

Dr. Sally Palmer, Professor Emerita of the McMaster School of Social Work, provided funding for a series of conferences organized by the School of Social Work in the Faculty of Social Sciences. The goal of the conferences is to address emerging research and approaches in the field of child welfare, particularly developments that centre the voice of the children, youth, families and communities the child welfare system serves. The conference series has been built on the following principles.

### PRINCIPLE OF 3VOICES

Child welfare needs to be developed by the following 3Voices working together:

**1/ Service users** (i.e. children, youth, families, grandparents, kin, and others who have received and are eligible to receive child welfare services, and those from communities impacted by child welfare services)

**2/ Service providers** (i.e. workers, managers, policy makers, foster parents, community members and leaders, or anyone else involved in the delivery of child welfare, child wellbeing, and related services)

**3/ Academics, researchers, or traditional knowledge keepers** (i.e. anyone involved in teaching, writing, researching, journalism, and keeping and sharing knowledge about child welfare and child wellbeing).

### IMPACT PRINCIPLE

Impact in academia tends to be measured by the extent that scholars think each other's ideas important, and the extent an idea is discussed in academic literature.

Social work, however, is a doing occupation, so the impact that matters are ideas that social workers say help them do their jobs well, and practices that service users say benefit their lives.

This conference holds that the impact that matters, is harmony between the 3Voices endorsing an idea or practice. We contend that impact comes from harmony between the three voices—because if academic research, worker experience, and service users' knowledge, all agree that a policy or practice is beneficial, then likely it is.

### JUSTICE PRINCIPLE

Child welfare is geared primarily toward addressing the failings of parents, and not the failings of the state—this is a mistake. Of course, child welfare must help children, youth, and families with their personal struggles, but should also address the societal inequalities that compound and often cause these struggles.

The conference promotes ideas that simultaneously address both the personal and the political roots of child welfare problems—ideas and practices that include a social justice perspective. We contend, however, that social workers have no mandate to unilaterally pursue their own personal ideas of social justice, but instead need to develop a vision for social justice in partnership with the families and communities they serve. As such, we look for social justice work that reflects 3Voices.

### MARGINS PRINCIPLE

Indigenous, Black and other voices that tend to be under-represented in the way child welfare is imagined and delivered—consequently the conference will attempt to centre and emphasize these voices.

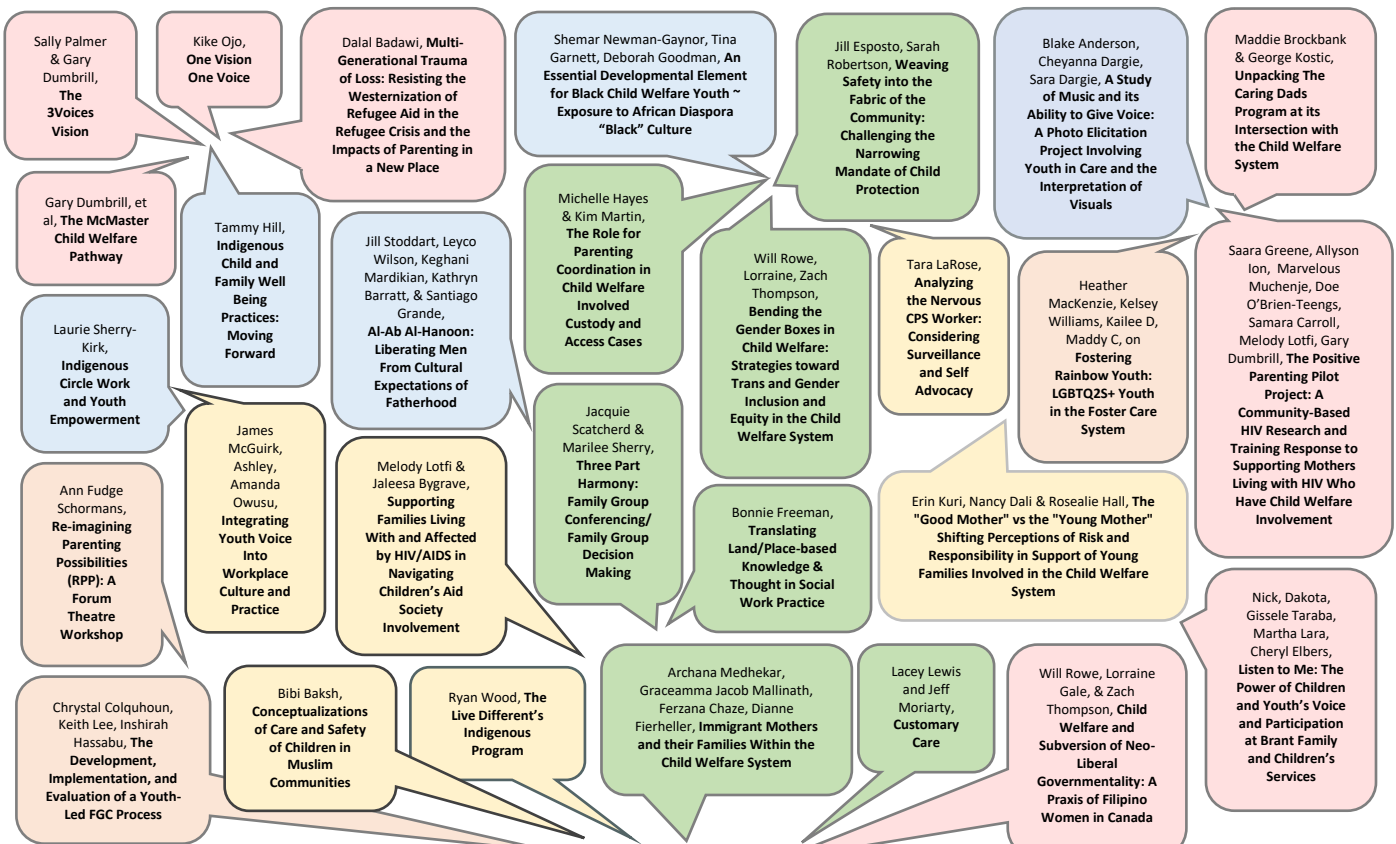
As well, as soon as anyone becomes a child welfare service user, their voice also tends to be marginalized. As a result, the conference attempts to centre and emphasize service users' voices.

## CONFERENCE OUTCOMES

The first conference was held in February, 2018 and was attended by over 200 people. Feedback from participants was positive. Innovative ways of including service user voices were shared, and the concept of 3Voices resonated with what participants were doing or wanted to do.

A clear vision that social work needs to be built on 3Voices was evident at the conference, but a clear vision did not emerge about how this idea can be moved forward to become a primary principle on which *all* social work (not just child welfare) is based upon.

Participants recommended that the next conference in the series be centred on working groups that move the 3Voices concept forward, and that invites be sent to policy makers, legislators, lawyers and others working alongside service users, and also service user organizations.



**3VOICES**  
IN CHILD WELFARE  
CONFERENCE ONE