for higher salaries for front line workers. Communities need to build capacities internally with human resources to provide needed services. Children are being put on a wait-list or denied services completely. Infrastructure funds would be beneficial for the community.

An opportunity was discussed about a funding stream with Indigenous Services Canada for any First Nation that wants to build capacity for their community, it is not for running the law but specific to building capacities. WFS has put in a proposal for the capacity funding. The community does not feel they need to meet reporting requirements to receive funding.

Trust needs to be gained and maintained with WFS. Initiative could be taken by implementing training within the community at the convenience of scheduling based on participant needs. In doing so this would save travel funds and overnight accommodations. The community should be recognized for their efforts and consulted for more input. Some community workers have more education than WFS workers, yet WFS staff make more money. Due to higher wages some community workers transition to WFS for employment. Community agenda items should have come from the community to ensure self-determination of community needs being recognized. WFS shouldn't be the center with communities on the outside. Devolution needs to continue evolving and ensure voices are heard by community members within the systems of child welfare.

There needs to be implementation of culturally appropriate services and incorporate the values of our community. The vision of the founding fathers of WFS needs to be recognized and affirmed. Empowering our communities should be in the forefront.

Three options were discussed: remaining at status quo, ascending into Abinoojii Inakonigewin, or for communities to stand alone under their own law. WFS will continue under mandate as long as there is at least one community under their umbrella. WFS will need to reconstitute under Abinoojii Inakonigewin.

Engagement structure is interpreted as hierarchical. The back of the mikiinaak would be more suitable to lay out process. Children sit on the back of mekanak in the center. Work from the centre out and concentrate the zhooniyaa on families instead of salaries. Empowering first nations through capacity building within communities. Each community should have their own grandmothers' circle. Culture should be in the forefront such as implementing culture camps.

Offenses were taken within part 4 within Tab 3 of the law. A community when assenting can say that this or that section does not apply. Communities need to design their own dispute resolution or alternative justice system. Bill C92 recognizes that indigenous people have jurisdiction and have always had their own laws. Indigenous Services Canada has communicated they will be looking at infrastructure. Concerns were raised while recognizing there is nothing within the law around funding.

Implementation checklist discussion:

- The community is already doing some of the work
- Checklist can be used as a table of contents for the community process

Evaluation Sheets – Data Analysis

The most common themes are listed as follows:

How was this information session helpful about Abinoojii Inakonigewin?

- Open flow of information, questions and responses.
- I didn't know what it was before coming to this info session so I'm glad I came.
- It was helpful because I didn't have any knowledge or even know what it was about.
- Diane Kelly very knowledgeable, explains things well.
- First time really presented and informed of only know of little information
- This information was helpful to hear others' opinions and ideas. Great to explore from different points.
- Clarified the intent of Weechi and Abinoojii Inakonigewin.
- More sessions would be needed.

What is your biggest worry about transitioning to Abinoojii Inakonigewin?

- That community loses its autonomy again.
- Creation of a third level siphoning of administration dollars.
- Transitioning from one paternal institution into another.
- Concerns about AI just being the same as WFS.
- Losing vision of Anishinaabe childcare law –the bureaucracy, transparency, parity
- Having one family in charge of the community care program.
- A transitioning period will always need flexible period and the ability to return to enhancing and amending.
- The principles – do they represent community values? Funding – how will it flow? Most important – Does it reflect cultural values?
- Following Weechi guidelines. Does this explain to all communities that can allow a parent to tell another parent what they are doing wrong to their child(ren)?
- Will divided communities make a fair decision hard to achieve?
- Need more information.

What advantages are there in transitioning to Abinoojii Inakonigewin?

- Everything, movement is better than stagnation.
- Empowerment of community. Reclaiming of our ways of being and doing.
- More information sessions would be beneficial
- Not being oppressed by Ministry-Weechi with funding dollars or lack of cultural congruency
- Accountability for own community members, children,
- The communities will be greatly enhanced by formulating this law and family strengths
- New phase of caregiving for our children.
- Children in care can potentially stay closer to home

What advice do you have about AI?

- Listen to the communities, trust needs to be built and sustained
- Funding is critical for community needs. What we have is not enough – ensure no losses.
- More community-based information sessions and updates
- Advice a layered affect of system or diagram that is conducive to Indigenous inclusivity mind set. Written process or example of amendments.
- Initiate cultural component- all First Nation communities have established different values and traditions. Reflect the uniqueness of each community.
- Do not fall into the same mainstream ideas. The closer to tradition/culture the better.
- Presenters were knowledgeable but still need more info as to when all this started. Stages from history through its evolution would be beneficial.
- More regular consistent meetings and gatherings.

