

Cindy Blackstock

Cindy Blackstock Speech, May 8, 2013

It's a great honor to be here in British Columbia and, more importantly, on the lands of the Squamish, Sauteau and Musquam First Nations, thank you so much, Chief, for your welcome.

In 2008, Prime Minister Harper apologized. He apologized for over a hundred years of where the Federal government, as David Nahwegahbow, the great First Nations lawyer said, “placed itself between First Nations children and their families... removing First Nations children from their homes, for neglect, as early as 1895.

I have a warrant in my office signed by Duncan Campbell Scott. Some of you studied him as a Canadian literary figure. Most First Nations people know him as one of the greatest tyrants in the public service, the architect of residential schools and one of those who perpetrated that harm for a hundred years.

And in that warrant, it authorizes any government official to remove children for educational purposes or for a failure to properly care for a child. Of course, “failure to properly care for a child” was defined under the assimilation views of the Federal government. Children were removed using force, for instance, necessary. The RCMP and other police forces would assist. The parents would be arrested if they resisted, and the children were placed in the schools.

The stories are just emerging about what happened there, but what we do know is that generations of children lost their childhoods there. Many were physically and sexually abused; and we know that, at least, 3,000 children died in those schools—died in a school that was supposed to provide them with a better life.

There's lots of talk about reconciliation now. But, for me, reconciliation does not mean saying sorry twice. What really counts is the way that we are treating *this* generation of aboriginal children.

It is a test not only of the government—has the government truly learned from its own wayward behavior? — it's also a test of *all* of us as Canadians, all of us as human people, all of us as First Nations citizens, Métis citizens and Inuit citizens.

The sad truth about our country is that the major human rights abuses of our time have all been perpetrated by the Canadian Government—the internment of Japanese Canadians in Second World War; the Chinese head tax; the turning back of Jewish persons to face the horrors of the Holocaust of World War II; the residential school fiasco; and the persecution of Muslim Canadians.

They all happened at the hands of our Federal government. They were all made possible because Canadians have not come to truly understand what that line in “Oh Canada” means, “Oh Canada, we stand on guard for thee.”

It means that we, absolutely, will stand up when our country needs us, when humanity needs us—to stand up for the principles of fairness, love, and justice.

That's how those horrible things stopped happening, not only in Canada but around the world. And so, there's never been a time when First Nations children needed you more than right now. And the good news is there's never been more that you could do to help; and it won't cost you anything. It won't cost you anything.

It is a calling to the best of humanity inside of you—that chance that every one of us is born with and longs to fulfill, that chance to make a difference for your fellow person, to make the world a brighter and lighter place for those who will follow us.

At the end of the day, that's the only thing that counts. And we, at the end of this lecture, are going to have an opportunity to do a number of things in that direction.

How is Canada doing?

Well, there are many First Nations in this hall who can tell you even more eloquently than I can that contrary to popular public opinion, First Nations children actually receive far less government and public services than all other Canadians enjoy.

Why is that?

Well, the federal government has forced First Nations to take on provincial legislation in child welfare, health, and education, and other areas. And that in itself is a matter of controversy because what we do know from the historical record is that First Nations children were never better cared for than when they were cared for under traditional First Nations laws.

What we have around the imposing of these non-aboriginal laws is overrepresentation of aboriginal children in every one of these systems. But, nonetheless, they apply.

But the federal government funds the services for children on-reserve; and provincial and territorial governments fund it for all others. And as the Auditor General of Canada has found repeatedly, the federal government provides less funding for these children even though their needs are higher because of the long-lasting legacies of residential schools.

The reports go back for decades. I was telling someone recently, I was reading a report in my office. It was typed on a typewriter—that tells you how long ago it was typed. And there's a passage in there and it says, “Can anyone hazard a guess as to what year or what century real progress will be made towards the equality of Indian children?”

That was written in 1967, and I was three years old. And we're still at it.

It's made possible by a concept I call "incremental equality" where First Nations children are always getting less; and in a good year, the government will announce something in the budget, some money that goes some way to addressing the inequality but falls far short to what's needed.

The Canadian public looks at that and says, "How generous we're doing for First Nations kids," and, of course, the government makes a big deal out of their own generosity; they always do. But they fail to call attention to how far that falls short of what all other children enjoy.

And then, First Nations are upset because it's not what every other child gets. And so, the Canadian public thinks—why aren't they grateful for all the money we're giving them? It must be that it's not being managed properly.

And so, we end up in this cycle where equality is only an aspiration for a whole pile of children in this country because of their race.

Racial discrimination has been embedded in public policy for children. And discrimination, I would argue, ladies and gentlemen, is most dangerous when it becomes normalized or made benevolent.

People think about status cards, for example. Think about that word, "status card." I tell folks I carry a couple of cards in my wallet, one is a Super Elite card for Air Canada which means that I don't have a life because I travel so much. And the other one is my status card.

Most people think they're perk cards. The reality is that I got my Air Canada card from flying so much. I got my status Indian card because Canada undertook a blood quantum analysis to determine how much blood quantum I had and whether or not I was a Status Indian.

We protested against the same measure being undertaken in South Africa. In fact, we exported that strategy to South Africa. A whole delegation came here to learn about it. We were the only country in the Western industrialized world to have such a system. And that embedding culturally of discrimination makes this type of thing possible.

Now, you hear a lot of talk about why addressing these inequalities for First Nations children is good for everybody. But here's the research to back it up.

One book I'm going to recommend to all of you to buy is *The Spirit Level*. And for those of you who have never read it, it's not about spirituality although arguably it is because you can apply it to kids. It's about economics. And what it says is if you want to be a government... this is based on some of the best research in the world. If you want to be a government that has a robust economy, highly educated persons in your society, a low teen birth rate, high life expectancies, trust amongst your citizens, low incarceration rates, good health in your citizens, you need to only do one thing.

