

“WARDEN” OR “NEIGHBOUR”?
CAN POWER BE SHARED IN CHILD WELFARE?

**“WARDEN” OR “NEIGHBOUR”:
CAN POWER BE SHARED IN CHILD WELFARE?**

By

SARAH ROBERTSON, B.A., B.S.W.

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AUTHOR: Sarah Robertson, B.A., B.S.W.

SUPERVISOR: Ann Fudge Schormans, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT:

Child welfare in Ontario has been the object of much scrutiny over the last two decades. The field has experienced a great deal of change as the focus of child welfare shifts to meet the latest political agenda. The mandated role of Children’s Aid Societies has remained constant with child safety at its core and within this role child protection workers wield a great deal of power over families and the community.

At Brant CAS, an alternate to main-stream centralized child protection practice was created to shift to a model that shared the expert role of child welfare with community partners. This model is referred to as an integrated model of community-based child protection. As part of this model, child protection workers and community development programs were relocated to off-site community locations to work collaboratively with families and service providers. The *New Beginnings Resource Centre* is one of these off-site locations where a layering of services is available to families within the community as a means to increasing child safety.

This qualitative research project utilizes the New Beginnings Resource Centre as a case study to examine power constructs that exist in the field of child welfare to gain a better understanding as to whether power may be shared within a community-based model of child protection. Using a window metaphor, this study involves a textual analysis supplemented by additional stories that have come to life through my

experiences working at the centre. This research project is grounded in an interpretative critical social work framework drawing from a Foucauldian perspective of power. The complexities of power will be explored as it relates to knowledge, use of self, and the development of relationships within the community. Emphasis is given to reflective practice as a means to deconstruct power. Although the origins of a community-based model are altruistic, there is concern that power may be used as a means of surveillance and social control. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into whether space can be created within community-based child protection to share power. Are we “neighbours” or “wardens”?

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“Warden” or “Neighbour”? Can Power be shared in child welfare?

Chapter #1: The Window Through Which We Look

A young couple moves into a new neighbourhood. The next morning while they are eating breakfast, the young woman sees her neighbour hanging the wash outside. “That laundry is not very clean”, she said.

“She doesn’t know how to wash correctly. Perhaps she needs better laundry soap.” Her husband looked on, but remained silent. Every time her neighbour would hang her wash to dry, the young woman would make the same comments. About one month later, the woman was surprised to see a nice clean wash on the line and said to her husband:

“Look, she has learned how to wash correctly. I wonder who taught her this.”

The husband said, “I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows.”

And so it is with life. What we see when watching others depends on the purity of the window through which we look.

Author Unknown

A window into my story . . .

It was an early spring day. The morning air was beginning to warm up with the rising of the sun. As I arrived at my office with the Children’s Aid Society of Brant (hereinafter Brant CAS) I observed many neighbours outside chatting as their children left for school. From the parking lot to my office, I passed many neighbours and we greeted each other, remarking on the weather. Some inquired about the programs running at the centre; another asked if we have any diapers at the centre. Many wanted to know if I had brought coffee for everyone and, having to sheepishly reply that I

didn't, I offered to put a pot of coffee on in the kitchen and welcomed them to come over to the centre. I could smell muffins baking in the kitchen and while I put the coffee on I chatted briefly with a neighbour who had come to the centre to use the telephone as she does not have one of her own. I settled into my office with my coffee in one hand and a muffin in the other. I peered out my window and observed the goings on within the complex as my computer booted up for the day. I wondered to myself, "What was today going to bring?" "Who might I run into?" "Who might pop in for a visit?" "Are there any service providers coming to the centre today?"

Everyday it's slightly different when I walk from the parking lot to my office. One day a female neighbour ran towards me in her bare feet in the snow, asking for help as she had just been physically assaulted in her home. Another day, a man pointed a large rifle at me and a co-worker on our way into the office. It ended up being a paint gun with the orange end removed but startling all the same. On another day, I arrived with several plants from my garden to share with the neighbours during the neighbourhood planting day. You see, the office I work out of is not located in a main agency building; rather it is located in Eastdale Gardens, a townhouse complex of 50 townhouse units, at 359 Darling Street in Brantford. Unit 17 is referred to as the *New Beginnings Resource Centre* (hereinafter the NBRC). Brant CAS has the use of the two story unit, the basement being a meeting room of sorts with a large table and chairs. The

main floor has the kitchen and play area where many programs operate from and which in other units would be used as a kitchen and living room. The second floor, which would normally be used as bedrooms, is where the Brant CAS office space is located.

I am the Child Protection Team Manager at Brant CAS working within the Eastdale community and the area surrounding the NBRC, and my office is in one of the bedrooms. The Children Service Worker on my team is in another former bedroom, now office. The Unit Assistant for my team shares a former bedroom with the Protection Support Worker on my team as well as the Child Development Worker from the Child Development Unit with Brant CAS. There are three other child protection workers that I manage and their offices are located in the neighbouring elementary schools: Major Ballachey, King George and Holy Cross. They often visit NBRC for meetings and to collect their mail.

Eastdale Gardens and the surrounding area has been identified within Brant County as an “at-risk” community due to high levels of poverty, limited access to resources, criminal activity and the high density nature of the population (Brantford Brant Community Profile, 2009; Demographic Profile Brant, 2006). The Child Development Unit of Brant CAS has offered programs for children and families at the NBRC for over a decade that focus on early intervention and prevention. The staff persons in this unit do not carry a child protection caseload. The programs

they offer are open to any Eastdale Gardens community member, whether an open file to Brant CAS or not. The protection team fully transitioned to the Eastdale Gardens community over five years ago. The Child Development unit staff and child protection staff work alongside each other to offer a full range of support services to families. This unique office setting is different from any other child welfare setting in the province. Although our move to the NBRC had a philosophical basis, we ultimately moved there in May of 2006, when we ran out of space at the main office. Since that day I, and the rest of my team, have been coming and going from Unit 17, bumping into neighbours, clients and service providers on a regular basis. On most days we go about our work, attending to the many tasks lining up each day, meeting with families, offering supports, seeking resources and making efforts to increase safety for children and families. We think we are doing our best to offer innovative and accessible supports and protection services but, on occasion, we ask ourselves if we are simply neighbourhood watchdogs rather than the neighbour next door. Is it even possible to be just a neighbour when you work for Brant CAS?

On this particular spring day, after settling at my desk, the hectic pace of the day quickly swallowed up any space for deep thinking and quickly I was hopping from one situation to another. I had no idea that something would happen that day that would change everything for me. Nothing could have prepared me for such an event. From my second story

office window I overlook the front steps of many different units. From the other windows in the unit I look out onto even more units within the complex. I did not wonder what families saw when they looked into my window and I only had to look out at the events that caught my eye and not pay much attention to the rest if I so chose. This suited me just fine and each day I patted myself on the back for making the walk through the community back and forth to the parking lot, naively thinking that by simply being in the community we would save children. I had little to go on, being there only for a year, but I assumed it was working; I assumed that families benefitted from it; I assumed that we treated families differently somehow; I assumed that relationships were forming and that we were becoming neighbours within the community; and I assumed that families thought differently about Brant CAS. As I remember those earlier times, I had many assumptions about the benefits of adding a child protection team next door. I did not look too carefully as to how another might feel about living next door to Brant CAS. I did not consider the complexities of power, the issue of surveillance and social control, or the possibilities of oppressive practices that may impact on families within the neighbourhood. The rest of my teammates had left for the day and I finished packing up my computer, activated the office alarm, locked the doors and headed to my car.

There were so many kids out playing that day. Some were on the climber in the middle of the complex, others were racing on the sidewalks in grocery carts, and others were riding bikes and skateboards. I made my way to my car, saying goodbye to those that were sitting outside. I was cautious backing out of the parking lot as there are lots of little children that are hard to see and always several cats on the loose. Just as I drove up Darling Street and was passing the end of the complex units, a child on a bike came sailing down the driveway and, before I could do anything, he was in front of my car. In a split second, we made contact, the helmetless child was thrown from the bike and the screaming began. I sprang from my car and instantly from both sides of the street a crowd formed. Families young and old, child protection clients and ex-clients appeared, neighbours collected. The child was moving but screaming in pain. I called 911 in a haze. I could hear shouts from some that said I was speeding, others who said I was CAS, and soon after the sounds of emergency sirens coming towards us. Three police cruisers and an ambulance arrived. The child was taken to hospital and the police stayed to take statements from myself and other witnesses. I began to panic – what would these witnesses say about me? How will I be perceived? What if they say I did it purposefully? How will this affect the relationships that I had formed within the community?

Not one neighbour spoke to me – even those that had chatted with me that day on my way to and from my car. It was like we did not even know what to say to each other or even how to interact. I was upset and rattled, they appeared scared and apprehensive. This struck me as one of the most profound moments in my child welfare experience as I grappled to understand why my neighbours were not talking to me, why weren't they helping me, did they think I did this on purpose? And why was I worrying about me when a child was en route to the hospital? Something struck me that changed everything but I just could not figure out what and how. This led me on a path of reflection that asked more questions than it brought me answers. The assumptions I had made did not make sense anymore, a shift had occurred both within me and around me and what it all meant was not clear to me. I knew I needed to examine it further. The “infallible” child protection manager with so much perceived power had suddenly become vulnerable and powerless. The neighbours did not know what to make of this, nor did I. It dawned on me that I did not even realize how much power I actually possessed until it was gone. What else had I not considered? What other assumptions had I made about my relationships with the neighbours? How did my power impact on these relationships? This marked a new beginning for me, and struck a new level of curiosity about community based child protection that was riddled with tension and possibility.

I dreaded my return to the community and my office the next day. I felt overwhelmed with tension, anxiety, fear even. I was confused and did not know how to act or what to say to people. As it turned out, the neighbours did not know what to say to me either. Merely a hello was exchanged as I made the trek from my car to the centre. Slinking to my office, at first I did not even want to look out my window, not so that I could not see others but rather so they could not see *me*. This tension existed for days but, slowly, I started to peek from my second story window and I discovered that something looked different. I went around to the other windows on the floor and thought things looked different from there too – but what? Was it the neighbours? Was it the activities? Or was it me? I needed to find out. My research thesis provided the perfect opportunity to explore this further.

I will be using a window metaphor to begin to understand the complexities of my experience and how it connects to broader questions about community based child protection. From any window I am able to observe the activities of the community. Some days when I look out any one of the windows I may see something slightly different. If the blinds are drawn I may see nothing at all. My knowledge about a particular family may affect how I see one family outside my window versus another. I can choose what I want to see and how I see it. Should my window shades be partially closed or perhaps my window be dirty, chances are I will not see

families as clearly as I might if my windows were clean. The idea of reflection to understand how we have come to look at something or someone is critical in keeping the window free from obstructions.

For this research I will be utilizing the NBRC as a case study and I will be drawing from my experience at the NBRC to contextualize the data discovered within this project. I acknowledge that central to this research project is my perspective and experience that shapes this examination of power constructs. This window metaphor will be a helpful mechanism to illustrate the connection between my experiences, my knowledge claims, my use and manufacturing of power through these claims and the intricate layering of power throughout the child welfare system. The hope of this research is to gain a better understanding of whether power may be shared within community based child protection. When relationships form do power relations shift? Do relationships within the community contribute to child safety?

I have worked both in a centralized office and, for the better part of six years, within a community based setting. The window from my centralized office, on the rare occasion that I had one, looked upon busy streets and vast parking lots. No one could see into my window – they were tinted and some of them were even bullet proof. Just to get through the doors I needed a security card, special keys and identification. At one centralized office, we had to completely hide from our windows as there

had been a sniper threat against the CAS building. Many of us didn't quite look out those windows the same way again, but I never asked myself, why? If my office was located in a centralized office at Brant CAS I would not have to worry about facing the families in the neighbourhood day in and day out. My window would not even look out at the families I had affected through my actions, nor would my reflection in the window cast a shadow of doubt upon my role within the community. I would not necessarily question what might have changed in the face of that interaction on the street that day. I might have never wondered if I am seeing things differently out my window at all.

I will be grounding this research in an interpretative critical social work framework. Power will be examined through a Foucauldian lens and reflection will be used to unpack the concepts more fully. I hope to gain insight into whether child protection workers are really neighbours within the community, thereby entering into a collaborative effort to help keep children safe, or whether we are merely wardens, increasing surveillance within these communities in hopes that we can save the children. Does community based child protection create the space to share power with families? As relationships develop within the community, do they play a part in helping to keep children safe? Does the knowledge that is created through these relationships help – or hinder – oppressive social work

practices? Join me as I look out the window seeking a view rooted in social justice, shared humanity and a sense of community.

Chapter #2. Child protection in Ontario – how has this window been shaped?

