

**"WALKING THE PATH TOWARDS COMMUNITY  
AND FAMILY WELL-BEING: VISION AND REALITIES"**

**A Board of Directors Training Workshop Report  
June 25 and 26, 1990**

**Frank Maidman, Ph.D  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

This report reviews and assesses the recent OTFS Board of Directors' workshop, held on June 25-26, 1990 in Kenora. The workshop was timely, given that several Board members were relatively new and had not received previous training. For this reason the main purpose of the event was to review the OTFS family support service model.

As well, drawing on the 1988 organizational review, the workshop examined some of the realities facing OTFS, particularly those challenges in implementing the family support model. These themes of review and challenge were embodied in the workshop theme, "Walking the Path Towards Community and Family Well-being: Vision and Realities".

A copy of the agenda is included as Appendix "A".

## **WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES**

Pursuing the theme of reviewing both OTFS vision and realities, the workshop objectives were as follows:

- (i) To review the OTFS family support model
- (ii) To review highlights of the OTFS organizational review
- (iii) To review the functions and roles of the Board of Directors

## **METHODS**

The workshop featured a variety of training techniques including:

.lectures.learning logs.small groups

.large groups.reading materials

The workshop was also used as an opportunity to continue the development of the agency. This was accomplished through a problem-solving process in which members examined problems in implementing the service model and proposed ways of overcoming these problems.

A listing of the various issues and the proposed solutions are included in the body of this report.

Frank Maidman facilitated the workshop. Doug Keshen spoke on legal responsibilities on the second day. Stan Indian and Cheryl Alexander helped with planning, administration and co-ordination.

## **OPENING**

Elder Alex Skede opened the workshop with a traditional sweet-grass and pipe-smoking ceremony. Elder Skede spoke of traditional Ojibway values and beliefs, and how these are reflected in the sweat lodge and the drum. For example, the circular shape of the sweat lodge symbolizes the circle of life, and the importance of respect for life.

Colin Wasacase welcomed the participants and introduced some of the visions and realities of OTFS. He mentioned how the co-operation of Chief and Councils, staff, and other band staff will produce strong communities. That there still is a lot of work to do is reflected in the continuing problems of alcohol abuse and the apprehension of children. Colin also mentioned the progress of OTFS development, including The Sacred Circle, a new Youth Addiction

Program, and the training in self-awareness, "Flying on Your Own".  
Stan Indian welcomed the group and introduced the facilitator, Frank Maidman.

## **MILESTONES IN OTFS HISTORY**

For the benefit of new Board members, Frank Maidman reviewed some important stages in OTFS' history.

1983 The fourteen First Nations Chiefs propose a new Native controlled child and family service agency.

1984 Community consultations with each First Nation define the nature, philosophy and objectives of the new agency.

1985 Further development of OFTS is facilitated by Project Coordinator Lucille Michaud. Proposal writing and liaison with INAC results in a five year agreement with the Federal Government.

1986 OTFS/Canada Agreement is signed; OTFS becomes operational in March. The Native Prevention Program is taken over.

1988 OTFS further develops its structure and programming by incorporating the former NNADAP program into the organization. With major funding from the Provincial Ministry of Health, The Sacred Circle Suicide Prevention Program comes into being.

1988 OTFS organizational review.

1990 OTFS prepares for a new operational agreement

### **SERVICE GOALS**

Following the historical review, Frank Maidman identified three essential elements of the OTFS service model: (i) service goals

(ii) service principles, and (iii) service activities.

Service goals were reviewed as:

(i) Strengthening families rather than removing children from their families during times of crisis.

(ii) Identifying children in care of other agencies, institutions and authorities and facilitating the return of these children to their families in their respective communities.

- (iii) Initiating community education and support programs to prevent the removal of children from their families and home communities
- (iv) Providing outreach services to band members of the fourteen reserves.

Workshop participants were then asked to work individually and write what they regarded as the most significant and meaningful words or phrases in these objectives. As well, they were asked to note the reasons for their choices. Some significant observations were that...

.Promoting the return of children to their families continues to be important because children are still being removed.