And that's to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor in your own country. Reduce the inequalities between the rich and the poor in your own country.

Now, as a G8 country, we are optimally positioned to do this. The unfortunate thing is that UNICEF, just last month, released some data where they ranked the world's wealthiest countries on how we're doing for children. And while we have a *G8 economy*, our children are G17.

So how is it possible that the economy is doing twice as good as our kids? Is that a good thing in a country?

Well, the reason that's happening is that among OECD countries, the gap between rich and poor in Canada is actually growing at a faster rate—amongst the fastest rate.

So we are actually... although we've got some people who are becoming a lot wealthier, they themselves—by not addressing that gap between the rich and the poor—are impoverishing that type of society that they want to grow up in.

So it's a false reality to think that, you know, this idea that everyone needs to pull themselves up by their boot straps. I agree with that at some level, but the reality is, some people don't have to pull as far. And what we need to do is provide people with an *equal* chance to be able to succeed in ways that make them feel proud of who they are, that don't require you to assimilate into someone else's standard of success.

So buy *The Spirit Level*. That's one of the first books. Chapters is going to love me by the end of this lecture.

Alright, so let's get to the real problem. Today, Stats Canada just released some research; and it is a wayward effort because, of course, they'd been eroding the collection of data on aboriginal peoples for some years and on the Canadians as well. But what we know is that the crisis in terms of First Nations children is right now. It's never been worse than it is right now.

There are more First Nations children in child welfare care today than at the height of residential schools by a factor of two or three; and when the data today says that although aboriginal children represent less than five percent of the Canadian child population, they represent over *48 percent* of the children in child welfare care.

And what you need to know is that they're not driven there by abuse. It's not that sexual and physical abuse don't happen in our communities. Of course, they do. And we need to take ownership of that and deal with it. It is absolutely unacceptable. I have not found one First Nations culture, indigenous culture anywhere in the world where that type of conduct is a traditionally acceptable behavior. But it doesn't contribute to overrepresentation.

It's neglect.

Now, a lot of people throw that word around as if we all know what it means. A lot of people assumed that you have the tools to parent and the knowledge to parent [but] you're simply not doing it. But the reality is that child welfare experts and the people on the ground who have been working with families for years know it is very difficult to understand because it's rarely that simple.

When we parcel out the factors that are driving First Nations kids into care, it's poverty, poor housing, and substance misuse. Those are the three factors.

Thirty percent of all children going into child welfare care in the United States, for example, go into care because they're poor. They really do. And that statistic is very similar here in Canada.

When I did a study in Nova Scotia of all children who were removed... this is all children in Nova Scotia. All children removed between 2003 and 2005, 95 percent of them had incomes below \$20,000.

The biggest predictor of whether you're going to have your children removed is how much money you make a year. It seriously is.

And so, governments like in the United States have developed things called the “National Center on Child Welfare and Housing” where they provide additional funds to child welfare and use that money to alleviate housing concerns for families. And that type of intervention has had great success.

So the good news is: We know what the factors are: poverty, poor housing, and substance misuse. The bad news is: Just like with every other service across the country, the government underfunds it.

And here we are... Sheila Fraser, of course, testifying before the Aboriginal Affairs Committee; and I think many of us, at least, in this room would agree that Sheila Fraser has got to be one of the most credible women in Ottawa who served in that office. And she's saying departmental officials—she's talking about aboriginal affairs there—and staff from First Nations agencies have told us that child welfare services in First Nations communities are not comparable to those off-reserve.

Now, this isn't new. I have access to information and documents in the government that called the situation in, British Columbia, for example, where they're using a funding formula called “Directive 20-1” as creating a dire situation for children. They go on to say that dire situation is because the funding formula for child welfare is structured so that you remove kids but there's no funding in there to keep kids in their families.

And I also worry about, “Oh my gosh, what are these kids going to do when they grow up? They might come and sue us as the federal government.”

So they're buttressing themselves for another wave of lawsuits from these kids who grew up in foster care instead of in their families.

We're going to talk about Mosquito Advocacy in a minute, how we actually take on groups like this in these situations. But one thing that's really important to know is I will not criticize the government unless they know about the inequality, they know about the harms to children, and we've been a part of a solution.

In this particular case, we sat at the government's table for over 10 years. We developed not one... we developed *two* evidence-based solutions, the last one with over twenty leading researchers including five economists. We released it in 2005. The federal government entirely agreed with it. It would have cost only a small percentage of the surplus budget to implement, and they walked away from it. They walked away from it.

And this is where negotiations become addictive. We look across the table and we see good people sitting across who'll tell us, "We just need to keep working. There's a new government coming in place just next year; just be patient. You know, what we really need is more data. If we had more data on this, we could actually turn the corner on this issue." Or "I know it's not this year's budget, but we're going to do our best for next year's budget."

The problem with that is that nothing changes for the kids in the meantime. During that time when we were at that table, roughly the same time period—1995 to 2001, the number of First Nations children going into child welfare care on-reserve, according to the government's own data, rose 71-1/2 percent.

So what do you do?

At this point, we're a small First Nations organization. The most staff we've ever had is five. We sat at the table for 10 years. We got the best research. And we've talked academics in the country. People like John Loxley and Nico Trocmé, really people who are just many of our heroes.

Do you sit around the table and develop Solution #3 and hope they'll do something?