Child welfare has many different windows to look through and child protection workers have many various perspectives that shape their view through these same windows. Much of the available literature has conducted a critical examination of child welfare, but there is less focus on community-based child welfare. To start, I will be providing an overview of the child welfare field in Ontario. I will then describe the literature that has specifically looked at community development and child welfare. I will then elaborate on how others have seen child welfare through their windows. Interspersed throughout these themes will be a Foucauldian perspective of power, how this is woven into many areas of child welfare practice and policy, and how a reflective approach to practice and research might enhance the critical examination of the NBRC as a case study.

Historically, changes to social policy and practice are rooted in the predominant economic and social structures and beliefs impacting on the functionality of the society and government at any given time (Parton, 1994). With restructuring, a new language is formed, technologies change, legal mandates are revised, the role of the professional is redefined and, within these roles, new theories are integrated into practice

(Parton, 1994 and 1998; Strega, 2007). Within the child welfare system there exist ongoing debates and tensions with respect to the focus of child welfare, is it family centred or child centred? Is it individualized in its response or seeking macro change? Is it forensic-based or strength-based? Is prevention part of child welfare? Is there a role for community development? Within these tensions it is generally believed that the system itself is broken, fraught with abuses of power, implicated in the further marginalization of women and those in a lower socio-economic class, and operating from oppressive policies and practices (Strega, 2007; Swift, 1995). For the purposes of this research, “child welfare” refers to the broader system, whereas “child protection” refers to the specific function within the system.

Central to the child protection role is the legally mandated power to become involved with families if there is a concern reported about the safety of any child under the age of sixteen years. Care is extended beyond 16 years should a child who has been found in need of protection become a Crown Ward prior to his/her 16th birthday. This power is extended to child welfare agencies through the Child and Family Services Act (hereinafter CFSA) (CFSA, R.S.O. 1990). The paramount purpose and additional purposes of the mandate is defined by the CFSA in Section 1(1) and Section 1(2). Section 1.(1) of the CFSA states that, “the paramount purpose of this Act is to promote the best interests, protection and well

being of children” (CFSA, R.S.O. 1990: For full definition of the CFSA section 1 please see Appendix A).

The CFSA, in Section 15(3), also defines the function of Children’s Aid Societies to include the responsibility to, among other things:

“(c) provide guidance, counselling and other services to families for protecting children or for the prevention of circumstances requiring the protection of children;” (CFSA, R.S.O. 1990: For a full definition of the CFSA Section 15 please see Appendix B).

Additionally there are a number of standards outlined by the provincial government of Ontario and child welfare agency-specific policies that further govern the practice of individual Children’s Aid Societies. This legally sanctioned structural and systemic power influences the practices of child welfare agencies and workers; the recording systems used by agencies; the child protection databases that are utilized provincially; and the funding that is provided to individual agencies. These power mechanisms possibly have a significant impact on service delivery. In a community-based child protection model of service delivery, it would appear that while there can be perceived benefits there may also be great risks in having the CAS as a neighbour.

Child protection agencies have created various different community partnerships along a continuum of community-based child protection that may include: hiring of community development workers as part of child

protection staff; having offices located within another community service providers space; having child protection workers based out of schools; having child protection teams centrally located but assigned to a specific geographic location; or having generic workers in which a child protection worker will manage each function of the case (primarily, Intake and On-going service). Much of the research I reviewed looks at community development as a function to add to child protection. Gordon Jack (2004) explored the social construction of child abuse in his work, *Child Protection at the Community Level* (Jack, 2004), in which he states;

“It has been identified that the key to integrating and balancing policies for vulnerable children lies in the adoption of a broader definition of child abuse that recognizes the harm done to children by the way that they are treated in society, rather than just within the confines of their own homes”. (Jack, 2004:377)

One of the functions of a CAS under the CFSA, Section 15(3)(c) is to “provide guidance, counselling and other services to families for protecting children or for the prevention of circumstances requiring the protection of children” (CFSA, R.S.O. 1990). Despite this legislation, and in response to a managerialist agenda of efficiency and cost-reduction, child protection work has been limited to an individualized practice focusing on the harm that occurs to children within the family unit (McKnight, 1995; Swift, 1995; Trocmé, Knoke and Roy, 2003). CAS’s receive funding for cases where a child protection concern has been reported and requires investigation - not

for the prevention of circumstances that may result in a reportable child protection issue. Child protection workers and community service providers have limited financial resources to support children and families who are marginalized within their social context which may lead to children being harmed and concerns about the safety and well-being of children (Dumbrill, 2003; Trocmé, et al, 2003). This is a conundrum facing child welfare agencies today - the persistent reduction and/or inconsistencies in funding that lead to a prioritization of narrowly-defined protection services and often short-sighted interventions that maintain the social construction of child abuse as a pathology within the family unit (Wharf, 2002; Jack, 2004; Margolin, 1997). In finding ways to challenge this discourse, as child welfare practitioners we must also find resistive strategies that create space to reflect on what should constitute “child protection”.

For almost two decades, the Brant CAS has been offering services to the community surrounding Eastdale Gardens and the NBRC. In the late 1980's and well into the 1990's, neo-liberal philosophy prevailed and had a significant impact on services available within the county of Brant, as well as in multitudes of other communities (OACAS, 1997; Parton, 1998, Aronson & Sammon, 2000). In an effort to minimize the welfare state, services once available universally were offloaded to the private sector, limiting access to those that could access the support privately. Communities such as Brantford, sandwiched between a number of richer

and bigger communities, were left with limited and often difficult-to-access services. Brantford also has a complex demographic with often higher than average rates of poverty, substance abuse, teen pregnancies, domestic violence and school drop-out rates (Brantford Brant Community Profile, 2009; Demographic Profile Brant, 2006).

At Brant CAS, a senior leader within the organization believed that there was a need to have a different approach to child protection. This visionary decided to look out of and into different windows to see if there was an alternative to the traditional centralized office-based model. This began with the development of alliances with other community partners with a view of a shared vision of child welfare for Brantford. The goal was to look at creative solutions to service provision in the community that was accessible to those in need. This proved to be the creation of a particular window – a window into having child protection workers located, not in child welfare silos, but in smaller offices within the communities that they were serving; a window into the world of that community. In addition, this type of window allowed social workers to share a view with families and community services providers: it was believed that social work practices could become more transparent and that social workers could share and receive knowledge from others to create a more informed practice and increased safety for children (OACAS, 1997).

The integrated model of community-based child protection had altruistic roots intended to create a shared response and layering of services available to families in the community that enhanced the client-worker relationship. The model also created the potential for unintended consequences with respect to issues of power, surveillance and practice that continue to marginalize families and children. Much like Foucault's idea of the panopticon, (Foucault, 1979), there is a power relationship that is in play in this community-based model of service. Regardless of the location of their office, Brant CAS social workers have power through the agency's mandated ability to intervene in people's lives. This is rationalized through a perceived need for the collective good of society to have a responsible government that creates moral citizenry (Foucault, 1980; Moffatt, 1999; Parton, 1994). As a result of the panopticon effect, it is the power of people changing their own behaviours because they *think* they are being watched, whether real or anticipated, that may perpetuate overarching neo-liberal ideals. Ultimately, the community will govern itself in its pursuit of achieving normalcy and social acceptance and this is what is deemed most powerful (Foucault, 1979). If a social worker – and the larger agency – does not take caution in their use of the knowledge about families they access through this power, then the worker/agency may be contributing to and potentially strengthening existing oppressive constructs.

As Brant CAS began to develop partnerships with school boards, housing departments, public health, and counselling agencies within the community as a means of improving child welfare services locally, provincially the child welfare system was also looking to restructure the larger provincial service delivery model. Workloads across the province were increasing and agencies were under scrutiny after several inquests into the deaths of children (Dumbrill, 2006; Trocmé, et al, 2003). The Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (hereinafter OACAS) developed a discussion paper (OACAS, 1997) to articulate a community vision for the future of child welfare. This paper proposed that “community-based child welfare services would share with the community the responsibility for protecting children and strengthening families” (OACAS, 1997:1) and “at the heart of this improved system is a community safety partnership for child protection (OACAS, 1997:5). It went on further to state,

“the role of child welfare must shift from viewing itself as the provider of all child protective services and, instead, begin to catalyze, organize and in a variety of ways, provide leadership to the development of sustenance of community partnerships for child protection and neighbourhood-based systems of service delivery that achieve the result of child safety” (OACAS, 1997:7).

Some of the projected outcomes of this restructuring included increased safety for children and decreases in the numbers of children in care (as more families would be supported in caring for their children). The

added benefit was extensive savings in in-care costs and improved relationships with families as a result of a more strength-based perspective (OACAS, 1997). In this type of approach, the child protection worker needed to bring to the professional relationship compassion, engagement and assessment skills, a sense of humility, and an ability to develop partnerships with both families and service providers. This skill set reflected the basic social work principles that social workers accepted when they chose social work as a profession, and were essential components of the use-of-self that they had developed both in school as well as in social work practice (OACAS, 1997). The OACAS (1997) acknowledged in this paper that, in order to achieve this, the provincial Ministry of Community and Social Services would need to provide policy support, the child welfare system would need to create differential responses to the varied needs of families, and child welfare agency services would need to be transformed.

The Ministry of Community and Social Services did not integrate this model provincially. Rather, the more expert-driven Ontario Risk Assessment Model (ORAM), centralized around the concept of risk, was introduced as the Ministry's restructuring strategy in the late 1990's (Dumbrill, 2006; Trocmé, et al, 2003). Argued to be in response to the public's demand for accountability, inquiries into child deaths in the province, and a need to streamline services, ORAM was the provincial

model of choice. New tools, technology, text, and a growing emphasis on “evidence-based practice” surrounding primarily risk assessment and mitigation became the new vision (Trocmé, et al, 2003). Once I stopped to reflect upon the view from my window, I began to understand how my view could be obstructed by the risk paradigm. The child welfare system sought comfort in the illusion of being able to predict risk and the practice of child welfare workers became coordinated in specific ways (Campbell & Gregor, 2002).

Still utilizing and governed by the ORAM model, Brant CAS continued to utilize an integrated community-based child protection model for three teams within the agency. This included providing a continuum of services in partnership with the community, while still meeting the extensive standards as outlined in the ORAM model. In May of 2006, I, along with members of the New Beginnings Protection Team (hereinafter NBPT) relocated our offices to the second story of the NBRC. NBRC is our ‘hub’ in a way – it is where we meet as a team, and with the school-based child protection workers; where we meet individually in supervision and connect day to day with community members and service providers.

The integrated service model at NBRC is unique within the province. In this model, my team, and a couple others in the agency, is situated in the community that it serves, and offers its services to families as part of a larger team of service providers who also offer various support

services to the same community members. I believe there is greater accessibility to child welfare services as well as to additional community support services. This layering of service offers opportunity within a community to increase its capacity, with the hope that there is an increase in the safety and well being of children and families (Brant CAS, 2004).

Through the windows of our offices, and the stories that unfold at NBRC, the relationships that develop, the partnerships that grow, and the collaboration that occurs, we believe we have been able to create an alternative to mainstream child protection practice that we feel enables us to do child protection work differently with families in the community.

These beliefs all changed for me the day that I hit that child with my car. I no longer was certain about these claims and I needed to understand this tension more comprehensively. What if I was simply a passive participant in underlying power structures that I had not bothered to critically examine more closely and was contributing to oppressive practices by not giving my windows a thorough cleaning? How do I even begin to clean my windows? Will I start to see people and things differently? Will this change my relationships within the community?

Chapter #3: What have others seen through their windows?

Although the majority of child protection agencies across Canada offer a centralized service where the staff members work from one main office, there are a few examples of how efforts have been made to create

community-based child protection services. These can vary across a continuum of different community development principles and practice as part of child protection services. Pete Hudson (1999) describes this continuum as one that “begins with the client and works outward into the community” to the opposite end of the continuum “which understands the whole community as client” (Hudson, 1999:352). The initial examination of the notion of warden or neighbour can also be explored through a review of this literature.

After years of government cutbacks laden with neo-liberalist approaches to decision making, there has been a narrowing of community services available to families (McKnight, 1995; Trocmé, et al, 2003). In child welfare, social work practice shifted to a risk based forensic model of service. This created individualized responses within child protection without examining the broader social context impacting on families. Risk identification and risk management as a social construction became evident. The majority of families involved with child protection services are single female led families living in poverty (Swift, 1995). The present mainstream structuring of child protection services contributes to this oppression and marginalization of women and families that are poor.

Foucault describes an inextricable link between the two dyads of care/control and knowledge/power (Foucault, 1980; Hugman, 2003; Chambon, 1999). Hugman states that “from such a perspective, ethics in

social work can be seen as the necessary work to both ‘know’ and ‘take care of’ oneself as a social worker, seeking ‘not to deceive’ (especially oneself)” (Hugman, 2003:1028). It is from this perspective that I am curious to understand how child protection workers in community based roles attempt to understand and develop their own understanding of their values and ethics, how they interplay with knowledge construction, the risk discourse, their use of self and power and how this may impact on practice.