This session was closed due to time restrictions and therefore, Community principles were not covered in this session.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the community engagement sessions were very informative for participants and the session facilitators. At every session there were questions and discussion about the future role of Weechi-it-te-win; how the relationship between Weechi-it-te-win and the ten communities, and each other would evolve; how we could better address the needs of children and families; and, most importantly, how can we ensure that children and families can stay together within their community.

Repeatedly the importance of the original vision of Weechi-it-te-win's founding elders, the late Moses Tom and Joseph Big George came to light in the deliberations as a reminder of where this journey began and the goal to which we strive. Many session participants pointed to the strength and guidance of the spiritual and traditional tools that have been gifted to Weechi-it-te-win, Maango'inini our drum, staff and sacred items, 'with this we have everything we need'.

There was acknowledgement of the path that Weechi-it-te-win has created to realize the vision as a leader in the re-establishment of community control of their children and families as well as in the devolution of services. 'We should remember what Weechi-it-te-win has done on this journey'. Participants were 'thankful' for how Weechi-it-te-win has helped the ten communities and all of Treaty 3. It was stressed that unity and finding some common ground for the ten First Nations is a vital aspect moving forward.

Community participants also reminded us that 'as we continue on this journey, always be mindful that we are talking about the lives of children and families, always'. Decisions made and actions taken will have impacts. The children and families are more than numbers.

1. Engagement Process:

In many communities there were questions about the perceived overlap in processes between Grand Council Treaty 3 and Weechi-it-te-win. While both processes sought to provide education and information sharing about AI, early on, a slide was developed that distinguished the processes whereby Weechi-it-te-win forums are focused on understanding AI, the role and responsibilities of Weechi-it-te-win, the essential elements for community codes, the community care program, community aspirations and readiness for the implementation of AI.

Participants from several communities voiced frustration with the lack of deliverables and lack of follow-up including either no meeting records or inaccurate meeting reports from the Grand Council Treaty 3 process and as such, had concerns with yet another engagement process. To ensure that the input from their community members was properly reflected one community hired their own note-taker. Participants were informed that their engagement meeting notes and this report would be available to their Chief and the Weechi-it-te-win Board of Directors.

2. Abinoojii Inakonigewin:

Participants were provided with an overview of AI and it was apparent that very few people were familiar with the terms and potential implications. Some commented that it was surprising that there was so little information or progress since 2005 when AI was originally passed by the GCT3 Chiefs-in-Assembly. It was recognized that the Chiefs and Board of Directors of Weechi-it-te-win are invested in the spirit and intent of AI.

a. Structure & Funding

A continuous theme from the community sessions was around definitions and structures set out within AI, for instance Ka Niigaanibowe't, Ombikiasowin Protectorate, the Anishinaabe Abinoojii agency. These are new concepts and as such the Chiefs and community session participants voiced significant concerns that 'another bureaucracy' would be created, and potentially community program funds would be utilized to support the new structure.

The Chiefs of Weechi-it-te-win addressed the concerns through the establishment of principles to guide the development and operationalization of the community codes and transformation of Weechi-it-te-win Family Services. The principles set out that nothing can be developed that takes away from or interferes with community autonomy or existing structures. Additionally, the Chiefs declared that 100% of funding for the ten communities and Weechi-it-te-win must continue to flow directly and without any deductions for administration or service fees.

Participants stated that considerable work had been undertaken to develop their community care program and the communities are best equipped to understand what is needed, they do not want to compete with other First Nations or organizations for funding in order to meet the needs for the families and children.

b. Amendments

Community participants commented on the outdated and some inappropriate sections within AI and consistently asked if the law could be amended. As each First Nation drafts their own community custom code to be implemented in conjunction with AI, a determination can be made to opt out of certain provisions or render them inapplicable. Further, should the Chiefs decide to revise AI this can be done in consultation with the GCT3 Chiefs in Assembly with advice from the Elders. AI in its current form is not written in stone.

c. Assent

Throughout the engagement process, participants inquired about the process to assent to AI. Within the terms of AI, it states that the law does not apply to any community until that community assents thereto. The practice has been that a community assents at a spring or fall GCT3 National Assembly, which to date begins the process of development of community specific governance structure as well as service design, delivery and capacity. An objective of this engagement is to assist with community custom code development and readiness for all communities to eventually assent to AI.

3. Weechi-it-te-win Family Services:

Over the last three and a half decades the relationship between Weechi-it-te-win and the ten First Nations has evolved, and as with any relationship there has been positive growth and periods of discontent, but the relationship has endured. For the most part, community participants see that Weechi-it-te-win has an ongoing role into the future, with some are reassured with the added level of guidance.