Well, the one thing that gave us hope is that we knew Canadians believed in fairness. And this is a small sample poll but it gives you a pretty good indication that when you ask the person on the street whether funding for kids should be the same on- and off-reserve, many of them believe it's true.

But I had to come to understand something really important, a humble moment in my life. I was honored to travel to India, and I was there at Gandhi's house—for those of you who've been here... of course, a hero to us all.

And I'm one of those museum goers that's just very quick. I go in and I see the highlights and I'm out the door. Anybody else like that here? Yeah, I'll see you all in the gift shop.

But I was with somebody who's one of those folks who... you know, they go right for the headphone set. And they're looking at every target and they read every plaque, right? It drives me nuts? But they do that. You see these people at the art gallery. And they'll stand in front of the same painting for 20 minutes? I was thinking—what are you looking at? Anyway, that's another topic.

So, I went and I was so impressed and overwhelmed by all of these great teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, but I got on the outside and there's a maintenance man. And he's leaning against the door smoking a cigarette. And since I was the only one out there, he asked me what I did for a living which is a fatal question in my case because I'm a talker.

So I went on about how we've got these little kids and we just want them to have a chance to grow up in their families. We're meeting with these bureaucrats. They keep smiling at us but not doing a lot, time and time again.

And so, I go on for the entire time that he's smoking a cigarette. But, finally, he's finished. So he throws it out and steps on it. And I have to take a breath which I think he was just eternally grateful for.

So he says, "Okay, let me get this straight. You know about this inequality and those does the government."

"Yeah."

"And you work out solutions and they don't implement. And you keep on going back to the same table and they keep on telling you the same thing."

And I said, "Yeah."

And he says, "Didn't you learn anything in that house? Gandhi knew that governments don't create change; they *respond* to change. Your conversation needs to be with the Canadian people and not with the government. The society needs to change in a way that a climate for a new conversation emerges."

And so, I went back in. I got the headphones and I went through the tour. [Laughter] And that led to this.

You know, when we created the Caring Society back in 1998 on the Squamish First Nation, the Squamish First Nation was generous enough to give us a hall and to donate some salmon. And that's all we had. We had no other money.

We had, though, some wonderful elders guiding us. And these elders said, “If you're going to create this national organization, we want you to do two things: Number one, never fall in love with the Caring Society. Never fall in love with it. And never fall in love with your title. Only fall in love with the children because you must be prepared to sacrifice both those things if the time comes—for them. You only exist to serve them.”

The second piece of advice we were given is: “Tell us when you're prepared to die as an organization. We want to know when you reach that tipping point that you're going to go all in for the kids. Tell us what that is.”

And we said it was if Canada did not implement that second solution for kids and give them a chance to grow up with their families. And that day came. They were sitting around the table.

What do we do?

The Assembly of First Nations had passed a resolution with the chiefs saying, “File a human rights complaint against the government of Canada.”

Okay, now, if we did that, we're going to lose of all our funding. This is a democracy but let's face it. Democracy becomes very limited when you take on the government.

But we realized, as a group, what we had promised the elders. And we decided collectively that we'd rather die on our feet than live on our knees. The least these kids deserved from us was to know that we loved them enough to fight for them.

And so, it was that on February 27, 2007, in the House of Commons, we attended a news conference with National Chief Phil Fontaine; and we announced to the world that we were about to launch a human rights complaint against the government of Canada alleging that they are racially discriminating against this generation of children.

There was nobody there.

I can still remember walking out on Parliament that day. It was a beautiful sunny day in Ottawa; and I remember the sound of my heels going down the steps.

Where was everybody? I wondered. What if that Canadians didn't care? Did they think these kids deserved it?

All those things went through my mind but, then, I realized that wasn't it at all. They're just like Gandhi and Shannen Koostachin and Jordan River Anderson and many others who inspired me. I had to believe in the goodness of people. I had to believe that if they knew about this inequality, they had a chance to do something about it, that they would do something about it.

And over the years, we created this “I am a witness” campaign. We load up all of Canada's court documents onto that website and all of ours—the auditor general's reports and everything. We



don't ask people to take a side. We just ask people to watch because we believe in the freedom and integrity of individuals to make up their own minds.

And what's been astounding is, today, there are over 12,000 individuals and organizations from all over the world watching this case. It is the most watched human rights case in Canadian history.

The government of Canada has been trying to derail it on legal technicalities. They spent three million dollars trying to derail it on these arguments. They're saying, "They should never be heard by the Tribunal because it's not fair to compare our level of funding to federal government to that the provinces provide even if the same law applies." They took that argument all the way to the federal court of appeal and lost.

And then, in the absence of convincing Canadians about that one, they say, "Well, I don't actually deliver child welfare as the Feds. I have these social workers working for these agencies who are. So if you're providing a lesser standard of service, it's *you* that should be on the hook for the discrimination claim, not me as a funder. It's called funding as a service. On those two issues, they blew three million dollars of our money that could have gone to help kids, trying to escape a full hearing.

But, thankfully, with the support of many in which I'm going to talk about in a minute, the unbelievable, the impossible happened. See, people often dismiss children but, really, they're the keepers of the possible. If you're going to tackle the impossible, it's kids that you need to listen to.

And, on February 25, 2013, against all odds, we walked into the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and began what is to be 14 weeks of evidence where the government of Canada will be held to account for its current treatment of First Nations children before a body that can make a binding decision and order them to do the right thing for kids going forward.

It is the first time *anywhere in the world* that a national government has been held so accountable. And it was made possible because a lot of small people came together and made it happen. And when I say "small people," I mean it literally. [Laughter]

This is the court room. This is federal court, February 14, 2012, Canada's last effort to try and derail the hearings. They were so many people who wanted to come to the hearings we had to move them to the Supreme Court of Canada building. And the people who wanted to come to the hearings tended to be those that are too small to go on the big rides of the amusement park.

