

kids these days...

Dr. David Rideout, CEO
North Central Alberta Child & Family Services Authority

CELEBRATING ABORIGINAL ROOTS

Kids in school often learn how Canadians take pride in being a multi-cultural society. That's important because knowing about our diversity is key to building a stronger, more tolerant society in the future.

Today, our Aboriginal people are making great strides to overcome the adversity of a difficult past to create a strong voice of hope for the future.

Historically the Aboriginal culture has been one of strength and pride, rooted in spirituality. Their worldview sees all living beings as related, with humans being part of a larger order that depends on a harmony within nature. Helping to maintain this balance by means of rituals and ceremonies was a deeply felt responsibility.

However, Canada's history over the past five to six hundred years created dynamic tensions that are still present in 2009. As a result, a culture with very rich family traditions and values faces some enormous social challenges.

The causes of that reality are certainly beyond the scope of this modest column to address. However, they are a contributing factor to the large number of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system, where they comprise nearly 60 per cent of the Alberta children and youth in care. These children statistically fare better when placed in Aboriginal homes, especially where there is a vibrant connection to their cultural roots.

Every effort is made to place each child who comes into the care of the Province in a culturally appropriate and supportive home. Therefore, if a child cannot remain with biological parents for any number of reasons, the next choice is to find them a

home with a family member. If that is not possible, a home that is able to provide strong cultural linkages and support becomes the next option. Children who are raised in such an environment are much more likely to grow into well-rounded adults. It's like a tree with deep roots, which has much greater chance of it surviving a wind storm than a tree that has shallow roots.

Later this month, on June 21st, we will be celebrating National Aboriginal Day in Canada, when First Nations, Métis and Inuit people from coast to coast to coast will come together to celebrate who they are and their heritage. It is an occasion for them to express deep pride in their traditions and accomplishments.

This is also an opportunity for all Canadians to show their appreciation and respect for the heritage and values of Aboriginal people. It is a day to recognize their unique achievements and contributions to the fabric of Canadian life.

It is my hope that kids these days recognize the importance of culture in life and will lead their generation to help develop positive relations throughout all cultures.

It is important that children and youth today learn from the experiences of previous generations and do their part to make Canada a place of promise and equal opportunity for all.

Any feedback or comments are welcome and can be sent via email to david.rideout@gov.ab.ca