Child welfare in Ontario has emphasized the expert role of the child protection worker to save children. There are fewer research projects that have explored the community’s role in helping to keep children safe. Sarah Wright’s article, *Child Protection in the Community: A Community Development Approach* (2004), highlights the importance of engaging communities to promote the welfare of children and for broadening the responsibility of keeping children safe beyond the role and function of professionals. Central to this approach is working in partnership with families so that they define their own problems and seek their own solutions to them (Wright, 2004). This is defined further in Ken Barter’s work (2001) where he outlines how “community building promotes the following:

- A justice rather than welfare approach
- Innovation rather than change

- Strengths-based rather than pathology-based
- Built on parents and families as essential resources and partners
- Proactive rather than reactive
- Based on a recognition that the protection of children is too important to be left to any one profession or agency
- About discovering rather than wielding power
- About community accountability
- About community-driven rather than community-focused practice
- Working with families and children in situations of risk and violence in the context of their neighbourhood and community”
(Barter, 2001:272-273).

Barter describes a paradigm shift that would lift child protection workers’ practice beyond an expert approach to a more collaborative effort of exploring interventions that involve families and the community in the process.

Brian Wharf has contributed a number of articles and books to examine community capacity and community development practices. According to Wharf, “there is agreement that office-based practice with individual clients who are diagnosed by experts as requiring professional help is not effective practice” (2002:14) for promoting child welfare. Child protection workers that rely on their expert role from a distant location may lose sight of the bigger picture impacting on a community and, from their windows, be unable to see any strengths that a community might build upon. Of concern, however, is if child protection workers relocate to offices

within the community but do not change the perspective of the window they are looking out from.

“If community approaches are to move into the mainstream, a shift in the paradigms will be required: from the risk paradigm that dominates child welfare at present to a community paradigm that would be based on the approaches of community social work, community organizing and community control” (Wharf, 2002:185).

This paradigm shift is crucial to mitigate issues of surveillance by child protection workers located within the community. Agencies may claim to have an understanding of the broader social context affecting families but if attention is not paid to the broader structural forces family behaviour may continue to be pathologized (Wharf, 2002; Strega, 2007; Swift, 1995).

Freymond & Quosai (2011) conducted a recent study about front-line child welfare in neighbourhood settings. Participating in this study were six child welfare agencies in Ontario that offered child welfare services from centralized and/or neighbourhood settings (Freymond & Quosai, 2011). Brant CAS was one of the agencies that participated in this study. Parents that had received child welfare services were also interviewed.

“One of the clear findings of this research is that workers at neighbourhood sites are delivering child welfare services in a way that emphasizes accessibility, co-operative helping relationships, and collaboration with other professionals and that this approach appears to improve families satisfaction with services” (Freymond & Quosai, 2011:29).

The study also highlighted that the workers at neighbourhood sites stressed “the importance of careful interactions with families and children in which they make efforts to minimize power differences” (Freymond & Quosai, 2011:30). By having interactions with families and children outside of the confines of a child protection investigation, relationships developed, trust grew, and not only did workers feel greater safety was achieved, families were more likely to return to the neighbourhood setting to seek support in the future (Freymond & Quosai, 2011). The study suggested future exploration into the values and philosophies that guide the client-worker interaction and relationship (Freymond & Quosai, 2011).

Dumbrill (2003 and 2006) also looked at strengthening families by coordinating agency services and using different ways of delivering child protection services to resist existing power and knowledge structures and the imbalances therein. Overall, the majority of the articles reviewed use qualitative approaches to their research. Many of the articles are seeking social justice to address issues of marginalization and oppression and there is a mix of interpretative and critical approaches to the research. Increasing community capacity and collaboration with families’ increases child safety, many researches proclaim.

SW Values, ethics and use of self:

Also important to understanding the worker’s role as warden or neighbour is the worker’s use of self. The ability of the worker to be

transparent about power structures, to engage in a reciprocal sharing of knowledge, and to enter the client-worker relationship with a sense of humility are key factors. Foucault's concepts have challenged social workers to examine their practice in a variety of ways (Moffatt, 1999; Parton, 1998). His ideas have given rise to the need to deconstruct the normalization process, to recognize the role of power, and to understand how governmentality has dominated politics (Moffat, 1999).

According to Moffat (1999) workers create the knowledge that helps workers to govern the clients and "social workers have claimed a special knowledge that aids the 'respectable' classes in understanding the destitute and also to punish the irresponsible poor" (Moffat, 1999:32).

"As social workers we must not abandon judgment, be we do need to identify the relations of power and inequality between the judgers and the judged. We need to judge our practice and our organizations alongside, or in solidarity with those who are clients and those who are poor, native, black, marginalized" (de Montigny, 1995:226).

Using reflexivity and critical analysis when exploring the experiences and stories created at NBRC may offer a depth of understanding of the experiences of the families within the community. This will be essential in ascertaining whether we are able to transform knowledge from the lens of a warden to the lens of a neighbour.

Contextualizing Power:

Power – the word itself evokes so many images and reactions. It can be such a broad term while simultaneously being very specific in its construction. The power differential in child welfare is intrinsic in nature. The CAS has a mandated power that supersedes that of the parent if there is a protection concern that jeopardizes the safety of the child. There is no way to remove this power differential, to deny it exists. The essence of power serves as a sheer curtain over my window affecting how I see others and how they see me. I must ask myself, am I seen as a warden or neighbour?

The power conundrum is multi-faceted. It is rarely operating in just one form. There are systemic and structural power differentials as well as various individual power relationships. The layers and connections can be overt or more subtle. Sellick, McKee, Delaney, and Brownlee (2002) expand this even further to suggest that social workers exert power invisibly and that “we don’t see what we cannot see” (Sellick et al, 2002:494). Within the child welfare field, attempts are often made to neutralize power by focussing on one particular area in which it is constructed or deconstructed. Several years ago many agencies created specific policies related to Anti-Oppressive Practice (hereinafter AOP). Some agencies received additional training in this regard to reach the goal of AOP, but I worry that the process may stop there; the assumption being

that the goal for AOP has been reached rather than being an evolutionary and fluid process. Ongoing space to have a dialogue about AOP may not exist; strategies to integrate into practice may not be considered; and out of necessity due to time constraints, workers may fall back into oppressive practices without recognizing the implications.

Although workers may have been given some knowledge about AOP it may never be integrated into practice. It may be that other forces exist that contradict AOP practice itself. Sellick, et al (2002) examine the concept of power and knowledge creation and they suggest that power is not as overt as one might think. “Disciplinary power works not so much by overpowering and coercing, but more subtly, through discursive practices” (Sellick, et al, 2002:495). As an example, child protection files have historically been entered into the data system under the mother’s name, regardless if the child protection concerns were about the father’s parenting. This process creates an overrepresentation of women as child abusers, enhancing the “bad mother” discourse and contributing further to the marginalization of women (Swift, 1995). Having said that, it is likely that the child protection worker entering the information into the system believes they are being anti-oppressive in their practice and perhaps has not considered the implications of the file creation process.

Foucault has been a source of many provocative books and research about power and knowledge creation within the social sciences.

According to Miehls and Moffatt (2000), “the Foucauldian conceptualization of the link between power and knowledge is useful in understanding sites in which contested identities are being considered and recreated. Power and knowledge are interrelated in interpersonal relations” (Miehls and Moffat, 2000:342). As much as we need to look critically at overarching structures and have discussions at the agency level about anti-oppressive practices, we must also enhance each person’s understanding of their location, not only their social location, but their location within their interpersonal relations. Equal attention needs to be given to the variety of power structures in place so as not to focus on “the local and the contextuality of the specific thereby taking attention away from the pervasive power of structural forces” (Noble, 2004:289). This seems like a challenging task and perhaps is a barrier facing child protection workers as the often chaotic work environment coupled with extensive administrative burden prevents workers from understanding the interplay between knowledge, power, interagency and interpersonal relations.

Foucault elaborates on this link between power and knowledge further by stating that “power is exercised everywhere in a continuous way” (Foucault, 1979:80). This captures the complexity of the concept of power and the extent of the multiplicity of the approach needed to deconstruct or even share power where possible. “These multiple

possibilities of truth construction about each other and about our identities suggest the necessity of micro analysis of specific relations in order to unveil how knowledge of the other is constructed” (Miehls & Moffatt, 2000:342; Foucault, 1980). Knowledge construction in a community based worker role may develop differently than that of a child protection worker located in a centralized office. Regular interactions between community members and child protection workers, as well as increased opportunities to observe each other, may create and shape knowledge, increase the development of positive relationships, and ,as well, may create space to exercise power in a variety of ways. How do we ensure that we utilize this power effectively and without contributing to further marginalization of families? How do we critically understand our expert knowledge claims as they are constructed within this context? How does knowledge and its relation to power affect the client-worker relationship?

Reflective practice:

Reflective practice and critical consciousness are essential to beginning to grapple with how and what I see out my window. The process within ethnography, as described by Campbell and Gregor (2002), of taking a story and unraveling it as if it were a ball of yarn to explore the complexities of social constructs and relationships was helpful for this research. Jan Fook (2003), in reference to the key tenets of critical social theory, describes self-reflection and interaction as an important process in

creating knowledge which places emphasis on the potential to transform communication processes. Sellick et al (2002) examined social work knowledge claims and emphasized the importance of dialogue, reflective engagement and the role of the social worker to critically unpack *what* he/she claims to know and *how* he/she came to think that way (Sellick, 2002:496). Plath (2006) explored the benefits and limitations of evidence-based knowledge and practice, as well as the significance of critical reflective practice as part of our knowledge construction.

Sellick et al (2002) describe a process of “framing” where everything that we claim to ‘know’ fits into a framework of how we see things. The use of self in the critical reflection process is so important to deconstruct what we are seeing in these frames. Much like what I see from my window – if I do not critically examine what I am seeing from my vantage point – I may only see certain things and ignore others that do not fit in the ‘frame’. Therefore it is essential to utilize dialogue and reflective practice to challenge what we claim to know. Sellick et al (2002) describe this process as “an engagement that seeks constantly to problematize our knowing, to probe and critique it, to trace its origins and assumptions and explore its implications, to open it to inquiry and transformation” (Sellick et al, 2002: 493-494). This opportunity to understand how I frame what I see through my window is essential to community-based child protection workers given my ability to observe families and the community from my

office window. Those that are in a centralized agency may have no windows at all and if they do it is unlikely the view includes a vantage point of a high-density townhouse complex.

Chapter #4: When I consider my research, what window am I looking through?

The methodology of this research project is developed through a critical interpretive framework. My critical lens is pulled from Foucault's work related to power and knowledge. I am going to use the NBRC as a case study in conjunction with a textual analysis of data gathered through Brant CAS. I will, through reflective practice and a critical perspective of stories of my experiences at the NBRC, connect the findings in the form of a narrative.

For workers in the child protection role, and as a basis for practice in the child welfare field overall, evidence-based practice is commonly regarded as a legitimate source of knowledge to develop policies and service delivery models (Plath, 2006). While the purpose of this research is not to determine whether evidence-based practice is valid or not, I worry that relying solely on evidence-based interventions and practices reduces the window to view the social contexts that impact families. The tension that this produces is the lack of humanist responses to the personal and social conditions present in practice (Plath, 2006). Plath (2006) argues that evidence-based practice may be an effective means of developing a

standardized response to cookie-cutter problems but it lacks space to understand the complexities of social experience. “A combination of methods and enquiry from a variety of perspectives are required if the complex practices of social work are to be investigated effectively” (Plath, 2006:64). There is much knowledge that is gained by exploring the perspectives of participants through qualitative methods.

“Regardless of how strong the evidence for a particular intervention may be, social workers are in a position where they need to critically reflect on their work in the political, social, organizational and interpersonal contexts, and engage in debates, negotiate appropriate practices and, when necessary argue convincingly for the effectiveness of the work that is done.” (Plath, 2006:66)

NBRC offers a unique opportunity for a “case study” that could begin to accomplish the type of critical reflection that Plath argues is necessary, and thereby enrich our understanding of community-based child protection as being able to offer an alternative to the oppressive structures in place that continue to marginalize families. This type of social action goes beyond the potential limits of evidence-based practice and related research. This research project is concerned about the oppressive structures and practices that have existed in the child protection system, and how to work to address these by providing alternative types of service while still meeting child welfare mandates. More focus needs to be given within child protection services to the importance of developing

relationships with families, and acknowledging power differentials and the abuse of power within the field (Dumbrill & Maiter, 2003; Maiter, Palmer and Manji, 2006).

