

Talk show with Shaw TV, June 21, 2018

Diana Elliott

Provincial Advisor Aboriginal Infant Development Programs of B.C.

Title: **Celebrating Aboriginal Infant Development Programs**

PART I

Estelle to camera:

Welcome to Conversations with KIDCARECANADA. With us in the studio today is Diana Elliott, the Provincial Advisor, Aboriginal Infant Development Programs, AIDP. I think you will be thrilled to learn about AIDP, some of cultural values that shape who Diana is, and hear some of Diana's sage advice!

Estelle to Diana:

I am so happy you are here, and it's as if the stars were aligned that we are doing this show today as today is a very special day.

Diana:

Yes, thank you for inviting me. Today is National Indigenous Peoples Day and I feel especially privileged to speak about our work with Indigenous families on this day.

My message today is about AIDP and relationships, time (as in pace and patience) respect, belonging, healing and the nurturing and care of the children and families we work with, and the flexibility to meet the families where they are at in their lives.

Estelle:

Full disclosure – I have been “privileged” to know you for many years and am very aware of the outstanding work you do – which was in fact officially recognized this year through the **Dr. Hillel Goelman Award for “Outstanding Leadership in Professional Development in Early Childhood Intervention”!**

For the benefit of others, please tell us a little more about you.

Diana:

I would like to add that AIDP also won an award in 2011 for **Cultural Heritage and Diversity** from the Representative for Children and Youth. The award recognized that we build our program on a unique sense of place, culture, language and community while preparing a better path for children... that support children to embrace the present while preparing for the future.

And thank you. I **have** been doing this for a long time! I am an original AIDP professional for a total of 29 years! I am Coast Salish from Cowichan Tribes through my father and Nuuchahnulth from my mother. I live in the Quamichan Village of Cowichan Tribes in Duncan with my husband of 35 years; I am the mother of two sons, grandmother of Corbin and Hannah with another granddaughter due this summer. I am happy that my parents live right next door as my neighbours.

Estelle:

Thanks Diana – The video introduction at the beginning of this show says, “You don’t have to be a parent, or even an aunt or uncle, babies are everybody’s business.” How does this fit with your approach?

Diana:

This fits with something I frequently say, you don’t have to be related to a child to play an important role in their life. In my community there are many “aunties” who may or may not be related to a child, and older men who may or may not be related to a child, yet they are all considered “grandpa” or “Uncle”. This gives our children a great sense of belonging. It illustrates the importance of FAMILY. Whether we are officially related or not!

Respectful relations are at the core of our being and clearly specified. It begins with the loving, nurturing relationship a child has with a parent or caregiver. It includes friendships with older siblings and cousins. It extends to cross-generational interactions, relationships with peers and others in the community. And to culture.

Estelle:

What you are describing is the essence of social and emotional health – the ability to have positive relationships at every stage of life. It is the key to good health and happiness.

Is this what guides you in your work with AIDP?

Diana:

Quote: Because our people had that strong belief whatever happened, to keep our family circle strong. With a circle, there is no beginning, no ending. Within the family circle, we have the grandparents, who were the teachers, the young moms, the young dads, big brothers, big sisters, uncles and aunts, cousins. They’re all in the outside circle. And every one of them had an obligation to the little ones in the centre. Children were never growing up without somebody there all the time.” (*Shuswap Elder – 2004 the foundation of AIDP practice philosophy*)

We recognize that this is difficult for many parents who may not have had secure early childhood relationships. It helps to explain why we take the approach described once in presentation by Diane Malbin, **“If you mother the mother, you mother the child.”** We realized early in AIDP that we had to support the mother or parent, including grandparents who may be raising their grandchildren.

Estelle:

That makes so much sense.

What would you like us to know about Aboriginal Infant Development Programs?

Diana:

Our mission and philosophy statements:

Every child is a unique gift from the Creator. The mission of Aboriginal Infant Development Programs is to honour this gift by supporting the development of Aboriginal children within the context of the family, community and culture by offering access to culturally appropriate early intervention and prevention support programs.

Community based, community driven, culturally specific programs and services will best meet the needs of Aboriginal Children.

We have been serving Aboriginal children and their families in BC for a second time now - for 26 years (1992 to present.)

We recognized a need to support Aboriginal children in the context of their family, their community and their culture.

A goal is to support families so they can create a safe, loving and nurturing home environment.

Thanks to the work of Truth and Reconciliation more people today are aware of the legacy of residential schools and the 60's scoops as detrimental factors in the health and wellbeing of our families and communities today.

Some people criticize Indigenous families who are struggling as parents.

Yet generations of children were raised in institutions without love, affection, hugs. And we know that these are critically important for healthy social and emotional development.

Estelle:

An expression that has guided me for years is “all behaviour makes sense”. Everyone benefits when we try to understand, rather than judge. Of course this is easier said than done. However,

following on your example, if we see parents who are struggling, we can hopefully understand that they are dealing with the legacy of the residential schools, and provide support, not judgement.

Diana:

It has helped me to understand so many things. The parents who don't know how to show love or affection, the dad who was afraid to change his daughter's diapers because he had been so abused, he did not know what a healthy touch was. Or, why parents don't go to the dentist or take their children to the dentist, because of their experience with dental care (or lack of it) in the schools. We have many health and social services now that are making a difference in the lives of children and families toward health.