Now, you might wonder what kids would possibly have to say about this. How can kids understand such a complicated legal thing?

Well, this group actually came the morning that Canada is presenting its arguments on service. And this one little guy, he's having his granola bar during the snack period because the court's

been fairly good. They know they have to adjust their schedule a bit. Snacks and naps are important.

So this kid gets a notepad because his teacher told him being a witness is like being a reporter. So those of you who are journalists, this will appeal to you. And he drew a line down his paper. And he says, “Okay, on this side of the paper, we're going to put all these tallies—one, two, three, four, five—long list. And on this side, there's a short list. And he tracks me down during the break and he says, “Cindy, do you know what this is?”

Isn't that difficult when kids hold up art and you don't know what the heck it is? [Laughter] I've never figured out a good response for that; I just kind of smile.

Anyway, he realized I didn't have a clue; and he says, “The long list is when the judge asked Canada people a question. And the short list is when they answered.

I came out and there was about a seven-year-old girl there; and she said, “Why are all these people talking about everything except for what's best for kids in that room? I thought this was about kids.”

You know, children are experts in love and fairness, and they can see when something is wrong. And they want to be a part of making it right.

Now, if you're Canada's lawyers, this is a very interesting situation in a court, one unfamiliar to you. And the kids will often come up and one of the things they have is autograph books. And they like to get everybody's autographs including those from the government of Canada.

The government tends to feel this is a little bit awkward but, nonetheless, they are signing it. So all these kids are a part of history; they are really shaping what the future of the country is. And so, you may be looking forward to your coffee break if you were not one of those who believes in equity and this is what you would find outside.

These are the kids in front of the House of Parliament. What have they done? These are children of every possible culture, economic group, racial group; and they are standing together because they know it's not right for the type of country and society they want to grow up in for any child to get less from the government because of who they are.

And they've written letters to the government, too. And what I've started to understand... I'm not a politician; I've never ran for anything, not even student council. But I understand this much. There's nothing more scary to politicians than a kid with a sign [Laughter] except for kids with signs and microphones. [Laughter]

Now, I should point out that in this picture, the kid with the orange hat is not an NDP supporter as far as we know. [Laughter] The blue are not Conservatives; and the red are not Liberals. They are there because they know the people inside can make this right.

So what do they say in their letters?

Well, Bethany steps up. She's a beautiful little girl. And I'm hoping you'll go to the "FNwitness" website and you can actually see her talking. She has beautiful blond ponytails and she's about nine years old. And she gets up there and she says, "Dear Prime Minister Harper, I think you should go back to Grade 5 [Laughter] because that's where you'll learn about something called the 'Charter of Rights and Freedoms.' And if you've read that thing, you would know that you have to treat everybody fair."

And then, there's Harry. He steps up and he says, "Dear Prime Minister Harper, do you have a cat? I have a cat. He's name is Mika. He's a boy and he's black." And then, he gets right down to business. He says, "Stephen Harper, listen to me. If you do not build more schools, you're going to create a crime wave and lose all of your money because kids who cannot go to school cannot get a job; and they're going to grow up and still need money, so some of them are going to have to steal it. And the people in the community are going to get mad because crooks are invading their homes. And since you're in charge, you're going to have to fix this mess. So you better get out in front of it and build more schools. Love, Harry." [Laughter]

Now, I don't know about you but I think the kids actually make much more sense about this.

And then there's the very tragic story of Jordan's Principle, Jordan River Anderson staying in a hospital unnecessarily for two and a half years before dying there simply because governments were arguing over who should pay for his at-home services.

Well, the government of Canada and the provincial governments have never implemented Jordan's principle.

So what I think they should do and I think you should do this because you have an election coming. Have all of your leaders of your political parties come with me to a Grade 3 class because they know how to solve it.

Whenever I have a problem I can't solve, I go to Grade 3 classes. So I say to the kids, "The feds and the provinces are arguing over who should pay for services for First Nations kids. Who knows how to fix that?"

All of them put up their hands; and so I call on this little guy. And he says, "Rock-paper-scissors." [Laughter]

You know, like what happens in these houses of Parliament, right? Does all common sense get drawn out of their brains? It's like we have to do the right thing. It's not that difficult.

So that's our story. How did we get there?

A lot of groups who say that they're really small feel overwhelmed when you're taking on something as big as Canada or a corporation. What I'm going to say to you is that is your best asset; that and a bit of desperation always helps.

Now, this is an approach we use at the Caring Society and it's designed for groups that have an evidence-informed solution. So this is not for groups who just think they have a good idea.

Especially when you're working for children, it's absolutely essential that you're out there talking to First Nations community members, that you're getting what *they* think is important, that you're backing that up with the very best research, that you're open to contrary points of view, and that you're advancing a *solution*.

A lot of people complain about problems. Well, that's easy to do. What we need to be doing is focusing on solutions especially when it comes to children because they only have one childhood. They can't wait for us to get our act together. We've got to start doing something right now. So it has to be evidenced-based.

So we've got the problem documented. We have an evidence-based solution. The government has the resources to do it.

Now, they're all saying that they're broke at the moment. I always find this so entertaining because when I'm broke, I'm really broke. I can't afford 1.2 billion dollars to spend on a party for the G20, for example, or a million dollars to send the Prime Minister's limousines over to India.

Those are not signs of a broke country. It's a sign that we really can re-profile our resources in a different way. If we would have spent that \$1.2 billion that we spent on the G8 for children, even children in the world, the World Health Organization says we would have seen a benefit of five to seven dollars coming back to taxpayers around the world.

