

Group wants Children's Aid Society off Six Nations land

By Carmela Fragomeni - The Hamilton Spectator

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OHSWEKEN

A group of parents angry that the Children's Aid Society at Six Nations has taken their children away wants the band council to kick the agency out.

The parents had planned to show up unannounced to the band council meeting this week to present it with a wampum, but the meeting was moved to another location. The group vows to return for next week's council meeting Tuesday.

A wampum is a belt of beads and shells that is considered sacred and is used to convey messages and represent agreements -- in this case, a historical agreement by colonizers and natives not to interfere in each other's business, according to clan mother Sandy Miller.

A man whose children were taken by the CAS said the reason given was that he and the children's mother were doing drugs. He has been meeting with other upset parents to work on strategies for getting their children back. The man cannot be named because doing so would identify children in the care of a CAS.

The children's protection services on the reserve are provided by native services branch of the Brant Children's Aid Society, which was invited by the band council to set up in Six Nations.

Brant CAS executive director Andrew Koster said staff at the branch are all from Six

Nations, so it's not a case of a CAS from outside dictating to a reserve.

Koster says there are some people who now want Six Nations to take over these child services "and we support that."

Whether Six Nations develops its own community type of care or not, "the bottom line is these kids have to be safe."

In the meantime, he said the Brant CAS tries, wherever possible, to place children in foster homes that have the same spiritual beliefs. Many of the children are also placed with family members, he said.

Koster said the CAS has 60 reserve children in its care, a relatively low number when compared with Six Nations' 14,000 population.

Koster admits there is a negative history of First Nations dealings with Children's Aid Societies and this makes individual issues more difficult.

Miller said the parents' group intends to take their children back and the wampum gives them that right.

She also said the CAS model is not suitable to aboriginal kids. "It's traumatizing those children and the parents and they tear their hearts out. They are hurting the children."

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