At the NBRC we make knowledge claims about how this specific integrated service delivery model creates space to offer child protection support services in a different way, one that potentially mitigates any structural and systemic oppression. On what do we base these claims? How do we justify this knowledge? How do we uncover injustice if there is hidden power –without our awareness of it - that maintains the status quo? In my role as researcher, operating from a critical perspective and through reflective practices I will examine NBRC as a case study, and place it in a larger, macro-level context (Neuman, 1997). I am curious as to whether NBRC and its integrated community based model of child welfare, is a less oppressive way to offer child welfare services, one that shares power with service users thus reducing further marginalization of families. I will critically examine NBRC as an example of community-based child protection to explore if this model is hiding power mechanisms that maintain the status quo or, perhaps even more worrisome, to determine if this model is more covertly a form of surveillance to maintain social control.

Not only is there structural and systemic power but there is individual power that each child protection worker brings to their practice.

Each person within the child welfare field brings their own lens, values and experience with them to their practice and to how he/she manages their authority (Fook, 2003; Maiter, et al, 2006; Plath, 2006). I cannot deny the power that I hold as a manager of a child protection team and how I am situated in this research project. Dumbrill (2003) states, “It is no longer sufficient for social work to speak of social justice without considering the location it speaks from” and “(b)y speaking from a location of dominance, social work not only removes the opportunity for those on the margins to speak for themselves, it also perpetuates mainstream discourses that underpin injustice” (Dumbrill, 2003:104). From my experience, this form of oppression is easily overlooked in the risk paradigm which dominates child welfare practice today. Workers have the power to control the resources available to families and workers also have the power to control what knowledge they share with families. Further, if child protection workers are not taking the time to understand their social location and how this may impact on their social work practice, they may inadvertently contribute to these oppressive structures.

I recognize the assumptions that I may be bringing to my research as well as to my social work practice. Yet I can also identify the story that I feel needs to be told. Margaret Kovach states that “by merely walking through (or out of) mainstream doors, we tend to make spaces alive with a politicality that creates both tension and possibility” (Kovach, 2005:20). I

left mainstream child protection to fulfil this role in a community-based office. My experience in both systems has shaped my perceptions of the child welfare system. As part of my research, I have had to challenge myself to reflect upon this experience, on my assumptions and hopes for the research, and to work towards understanding the concepts that shape my knowledge claims, knowledge creation and power. My hope for my research is to answer the questions: Can power be shared in child welfare? Is there space to resist the structural and systemic forces at play in child welfare that continue to marginalize and oppress families while keeping children safe? How do relationships develop within the community? Do these relationships contribute to child safety and increased community capacity?

As I sat in my office and reflected on what had happened, I could not but help think that there may have been a moment in time that the mother of the child that I hit with my car had to think about whether I would be sitting in judgement of her. I was saddened by this, that this mom, as her child screamed in pain, had to worry, if even for a second, whether I would initiate an investigation into whether her child was adequately supervised, was wearing a helmet or that she had not ensured her child understood the rules of the road. Next, would she have to worry about how she was going to pay for the ambulance that needed to transport her child to the hospital? Even if I remained silent in this regard, I brought this

power differential to the surface. Although it may have seemed invisible, in the moment it appeared as obvious as a crack running through the centre of my window.

As I looked out my window during the days following my accident with the child on the bike, I noticed that the neighbourhood seemed a little different to me. I could see families bringing get-well cards to the family home. I saw CAS staff bringing games and activities to the family to help pass the time while the injuries healed. I saw other neighbours reminding children on bikes to wear their helmets. I then began to hear the stories about the many families that could not afford to buy helmets for their children. From my window, I could see that the community cared about the child who was hurt, was committed to helping keep other children safe, but had difficulties due to the poverty within the community to achieve this. This was not because they did not want their children to be safe but because they did not have the resources to do this. I could feel the shift in my view from my window, and I could feel things changing and although it made me a little anxious, it also felt liberating in some strange way. For the first time in days I felt that there could possibly be some positive outcome from this very difficult situation.

Chapter #5: How will I clean my window, open it, look through it, and clean it again?

This research project is a qualitative interpretive study drawing primarily from a critical perspective. Using the NBRC as a case study, I hoped this research project would provide a better understanding of community-based child protection at the NBRC as an alternative to child welfare practice and as a means to deconstruct dominant power structures. As I began to explore how I was going to proceed with my research I found the greatest barrier to obtaining data was in relation to my position of power within the agency and community. It is often challenging to obtain data from families that have been clients of child welfare services given the power differential implicit to the role of the researcher, (Dumbrill, 2003), let alone that of a researcher who is also a manager in the child welfare agency providing those services. An additional complicating factor for using families or staff members as sources of data was that my management role at Brant CAS risked compromising the validity of the data. For good reason there is - and should be - careful scrutiny of research projects to ensure that participants, vulnerable or otherwise, are not subjected to harm as a result of the research project itself. The challenge became how to examine what is happening at the NBRC, how do we take a critical look at power in child welfare, when there are limitations created as a result of me being an insider and the researcher?

After considering several different options, I soon discovered the challenges that I would face collecting data through clients, community members, and Brant CAS staff. Given that this was a Masters of Social Work thesis and there are some limitations as to the extent of a project one can complete, I chose an alternative to interviews as a means to access data. Textual analysis has served to be a legitimate source of data for qualitative research projects. I began looking for textual data and found several sets of minutes from both community and agency meetings. With NBRC as my case study, combined with a textual analysis and supplemented with reflections into my stories from my experiences at NBRC, I began to formulate my research project.

The NBRC is a unique program offered at Brant CAS. In my position of ‘researcher’, I cannot hide behind a curtain of neutrality. I am centrally located within the research and in essence I am an active participant in this research. Transparency about my position and subjectivity, as part of this research, is critical and as McNamara (2009) states, “my story is clearly part of the tapestry being woven in the qualitative research process” (164). Critical social work creates space for social workers to utilize research findings within practice by identifying potential misuses of power (Fook, 2003). Further, “critical researchers enter into an investigation with their assumptions on the table, so no one is confused concerning the epistemological and political baggage they bring

with them to the research site” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:292). The specifics of relations of power that accompany me as the researcher demand a critically reflexive approach – on my part – to this research. By utilizing this approach I create the opportunity of learning a different way of seeing the same phenomenon (Fook, 2003). Reflective practice, critical consciousness and the use of self are significant strategies to explore not only my own position and experience within the research but also as a means of analyzing the data (Fook, 2003; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005; Rossiter, 2007).

When I took pause long enough to really look out my window and understand what was framing it, tinting it, even making it dirty – I realized I had a lot to learn about how and why I was making these broad statements. I had more questions than answers and I had not made much effort to really challenge what I was thinking, what I was doing, and what, if any, positive impact this might be having on the families I was working with. Through my Masters of Social Work course work and, ultimately, this thesis, I literally saw a *window* of opportunity to bring this story to life, to gain a better understanding of the relationships that form within a community-based model and how power may influence these relationships and child welfare practice overall. “A new form of practice which is local and contextual, and linked to the politics of transformation needs to develop” (Camilleri, 1999:33). Was the NBRC this place? What might this

story and all the others at the NBRC tell us? What then became the primary challenge was how I was going to be able to access the stories from families within the community directly.

Both critical research and interpretive research draw from the hermeneutic process of interpretation (Neuman, 1997; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Within the hermeneutic process, an emphasis is placed on the examination of text to discover what meaning may be embedded in the text (Neuman, 1997). The data that was analyzed for this research included the minutes of two community meetings that involved the participation of Brant CAS staff, community service providers, and community members that utilized the NBRC. Data also included two other sets of meeting minutes that involved only the staff at Brant CAS. A critical analysis of these texts were believed to have the potential to offer insight into understanding the details of interactions between workers, community partners, and community members in their context and how meaning is created (Neuman, 1997). The use of the meeting minutes, I hoped, would offer a rare glimpse of the voice of community members that have attended programs and received service through NBRC. The agency meeting minutes offer insight into the child protection workers feedback with respect to community-based child protection. It is this interpretation of the context of community-based child protection that I believe offers insight into how power structures can exist or might be mitigated. “The

interpretations emerging from the hermeneutic process can still move us to new levels of understanding” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:286).

Stories derived from my direct experience at NBRC were used to bring to life these interpretations and to help others develop a better understanding of the reality of community-based child protection (Neuman, 1997) for those involved in it through NBRC. These stories were used to help link theory, data, and reality as I perceive it to be. Standardized recordings that form the documentation utilized in the child welfare field do not capture the context of the social reality that families are experiencing (Plath, 2006). The streamlined nature of that documentation (including tick boxes, and a selection of standardized responses) confines child protection workers in their thinking. Child protection workers begin to centre their thinking around certain constructs leaving little room to expand on the complexities affecting most families (Strega, 2007; Trocmé, et al, 2003). The anecdotal stories from my perspective are used in this study to critically unpack the experiences at NBRC and “makes visible the underlying scaffolding of understandings on which actions are based” (Neuman, 1997:73). In discussions with the McMaster Ethics Review Board, it was determined that the stories chosen for this narrative were mine to share as I was a participant within the interaction and, as a result, permission of others was not needed. An expectation from the Board was that these stories reflected my perspective and experience within the

interaction. As an extra precaution to protect the identity of those in the story, I selected stories in which I was a participant as a community member, and not solely in my role as a child protection manager. Some of these narratives included or were about composites of the individuals involved – as opposed to being about particular individuals – and could be generalized among several persons who have had similar experiences. The many specifics of the other participants were not included within the story to reduce the possibilities of identifying these persons. Several of the stories were public in nature, with many community members involved, and were part of public discussion on several occasions following the event. These stories represent my perspective of the particular event and it is through a reflection of these concrete practice examples that the research becomes a bridge linking theory and practice. While there are limitations with respect to using just personal anecdotes, I chose to use supplementary data from the four sets of minutes to enhance the findings of this research.

In an effort to evaluate the services offered at NBRC and to create the space for neighbours and clients to have a voice in the service needs, Brant CAS staff at the NBRC participated in a number of meetings with the community over the last two years. The first meeting occurred in June 2009. A meeting format derived from the Signs of Safety model, (Turnell & Edwards, 1999), was utilized to elicit feedback. This format utilizes three

questions: What's working? What are we worried about? What needs to happen? Information was collected under these columns and was made publicly available to service providers, Brant CAS staff, and the broader community. The rationale for this meeting format was that it was concise, non-leading, was being introduced at that time into the child welfare field as the next panacea, and, perhaps most importantly, looked at strengths, considered areas that needed improvement, and included an action plan.

Community members, community service providers, housing staff, and Brant CAS staff were invited to attend. Attending the meeting was voluntary, no attendance record was taken, and identifying information was not added to the form. A second meeting with the community occurred in September 2010. The same broad invitation was circulated, attendance was still voluntary, and the same format was utilized to collect feedback. The notes of the second meeting were also made publicly available. These meetings and accompanying minutes offer a rare opportunity to hear the voice of the community, service providers, and clients to help identify needs, identify areas of improvement from an agency and community perspective, and act as a source for dialogue about the integrated community-based child protection model. Although I was unable to interview clients for this research project (given the aforementioned power and confidentiality issues), there is some representation of the community and client's voice through the use of

these minutes. For the purposes of this thesis project, this data will be referred to as the *community meeting minutes*.

Similarly, an internal process at Brant CAS was initiated by me and three other Brant CAS Managers. This involved including agency staff in a meeting format to conduct some level of evaluation of an integrated services model of community-based child protection. One meeting occurred in February of 2010 and it included only Brant CAS staff on the NBPT. This team meeting was a review of community-based child protection services and explored, generally, the role of community work, the child protection team, and the perceived benefits and barriers. A second meeting occurred involving four Brant CAS teams in June of 2010. The four teams were made up of the Child Development Unit, two community-based child protection teams, and a third child protection team that was embarking on a transition into a community based office. The second meeting utilized the same Signs of Safety format as described previously. Both of these meetings collected the information in minute format and both sets of minutes were posted electronically for all areas and levels of Brant CAS to peruse. For the purposes of this thesis project, this data will be referred to as the *agency meeting minutes*.

It was determined by the McMaster Research Ethics Board (hereinafter referred to as MREB) that the *community meeting minutes* were public documents. These minutes were accessible to the public and

had been publicly posted to anyone who attended the NBRC. Copies of the minutes had also been previously distributed to Brant CAS staff, community service providers and neighbours within the community (regardless of whether the individual attended the meeting or not). No further review was needed by the MREB with regard to the *community meeting minutes*. Although my research had limitations with respect to accessing the voice of the community, these minutes offered a rare opportunity to review the feedback from the neighbours as to their perceptions of the integrated service model offered at NBRC, their experiences within the community, their safety concerns, and their self-identified needs and goals.