The best economic stimulus you can make is in a child.

So it's not about that they're broke. They've got the money. And the government doesn't implement the change.

What do you do? That brings you to Mosquito Advocacy.

How did I come up with the term?

Well, I grew up in the rural and remote parts of northern B.C. And when we were filing this case against the government of Canada, I remembered... I was thinking—now, what's really small and does a lot of damage?

And immediately what came to me is if you see pictures of me as a little girl, I was always a fashionista, right? I'd be sitting there in my little green polka dot dress with my green polka dot

cardigan to match in reversing colors, of course—you don't want too much polka dot—and my black patent shoes; and I'd be holding fish, right?

But I'd also always choose the stump that sat in the smoke. Why? Because that's the only place the mosquitoes didn't get at you. I would be moving along my stump in whatever the direction the wind would come.

So what is it that mosquitoes have to teach us about advocacy?

Number one, they're small and they use that to their advantage, right? They're infectious. They're target oriented. They're not asking all over the place.

Remember the *Spirit Level* book? That gives us what I call the “first domino solution.” And that's what gets us this strategy.

So go after the public ask that gives the best benefit. To me, it's reducing those inequalities. If we do that, that pays off not only for First Nations but for all people. It doesn't matter if you want your program funded. I'm not interested in that. That doesn't get the type of benefit that you want. If you're going to make a public ask, go for the big ask. That's my push to all of you. Clear out all the nonsense and get to the public with a message they can understand.

The thing is you've got to make it understandable, and there's a great book that all of you should buy. I really do need to get Chapters to give us a charitable donation for this. It's called “*Don't Think of an Elephant.*” It's how to frame up your message in a way that people can understand.

So many folks come up to me and they tell me about their issues. And I have to be honest; sometimes, even my eyes are glazing over because I'm just like, “Oh, my God!” You know, you just can't understand what they're telling you or it's in such a non-compelling way.

With Jordan's Principle, for example, instead of saying, “Jordan's principle means that where service is available to all other children, the First Nations children get to access it,” I could have gone into, you know, the British North America Act, and then there was Section 88 of the Indian Act and that created this jurisdictional quagmire and kids find themselves in the middle of that. That doesn't get you the same place as Jordan's Principle does.

So learn how to frame your message. And what George Lakoff tells us is just what Gandhi and many of the elders told us before: “Embed your message in deep national values.”

Think about Martin Luther King for a moment. King did not ask for affirmative action programs. He talked about freedom because freedom is an essential human value.

We all, at the end of the day, want to be free to be who we are. Go after those values because, then, people can connect.

The other thing... and let's just take a poll. I just want to see how many people were as silly as I was and made the same mistake. How many people when a new government comes into power takes up the language of the new government? So accountability and transparency in your proposals—let's be honest here.

Alright, the rest of you are not sure about your honesty. [Laughter] But, anyway... because I've seen, so far, too many proposals like this.

George Lakoff says that's completely wrong. He's a linguist, and he says that the way we create language is in deep cognitive frames.

Think about the title of his book. I want you to think of an animal but I don't want you to think of an elephant.

That's why, in many ways, George W. Bush only had five words in his vocabulary. It wasn't all genetic. It was because he was reinforcing these messages. And when you argued against him, it would reinforce that same message. So it was good communication strategy.

So don't take up their message. Make sure you're being clear about what *your* message is; and when we're talking about children, that's easy to do in very authentic ways.

The second thing is: Build a swarm.

I go to so many so-called “networking functions” where you get people from one agency who are coming there to network; and they sit together like glue. They're all at the lunch table together. No one wants to go to a workshop by themselves. And they all come back together.

Well, we have some great elders on the Caring Society board who said, “We do not want you going to workshops where you know anybody. They're not the people who need to hear this message. And they're not the people who can educate us about how we could do things differently either.”

When I walk into a conference, I have an agenda; and it's not a hidden agenda. My agenda is to get you all to sign up for Jordan's Principle, the “I am a witness” Campaign, and Shannen's Dream before I leave. So I will sit at the back and come into a conference table. I'll find a table where I know nobody. That's how I identify my table. I usually sit in the back. I hate VIP tables because those are people that I know. So I will tell people discreetly I'm not going to sit there; I'll go sit in the back.

And then, by the time I start to talk, I want all of you wearing “I am witness” badges. And I want to make you feel either... I'm going to either get you to do it because you're guilty or you just want to get rid of me. But you are going to wear one.

And the thing is you've got to come at it from a point of view of understanding that your best allies are not your friends. They're the unexpected allies.

Cindy Blackstock

When we started Jordan's Principle website, we had this online sign-up things that you can do. And they're not petitions because petitions are private. I could get all of you to sign up in this row, and then deliver it to you, and only you and I would know that everybody signed up. Instead, what I do is I create a website and I ask people to sign up online.

Now, people say, "Well, the government will never get that."

But the government is concerned about everything, and the government is the most frequent visitor to the Caring Society website by far. And when we originally started and it was only like groups that were signing up, the government would only be on three or four times a week because I have a program that picks up when the government is on my website. I think I'm going to send them a membership form. [Laughter]

But when groups like the Canadian postal workers signed up or mechanics in garages or cosmetic companies or right-wing political parties, the government was on there three and four times a day.

When you go to a meeting, don't just bring the usual allies. They're like mosquitoes. They don't come right in a row, like "here we are" so you can clap them off, right?

But, too often, what we've relied on is a negotiating table and a roadblock. We've to get more creative than that, right, because I know how to deal with those things. So you've got to build a swarm.

Engage unexpected groups. And how do you do that?