.Strengthening families is still an important prevention focus, to build family spirit and unity. Strengthening families means providing support and care without creating dependency and transferring family responsibilities. Families must be supported while children are in care: OTFS is not a baby-sitting service

.Strengthening families takes its toll on staff; they, too, must be strengthened.

.Prevention programs continue to be important, particularly to combat alcohol abuse.

.Outreach services should attend to care-givers and children as well as parents with problems. Care-givers require support and assistance during temporary placements.

.Try to avoid removing children, although some parents do not seem to care. Children should not be victimized for their parents' misfortune and inadequacies.

## SERVICE PRINCIPLES

The next important component of the family support model is the series of service principles or guidelines governing the work of family support management and staff. Principles are ideals which give general direction to planning and service choices.

Frank Maidman reviewed the various service principles as follows:

- 1.All services should mobilize or energize the community in the support of families and the care of children; the communities' informal "natural" sources of support should be used.
- 2.Service decisions and practices should utilize the customary care traditions of family support and child-rearing, particularly the important roles of the extended family.
- 3.Services should be compatible with, and supported by, Ojibway cultural traditions and local community practices; services should not be artificially imposed upon existing communities; in other words, family support should be an integral part of community life.

4. Related to this, elders are identified as important human resources for family support, both at higher levels of guidance (eg. Council of Elders) and in specific support roles.

5. Family support services should be integrated with other band services in a community-based resource network.

6. Training and development is an important on-going requirement of family support in two ways:

-keeping all human resources knowledgeable and skilled in all facets of family support work, and

-doing the necessary community development work to keep each community aware of, cooperative and supportive of O.T.F.S.

Maidman identified the principles of customary care, the use of elders and cultural traditions, and integrated services as the most difficult or challenging principles to apply in practice.

Participants were divided into small groups to develop a thorough understanding of these issues, and to propose solutions. The results of these discussions are as follows:

### **1. Customary care: practical difficulties and solutions**

#### **The vision**

Service decisions and practices should utilize the customary care traditions of family support and child-rearing, particularly the important roles of the extended family.

#### **The reality**

OTFS staff do not always find it easy to make customary care placements and use the extended family.

#### **The issues**

.The difficulty of finding suitable homes due to the competition for C.A.S. funds, fear of reprisal from natural parents, unwillingness to take special needs children (eg. behavioral problems)

.The difficulty of working with natural parents during the placement; sometimes won't cooperate in family support planning

.Some customary parents want to keep the child longer.

.Current relationships between extended family members are not as strong as they were in previous generations. Today's families are not as intact.

- The traditional extended family structure and skills have been weakened as a result of past events (eg. boarding school), modern society (eg. bingo, both parents working), and problems (eg. alcohol/drug abuse). All of these mean that extended family members may not have the skills, willingness, or time to assume customary care of children at risk. Sometimes relatives transfer responsibilities to older children who are not capable.
- Agreements between the natural parents and customary care-givers have been poor or non-existent. Sometimes placements are done on the spur of the moment during emergencies. Mutual understandings are not established.
- The understanding and commitment to customary care traditions is weak because they have not been explained to young people.

### **Suggested solutions**

- community education on (a) parenting skills (b) the importance of the extended family, and (c) customary care
- training of Family Support Workers in traditional customary care and skills for arranging customary care placements
- Board policy discussion on customary care, financial arrangements, and customary care agreements (including legal implications)

### **Service Compatibility with Cultural Traditions and the Use of Elders**



### **The vision**

Services should be compatible with, and supported by, Ojibway cultural traditions and local community practices

### **The reality**

OTFS staff find it difficult at times to use cultural traditions.  
As well, some find it uncomfortable to approach Elders for advice.

