

Conference Workshop Descriptions - Professional Day Friday November 8rd

Keynote: The Blanket Exercise with Kallie and Chris of Converging Pathways

The blanket exercise supports foster and adoption professionals in understanding the history of how our system was formed and the way in which history continues to impact our beliefs and practises. This exercise is a teaching tool that will get you, for a time at least walking in someone else's shoes! Explore over 500 years of history with us as we share the historic and contemporary relationship between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous peoples in Canada! The exercise is an endeavor to learn the history from an Indigenous perspective.

Kallie Wood is Nakota Cree of Carry the Kettle Band First Nation is the owner of Converging Pathways Consulting; to promote education, reconciliation, motivation, and inspiration between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples on a long-term sustainable relationship forward. Kallie's experience also includes: Strategic planning and Governance Model Building with multiple organizations in North America; extensive history in Leadership and Management; developed and facilitated Indigenous core strategy research in education with a circle of influence compiled of key leaders in the country on Indigenous issues, academics, education, legal, finance, government and theology; trained in the reconciliation process, Kallie has spoken and taught in many contexts in North America on principles and practices, at various colleges, seminaries, high schools, elementary schools and universities.

Chris McKee is a born and raised Saskatchewan boy whose connection with the province's wide open spaces has left him with the belief that any individual or organization can have a wide open future with the right coaching and direction. A firm believer in the uniqueness and intrinsic value of every individual in an organization, Chris can engage any audience with his common sense directness, and passionate honesty. With more than a decade of experience in daily inspiring and leading teams in designing, developing, and deploying organization-wide initiatives, Chris is no stranger to the challenges of change and the ways to harness the power it can provide. Chris is a highly regarded non-Indigenous man in Indigenous communities. He has had a naming ceremony and his Cree name is 'Mistapew'; Big Man – Big Voice – Big Heart, which is a sign of trust and relationship and his importance in the journey forward for Indigenous Peoples. His strength, resiliency and passion for reconciliation from a non-Indigenous perspective is palpable. He brings with that a passion for change in this country that captures the interest of audience members of all ages. He is passionate about the message and as a result motivates audiences to action.

A1 – 'Please Move these Kids:' Responding to Caregiver Crisis

Every social worker dreads the call from a caregiver that indicates a placement is in crisis. At this point many parents are indicating that they are out of ideas on how to manage a child's behavior or are insistent that the child be moved right away to avoid further difficulties. Managing this conversation with confidence and expertise will impact the outcome for children. Participants in this workshop will be guided through a discussion about how to respond to the emotional experience of the caregiver and engage them in a problem solving process that will increase stability for the child with difficult behaviors.



Andrea Chatwin, MA, CCC is the Founder and Clinical Director of A Child's Song. She specializes in effective responding to attachment and trauma, particularly focusing on children who have had caregiver losses and placement disruptions. Andrea has extensive experience in early childhood mental health and has worked overseas in orphanages studying the effects of abuse, neglect and developmental trauma on children of various ages. She is an adoptive parent herself and therefore experienced firsthand the unique challenges of parenting through adoption. Andrea is a keynote speaker and workshop facilitator addressing parents, professionals and policy makers.

A2 – Transitioning Children from Foster Care to Adoption

Transitioning a child from foster care to adoption is a complex process with significant implications for the future development of the new parent-child relationship. Planning transitions based on current ‘best practice’ can be slow, confusing and at times discouraging for those involved. Participants will receive new information that will assist them in understanding the needs of children and caregivers in the transition process and a set of Guiding Principles to inform their decision making (workshop is based on the Transitioning Children from Foster Care to Adoption manual).