Number one, you frame your message in an infectious way based on national values that appeal to everybody. And don't bamboozle people. Make sure it's evidence-based. I always say to people, "Read the auditor general's reports."

The last thing I want to do is erode the credibility of the movement by giving somebody misinformation. That does not work in your favor.

Then, the other thing is to create ways for people to make a difference.

So we have these bookmarks, "I am a witness," FNwitness.ca, and I hand them out to everybody in the room. That way, all of you can go on there and do it.

Number two, in a petition, how old do you need to be to sign a petition?

Nineteen.

And what is the largest demographic in the aboriginal community?

Below that age group!

Cindy Blackstock

So why would I be cutting out all these potential supporters when they could be doing something?

So you do that piece.

And you do need someone who can do public speaking. And there's a great book by Mario Cuomo. I don't mean to be partisan here because both Lakoff and Cuomo are Democrats. But Cuomo, I think, is one of the very best public speakers in contemporary times or, at least, was.

I used to watch the Democratic National Convention just to hear him talk because he's one of these people, like many of the elders, who can tell a story and you actually see pictures in your mind when they're talking. Time escapes you.

So how does he do that?

Well, he has a whole book in there about how you do these things. And one of the things I learned from him is to include the rebuttal in my keynotes.

So I will talk about financial mismanagement, for example. We've all heard that financial mismanagement is a racial characteristic of First Nations. Now, if that's true, if race is a predictor of financial mismanagement, then, in 2008, when I was watching my bank account, investments hit the tank and I saw the cast of characters in Wall Street doing that. None of them were Native American.

And what did we do? We gave them bonuses for doing such a good job.

So is it a characteristic there? What about the fiasco in Montreal? Why aren't we saying that that is a racial characteristic? Why is it that we only characterize First Nations folks in that way?

And it's not that there aren't people mismanaging money who are First Nations just as there are of all cultures. The problem is when we generalize it.

So by dealing with those things right in the speech, you take away that awkward moment and you put it out there—expose it.

Come from all directions, like I said. And come all the time. You know, use Access to Information. Get out there and do talks. Do media interviews. Get the kids out there writing letters. There are all kinds of things you can do for completely free.

Be persistent.

An elder once told me you need four things to change the world. He said, “Knowledge and a lot of people have that; persistence and some people have that; passion and a lot of people will criticize you for that; and spirit and you need to remember that.”



And I see, so often, people give up. This whole effort of being in a courtroom that day was paved by the footsteps of many others who came before us, and it came to happen because we did not give up despite the barriers.

And here's the other thing. You will never have anything lined up.

When we filed that court case against Canada, we had \$50,000 in the bank for my keynote monies. That's it. All of our federal funding was gone within 30 days.

But you've just got to believe in the spirit. You've got to believe that it's going to be okay. And even if it isn't, you've got to believe that it was the right thing to do to stand up even if you don't make it. It's all, at the end of the day, really about how much you personally are prepared to sacrifice. It goes back to that elder's teaching. You've got to know how much you're prepared to sacrifice.

And the bite—mosquitoes don't mess around. I don't know if many people know about this. Actually, a biologist told me about it who came to one of my talks. He said, “You know, it was kind of ironic because only the female mosquitoes bite.” I think that's true in many communities. [Laughter]

And what I'm talking about that is the biting action is something that takes away this simply being arbitrary decision-making. And it must be done in peaceful and respectful ways. That's why we use the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

And I said at the opening of the tribunal, I don't want the tribunal members to decide this case on what's best for me or the Caring Society or what's best even for the Assembly of First Nations or what's best for the government. They must make this decision on the basis of what's best for the children. If they do that, then, we will all win.

So what about this idea of being small?

I'm going to wrap up with this and another story. I'm going to introduce you to Dave Morris and Helen Steel. Anybody know?

Dave is a postal worker. Helen is a gardener. And they're from the UK. They joined this little group called “Greenpeace,” not the Greenpeace you and I know about but another Greenpeace. And one of the things they're concerned about are these big multi-national organizations like McDonald's coming in and wrecking UK society, and not only their own society but the societies of many people around the world.

And what they're particularly concerned about is... they're saying that the wages are not very good and the food is not nutritious. I know that comes as a shock to many of us, but these are the allegations.

So they write up a pamphlet and they decide the best place to distribute these pamphlets is right below McDonald's UK headquarters in London. So they're out there and they're sending around flyers.

Now, in the past, when the press has published one of these disparaging stories such as "McDonald's food is not nutritious" or "Their wages suck," the lawyers from McDonalds would contact the press and gently encourage them to retract the story which they would do immediately.

So it's no surprise that the CEOs from McDonalds Corporation peer down on to the street and call down to legal and say, "There's another problem for you. Go deal with these granola-crunching hippies downstairs with these pamphlets."

And so it was. The lawyers followed orders. And they head down there and they confront the whole group of protesters and they start handing out "writs" saying that they're going to sue you if you don't retract your statement and say you're sorry. That's all we want, for you to say you're sorry.

So most of the group cave—except for Dave Morris, a single parent and postal worker and Helen Steel. Why should they apologize when what they're saying is right, they say?

So McDonald's says, "We're going to make a lesson out of you. We're going to take you to court."

Now, these two cannot afford a lawyer. So what do they do? They decide they're going to represent themselves.

In a great David and Goliath battle, you've got McDonalds coming in with its whole corporate weight and legal team; and you have Helen and Dave with their homemade signs. The case goes on for *seven years*. It was the longest liability case in UK history.

And on the day of the judgment, by this time the courtroom was full of people from the community because they were appalled that this American multinational is bullying around these grassroots citizens.

And the judgment comes out.

