From the Editors

The first two lines of the Preface to the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Final Report read: “Canada’s residential school system for Aboriginal children was an education system in name only for much of its existence. These residential schools were created for the purpose of separating Aboriginal children from their families, in order to minimize and weaken family ties and cultural linkages and to indoctrinate children into a new culture – the culture of the legally dominant Euro-Christian Canadian society, led by Canada’s first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald.”¹ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission revealed to Canadians and the world, the intimate details of what happened in the residential school system to Indigenous children and the negative consequences these experiences had for children and their families. The Commission released 94 recommendations to improve outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

Early in 2016, we learned from a decision by the Canadian Human Rights Commission that the government of Canada does indeed discriminate against children living on reserves. Thanks to the diligent advocacy work by Cindy Blackstock and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society who filed a complaint against the government of Canada in February 2007, they demonstrated that the federal funding model and management of First Nations’ child and family services is discriminatory and denies children and their families the ability to live their lives fully. Significantly, their work demonstrated that the on-reserve child welfare system receives substantially less funding than elsewhere in Canada.² When the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal agreed in 2016 that the government had acted in discriminatory ways, they called for changes in the system and for government to "cease the discriminatory practice and take measures to redress and prevent it."

Indigenous children in Canada are still waiting for these changes; yet this situation, incredibly, is not news. Consider that in 2002, the UN General Assembly Special Session for Children highlighted the plight of Indigenous children, the denial of access to services, and a system of child protection and wellbeing that treats them unfairly and in a discriminatory way. Delegates to the Special Session, including the Honourable Landon Pearson, urged governments to treat Indigenous children with dignity and respect by ensuring access to quality education, health care, respect for their heritage and cultural identity, and to value their participation in matters that affect their lives, among others. Despite these efforts predicated on respect and implementation of rights, Indigenous children in Canada continue to live in poverty and at a higher rate than
non-Indigenous children, continue to attend school at lower rates, continue to be denied access to safe and affordable housing, continue to experience high rates of suicide, and continue to encounter a continuum of violence in their lives due to the vulnerabilities that they disproportionately experience living in contexts fraught with inequalities. It is hardly surprising that issues of identity and belonging continue to underscore much of what young people say about their lives and their communities.

For this third issue of the Canadian Journal of Children’s Rights we focus our attention on continuing the dialogue regarding the complexities and challenges of human rights and Indigenous children’s lives. The voices, experiences and ideas inscribed in these pages present a complicated picture of what it means to live your life as an Indigenous child in Canada. We hear from a residential school survivor, as well as reflections about the experience from his son; from researchers working to honour the views of Indigenous children who articulate what is important to them so that adults can better understand; and from children attending elementary schools in two Canadian cities who understand the inequalities and passionately demand that Indigenous children’s rights be recognized and upheld. Each writer offers a unique perspective to consider in exploring and understanding Indigenous children’s rights more fully.

We are particularly grateful to the family of Russ Moses for entrusting us with his residential school memoir and photographs. We are honoured to publish as part of this special issue his first person account of his time at the Mohawk Institute Indian Residential School in Brantford, Ontario between 1942 and 1947. The memoir and photographs offer insight into a residential school experience that profoundly shaped and altered Russ Moses’ life and pathway.

We are pleased as well to present invited submissions from a number of guest authors including Jennifer King, Jocelyn Wattam and Cindy Blackstock; Judy Finlay and Lauren Akbar; Tracy Coates and Philip Leach-Ngo; and Margo Greenwood, all of whom have devoted countless hours to finding ways to improve Indigenous children’s lives through their advocacy work and research. Each writer brings Indigenous children’s world-views of their lives and their communities to the forefront in order to be heard and listened to as dialogue and action on Indigenous children’s rights moves forward.

One of the ways forward is through quality early child care, education and support for families. Landon Pearson offers a glimpse of two model preschool programs that take a rights-based approach in working with Indigenous children and their families – the Tumiralaat Child Care Centre in Ottawa and Pirurvik Preschool in Pond Inlet. The programs emphasise strength and offer children a multitude of ways to make connections that are culturally appropriate, deeply felt and meaningful.
Following on this theme of education, the next section of the issue includes two peer-reviewed articles by Joannie St-Pierre and Sheila Grantham. St-Pierre offers readers a critical look at the ways education programs, curricula, and instructional materials for elementary francophone students in Ontario fail to respect Indigenous history. She illustrates through her analysis how these materials convey a sense of value, beliefs and stereotypical ideas about Indigenous children that contravene the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In turn, this impacts on the ways their lives are lived and understood. Sheila Grantham continues this argument by focusing on a case involving Indigenous children and youth within the child welfare system in an era known as the Sixties Scoop. Grantham’s analysis of the report of the Independent Review of Cathedral Valley Group Home, that was commissioned by the Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs because of allegations by Indigenous residents claiming exploitation had occurred, demonstrates how it decontextualized the experiences of Indigenous children in the group home and made invisible the interconnections between race, exploitation, and marginalization that further exacerbated the oppression these children faced in their daily lives.

Our youth section rounds out this special issue with three submissions that each exude passion and determination. Hannah Battiste’s riveting poem WARRIORS will capture your imagination with the way she honours memory and combines this with hopefulness that is determined to make the world a better place for Indigenous children. There are two further submissions in this section from groups of children in two elementary schools who were invited to collaborate to write a letter on behalf of Indigenous children. We are certain you will find their writing moving and compelling in a way that only children’s perspectives can do in illuminating a way forward.

We are grateful to all of the contributors to this special issue of the Canadian Journal of Children’s Rights on Indigenous children’s rights. It is our hope that by engaging readers in considering the complexities of Indigenous children’s rights in an era of global change that impact on social inequalities where technologies proliferate and movement and migration mark everyday lives, the dialogue on the possibilities for realizing and fully respecting them will continue.

The issue includes a number of compelling photographs. We wish to thank John Moses for permitting us to reproduce the photograph of Russell Moses and his sister Thelma for the cover of the issue. We have also included images of children who attend the Pirurvik Preschool in Pond Inlet with the permission of Tessa Lochhead and images to accompany Judy Finlay and Lauren Akbar’s work; our thanks to all for the use of these images.
Our thanks to the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation for continued financial support and to Patricia Moore of Carleton University’s MacOdrum Library for her technical assistance. We also benefit from a supportive editorial board and dedicated reviewers who work with us behind the scenes to ensure the publication of this high quality journal. Our thanks to everyone for your invaluable support.

_Virginia Caputo and Landon Pearson_

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