



# Native father questions CAS commitment to his child

## Society inaction tantamount to co-conspiracy

Letter to the Editor - July 9, 2008

As an Aboriginal person, I have been dealing with the Sudbury Children's Aid Society since March of 2004 regarding my child-protection concerns. Since that time my ex-partner had lived with a person who was charged with murder and was banned for life from having weapons in his possession. My ex-partner was fully aware of her new partner's background and weapons restrictions.

In December 2007, her partner was charged with discharging a weapon in their home. I can only imagine what might have happened had my son been home, as I had my son for my regular weekend access. The society was notified twice by myself, once in April 2006, and verbally in November 2007, of the weapons in the home and the potential for violence, as my ex-partner has her own violence issues. Consequently, nothing was done by the society. I had sent letters to a CAS supervisor, the CAS director of services, including the CAS executive director, asking why my son was allowed to be in an unsafe and stressful home environment in light of my notifying them of my concerns and in light of the evidence.

To date, and after numerous attempts to seek answers, the society is unable or unwilling to provide me with any answers as to why weapons were allowed in the home of my ex-partner or why children were allowed to reside in such an environment. In my view, this is unacceptable and deplorable behavior on the part of any child welfare agency. I have come to the conclusion that the society has become co-conspirators in the abuse and neglect of my son who is an Aboriginal child. I am not sure if the society has identified my son as being from First Nation heritage, or whether or not they have taken this fact into consideration when determining the "best interests" of my son.

I should note that from March 2004 to November 2007, and since I reside in a community near Little Current, not one member from the society, either from Little Current or from Sudbury, had ever visited me regarding my concerns or to verify the evidence that I have. I should also note that I have represented myself in family court. As a result, my ex-partner went from sole custody to a joint custody arrangement as of April 1, 2008.

Overall, I have had nothing but problem after problem with the society since my contact with them in 2004. They choose to drag their feet, or worse yet, they fail to respond to my concerns altogether. It seems that it is not enough that I have

evidence that my son's health and wellbeing was being neglected or that he has to live in overcrowded conditions or that he attended a Family Violence Program with the Child and Family Centre in Sudbury. It is not enough that I have evidence that my son has to endure "age-inappropriate" discussion with his "primary care giver," or that he is physically stressed when his "primary caregiver" engages in physical violence with his siblings and other family members and/or partners. It is not enough that my son has been made to cry during access times when his "primary caregiver" calls my place of residence. It is not enough that I have evidence that during access times my son has moved a total of six times in a two-and-a-half-year period, disrupting a safe and stable home environment for my son, or that his dental care is being neglected. Indeed, it is not enough that my son's "primary caregiver" was living with someone who has a criminal history, or that this particular relationship was violent and physically stressful on my son. This seems to be acceptable to the society, as they have done nothing substantial to address my concerns.

Due to my volunteering a psychological report on my ex-partner's daughter, the society has since prevented the daughter from babysitting my son. This person was prevented from doing so through court order as well, which was breached by my ex-partner and her daughter on the very day she signed the order. My son continues to be "at risk" as a result. The society has also called a pediatrician on my ex-partner's behalf, suggesting neglect and the fact that my able-bodied ex-partner was unable to do so on her own accord. The same with housing, as the society seems to be in the habit of finding homes for women who are physically capable of doing so themselves.

Overall, I feel that the society is so blinded by a biased Euro-western feminist perspective and the assumption that my case is a child-custody matter, so that the society has failed to see the child-protection issues inherent in my case. Since I am Aboriginal, I have been dealing with the society's First Nation/Rural Team who service off-reserve clients. I see this particular team as token First Nation family service workers peddling a non-Aboriginal child-welfare mandate to off-reserve First Nation people. This has rendered them ineffective in meeting the socio-cultural needs of First Nation people and children. If anything, the First Nation/Rural Team is a reflection of the conflict of interest that has been inherent in the society's contemporary and historic relationship with First Nation people.

In my case, I question whether or not race and gender are significant factors with the Sudbury Children's Aid Society of the districts of Sudbury and Manitoulin. Regardless, the issues continue to mount with each passing day and as long as the society continues to blatantly and willfully neglect my concerns as an Aboriginal father, and those of my son, the society will continue to act as co-conspirators in the abuse and neglect of my son.

A concerned father

Whitefish River First Nation

EDITOR'S NOTE: The name of the letter writer has been withheld to protect the identity of the child.