### **Issues**

- .Communications are sometimes hampered by language barriers
- .Resistance to following traditions, particularly by younger generation
- .Confusion over the definitions of an "Elder" and how specifically to approach an Elder.
- .Because opinions vary, some families may not have confidence in a worker using cultural traditions.
- .Workers may not know when and how to apply traditional methods.
- .Other Band service providers may have other religious beliefs which conflict with OTFS staff or family; may not agree with type of treatment (eg. traditional alcohol treatment)

### **Solutions**

- .Workers should seek the necessary training (eg. participate in sweats and traditional ceremonies) to develop the knowledge and confidence to apply the concepts of tradition and culture.
- .Elders should be encouraged to share their knowledge through community workshops and 1-1 discussions.
- .Provide community awareness of how workers can play a role in implementing cultural traditions to assist in problem-solving
- .Encourage local, human resources to work together efficiently  
much like Grassy Narrows is attempting to do (eg. team case conferences)
- .Concerning the appropriate definition of an Elder, the key lies in the feeling of respect. Workers should follow their own personal guidelines, based on who they respect. If Elders are not available in a particular community, those in other First Nation communities should be approached.
- .A Council of Elders will be discussed at an up-coming meeting on Pow Wow Island; otherwise, a Council is likely to emerge when Elders are used at the community level.

## **Integration of Services**

### **The vision**

Family support services should be integrated with other band services in a community-based resource network.

### **The reality**

In many communities the co-operation and co-ordination among Band service personnel is not happening. In some instances there are poor communications between personnel. Some personnel are not available when needed. In other cases, band service personnel seriously disagree over their respective policies and procedures.

### **The issues**



- .In some cases, Band service personnel are seen as dumping their responsibilities on to OTFS Family Support Workers. This is partly due to the limited funding of some programs, and the Family Support Worker is perceived as having responsibilities in a number of different areas, including health, alcohol abuse, etc.
- .Funding criteria for some programs are viewed as too narrow, resulting in some Band staff having to neglect problems deemed as outside the program description. OTFS is viewed as a financially healthy organization, a perception that promotes requests to staff to do certain tasks (eg. driving a client to the hospital).
- .In some communities, Chief and Council are seen as not sufficiently supportive of integrated services.
- .The concern over client confidentiality is inhibiting the appropriate sharing of client information.
- .Some working relationships are strained because of the respective family memberships. For example, a Band staff member may be related to an OTFS' staff's client. The OTFS support may create disagreement or jealousy in the person who is a member of the extended family. Family support tends to affect family dynamics.
- .In some instances, Chief and Councils have assumed supervisory responsibility over OTFS and other Band staff. Yet, they may not have the time, program knowledge or supervisory skills to do an appropriate job.
- .The mandatory two-year elections of Chief and Council do not allow the stability and learning for sound development of supervisory systems. For example, with a new administration, Band staff and/or Family Support Committees may be relieved of their duties.
- .Family Support Committees, one source of organized integrated services, may not be sufficiently skilled or committed.

### **Suggested Solutions**

- .A community-based organizational development initiative which would create and support integrated services. In this initiative, each band would receive appropriate training and consultation. Organizational development would facilitate ...
- .clarification of (a) service staff responsibilities  
(b) accountability and supervision, and (c) team-building
- .on-going coaching and follow-up training for Family Support Committees, supervisors, and staff, in order to support and consolidate these new arrangements
- .An innovative funding arrangement whereby local service staff would not be underfunded and need to rely on other program staff to share duties. (eg. block social service funding allocated locally among the various services)

## **SERVICE ACTIVITIES**

### **Prevention Services**

Frank Maidman introduced the third element of the OTFS family support services model: service activities. Because OTFS is primarily a prevention service agency, Maidman began by introducing the three types of prevention services.

Primary prevention aims to build strengths in communities, families and individuals, so problems do not happen in the first place.

Secondary prevention strives to help high risk groups (eg. single parents) by giving them the skills, knowledge and attitudes to cope with, or solve problems.

Tertiary prevention provides service to those with problems, with the intent of minimizing the negative impacts of the problems.

With this background on prevention services, Maidman proceeded to review the OTFS service offerings. He drew details on services and implementation issues from the organizational review, and invited participants to contribute to the discussion in the large group.