The *agency meeting minutes* required further scrutiny as requested by the MREB. The following steps mitigated the concerns put forward by the MREB. I requested and gained permission from the Executive Director to utilize the minutes for my research data. Next, a third party Brant CAS staff member circulated a copy of the minutes to the four teams that were involved in both of the meetings. Included was a description of the research and an explanation as to why I was interested in using these minutes for my research project. Brant CAS staff members had the option to email, call, or contact the third party confidentially and without identifying him/herself and request that any particular aspect of the minutes be removed. Brant CAS staff persons were allotted a two week

timeframe to review the two sets of *agency meeting minutes*. If there was no request for amendments within that two week period I would proceed utilizing the minutes as is. There were three responses and all three indicated that he/she did not want any amendments made to either set of minutes. These sets of minutes remained unchanged for the purposes of my data analysis.

Chapter #6: Data analysis – what did I see through my window?

To begin my analysis, I first reviewed all four sets of minutes in their entirety. “Part of interpretive work is gaining a sense of the whole – the whole interview, the whole story, the whole body of data” (Charmaz, 2003:268). At a glance, this step offered an overview of what the minutes might look like looking through my window. I reviewed them a second time highlighting the points that stood out for me and resonated for some reason, even though I was unsure of what the reason might be. As I ruminated over the contents, themes began to emerge. This is consistent with what many describe as a process of coding data and organizing it into themes to gain a better understanding of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Kreuger & Neuman, 2006). There were several themes that were coming to life as I continued to review the data and many stories of my experiences at the NBRC jumped to mind as I mulled over what was captured in the text. Bochner wrote that “our subjectivity is not a barrier between us and meaning, it is what makes

meaning possible” (Bochner, 2009:364). The interplay between the researcher and the data, as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998), in addition to my experience as an insider within the community, enhanced my ability to critically examine the data (Bochner, 2009).

Data analysis has increasingly utilized narrative inquiry within qualitative data (Mello, 2002). According to Mello,

“the entire research paradigm shifts toward the story-telling mode and away from an emphasis on the researcher as ‘Other’, or what it means to observe and report versus what it is to be a participant as well as the principal actor within the research” (232).

As part of my analysis of the data I will be including stories of my experience at the NBRC. These stories will be infused with the themes that were identified within the minutes and will appear in italics to identify it as a recollection of my direct experience. This process included a reflective analysis of these stories as informed by the data from the minutes. It is without a doubt that I am central to the interpretation of this data through the window I look out from. It was essential to place the narratives and perspectives of others alongside my own in such a way that my personal biases and agenda did not become a barrier to the research (Mello, 2002). This can be attempted “through connecting and collating data” and “in doing so, the researcher becomes the storyteller, a bridge-builder working to link the use and production of stories in the field together with the analytical discourse of research literature” (Mello,

2002:241). There are four themes that were revealed through the data: Knowledge; Use of Self; Being a neighbour in the Community; and the overarching concept of Power. Without further ado, I shall begin with a story . . .

A story about knowledge and the power of knowing . . .

Community Kitchen is a regularly scheduled program offered through the NBRC. Parents attend the centre to share a new recipe, prepare it and then bring it home to their families for dinner. All food items are provided through grants accessed by Brant CAS through the CDU and families often give suggestions of different meals they would like to prepare. On some occasions Brant CAS will receive a donation of food items from the food bank or kitchen utensils that are distributed as well. On the surface, it may simply appear like a cooking frenzy but underlying this activity is the safe space for neighbours and Brant CAS staff alike to share knowledge about a variety of different things. The relationships that develop through this activity are enhanced by a deepening level of trust, an ability to help meet basic needs, respectful interaction and an opportunity to see each other as “real people”.

On the mornings of the Community Kitchen there is often a buzz in the air. The kitchen at the centre is full of activity as the food preparation begins. Slowly the neighbours begin to arrive, some with toddlers in tow. Soon toys can be heard binging and bonging, pots are being clanged

together by one little girl sitting at the feet of the adults on the kitchen floor, and boisterous conversation is filling the air. So much knowledge can be transferred and gained during these cooking groups, aside from the obvious recipe. Neighbours learn about the family down the street who has an air conditioner to give away, someone else is asking for advice in dealing with her teenagers, another is seeking comfort after just recently losing a family member. Brant CAS staff learn about the experiences in the community and, where possible, share what knowledge they have with respect to parenting strategies, community resources, and when necessary social action. These conversations flow and lead from one topic to another. Bursts of laughter can be heard and, on occasion, the tears of a child. At these meetings and at other programs at the centre – the child will be comforted by any number of adults. I have often seen other moms and Brant CAS staff holding infants just to give the new mom a break or sitting down reading a book with an older child. One mom discovered for the first time that there have finally been legislative changes and she is now eligible for Native Status. The pride and relief that washes across her face as she learns the news is witnessed by many and those present experience more deeply the impact of oppression. It is beyond words and actions that our knowledge claims are shaped, challenged and transformed – all while the lasagna bakes in the oven.

I was up in my office one day while the bustle continued below me. Yummy smells were wafting up the stairs and I was trying hard to ignore the rumbling in my stomach. I could hear some muffled conversations and footsteps on the stairs. I glanced out my window to see the neighbour's young children outside wearing no clothes. I began to wonder what was happening and soon my hunger was replaced with concern. A Brant CAS staff member from the CDU, who was facilitating the community kitchen, and two moms that were participating in the cooking that morning, arrived at the top of the stairs and asked to speak to me. They were looking for advice about a possible safety concern outside and wondered what the CAS thought about the situation. Briefly in the moment, I couldn't help but think how different this would look had our office not been at the centre. Upon reflection, I gained insight into the knowledge that we are able to share with each other due to the accessibility of our office to those in the neighbourhood.

The situation, as described by the neighbours, was this – a neighbour with two young children had asked the teenaged-son of another neighbour to watch her children for a few hours while she was out doing errands. It would seem that hunger got the best of the babysitter and he ran home to get some food and left the two young children alone in the townhouse. This came to everyone's attention when suddenly, out of the window, in the kitchen they saw the young girl running down the sidewalk

naked. 'What to do?' was a really good question! The mom of the children could not be reached, the babysitter was not adequately supervising the children, and all eyes were on me to have a solution. Instead of speculating about an answer, I asked instead, "What do you think we should do?"

I have to admit I was a bit surprised that so quickly they had an answer – what does this say about my 'expert' knowledge? The plan was this, one or both of the neighbours would attend the home with me to help get the children dressed and would have the children come to her home until the mom returned. I knew from previous conversations that the two parents often exchanged and watched each other's children and, having been in both of their homes in the past, I also knew that there were no immediate safety issues that would prevent the children from going there for the short term. The two neighbours knew that the mom would be upset to know that all this had transpired but also knew that she would be relieved and comforted to know that they had stepped up to help keep her children safe.

So off we went – the unlikely mix of professionals and neighbours as a safety response team – entering the neighbour's house – locating the children, dressing the little girl and explaining to the children that they would be playing at the one neighbour's home until their mom returned. Unfazed, the children responded with glee – they were pleased to be

going to the neighbours to play with her children and their toys. The teenaged-babysitter returned, with his mother. I took this opportunity to highlight what I knew about the safety concerns for the children and the responsibilities that come with babysitting. I shared with them that there will be a babysitting course offered at the centre and recommended he attend prior to his next babysitting gig. When mom returned, after a brief panic over not knowing where everyone was, she soon heard the whole story, not from me, but from her friend.

I had returned to my office and was contemplating the events that took place. Does this become an open file? What would have happened if a worker from the main office had needed to respond? How would they have known that the neighbour was able to help? How would they know that it was not the mom at fault for not providing adequate supervision? How would they know that there was a babysitting course coming up as a resource? What would they have done if they attended the home and the children were unsupervised? Would they have taken the children to sit at the agency while the worker tried to track down the mom? How would the children feel about this type of intervention – I don't think it would be glee. How would the mom feel returning home to find out her children had left with a child protection worker? How would she know what to do next?

The concept of 'knowing' was also a common theme found in all of the minutes. In both sets of the *community meeting minutes* the idea of

having an increased knowledge of both the community and the Brant CAS was seen as a positive. In the June 19, 2009 *community meeting minutes*, the statement made was, “we see each other as ‘real’ people”. The *agency meeting minutes* dated June 24, 2010, state, a “person is seen more as a person”, there’s greater “familiarity with families” and this knowledge can be used to “support families in other ways” which may “reduce the number of times a (child protection) file opens”. The knowledge that is created in this regard possibly reduces the over representation of low income families involved with the child welfare system.

Quite literally, we are able to see each other through our windows and, at the NBRC, learn more about one another, and gain new and different knowledge about one another. I am able to hear the stories shared by the neighbours and Brant CAS staff and we reflect upon these stories to gain a better understanding of the deeper meaning underneath the events as they unfold. “Reflective and dialogic engagement with our knowledge and with the people served through it” will challenge our knowledge claims and enhance our practice (Sellick, et al, 2002:493). This concept was raised again at the September 15, 2010 community meeting when the statement was made that “(we) get (the) community”, which is enhanced by the dialogues that occur on a regular basis to develop knowledge about the community and challenge the discourses that shape

our practice and “break down negative stereotypes” (June, 19, 2009, *community meeting minutes*).

Knowledge that has been shared by other community service providers and both of the *community meeting minutes* describe the community partnerships as something that is working at the centre. “Community partners bring specialities to the families” and the “people who run groups listen to community needs and what it asks for” (September 15, 2010, *community meeting minutes*). The NBRC creates a space where community partners and neighbours alike are able to share their knowledge, their “specialities”, and this exchange of knowledge develops individual and community capacity.

The *agency meeting minutes* dated February 22, 2010, state that through the “increase in knowledge of families” Brant CAS is able to “offer families tools” that may better meet the needs of families. Neighbours and service providers within the community are able to find a voice to impact child protection knowledge as “families tell us what they need” (February 22, 2010, *agency meeting minutes*). Both sets of *agency meeting minutes* reiterate the increased ability to see children, families and community partners more regularly when situated in a community-based setting (school or neighbourhood setting) which assists in the development of relationships and child safety: “staff/teachers get to know you” and child protection workers can make more informed child protection assessments,

“(we) know more, know better, have more people informing” (February 22, 2010, *agency meeting minutes*). “Knowledge is primarily gained through activity both in attempting to change our environment (through labor or work) and through interaction with other people” (Sayer, 1992:13 – in Neuman, 1997:78).

The story I just told represents that there is something in the knowing that is experienced differently within a community-based setting. Maybe it was about the knowledge exchange between Brant CAS and the families. Maybe it was the knowledge the families had of each other. Maybe it was the lack of knowledge that the babysitter had in caring for children. Maybe it was the new knowledge created for the mom, who would learn that she had neighbours who cared about her and her children, the babysitter, who learned about adequate supervision, or the neighbours, who learned that they have a voice and a means to help their neighbours keep children safe. Maybe it was that I, as the expert, did not know the answer and instead relied on the knowledge brought forward by the neighbours. “We don’t always have the answers – family may have the answers”, and/or the knowledge to inform these answers (February 22, 2010, *agency meeting minutes*). Maybe it was the joining of child protection staff with the community, as a different type of intervention, to bring about child safety? Maybe it was all of these things and likely more, as knowledge construction is a never-ending process and community-

based child protection makes both the agency's and the families' knowledge claims more transparent and open for challenge.

Alternatively, what knowledge is gained, challenged, or shared by a child protection worker could be subjective. It is possible that, as a community-based child protection worker, the knowledge about families that is gained is used as a function of control rather than for equitability or with justice in mind. Community-based child protection workers may limit their view from their own windows to only seek out the knowledge that substantiates risk claims rather than mitigate these claims. I worry that community based-child protection workers could withhold knowledge from families, limiting opportunities to access supports or create change within the family unit. Child protection workers may not challenge their own professional knowledge and continue to act upon only their expert knowledge, not deeming what knowledge families, neighbours and community members contribute, as credible. This could have a significantly detrimental effect on the community and contribute to oppressive practices within a community-based office setting.

A story about Use of self

It was a gray and rainy day and the NBRC was quiet – the entire neighbourhood was quiet, which is often the case when the weather is inclement. The neighbourhood children had stopped by the centre quickly on their way to school to grab their breakfast which is prepared twice

weekly at the centre. On average fifty children will pop into the centre for a nutritious boost to the morning routine. The Child Development Team of Brant CAS accesses community dollars and resources to obtain food items for this program. I am approached frequently for assistance with food for the families in the community. This is one program that is accessible to children at the centre to prevent them from going to school hungry.

