

# HEART & SPIRIT

In November of 2015, workers from the Sarnia-Lambton Children's Aid participated in training for HEART and SPIRIT. HEART AND SPIRIT is a program that was developed by Mnaassged Child and Family Services, and purchased by The Association of Native Child and Family Service Agencies of Ontario (ANCFSAO) with the purposes of providing a culturally appropriate alternative to SAFE and PRIDE; (the OACAS home assessment and foster parent training programs) to Indigenous families.

A number of staff were trained in this program with the hopes that it would be offered to Indigenous families currently being served by the society, and that the feedback received would contribute towards the efforts of getting this culturally appropriate home study and care giving training tool sent to the Ministry for approval of official use.

At the start of 2016, five families participated in weekly three-hour sessions over the course of several weeks at the Maawn Doosh Gumig Community and Youth Centre on Aawmjiwnaang First Nation.

This program is strength-based; uses Indigenous practices to engage parents; engages elders as an important part of the learning process; as well as builds collective strength through sharing and storytelling. Upon completion of the program, participants were asked to provide feedback on the program and facilitation of the program.

Some comments included:

"Overall, it was the best training I've gone to. It has been very educational. The trainers did a good job encouraging conversation."

"Enjoyed the course. Would take it over again. Help a lot with learning more about the native life for my great grand-babies."

"Was very interesting and was explained in a clear way how residential schools affected our parents and grandparents."

"I enjoyed the Heart and Spirit very much. A lot of useful information. Great activities."

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The Sarnia-Lambton Children's Aid Society has taken Indigenous guiding principles and values of the HEART and SPIRIT program and has combined it with CIRCLE OF SECURITY, a highly acclaimed, relationship-based early intervention program, designed to enhance attachment security between parents and children. The goal is provide the Indigenous families we serve with the historic and culturally relevant knowledge, tools, and skills needed to better understand their child's needs, and improve the relationship they have with their child(ren). The SLCAS just recently completed this program for the first time; and will offer this program again in the near future.

Learning Objectives and Goals of the Training Include:

Understand your child's emotional world by learning to read the emotional needs

Support your child's ability to successfully manage emotions

Enhance the development of your child's self esteem

Honor your innate wisdom and desire for your child to be secure

Explore needs of belonging, acceptance, and security; reexamined within a cultural frame of reference

Reconnect with Indigenous family and clan system concepts

Understand the impact of historical multi-generational family trauma on Indigenous family systems

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