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Better Data, Better Decisions, Better Outcomes for Kids

An interview with **Barbara Fallon**, Associate Vice-President, Research Professor, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work University of Toronto

One of the biggest challenges in child welfare data or child protection data collection is that there's an absence of it. So although we have information systems that review case files, it's very difficult for us to aggregate it in any meaningful way.

So the studies that I work on really give an overview at the front end of the system: who comes through our threshold, what happens to them in terms of our service dispositions. It's very difficult to make good policy about kids and families without appropriate data, and so that's one of the gaps that my program of research helps to fill.

Prior to 1998, there's no good data around the children and families who are identified to a child welfare authority, whether or not they transfer to ongoing services, whether they place a child in out-of-home care. So in 1998, the first National Incidence Study was conducted. I was a part of it and really since then we've replicated the study I think now four times — the most recent one in 2019. And in Ontario we have done the studies in five-year increments since 1993.

We have inequity in this nation with respect to the drivers of child maltreatment, and certainly colonialism has left pervasive need. Some of the



data, particularly in 2008, were used to inform the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, where there was a finding that the federal government had actively discriminated against providing child welfare services on reserves. So some of the data that we collect have been used to inform the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

I was a kid who was adopted. I was, you know, in foster care until eight months, and I had great parents and family and friends certainly throughout my life. But you know I think as I get older, I'm very conscious that someone made a great decision for me. You have to get it right because this is about children, and we work in service to children. In service to children.