A few Brant CAS staff were upstairs at NBRC, including me. Not much was happening outside my window and I remained mostly focused on what was on my computer screen. My concentration was broken by the chime of the door downstairs opening. Footsteps are heard crossing the floor and soon I hear my name being called from the bottom of the stairs. I recognized the voice as being that of a neighbour, who I will call Vicky to respect confidentiality. Vicky has been involved with Brant CAS since the birth of her child. Although the child protection worker is from another team at Brant CAS, Vicky has accessed the programs at the NBRC on occasion over a couple of years. Vicky and I have chatted on several occasions. She often tells stories about her child and sometimes asks for advice when it comes to parenting. Vicky has asked for information about the court system, the child welfare system, and how to improve her relationship with her own mother. Our conversations were sometimes just between the two of us and on other occasions within a larger group

involved in the programs at the centre. Vicky shared more about her family over time, and I soon learned she struggled with anxiety, historical intrafamilial physical and sexual abuse, and her own addiction issues.

Vicky is a young mom and reports having few reliable supports of her own.

I came to the top of the stairs to respond to Vicky's calls. She asked if she could speak with me. I put aside my work and joined her downstairs.

Vicky was very upset and was requesting help. So often within child welfare the field focuses on the families that are not wanting CAS assistance, when there are, in fact, families who develop a trust and relationship with child protection staff and seek out the support available through the child welfare agency. Vicky has historically been guarded and distrusting of Brant CAS, mainly because her child was initially apprehended from her care, and as a result of generations of victimization and structural and societal oppression. Interaction after interaction, program after program at the NBRC had begun to break down these barriers and it was on such a day that Vicky, feeling alone, desperate and at wit's end, came to the NBRC.

Vicky began to speak through her sobs. She had no sense as to what to do next. She was fearing deeply that she was about to relapse from her sobriety and use drugs. Vicky told me she knew exactly who to call to get 'her fix'. Vicky was reeling from being sexually assaulted by a man the night before. She was worried about so many things that all of her

words were just pouring out of her in a heap. Vicky was afraid of contacting the police as she did not think they would believe her and she was afraid to tell people in case it affected their perception of her child's safety. The pressure and isolation was tempting her to ease the pain with drugs, coupled with her instinct to begin cutting herself as a release. As we spoke the anxiety began to peak and she started to hyperventilate from a panic attack. We took deep breaths together and I continued to speak slowly and quietly about other things to help her regain her strength. Once Vicky was able, we shared a cup of tea and started to break down what she was experiencing in smaller bites that were not so overwhelming. I felt compelled, not just mandated, to help Vicky - but where to begin?

At times it seems serendipitous the way things fall into place in a community-based setting. When I find myself asking, "What are the chances?" I am soon able to reflect that it is more than just coincidence that the supports families need are readily available at NBRC. As we sat together in the kitchen, Vicky asked to speak to an addictions support person. That day, that afternoon, at the NBRC a St. Leonard's addiction counsellor was scheduled to be present at the centre for drop-in support. I was soon able to find out that the Sexual Assault Treatment Centre was going to attend the centre as well as a means of introducing the community to the services offered through their agency. Both of the community service providers attending the centre were familiar to Vicky as

she had met with them in the past. Some relief could be seen in Vicky's eyes knowing that there would be accessible services available to her that would meet two of her needs almost immediately. Once we were able to work through this initial piece, Vicky was able to broach her question to me about her child's care, and to explore what she needs in this regard. Presently, her neighbour was watching her child but she just did not know what she was going to be able to manage in terms of parenting, particularly as she struggled through a possible relapse. I asked Vicky how she wanted to let her child protection worker know about what was happening. She asked me to call her worker and Vicky wondered whether the worker would also be able to come to NBRC that afternoon to meet with the other service providers as well to develop a plan. When I reached the worker, she, too, agreed to attend the centre to support Vicky. By the end of the afternoon, Vicky had the support she needed to make it through this crisis, not only formal supports but a strengthening of the support she received from her neighbour caring for her child. A safety plan was also developed for herself and her child. This shared response was possible through the space created at the NBRC.

Engagement, trust, honesty, and relationships need to develop over time. As child protection workers, it is not realistic to think these goals can be accomplished in one home visit. Vicky and I interacted on multiple occasions, shared food, drink, and laughs in the kitchen. When there were

so many unsafe doors in Vicky's life she chose to walk through the doors at the NBRC. When Vicky felt there was nowhere to turn, she came to the NBRC. When Vicky asked for help, she received a combined response from a variety of community service providers at the NBRC. What might this have looked like if she had sought support at the main office? Would she have made the trek to the main office downtown to seek out this support? Would there be information available to her about services in the community available that very afternoon? Would she have been told where to go to talk to someone and would she then be expected to make her own way to these services? What are the chances that, as she bumped between one service and another, she would have been able to resist the need to use drugs to silence her pain? Maybe that would be easier than having to walk through yet another door before someone is able to offer concrete help.

Many authors have explored how service delivery may be improved within child protection settings and, more specifically, how the child protection worker's use of self has a significant impact on how a family experiences a child protection intervention (de Boer & Coady, 2006; Dumbrill & Maiter, 2003; Maiter, et al, 2006; Palmer, Maiter and Manji, 2006; Trotter, 2002). It has been further suggested that effective client-worker helping relationships may contribute to increased child safety (de Boer, 2006; Dumbrill & Maiter, 2003). I have defined the use of self as part

of this research project as how the child protection worker uses her/his social and professional skills, personality, and knowledge in the client-worker relationship. There are a multitude of examples of use of self, however deBoer and Coady concluded that, “one of the primary factors contributing to a good helping relationship is a humanistic style of worker – a style that stretches traditional professional ways-of-being (2006:38). This helps child protection workers to develop a rapport, have a better understanding of the experiences of families, and have more realistic expectations (de Boer & Coady, 2006). The *agency meeting minutes* dated February 22, 2010, highlight this concept of child protection workers needing to “bend a bit and do other stuff, other duties as assigned – not just protection – this is when the trust starts” and the “need to have a heart for people – want to see change” in the form of justice, as well as the “need to have humanity, want to help”. The *agency meeting minutes* reflect the desire of child protection workers to “provide a response that is more specific to family needs – not a cookie-cutter response” and to create a “different level of connection” through using a skill set that includes but is not limited to “active listener, patient, honest, clarity about role, clear expectations, self awareness, collaboration with family and service provision, understanding – not undermining, non-judgemental, strength-based, respect, knowledge, engagement, agent for change” (February 22, 2010, *agency meeting minutes*).

The *agency meeting minutes* dated June 24, 2010, repeat this theme by highlighting that various aspects of what is working in community-based child protection relates to use of self and the relationships that develop within these communities. These include “better relationships for families; opportunities to build trust; seen more as a person; collaborative approach; faster and more customized approach; partnership in community events”. Both sets of *community meeting minutes* capture use of self and relationships as well. The June 19, 2009 *community meeting minutes* identify as important a “sense of humour; helping each other watching the kids; see each other as ‘real’ people; working together for special occasions, more respectful relationship”. The September 15, 2010, *community meeting minutes* expand on this further with, “everyone helps each other out; lots of community events to keep in touch and meet neighbours; everyone pulls together to help; lots of love in community – thinking about others; lots of community partnerships; CAS (staff) have a chance to do work differently and understand needs of families”. Palmer, et al, stressed the value of workers “who were able to establish respectful and supportive relationships with parents”, finding that “these workers were building a partnership with parents, with the mutual goal of a safe and supportive environment for children” (Palmer, et al, 2006:822/823). Maiter, et al, found that “parents appreciated workers who were caring, genuine, empathetic, exceptionally helpful, non-judgemental,

and accepting” (Maiter, et al, 2006:167/168). These studies and the minutes as described indicate the value of a child protection worker’s use of self in the client-worker helping relationship.

There is much to be learned about a child protection worker’s use of self, and the relationships that develop as a result, as a means to more readily achieving the agency’s mandate regarding child safety. In the *agency meeting minutes*, dated June 24, 2011, balancing relationships and professionalism was identified as a worry. Retrospectively, it is hard to determine what was meant by this. It would seem this statement might indicate a concern about one’s professional self needing preservation within the development of relationships within the community. It could be a need to keep professional and personal selves separate. Maybe it is a fear about lack of professionalism rather than something within the relationship. It will be important to explore this further.

What becomes of the families that are neighbours to community-based child protection workers that are not concerned about their use-of-self skills, professionally and/or personally? What if the data had captured the validity of an expert-driven model that does not emphasize collaborative efforts when working with families? I have observed child protection workers that continue to attend client’s homes without calling first as the norm, rather than the exception. Families continue to complain about this practice, but the worker struggles to move from this need to

“catch people”; certain that if the family was unaware of her/his arrival, they would surely be caught ‘red-handed’. This deficit –based approach within the child welfare field continues to be prevalent and demonstrates the continued use of power as a means to further marginalize families rather than utilize strengths to develop positive change. Child protection workers fear that if they seek strengths they will miss the risk factors. Continued support to develop use-of-self skills that enhance a respectful worker-client relationship is essential within the field. Despite this, developing relationships within the Eastdale community increased trust which enhanced the client-worker relationship. By engaging with clients and starting where families are at, child protection workers are able to share power at a variety of levels. The skills that are incorporated with the use of self, reflect broader social work values and ethics and enhance the development of relationships with clients, neighbours, and community service providers.

A story about neighbours

I was heading to my office from the parking lot, quietly hoping the dog that was off its leash and charging at pedestrians would somehow not notice me heading up the sidewalk. A little girl, who often stops to chat, and lives in a neighbouring unit, called out to me, “Sarah, Sarah, I have to tell you something”, she said. “I have to whisper it to you”, she added. I crouched down low so she could lean into my ear. I was very curious

about what she had to say. She whispered to me, “It’s my birthday today. I am 8 today”. I replied, “My goodness, what a special day. Any plans?” I was slightly worried about her response, knowing that poverty is prevalent within the community and it is often difficult to put food on the table let alone plan for a birthday. She said, still whispering, “We might have to wait till Thursday and hopefully my dad’s EI cheque will arrive”. My eyes filled and I worked hard to compose myself and find something to say that could possibly be suitable. After some pause, I said, “Well . . . this way maybe you can enjoy two days of it being your birthday.” It was weak, I know, but I was admittedly stumped. The little girl headed off to school and I, with my head hanging and shoulders slumped, continued the walk to my office. What can be done to help? I wondered what a neighbour might do.

I remembered the many donations the agency had received of various gifts that we stored in the basement at the centre. Through the generosity of many, the Brant CAS receives many donations of toys, clothes, games and miscellaneous items. Several staff that work at the community centres collect some of these items to have at the centres for raffles, game prizes and community events. I wondered if there might be something down there the mom might be able to pick out for her daughter? How can I offer this support to the family without seeming offensive? Knowing that all but the toddler was still at home, I attended the home and knocked on the door. It bothers me that I see fear in parent’s

eyes when they see me at the door. They expect me to arrive asking questions about the adequacy of their parenting, challenging their way of doing of things, having to explain themselves. I thought to myself, how can I ever be a neighbour if my visit to a home brings so much angst? I persevered despite my worries, and hers, and explained that I was there to let her know there were some toys/gifts at the centre and I wondered if she might want to pick something out for her daughter. Her response was a humble, “okay” and back we went to the centre. While there, something really special happened. In the kitchen, a CDU Brant CAS staff member was pulling out the baking supplies. The mom asked her what was going on at the centre today? My jaw dropped to the floor when she replied, “we are making and decorating cakes today”. Are you kidding me, was all I was thinking. The mom quickly asked if there was space left to join the group. “Absolutely”, was the response. The mom was grinning from ear to ear knowing that she was going to be able to bake her daughter a birthday cake today. And bake she did – a wonderful cake was created - decorated with pinks and purples, her daughter’s favourite colours. While she baked, the mom shared with the other neighbours baking cakes her worries and they, in turn, offered support and understanding. Laughter soon followed as the women shared stories about their children, their families, and life in general. With gifts and cakes in hand, the mom returned home so pleased, proud, and relieved she had something for her daughter on her birthday.

The next day I saw the little girl and asked her how her birthday was. She was sitting outside at the picnic table playing with a toy her mom had selected for her from the collection downstairs. Without hesitation, she shouted, "IT WAS GREAT!" I have thought back to that moment many times. There is something different that is almost intangible that happens through the various programs at the centre. It is not at all about baking cakes really, it is much deeper than that, something that weaves itself through the centre, through the community. I may not be a neighbour in the traditional sense of the word but through my position at the centre I and others at the NBRC are able to create space for families to do things for themselves and each other that is, in fact, not only neighbourly but also something that builds a sense of community, a community that cares for each other. What began as a whisper of a doubt, ended with a shout . . . of happiness.