***Dr Joanne Crandall** is a Registered Psychologist, with a Ph.D. in Counselling Psychology. Joanne has extensive experience as an Early Childhood Mental Health Psychologist, and is a graduate of the Infant-Parent Mental Health Program (University of Massachusetts-Boston). She specializes in attachment and trauma, particularly focusing on children who are currently in care and who are in the process of being adopted. Joanne holds expertise on the neuro-developmental impact of abuse and neglect. She is also a skilled workshop facilitator who has discussed the impact of trauma and neglect on children provincially, national, and international conferences. Joanne is also an adoptee herself, so she continues to reflect on her own lived experience as an adoptee and she brings that very valuable personal perspective to her work with families.*

B1 – When Social Workers Experience Trauma: Impact of Complex Decision Making

The personal impact of working daily with complex human relationships can be intense and at times traumatic, which can leave professionals feeling at a loss for control and numb to their experiences. Left unprocessed, the social worker’s trauma is often mistaken for burnout and leaves the underlying issue unresolved. This workshop will provide social workers with a clear understanding of how to recognize the symptoms of trauma in themselves and others as well as offer them preventative tools using evidence based interventions that can be readily implemented into daily practise.



***Meagan VanDiermen, MA, RCC** holds an MA in Counselling Psychology with specific training in (OEI) and Lifespan Integration Therapy, dynamic body-based trauma interventions that are effective in working with people of all ages to provide deep healing. Meagan is dedicated specifically to the areas of trauma (especially preverbal trauma) and anxiety with a focus on the therapeutic nature of the parent-child relationship. She is able to work with parents to understand the roots of their child’s experiences and implement strategies that process and minimize trauma induced responses. Meagan is actively involved in adoption research, seeking to understanding of the unique challenges that adoptees struggle with and the most efficient and meaningful processes that promote healing.*

B2 – Managing Birth Family Contact in the Adoption Process

Assessing and planning for long term birth family relationships is an important aspect of creating successful permanency plans for children. Our clinical counsellors at A Child’s Song have observed that birth family visits are stopped or decreased significantly during and post transition with the understanding that this is ‘best’ to help children prepare for adoption or to bond with their permanent caregivers. This workshop will discuss the role that birth family relationships can play in the adoption process and how to factor in birth family contact throughout the matching, transition and post placement stages of adoption. A discussion, focused on complex birth family situations, will offer practical strategies for developing effective birth family contact plans for children.



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C1 - Understanding the Role of Parent-Child Therapies in Healing Attachment Disruption

A Child's Song believes that parents are key to the healing and transformation of a children's early experiences of loss. This workshop will offer clear descriptions of the different parent child therapies that are attachment and trauma informed, and the rationale for why these services meet the unique needs of foster and adoptive families. Best practices for therapeutic interventions to meet the needs of foster and adoptive families will be discussed. Professionals will leave with a better understanding of what therapies to suggest for children and families, when therapy is likely to be most effective, and what to expect in terms of outcomes. An opportunity to ask questions about which therapeutic interventions will address specific client needs will be provided.



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C2 – Understanding Trauma and the Brain with the Experiential Brain Architecture Game

This workshop is an experiential activity that builds understanding of the powerful role of experiences on early brain development—what promotes it, what derails it, with what consequences for society. The goal is to build a brain that is as tall as possible, which represents functionality, and as sturdy as possible, which represents the ability to withstand stresses. After the initial period of early childhood development, weights must be hung from the structure of the brain when life hands out stressors. Will the foundation withstand these weights, or will it collapse? Afterwards, participants use the notes in their Life Journals to discuss the experiences that strengthened, or weakened, the architecture of their developing brains. The workshop facilitator will engage participants in a discussion about the practical application of this information to effective interventions for children and youth.



Renae Regehr, MA, RCC holds a Masters of Counselling Degree from the University of British Columbia. She has experience working with children, youth, and families who have been impacted by trauma and attachment disruptions. As a mother to three children, biological and adoptive, Renae is passionate about child development from infancy through adolescence and she aims to support adoptive, foster and biological parents to ensure their children have strong family connections, optimal social skills and emotional regulation, and a coherent sense of identity. While trained as a generalist she has advanced skills in trauma, infant and child development, attachment, adoption, body image, Interpersonal Neurobiology (IPNB), Emotional Focused Family Therapy (EFFT) and Lifespan Integration (LI).