The first lines of the judgment aren't encouraging. It says that there is really no evidence that McDonald's is pillaging rain forests through their gardening efforts for their McDonald's hamburgers. So the judge makes a judgment against Helen and against Dave for that.

But the thing is just teeming with reporters so that seems like it's going to be the deadline. And then, the judge says he's not finished. He says, "It turns out, however, that McDonald's does have some exploitive work practices." So you can see all the reporters erasing out Headline #1 and replacing it with Headline #2.

Cindy Blackstock

But it gets better. They are exploiting workers, and then the food is not nutritious. So all of that goes out—“Their food is not nutritious.”

And then, we've all seen the Ronald McDonald play parks. Helen and Dave said those are exploiting kids. They're trying to create these play parks do the kids will be in there asking and bugging mama, dad, and caregivers to eat non-nutritious food.

The judge agrees. This is exploitation of children. So even better—“Exploitation of kids in the UK” headlines.

And McDonald's is not nice to animals. So not only did they exploit kids, they're not nice to animals. That is all over the UK headlines.

Does McDonald's corporation ever collect on its funds from Helen and Dave? Not on your life!

And how do Helen and Dave celebrate?

Well, they felt there was no more appropriate thing to do than to get to the printing press, to go out in front of McDonald's headquarters and hand out some more brochures. [Laughter]

You know, do you think Helen and Dave would have been as effective if they had glossy signs made up by a public relations firm—anybody? Do you think that they would have been as compelling if they weren't people standing on principle? Do you think they would have been compelling if they were a big group?

It was because they were two grassroots people standing up for what's right. That's what got the public attention and wins the day.

So when you're dealing with the big guy, you don't want to match him on size. There's one good thing about bureaucracies. The larger the organization, the thicker, the bureaucracy, the slower they are, and the less creative they are.

The smaller you are, the quicker you can move.

Like in my organization, we have four people. So decision making tends to go really quick—especially if it's a decision I want agreed to by myself. I just say, “Self, do we want to do this? Yes, we do.” Done!

Whereas Canada has to go through 15 layers of all kinds of craziness to get anything out the door. So know that's your asset.

The second is: Speak authentically about the issue and know when to say ‘no’ to money.

In this whole thing, we could have asked for funds for me, personally, and all kinds of things. We've not done that.

If you're going to stand up for principle and say the money has to go to the kids, then, that's what it means. It doesn't mean you getting any money back. So we won't even get our court trial costs back in this fight.

But at the end of the day, the Caring Society may not survive this fight. But, at least, we did what was the right thing to do. And I think that's why so many people have rallied around us.

And the big guys are well resourced, but that doesn't mean that they think better. There seems to be something that comes with the big organization; it kind of dumbs it down, you know.

People who are creative and just in a small group, we can come up with good ideas by brainstorming and leveraging each other's strengths.

So this is a sign that the kids made; and like many of my ideas, I steal them from children with their permission. But this is a sign that they made that I really think speaks to many of us. It says, "Just because we're small doesn't mean we can't stand tall."

So never, never feel intimidated or scared. And I know that's easy to say but let's face it, I've had Canada on my Facebook page. And when I tell people... they say, "Well, doesn't that freak you out?"

Of course, it does. But I am much more afraid of growing up in a country where kids are racially discriminated against than I am of anything that they can hand out.

So what do you do? Maybe you're not a great public speaker. I, personally, by the way, come from the scared-stiff school of public speaking so I should give everybody hope. I transferred out of courses in university and everything to try and dodge the dreaded presentation. That's how I ended up in, God forbid, 17th century literature. [Laughter]

And so, anyway, I'm still recovering from that whole experience. I think, more than anything, that was probably one of the things that helped me get over my public speaking skill. That 17th century literature course, that was the pathway of life if I didn't start opening my mouth. So I realized right then and there it was time for a change.

But all of us come with different gifts. And what I see a lot of people do when they're trying to organize something is they look for people and they'll say "task orientation." So they'll say, "We have to have someone for a budget," and that's when everybody dives under the chair. And there's some poor soul sitting there who knows something about finance who ends up getting shelved with this.

It's not the right way to do it and it's not the way we do at the Caring Society. What we want to do is honor the very special gifts that each of us comes with and leverage those for public policy advocacy.

So here's another book: *The Element* by Ken Robinson.

Ken argues that you're in your element... many elders have told us, you're in your element not just when you're *good* at something because I'm pretty good at running an NGO. We've managed to stay incorporated and everything else. I don't really like it.

When those financial statements come by on my desk and I have to look at the balance sheets, it's kind of like not my whole enthusiastic self is there. It's when you're doing something you're good at and you're passionate about.

And Robinson says that, too often, we actually discourage people from their passions. He tells a wonderful story in this book about a little girl who was getting into trouble for always fidgeting in school. And so, this is the day, thank heaven, before Ritalin appeared on the scenes.

So her mother took her to a psychologist, the child psychologist. And the little girl is so aware that this is what gets her into trouble that she sits on her hands on the couch so that she wouldn't fidget. And the psychologist is talking to the mom and going back and forward and getting some history. And he looks over at the little girl a few times.

And then, he says to her, "Would you mind if I just talk to your mom outside for just a few minutes?"

"Oh, that's okay."

And he turns on his radio before he leaves and then he walks with her outside and he leaves the door slightly ajar; and he says to the mother, "Put her into dance school." She was up on her feet dancing to the music. She became one of the foremost choreographers and ballerinas in the world. And her gift was something that was being put to the side.

So what I do with the children or with the members of the community who come, I ask them, "What is it that you love and you're passionate about? If you can cook, then, not only can you join our campaign, you can move into my house because I hate cooking." [Laughter.]