The idea of being a neighbour is particularly complex when trying to ascertain whether an office of professionals, particularly from Brant CAS, located within a community-based setting, are even able to consider themselves neighbours. Communities are derived of groups of people that reside in a particular area and often refer to each other as being neighbours, but a sense of belonging to a community stretches beyond just simply residing next door to someone. "A community is more than just a place. It comprises various groups of people who work together on a

face-to-face basis in public life, not just in private” (McKnight, 1995:118). McKnight continues with this stream by stating, “Community is about the common life that is lived in such a way that the unique creativity of each person is a contribution to the other” (McKnight, 1995:123). In this regard, all neighbours within the Eastdale Gardens community, including Brant CAS staff and community partners utilizing the centre, are in a position to contribute to each other. There is an exchange of resources, knowledge, and support among all persons that is circular in nature and that creates opportunities to contribute to the community as a whole. Accessibility is critical for families within a marginalized community as there are often limitations to the families’ ability to be able to attend central offices to access the supports they need. Community-based child protection workers and the CDU staff at Brant CAS have a unique opportunity to utilize their power, interpersonal skills and resources, to:

“bring a person into the web of associational life that can act as a powerful force in that person’s life. And they bring the individual into life as a citizen by incorporating him (or her) into relationships where his capacities can be expressed – where he (or she) is not simply defined by his (or her) ‘deficiencies’” (McKnight, 1995:119/120).

This point is especially captured in the story where the mom was able to express her capacities to create something for her daughter, rather than focusing on her perceived deficiencies in not being able to afford a birthday cake.

Both sets of *agency meeting minutes* capture this circular exchange that may include, but not be limited to, a two person exchange or in many cases a ‘pay it forward’ exchange. The “centre (NBRC) can offer resources not normally available to families” and assist families in having their “basic needs being met” which then “decreases individualization of the issues” (February 22, 2010, *agency meeting minutes*). There is “more connection to community partners”, “families tell us what they need”, and “families coming to us (CAS) for support can get help at the NBRC” (February 22, 2010, *agency meeting minutes*). Additionally, there is a “collaborative approach between various units and community providers”, “everyone gets a say” and “(Brant CAS) support families other ways – basic needs” (June, 24, 2010, *agency meeting minutes*). Brant CAS is able to contribute to creating space for neighbours to access support services and as a result of their needs being met, neighbours are then able to offer a different type of support to other neighbours, thereby increasing a positive sense of community life and community capacity.

This is not just the perception of the ‘professionals’ at Brant CAS as this theme was also identified within the *community meeting minutes*. Many positive points were identified under the ‘What’s Working’ section of both sets of *community meeting minutes* with respect to accessibility to concrete support services, including basic needs and safety, as well as the value of being a neighbour contributing to a sense of community. Many

points were captured in the *community meeting* minutes, dated June 19, 2009, and to identify a few: “have someone there when ‘down and out’ – neighbours; better sense of community; children’s safety program; other services are coming into the community; helping each other watching the kids; every voice being heard”. Some highlights from the *community meeting minutes*, dated September 15, 2010 include, “everyone helps each other out; watch out for kids to keep safe; good programs for all ages; lots of community events to keep in touch and meet neighbours; group participation; good food; lots of love in community – thinking about others; community supports service providers – reciprocal”.

Becoming a neighbour and developing a sense of community is not something that can occur overnight. Building trust and relationships between Brant CAS and community members is an essential foundation that must be established first. “There are lengthy processes of developing an understanding of a community, establishing effective networks, bringing people together, helping groups to identify priorities and taking action” (Wright, 2004:396). What benefit might a child welfare agency receive in this exchange? “The community development approach offers a model for engaging communities more actively in promoting the welfare of children and for extending the responsibility for safeguarding children beyond being merely the domain of professionals” (Wright, 2004:397). Sharing the responsibility to keep children safe, while working together with

communities to identify needs and creative action plans is the ultimate goal of community-based child protection work at NBRC.

How can we, as community-based child protection workers, ever really be neighbours? We do not sleep there at night. We rarely are there on the weekends. Is it enough to merely extend myself as a neighbour during working hours only? The neighbours near my own home have large fences and big trees to protect their privacy. At Eastdale Gardens this type of privacy is not possible, and can be easily exploited by child protection workers focussed on surveillance ". It would seem to be much easier to be a warden than a neighbour given the power imbalances present.

The neighbours did not have a choice to have me move in next door. The families at Eastdale Gardens have limited say, rarely a voice, and how would they ever begin to have Brant CAS leave? How does it feel to reside in an area deemed "at risk" and in need of a child protection agency next door? The *community meeting minutes*, dated September 15, 2010, indicate that Eastdale Gardens is perceived to be a "bad place" and people who reside there are "social outcasts". Further input within these minutes included, "it's a fear like any prejudice – people from here are treated differently at school, in society when they know you are from here – 'Boomtown'". As a neighbour I should also experience this stigma, but through my social location I do not. I have the luxury of separating myself from these labels and look from a different window at the end of the day. It

is an integral step towards social justice to continue to seek opportunities to understand the social context within the community, to challenge these stigmas, and as a resourceful agency neighbour, find ways to affect positive change within the community.

I wonder if it is more about *being neighbourly* as opposed to being a neighbour. Maybe, through being neighbourly, we can engage in the circular exchange that helps enhance and develop the capacity of the community. During the community meeting on September 15, 2011, worries were raised with respect to “needles found by the blue bin and the baby park”, and there have been “break-ins to units and vehicles”. Brant CAS and other service providers were able to work together with the community to address these safety concerns. Cohesion is created within the neighbourhood with the common goal of increasing community well-being by working together to “continue to break down negative stereotypes” (*Community meeting minutes*, dated June 19, 2009). As neighbourly relationships develop, trust has space to grow, and when there is trust, there are opportunities to share power. The issue of power will be explored more fully in the next section.

The complexities of power – a critical reflection

A prevalent theme that emerged in the data was the issue of power. Power was named in a broad, abstract way and I struggled with trying to identify the specifics. In retrospect, it would have been helpful to draw out

more discussion during these meetings about the specifics of power, how it is used, where it is hidden, how it affects practice and families. This will be a necessary next step as service delivery at NBRC evolves. After much thought and deliberation I rediscovered what I had mentioned earlier in my literature review – power is not an entity of its own – rather it weaves its way into all aspects of social work practice. The specifics of power required more careful scrutiny. Each theme within this research project is infused with power relations and constructs. A critical reflection of different stories about my experiences at the NBRC helped to untangle some of these concepts. Next I will endeavour to more deeply engage with the intersection of power with these themes through the data.

Power and knowledge:

Both sets of *agency meeting minutes* emphasize the importance of decreasing expert power. The *agency meeting minutes*, dated February 22, 2010, state, “Person is seen more as a person than as an authority in the community”. The expert is presumed to have extraordinary knowledge about a particular field or issue. In this case, child protection workers are perceived to have expert knowledge about child protection issues. If you are the expert then you are in a position to exert this expert knowledge, authority and power over others. This expert position creates very little space for others to insert their knowledge. With respect to knowledge about a community, my attendance during mostly regular business hours,

five days a week, does not in any way make me an expert about the community. Rather, the community members themselves are far more knowledgeable about the community, just as a family member has greater insight into her/his family dynamics than does an outsider.

The *agency meeting minutes*, dated February 22, 2010, elaborate further about power in the discussion about the qualities of a community-based child protection worker. The minutes indicated that a worker needs to “understand power differential; perceived power and the use of authority”. To achieve this deeper understanding of power, “ongoing interrogation of accepted truths will free more conversations between groups and offer new sites of alliances and sites of struggle” (Noble, 2004:300). These dialogues need not only to occur among Brant CAS staff but also with the neighbours and wider community circle.

A common thread that was identified in all four sets of minutes was the value in, and need for, the community members to have a voice. “Every voice being heard; program staff listen to community needs and what it asks for; everyone gets a say; families tell us what they need”. These statements resonate for me because of the importance placed on creating space for the voice of clients and neighbours to have input into the services available to them.

For over a year neighbours requested recycling to be available at Eastdale Gardens. Brant housing expressed concern about making this

available, stating that it is too complicated, neighbours won't follow through, recycling boxes will go missing. Through the forum of our community meetings at the NBRC, neighbours were insistent. Finally the recycling program was implemented and, when it worked, the feedback was (we) "proved housing wrong – recycling works" (*community meeting minutes*, dated June 19, 2009). This level of empowerment creates the space for the community to take ownership and experience power over other, often more powerful, structures. As we experience and hear the voices of those who are often less powerful, a different type of knowledge is created that will often challenge existing knowledge claims.

Power and use of self:

A child protection worker is faced with multiple decisions involving families each and every day. With each interaction, each decision, each intervention, a child protection worker is able to choose how he/she will exert or withhold power. Thus, "it means social workers being able to choose *when* and *how* to negotiate, relinquish and exercise their power to help service users to empower themselves" (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005:447). Strega (2007) articulates this point further: "anti-oppressive practice in child welfare is not about making choices between protecting children or supporting families. It is about finding a respectful way to engage with children and families that allows us to do both". (Strega, 2007:82). Within a community-based setting, there are more opportunities

to find different ways to engage with families. “CAS protection team feels we can work differently – help and support not always investigate” (*community meeting minutes*, dated June 19, 2009). Additionally, through their location in the community and their efforts to work differently, community-based child protection workers felt they were able to “infuse themselves into the community” (*agency meeting minutes*, dated February 22, 2010).

Reflection about the work being conducted within the community is an essential step in understanding what is working, and what is contributing further to oppressive structures. “Critical consciousness makes social workers aware of power in their professional role which may be oppressive to service users. Used consciously and carefully as allies, this power can help to promote emancipatory changes for service users” (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005:447). Within the field, as social workers, we each have to choose – complacency or action. “Critical consciousness challenges social workers to be cognizant of power differentials and how these differentials may inadvertently make social work practice an oppressive experience” (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005:448). This level of reflection lies within the worker and must become part of the work processes.

Power and being a neighbour:

Throughout the data, although seen as a positive, a common thread was the value of being able to see families and children more often.

Typically, for many people living in a community, the idea of seeing each other regularly is arguably less threatening than having a child protection worker as your “neighbour”, as someone who can “see you” quite easily.

The issue of surveillance must be considered carefully. If I chose to see risk rather than strengths through my window, it is quite likely that I would be acting (and perceived to be) more like a warden than a neighbour.

Should I accept a policing role as I sit in my office looking out my window, I will marginalize families further, as it is always possible to see something within the community, any community, which might impact on child safety.

The “what if” approach can result in endless safety concerns being seen out of the window of any child protection worker. These worries were

expressed by the community, as well as by child protection workers, within the minutes. The *community meeting minutes* dated June 19, 2009,

indicated that the community was “worried about CAS being in the neighbourhood – can be scary”. The *agency meeting* minutes dated June

24, 2010, also expressed worry about “CAS being seen as surveillance”.

At Brant CAS, and within the child welfare field, this type of practice

requires careful scrutiny. Dialogues in this regard need to take a critical

look at using power through our community-based location as a means of

surveillance. We, in child welfare, must be willing to be implicated in this power, to uncover it, to recognize it, in order to change it.

The flip-side of this, however, is that community-based offices create opportunities for families and neighbours to look into child protection windows. The work at NBRC becomes more transparent and families are able to have a greater understanding of the child protection role. It is “not about power, about community” (*agency meeting minutes*, dated February 22, 2010). When we share knowledge about child protection practices, expose our flaws, accept feedback from those that are affected by our work, we change how people see the agency through our windows.

Not every neighbour within the community is going to have or experience privilege in the same way. Child protection workers have privilege through their social location, as well as their mandated role. There are occasions where child protection staff persons need to exercise this power to meet the child safety mandate. Community-based child protection does not necessarily eradicate protection issues within the community and our on-going child protection role may impact on relationships both positively and negatively as we strive to increase safety within the community. As a community-based child protection worker sometimes these shifts within the relationships are subtle as trust builds,

or conflictual as trust diminishes. Regardless, these interactions are more transparent and frequent given the community-based location.

Within the community, when a child apprehension occurs, not just the one family under investigation feels the impact of surveillance and power; all of the community members are affected. While there were no comments within the minutes with respect to an apprehension within the community, I remember one particular apprehension that occurred within the Eastdale Gardens community. To minimize safety concerns, the police were asked in this instance to attend the home with the child protection staff to conduct the apprehension. I remember looking out the window of the play room on the main floor of the NBRC watching the protection workers, with the police in tow, carrying these children across the playground towards the centre. Many neighbours had moved from their usual posts outside and retreated indoors, but through their windows they could see what was happening. Fears for the security of their own children and awareness of the power of the agency to take them away had come to the forefront.

For several days following the apprehension, interactions between me and the community members remained limited as there were fewer people standing outdoors. Relationships seemed to be put on hold for a day or two while we all adjusted to the intrusive intervention of the Brant CAS, a supposed neighbour. This seems to happen whenever there is a

visible and intrusive response from child protection staff within the Eastdale Gardens community. The relationships between Brant CAS staff, neighbours, and community service providers become tentative at best. We all seem to be a bit shy, ashamed even to face each other, to know what to say. To carry on as if nothing happened appears callous and covert. To speak of the issue could violate confidentiality, despite the potentially public nature of the child protection intervention. The power of the intervention blows through the room as the window is opened for all to see. It is not as simple as just closing the window as the air has already escaped and the stench of power breathes its way into the fibre of the community.