The Chiefs and Board of Directors have unequivocally stated that the relationship will continue post implementation of AI, but it will change. Weechi-it-te-win should be more system focused on areas such as training and standards development, while each community continues to focus on service structure, delivery and design. It's the next step in devolution and has been talked about since the inception of Weechi-it-te-win.

a. Reconstitute:

Section 28 of AI states that “Ka Niigaanibowe’t may, with the consent of the National Assembly, constitute or reconstitute an Agency to administer this Law.” Consistent with the original vision, it is proposed that Weechi-it-te-win will be reconstituted as an agency pursuant to AI, as opposed to provincial law.

Currently Weechi-it-te-win sets broad policy and oversees all aspects of practice in relation to Customary Care and the Community Care program within the confines of the provincial child welfare legislative framework. While Weechi-it-te-win and the ten First Nations have made great strides in the past to expand the boundaries of provincial policy to better accommodate the needs and aspirations of the children and families, there will be more opportunities pursuant to AI and the First Nation laws to operationalize jurisdiction.

As a reconstituted agency, Weechi-it-te-win will collaborate with the ten First Nations to develop and oversee essential system elements from a wider perspective to advance the underpinnings of AI and the community codes. Session participants also suggested that Weechi-it-te-win should monitor and ensure that the laws of each community are respected and enforced.

b. Standards & Training:

At every engagement session participants were troubled by the inability to keep the children within the community. Meeting provincial housing standards, historical background checks and social conditions are the biggest challenges facing Community Care program staff and driving up the number of children separated from family and community.

As a priority, training on the federal First Nation Children, Youth and Families Act should be provided for all staff along with a determination on how to incorporate the national standards into practice. While communities transition away from the provincial system, action should be taken to ensure that Community Care program staff have options and the tools to keep children safe with their families and within the community whenever possible.

c. Funding Options:

As First Nations move to implement a new governance and service regime, so too should an appropriate funding model be developed to match service goals. Chiefs and participants all agree that the current funding is inadequate and will not agree to anything less than current funding levels.

Weechi-it-te-win, as an expert in First Nation child welfare should develop an innovative funding model that meets the needs of children, families and communities and enables proper resourcing for service delivery to focus on prevention, early intervention and family preservation. Community Care program participants commented that families are eligible for very little financial supports to keep their child at home, even though it would be more cost effective than placing the child in care.

d. Justice & Decision Making:

In several engagement sessions participants noted that children in care often get mixed up with the criminal justice system and addictions. It was recommended that there be a thorough examination of potential trouble areas for youth and to find ways to support them before their issues become too engrained.

An essential piece of operationalizing First Nations jurisdiction will be to institute our own dispute resolution mechanisms. There are structures in place to facilitate decisions and restore balance such as restorative justice methods, family group conferencing and sharing circles. Options should be explored to enhance community capacity without resorting to the mainstream justice system to resolve disputes.

As First Nations assent to AI and operationalize their codes it will be very important to have a community and regional body to interpret the application of Anishinaabe laws. This will be critical in order to maintain the meaning of AI and the community codes. While there is provision within AI for interpretations, this concept should be explored further.

4. First Nations:

Community participants acknowledged that ‘yes, we will come under our own law’ while noting that ‘the significant amount of work and expertise that was devolved’ must also be respected. Community laws need to be living laws, this is how we survived as Anishinaabe...we adapt.

a. Capacity Development:

Throughout all the sessions, participants were eager and hopeful to draft and implement their law in order to displace the provincial system. The community custom code readiness checklist illustrated that each First Nation had undertaken and completed significant developmental work. The future work did not seem as daunting. It is also noted that the readiness checklist is a guide and communities may also have their own readiness tools.

Communities are taking a variety of approaches to identify and refine their capacity and infrastructure moving forward. Several First Nations have requested assistance from these session facilitators. While Weechi-it-te-win is committed to moving this process forward and has provided some initial funding, many of the First Nations have used their own resources to forward their developments.

b. Prevention, Early Intervention & Family Preservation:

All First Nations identified that their primary focus will be on prevention, early intervention and family preservation. In order to make the paradigm shift for service delivery with adequate funding, an analysis of current and future state should be undertaken leading to the development of an implementation plan for communities to make the transition.

c. Service Agreements:

There are currently Service Purchase Agreements in place between Weechi-it-te-win and each of the ten First Nations that outlines the roles and responsibilities of each of the Parties. These agreements will have to be revisited in order to reflect the new roles, responsibilities and relationship. The agreement will set out how the Parties will work together pursuant to AI and the community codes. Potentially, Weechi-it-te-win could have ten very different agreements.

APPENDIX A

Community Engagement Guide - Final Oct 2020.pdf