### **OTFS Service Activities**

**Community education** is an example of either primary or secondary prevention, depending on the target group. Community awareness activities directed to the community at large is primary prevention. When directed to selected at-risk target groups, like pregnant teen-agers, the service is secondary prevention. Cultural awareness is another example of community education.

Staff report a need for more prevention work with at-risk groups (eg. parenting skills teaching, drug/alcohol education, and adolescent relationship-building). In their discussion of this limitation in services, workshop participants raised

questions concerning the appropriate person to deliver community education.  
One suggestion was that the service be delivered by an OTFS Co-ordinator rather than local staff.

**Social and recreational programming**, another example of primary prevention, has also been provided by OTFS. If done well, such programming has a number of significant benefits for the community at large. It reduces boredom and keeps young people away from drinking and sniffing. Social and recreational programming also builds relationships and reduces isolation between community members and families, and develops a strong sense of being part of a community.

Despite many accomplishments in this programming area, OTFS efforts have decreased in the last year or so. This is likely due to a lack of funds and organizing abilities. Board discussion on this topic resulted in the following suggestions:

- .Efforts should be made to access funding from those Ministries giving priority to prevention initiatives. (eg. Ministry of Health)
- .OTFS should work towards a full-time Social and Recreation Officer who would help First Nations develop local programs.
- .The summer SEED program should continue to build social and recreational leadership.

OTFS **counselling activities** are an important part of the service model. Counselling is provided to individuals, partners, and families. The organizational review found that staff struggled with this service for a number of different reasons. Last year's family counselling skill training at the University of Manitoba should greatly improve counselling services.

**In-home care services** assist families within the home, while children are still living at home. These services provide assistance to parents at times of crises, illness or other circumstances where strengthening parental roles is needed.

**Providing alternative living arrangements for children** consumes considerable staff service time. Families are reluctant to offer their support when CAS offers higher rates for foster care. As well, some people continue to abuse this service, using OTFS as a baby-sitting agency. Good follow-up with parents of temporarily placed children is still an important staff function.

The **advocacy service** involves OTFS staff in support of clients in contacts with other agencies, courts, and other institutions. Through advocacy work staff assure that clients receive the best and most appropriate service, and that they are treated fairly. As band representatives in courts, OTFS advocates represent client interests.

Court work continues to occupy considerable time of some staff, as children are apprehended on particularly troubled reserves. Staff are intimidated by the court situation, and find it challenging when interpreting court decisions to families. The up-coming training video for band representation, coupled with Band/CAS protocols should alleviate some of the difficulties.

**Special needs services** refer primarily to OTFS efforts to secure appropriate specialized or professional services not available in the community. In the past this has included referrals to alcohol treatment programs, speech therapy, and specialized counselling. Helping clients access and make the best possible use of these services is an important supportive function.

Finally, **repatriation services** aim to re-establish ties between children, their families and the community. Children placed off-reserve by provincial child welfare authorities receive special attention in this service. Repatriation started off strongly in OTFS early years, but has tailed off because of the enormous costs involved. Board and management face the task of establishing the priority of repatriation services and discovering how to reduce repatriation costs.

## **BOARD FUNCTIONS AND ROLES**

On the second day, the workshop addressed Board functions and roles. The purpose of this segment was to review Board functions for the benefit of new-comers, and to examine any difficulties in fulfilling responsibilities.

Frank Maidman began by reviewing the five broad functions as follows:

- (i) To obtain human, financial and other resources for OTFS in sufficient amounts to meet the agency's obligations.**

**(ii) To ensure that OTFS' human, financial, and other resources are managed with effectiveness and efficiency.**

**(iii) To maintain government and community relationships which assist OTFS' operation.**

**(iv) To maintain management, staff and organizational relationships which facilitate the proper operation of the agency**

**(v) To monitor the over-all service performance of the agency so as to assure that it is "on track".**

Doug Keshen followed with a review of the Board's legal responsibilities as a federal corporation. Briefly, the OTFS Board is responsible for the management of the Corporation's business affairs. In doing this, Board members must ...

. fulfill their obligation to act honestly, in good faith, and in the best interests of the Corporation, and

. fulfill their duties according to a minimum standard of care.

