



Simpcw signs first co-created child welfare agreement in B.C.

A ceremony was held April 12 and the agreement was signed by both parties

Simpcw First Nation and the Ministry of Children and Family Development signed an agreement Tuesday (April 12) that integrates customs, language and traditions with child welfare decision making. The move means the First Nation will be involved in the protection, planning and placement of Simpcw children and youth who encounter the welfare system.

"I feel a great sense of pride after a long journey with the MCFD to reach this agreement," said Kúpi7 (Chief) Shelly Loring in a press release. "I felt our ancestors guiding us in the creation of new relationship that significantly changes practice and ensures our Nation's support for the well-being of our members across British Columbia."

The traditional language of the Simpcw/Secwepemc people, Secwepemctsin, is the "guiding force" for the culture. The agreement, Tcwesétmentem (pronounced Twa-set-men-tem) translates to "walking together," a term championed by Simpcw Elder and language expert Mona Jules, PhD, as well as Simpcw language manager, Charli Fortier.

"This interim measure marks a significant milestone on our pathway toward implementing our inherent jurisdiction," said Loring. "I am especially pleased that our laws, customs and traditions are enshrined in this legally-binding agreement through the meaningful inclusion of our Secwepemctsin."

The agreement outlines how SFN will work with the ministry on assessments and investigations, as well as plans of care and independence. It also sets a framework for how child welfare decisions made by the ministry will be informed by a SFN community delegate to ensure the Nation's "worldview and cultural continuity are incorporated." It is subject to an annual review.

A ceremony was held for the signing of the agreement, with opening prayers were followed by drumming and songs by children from the Neqweyqwelsten school. Discussion and negotiations between the two groups spanned more than two years to establish the new relationship between SFN and the MCFD. The first of its kind in B.C., the new agreement forms a pathway for other Indigenous communities to develop their own unique partnerships with the province.

"It is our commitment to work with Indigenous communities to honour and affirm their inherent right to support and protect their children and families in ways that are aligned with their Nation's beliefs, cultural practices, traditions and laws," said Mitzi Dean, Minister of Children and Family Development. "This new community agreement is the result of intensive consultation to understand the needs of the community in relation to their history and cultural heritage, and will shape how the ministry and SFN work together on child welfare issue now and into the futu