We have kids who are good at building things. They build the school mailboxes that we put all our letters in. We have kids who are good at planning things. They plan Have Heart Day events for all the children.

We have children who can sing. We have children who are good at mathematics and they do the budgets. We have children who are good at thinking about things, reflecting on things.

So find out.

What I do in a circle when I have a few people is I'll say, "What is your element? I want you to go around and tell me that first. And then, I'm going to give you a job based on that. Why wouldn't you use that to your advantage, right?"

And here's the big one that comes to the personal sacrifice. You've got to manage backfire. If you're going to come up against the big guys, you've got to know that they're going to come back at you.

And this is a great article by Gray and Martin (2006), and it talks about the way that organizations will typically backfire when they're up against it.

Who was it that said... I said it was Nelson Mandela who said, "First, they ignore you; then, they laugh at you; then, they fight you; then, you win." This is for when they fight you.

And what I'll do is I'll try and cover it up, and we've seen this time and time again in different forms, right, not only in government but in other areas of life as well. People just want to sweep it under the old carpet and pray that nobody opens up their mouth. That's why we all have to value and support whistle blowers.

I mean, thank heaven for these people who've got the courage and the guts to rise above all that and speak out.

Devaluation of the target: They're going to say, "Hey, you know what, is that an official degree?" They're going to try and devalue the target of the person who is bringing forward the issues. They're going to try and make the conversation about them, i.e., that financial mismanagement thing is a good tactic by the government to use time and time again.

"Let's refocus it on this financial mismanagement issue," when it's really not about that at all. It's about inequities and funding.

They'll use reinterpretation of what happened. The Iraq War is the gold standard on this. Now, even I have forgotten all the reasons, but I think the U.S. government went in there because of Al-Qaeda. But when that did not pan out, then, it was weapons of mass destruction. Then, when that did not pan out, it was about freeing the Iraqi people.

You know, and that's what happens, right? You reinterpret what happens, and it'll actually take a lot of public people with you because people don't have good memories.

The use of official procedures to give the appearance of justice:

Let's strike a committee. If I was a government body not wanting to do anything, the first thing I'd want is someone to ask me for an inquiry or committee. I would say, "Let's do it."

Sure, we've had tons of them. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was a good example. It set the whole pathway away from the Indian Act. And it was never implemented—still a very valuable, good piece of work.

So we have to be very cautious of this one. And this one, personally, I think, we get sucked into a lot. And it's not that you don't want to an obstruction to government. You've just got to know when the time is up to move on to other things that are going to work better.

And then, in the absence of that, intimidation and bribery, right?

And this article by Gray and Martin, you can Google it and find it yourselves because you have all kinds of strategies of how to put up with this; but what I'm going to tell you is this:

Number one, you have to be centered on your values. Never reprise with nasty behavior.

So when Canada was on my personal Facebook page because they're trying to find other motives for the child welfare case, when they were taking the URLs of other people who are posting comments about my cookies including a 12-year-old kid, did I go on to *their* Facebook pages even though I have the names of all these public servants? Did I release their names publicly?

No! What I did is try to bring the spotlight on what they had done. I went to CBC, *The Current*. I said, "This is what happened. This is the documents that I have."

It shocks me that this is happening in what's supposed to be a free country to someone who has no criminal record, has never been arrested, and doesn't even have a parking ticket. Is this the real type of Canada we want to grow up in?

Never get down into the muck. If you do that, they've already won.

I absolutely say to people, "You cannot care about children and advocate for children if you yourself are not acting in honorable ways. It begins with you. So you've got to know that and you've got to be prepared to stand up for that."

And one of the things that people have said to me, "Well, you know, you could have lost your job" or "You're going to lose your organization in this."

I did have my privacy revoked and I was telling people, I said, "The worst part of that privacy violation is my 17-year-old nephew who has been living with me, who I had already talked to him about Internet safety, but now I had to tell him that government of Canada was on our Facebook page."

I was trying to say that in a way that he wouldn't be scared. And so, you have to try and say these things; and then, I said, "Oh, and, by the way, just in case you see a moving bush out in the front lawn, it may not be your hallucination."

But you have to expect that it's going to come for you and your best response is to shine a bright shining light on it. Don't get in the muck with them, ever. It will backfire and it will reduce the credibility of your whole movement.

Cindy Blackstock

I think, with that, I've already gone overtime. I'm just going to encourage you to do one important thing.

Wesley Prankard, the eleven year old who raised \$90,000 for a playground in Attawapiskat will tell you: Caring is not enough. It doesn't do anything to make things right. It's a starting point. The real test is what you *do*.

What are you personally prepared to do? How much are you prepared to sacrifice to stand up for the moral good? And how long are you prepared to take it?

A dear mentor of mine, Hennie Kerstiens used to say, "Tall trees catch a lot of wind." But isn't that the role of every adult in this country—is to catch the wind so our kids don't have to?

At the end of the day, the children are going to win this case; and when they do, all Canadians are going to win it as well. And the real magic of it is not what happens in the courthouse, it's in that binding together of non-aboriginal and aboriginal children standing together for what's right.

It's the thousands and thousands of children who are going out and talking to other children about the type of Canada and world that they want to grow up in. That's where real change happens.

What we need to do is to be the lighting force behind their efforts and to make sure that we never miss a chance to do the right thing for them because, in the end, no matter how great we are, our collective destiny is to be forgotten. No one will remember our names in another hundred years.

So the very best thing we can do is breathe forward the very best of humanity and ensure those breathes are shared in those babies a hundred years from now and that it's only the good we gave them that they're having to deal with.

Thank you very much.