To operate according to a minimum standard of care, members should acquire the basic information to run the organization. For example, Board members should have information on OTFS goals and objectives, finances, legal obligations (eg. OTFS/Canada Act, Corporate By-Laws, Children and Family Services Act), policies, services, and programs.

The concept of the "best interests" of the Corporation was discussed. Doug explained that Board members were indeed authorized to represent the interests of their respective First Nations. However, for policy-making and other decisions affecting all fourteen First Nations, they must act on the basis of all interests. This is admittedly difficult to do, but is required by law.

Following the discussion of Corporate legal responsibilities, Frank Maidman reviewed the major activities for fulfilling Board functions. These are:

. Financial monitoring. Policy and program development

. Planning. Evaluation and monitoring

. Liaison/public relations. Personnel administration

Maidman then facilitated a small group problem-solving process in which members addressed those difficulties making it difficult to undertake Board activities. He identified four activity areas which the organizational review indicated were particularly challenging: financial monitoring, policy and program development, planning and liaison.

The small group exercise involved the following steps. First, each group was asked to specialize in an separate Board activity; participants were asked to read the relevant sections from the document entitled: "OTFS Board of Directors: Functions and Roles".

Second, groups were asked to discuss what made these activities particularly challenging or difficult. Third, members were asked to identify ways to minimize these difficulties and to report back to the larger group. The results were as

follows:

## **Financial Monitoring**

### **Vision**

The Board is responsible for helping the organization acquire the necessary funding for its operations, and assuring that money is spent appropriately. The Board must assure that (i) sources of funding are known and accessed (ii) proper documentation is completed on how the money is spent (iii) procedures are established for assuring that OTFS management is accountable for its spending, and that such procedures are followed (iv) money is spent efficiently and effectively.

### **The Reality**

The Board of Directors admit that that financial monitoring is a challenging task, although the task does get done regularly.

### **The Issues**

Several issues contribute to the difficulties of financial monitoring and decision-making. These issues pertain to (i) internal monitoring (ii) financial services to clients, and (c) responding to applications for special projects.

.At times, financial statements are difficult to understand, making it difficult to pin-point financial difficulties.

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- .In some instances, it is difficult to monitor the financial support given to clients. First, some clients are receiving financial support from different sources. Secondly, some clients make last minute requests for emergency situations, making it difficult to say "no". No policy definitions of "emergency" guide decision-making for management.
  - .Some requests for special project funding come in at the last minute without proper documentation and budget. Pressures build up to make decisions without adequate information.

### **Proposed solutions**

- .Board training on financial monitoring with emphasis on reading financial reports. The Co-ordinator of Finances should be in attendance, so that common standards are developed.
- .To avoid duplication of financial services to clients, an investigative process was proposed in which (a) intake information is obtained (b) other financial support agencies are contacted, and (iii) follow-up information is gathered.
- .Develop a policy which clearly defines client financial emergencies, and specifies necessary information required from clients.
- .Develop a policy which pertains to requests for special project funding. This policy should specify (a) the appropriate timing for submissions (b) necessary accompanying information, and (c) appropriate expenditure statements. Unspent allocations should be returned.

## **Policy and Program Development**

### **Vision**

The Board is expected to (a) review all existing policies and programs (b) identify gaps in policies and programs (c) monitor policies, i.e. make sure that policies are in place and actually have an effect on the work of OTFS (d) role clarification, i.e. make sure that clear job descriptions are available that specify what each person does, and who reports to whom, and (e) receive an up-date on all policies and services.

### **Reality**

The reality is that the Board has been minimally involved in policy development and programs for OTFS. The Board recognizes the importance of policy-making, and believes that they should be actively involved. As one group said "Policy-making should be taken more seriously by the Board, and should not be the sole responsibility of management".

### **Issues**

Several issues were identified as affecting the policy-making process:

.The difficulty of identifying problems for policy development at Board meetings.

.Board members have limited knowledge and skills for policy development.

.The difficulty of securing committed Board members to sit on the policy committee.