Estelle:

You have a beautiful slide with a young child's face. The words say,

"We cannot change yesterday. We can only make the most of today. And look forward with hope toward tomorrow."

You and your AIDP colleagues model this!

Diana:

Yes, we are organized in such a way that we can be what we need to be for families. Each family has different needs and AIDP is not limited by strict or rigid policy. Instead we can identify the challenges a family is facing and try to meet their specific needs.

In the beginning, people would ask: is AIDP education or health? We are what we need to be for families, but I say, we are both, and community and economic development and healing. We learned a long time ago what was happening in families. We learned from Elders, from residential school survivors, from grandparents raising grandchildren. They were telling us the same thing that research was telling us about the importance of healthy relationships, brain development, early and lifelong learning, being connected, being loved.

We conducted a survey among the Cowichan Tribes, for example, to learn at what age children typically see a dentist. Often it was late – age 5, so we hired a dental hygienist and are seeing a real improvement in oral health for whole families. I love seeing the pictures of cavity free smiles at our dental clinic.

In the same way that a child needs a responsive caregiver, we try to be responsive to the needs of our families.

We might **plan** to do an official assessment one day and realize that on that day the family needs an empathetic listener, and we move the assessment to a different day.

I think we have been successful because we recognize the broad spectrum of needs of a family. Some days it is about food security or housing or transportation. Unless we respond to these needs, we can't really move forward with a home visit about language delay, for example. I think AIDP understands the concept of seeing the child in the context of the family and the environment the family lives in or comes from.

We feel good that AIDP is truly a family-centred practice with our own values and beliefs toward cultural safety.

Estelle:

For both of us, values underlie our work. What are some of your guiding values?

Diana:

I have definitely been shaped by my family and the teachings I have received. I look at the Cowichan Teachings every once in a while (they are hanging up in my office).

They stress that

- Each person is important
- That we are related to everything in nature and need to live in harmony with nature and take care of the earth.
- They encourage us to only take what we need, and to share.
- As individuals we are taught to be truthful in our actions and words, to learn from one another and respect each other – our leaders, our neighbours, women and children.

I think all our AIDP professionals possess the following values in their work:

Respect, Humility, Compassion, Empathy, Tolerance, Fairness, Generosity, Honesty... or the 7 sacred teachings.

Estelle:

If only all of us could follow those teachings our world would be a better place.

This seems like an ideal time to take a SHORT BREAK and when we return we will learn more about the Cowichan teachings and children and see something very special that you have brought with you.

PART II Estelle to camera:

Welcome back! With us in the studio today is Diana Elliott and she is about to share more about AIDP – Aboriginal Infant Development Programs -- and their approach to children.

To Diana:

The Cowichan teachings speak of respecting the sacredness of children. What does that look like?

Diana:

We have always taken a holistic approach to the well-being of the child. Our elders remind us that children don't come in pieces or domains – the mental, physical, spiritual and emotional sides of us are intertwined, and if one area is struggling, the others are affected.

The Cowichan Coast Salish also speak of children as Sp'e'qum – a flower that needs nourishment, love and care. Think of children as a garden, they need a place to show their beauty and pride.

Estelle:

There are many things I admire about you and your work. One is your ability to take aspects of early childhood development and assessment and make them meaningful and relevant to the families you work with. Can you tell us about that very special canoe you have brought with you, and how you use it?

Diana:

Yes, there are screening assessments we do to measure a child's development. I like to do this in a culturally meaningful and safe way.

The canoe story ...

- Can the child hear, follow directions?
- How is their hand-eye coordination?
- Do they understand shapes?
- Can they build a tower, a train? (a totem pole, a canoe)
- AIDP is a provincial program – Animals, food found in their environment

In everything we do we focus on emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

The goal is to achieve balance. Of course, violence affects this.

We do what we can to help families create a nurturing family and home and environment.

(Short video: We play the *Emotional Safety* Video trailer and discuss it.)

Sometimes we may feel that we are working as hard as the family toward goals or outcomes for their children, but then we are rewarded! A psychologist I once worked with made me understand relationships with families. About the term “meeting families half way” and if you are only willing to go 50%... you may never reach them. You might have to go 60% to reach their 40%... but that is what you need to do to start a relationship that can move forward. Rather than label families as “non-compliant” or “no shows”, what can we do to make them feel comfortable and safe?

I received a call from a woman who told me she wanted me to know that she was graduating from the University of Victoria in the Child and Youth Care program. She said,

“You and AIDP have a lot to do with who I am today.”

Estelle:

Diana, you have put together a lovely slide show that gives the Cowichan teachings you spoke of and the 7 Sacred Teachings and Teachings of Elders. There is also a wonderful visual that shows at a glance healthy relationships. We will post this to our website. For now, I want to congratulate you on the outstanding work you and your colleagues do within AIDP and thank you so very much for sharing some of that with us today. Have you any parting words for us?

Diana:

I am thankful for the opportunity to share the work of AIDP... and I would like to acknowledge all the AIDP professionals in all 48 AIDP in B.C. We are making a difference big or small in the lives of our children and families and our future. I will end with a couple of quotes to acknowledge that we don't do this work alone:

Quote from a parent: *I have way more confidence than ever before, I thought I wasn't a good parent and today I feel like a great parent.”*

Quote from an Elder: How we walk determines where our children go... Do it for yourself and it will happen for the children... We are their future...

E to camera: – thank you for joining us, visit our website, follow us on social media and remember, we are here to support you on your journey as a parent.