.Members of small committees are reluctant to make decisions on behalf of the entire Board. This reluctance was associated with the Native values of respect and honour.

### **Solutions**

.A specific system for policy development should be established which would (a) specify the roles of management, staff and Board in policy-making (b) indicate how policy-relevant problems would be identified and discussed, and (c) provide policy-writing guidelines

.Sub-committees should be reconstituted so that all Board members are happy and committed to their respective



- committees, and are suitably matched with their committee.
- .One staff member should sit on each Committee with the responsibility for raising policy issues. The Sub-Committee Chairperson bears the responsibility for Committee leadership. Committees should meet regularly, and follow up on all issues raised.
- .The Board should review all policies on a regular basis. One suggestion was that one policy per Board meeting should be discussed, thereby resulting in 12 such reviews per year.

**PLANNING**

### **The vision**

The OTFS planning function requires the Board to (a) anticipate community changes and needs (b) think about other changes such as legislative change or the availability of financing (c) speculate about new or expanded services (d) examine community response to existing programs and the organization as a whole, and (e) think about what new or revised programs, services or resources could meet client needs in the future; and what staff and financial resources are needed.

### **The reality**

The Board of Directors has not involved itself in either short- or long-range planning. OTFS does not have a systematic planning procedure, although the management information system is much improved since the organizational review.

### **The issues**

- .Funding criteria and guidelines tend to limit the ability to plan ahead. Government priorities change.
- .The level of funding does not meet community needs.
- .Lack of feed-back from the community re: needs and concerns. Sound planning requires clear and consistent communication.
- .Changes in Chiefs and Band Councils, Band staff turn-over, elections tend to change priorities and personnel.
- .Conflict of interests among Board members. The difficulty of balancing individual community needs with the collective needs of all fourteen bands for planning purposes.

### **Solutions**

- .Change the government
- .Lobby for changes in program and funding criteria.
- .Be aware of changes in CFSA and other relevant legislature.
- .Encourage Board members and staff to communicate with community re: problems and needs.
- .Organize basic information about OTFS in kits for Board members to distribute to new Chiefs and Councils. Such information would include the kinds of needed information for planning purposes.
- .Board training on the planning process.
- .Use statistics from staff reports to stimulate planning.
- .Encourage elections to be held at the same time.
- .Lobby for longer periods of time for Chiefs and Councils.

.Finalize the process of developing OTFS/Band protocols. This should stimulate support from Chiefs and Councils.

## **WORKSHOP EVALUATION**

The final activity of the workshop was an evaluation. The evaluation focused on (i) assessment of physical and organizational arrangements for learning (ii) the instructor's training style (iii) impact of the workshop in terms of workshop goals, and (iv) recommendations for future training. The evaluation tool was a self-administered questionnaire with eight questions.

Over-all, the workshop was deemed successful. Information on all measures of organization, training style, impact and satisfaction were clearly positive. A few recommendations were provided for future training.

The specific results were as follows:

- .The majority of participants judged the Travel Lodge's facilities as either good or excellent. The lighting in the training room was the most serious deficiency.
- .The workshop was assessed as good or excellent in terms of: organization, opportunity to contribute, learning atmosphere, and the variety of learning approaches. Two participants felt that the learning atmosphere (eg. state of relaxation and ease of learning) needed improvement.
- .The majority of participants assessed the instructor's style as either good or excellent in terms of clarity of explanation, ability to draw people into discussion, pace of discussion, manner, and respect of people's knowledge. Despite the over-all positive response, a few responses suggest that the instructor should improve his ability to involve more people in the discussion and work at a slower pace.
- .Concerning the impact of the workshop, all but one participant felt that, compared to the beginning of the workshop, they knew more about (a) the OTFS family support model, and (b) the functions and roles of the Board.
- .Taking all things into consideration, one-half of the participants assessed the workshop as excellent and one-half judged it as good. One person described the workshop as average.
- .The most frequently mentioned recommendations for improving future workshops were...
- .To start on time, and not wait for late-comers.
- .Maintain or increase the number of small group learning exercises.

**APPENDIX "A"**

**AGENDA**