It is very difficult to have dialogues with community members and service providers given the both public and confidential nature of the child protection safety concerns. How are we to process this with community neighbours when Brant CAS staff needs to limit what information is shared, even if only to assure them that the children are doing okay? It will be difficult to appear transparent when we are cautious about anything that is said for fear of violating confidentiality. How does this tight-lipped response further exacerbate fear and the power differential between Brant CAS and the community? When the power is so obvious, how do we address the elephant in the room when we are constrained in what we can say?

The apprehension was raised by only two neighbours following the incident, one remarked that it was about time the CAS did something and the other remarked that the CAS was a joke and should mind their own business. Strangely, both these positions were raised in the kitchen of the centre, and although I was just one person in a room of many, it was almost as if Brant CAS was a separate entity from the NBRC. The programs at the centre continued to operate and families continued to attend. Families seemed to feel they could attend the centre even though staff at the NBRC had initiated the apprehension. Does this mean there is some acceptance that some children are unsafe and need to be removed from their home? Does it mean some disconnect the child protection role from the NBRC? Does it have to do with the relationships that are developing within the community that help to heal the trauma after an incident? Maybe it has to do with trust of the system – or at least, trust of NBRC? Sadly, it could also mean that voices feel silenced when child protection workers exert power in this manner. It is important to seek methods to access the voices of the community during these and other challenging times when the mandated power of Brant CAS is so clearly visible through the windows. This will deepen our understanding of the impact intrusive child protection measures have – or of the community's understanding of those times they perceived a lack of response by Brant

CAS – on the community, and what we need to do differently to address these needs.

With this, and every apprehension, the traumatic implications of an apprehension rippled through the families as they observe this scene from their homes. With an apprehension, the issue of surveillance bubbles to the surface as the public nature of the agency's power and control is exposed to everyone within the community. We cannot escape the community's gaze as we conduct this work from a community-based setting. This type of power we cannot neutralize. We cannot pretend it is not there. Therefore, we must seek ways to understand it and share it. It may be necessary to work a little harder after an intervention such as an apprehension, to restore and build on relationships within the community. We may have to grow a thicker skin as the community tells us "we are a joke" and "don't do anything right". We may need to ask ourselves some difficult questions to recognize issues related to surveillance and power. Most importantly, we need to find ways to use this power effectively, without further marginalizing families.

Through our power and privilege, child protection staff persons are able to access resources and support in a beneficial way for families within the community. Baines suggests, "using your privilege means using whatever advantages, power and resources you have to the advantage of the marginalized and oppressed" (Baines, 2007:63). As stated previously,

this circular exchange of power and resources within the community creates opportunities to increase community capacity and safety – to be neighbours rather than wardens. This is a concrete way in which child protection workers are able to share power with families and use power effectively to seek justice.

Things are going to be different somehow . . . as the story unfolds . . .

As I reflected further about my incident with my car and the child, I could begin to unpack the intricacies of how power influenced my feelings at the beginning of the crisis, during, and in search of a resolution. I continued to be plagued with a torrent of thoughts. How do I fix this situation? How do I help families keep their children safe? How can families keep their children safe on some of the most basic levels, like purchasing a bike helmet, when their finances are so limited? Surely, a powerful agency like Brant CAS, should be able to access resources to help build on the strengths of the community? Would this not contribute to child safety and a sense of community well-being? Why do I still feel so vulnerable? I began to talk more to others about the incident, finally able to lift some blame and even shame from my shoulders, to further understand how I am implicated in this reflective journey.

A week went past and the walk from the parking lot to my office had become less overwhelming. Seemingly, as the child healed, neighbours appeared less apprehensive to speak with me. Some asked how I was

doing and told me that they were worried about how I would be feeling but didn't know what to say to me. I guess we all needed to find our footing again. I had once thought, even subconsciously, that I was quite infallible and I had not taken much opportunity to really explore my position of power. I just assumed that I did not even need to acknowledge it existed thus causing me to not even recognize when I was yielding it, abusing it even, and – at the very least – not using it to its fullest potential to achieve social justice. Thinking back to when I stood in the middle of the crowd standing over this poor little child, I was humbled to the core. I did not know exactly how but I knew that things were going to be different somehow. The neighbours sensed the change as well. Our discomfort with each other represented their eventual acceptance that I do not and will not have all the answers. I am human after all; affected by many different life experiences, by making mistakes, and learning as I go along. I knew that my window would now not only look different from the outside looking in but also from the inside looking out.

As a result, rich discussions ensued and an idea was born. The hope was to organize a bike safety event that would share resources, knowledge, and food, and which would bring neighbours together with community service providers to promote bicycle safety in the community. The event was coined, The Bike Rodeo, and included the fire department, police officers, community volunteers, housing, Brant CAS, and the

neighbourhood families and children. Brant CAS and Brant housing pooled their financial resources to purchase bike helmets for all of the children that needed them. A neighbour in the community met with each family to determine how many helmets were needed. On the day of the event, the volunteers and police officers assisted the children and parents with bike repairs and adjustments, and offered some instruction and fitting of bike helmets. The children were able to complete a bike-riding course and practice some of the skills shared during the event. Each child received a certificate of completion. On the basketball court, hundreds of hotdogs and hamburgers were prepared by the Child Development Unit of Brant CAS. A neighbour had loaned their barbeque for the event. The event was scheduled while I was to be away on vacation but I could not miss it. My children and I attended the event together and we all learned something that day.

Neighbours, Brant CAS staff, and community partners jumped in to haul food, drinks, and whatever else was needed to help the event. The Bike Rodeo occurred at each resource centre in Brant that summer and has been an annual event for the past several years. This last year Brant CAS received a donation of 24 skateboards and safety pads to distribute at the centres. I discovered that even when I feel powerless, through my social location and position, I will still maintain power, whether I want it or not, feel it or not. As a neighbour, a professional, in terms of my

knowledge, and how I use myself within my relationships, I am influenced by power but more significantly I am in a position to create the space to share power.

Chapter #7: A window into a new beginning . . .

As social workers in the child welfare system it is easy to become complacent in our work, to use cookie cutter interventions with families and to claim to be using evidence to guide our work – all in the name of saving children. When we engage in dialogue with service users, the community, and other service providers, we create opportunities to challenge this complacency. At the New Beginnings Resource Centre we have monthly meetings called “community chats” where anyone can attend to discuss what is happening within the community. We have also held broader meetings with the community to discuss our worries, what is working, what needs to change? Sellick et al (2002) describes this as an opportunity to, “reflect(ing) out loud with our clients on the sources of our knowing, to articulate how we know what we know, or to reveal the areas of our own uncertainty and the dilemmas we experience in constructing our practice worlds” (Sellick et al, 2002:495). The window metaphor becomes something deeper, not just something I can see out of but, most importantly, something that families and the community can see into: an opportunity for transparency – for families to see what we are doing – and for accountability – to share power. Am I really a neighbour? Or am I really

a warden living next door? Is it more important that I can see out my window? Or that others can see in?

Embedded in our reality by virtue of our location and accessibility to the community we create the space to increase opportunities for engagement and this facilitates the client-worker relationship to develop over time. Contact with families may be more frequent, not always crisis driven, and may be more meaningful and respectful. New insights are gained when we pause to clean our windows.

There are barriers identified within child welfare and many other social work settings that reduce the opportunities to create space to have these dialogues, not just with our professional selves but with the families and communities we work with. Over the years that we have been working within the community we have gathered many stories. These narratives are the truths as we see it, experience it, tell it – not just our narratives, but also the stories as told by the families in the community. These stories do not pass the rigid and carefully defined parameters of quantitative research but are they not knowledge and truth just the same? Are they not the voices of the families that we so often overlook? Could these stories challenge us to deconstruct our assumptions?

One of the challenges facing researchers within this area of interest is the ability, or lack thereof, to collect stories from the community members, service providers, and families involved with child protection

services. Despite best intentions, the participants have few opportunities to exercise any power within the context of these research projects. For those who believe that knowledge is localized to a context as I am, the input of the community and participants enhances the critical analysis of the realities, capacity issues, and service needs facing these families. These stories can often be rich with insight and, ideally, a participatory action research approach could be used to capture the voice of the community and participants (Maiter, Simich, Jacobson & Wise, 2008; Etowa, Bernard, Oyinsan & Clow, 2007). Utilizing this approach to research, community members could be involved in the design, operation and analysis phases of the project. The focus could be to explore the effectiveness and limitations of community-based child protection. The community members could determine the questions to be asked, how to ask them, who to ask, and they could be actively involved in making meaning of the information gathered, creating new knowledge, and challenging existing assumptions. It would, however, be very difficult for a Master's student to engage in such a process for their thesis given the time constraints.

I believe that the stories that are created and shared at the New Beginnings Resource Centre challenge our social work practices and knowledge claims. Families within the community have a voice that needs to be listened to and, as social workers, we have an opportunity to

deconstruct our ways of knowing and thinking. We should view our role in this regard as a constant “work in progress, not as a fixed and final project” (Sellick et al, 2002:496).

At Brant CAS, stories are collected and shared for many purposes and in many areas of practice. Community members and Brant CAS share stories with each other and to others. These stories create space for dialogues to occur that enhance our understanding of a context and can bring to life concepts that are sometimes difficult to unpack. Brant CAS encourages the use of stories and welcomes others to share their experiences to help develop understanding of a particular function, area, or practice. These stories are used in training for staff, foster parents and community service providers, as part of the orientation process for new staff, as critical discussion within team meetings, and in presentations about community-based child welfare. Stories about the community, practice, relationships, would help us to look critically at the principles and policies of practice, whether these principles and policies are being actualized within child welfare practice, and where agencies might be able to create space to do the work differently through community-based child protection work. These narratives could guide our decision making, inform our practice, understand and develop the client-worker relationship and help child protection staff to share power with families.

It would be a positive next step to expand the use of these stories within broader intra and interagency discussions. It would be important to include the voices of many to help gain a broader understanding of people's experiences. A suggestion put forward within the community meeting minutes was to access stories and feedback from families within the Eastdale community that could be put forward through means other than in a larger group setting. One way of doing this would be to have a suggestion box in the kitchen at the centres where community members could offer their insights anonymously. Alternatively, a "story book", intended in the way of a journal, has already been made available at the NBRC for anyone to add their thoughts or stories about the community. While there has been little added to date, with the addition of an anonymous option, both of these choices could be reintroduced at a community meeting to help bring this to life.

Internal agency protection teams could participate in reflective discussions with their colleagues, without manager participation, to create space for open discussions. Leadership teams could also begin to share stories in leadership meetings related to child welfare practice as a starting point to enhance critical discussion about agency practice and philosophy. The information gathered within these various processes would lead to further development of community-based child welfare practice in a more

meaningful way, ideally affecting the greatest change in the pursuit of social justice for families within the community.

It is my hope that my research offered some insight into an integrated service delivery model at the NBRC that melds child protection and community development. The NBRC may be a site where mainstream discourses are challenged and child protection workers and families may have opportunities to connect as ‘neighbours’ working together in the same community to help keep children safe. “It is in these interactions that the needs of families and children can be known and optimal responses can be achieved” (Freymond & Quosai, 2011:30). Conversely, it may also become a site where child protection workers exercise their mandated and professional power, either knowingly or passively, to contribute to further oppressive practices. This concept of surveillance and child protection workers as agents of social control may mean this space continues as one where child protection workers act more like ‘wardens’ within the community - wardens with the expert responsibility to save children. More research is needed to explore this concept further. Accessing the voice of community neighbours will be necessary in developing an even deeper understanding of the role of social control and the implications of being a warden within the community. A research project such as this should seek opportunities to share power with participants and utilize a reciprocal exchange of

knowledge, power, and resources with the community, within the research itself.

The reflective use of self to engage in a dialogue about power is essential. In the often overwhelming and fast paced world of child welfare the value of this process can be overlooked, traded in for standardized quick fixes, and individualized responses that defy introspection. The subjective role of the social worker is minimized. How a worker thinks or the claims a worker makes about a family may remain unchallenged in the stringent and oppressive structures within child welfare.

It is imperative we weave reflective practice into child protection and resist what oppression we are able to. Complacency is not an option. “We need imagination not rules; intuition not technique; warm ideas not cold facts; inventive people not conformists, fertile thinking not rigid rules to follow” (Bochner, 2009:363). It is necessary to understand the complexities that are the underpinnings of power and knowledge, include the voices of many to inform this knowledge and create the space to reflect upon practice in the pursuit of justice. As next steps, both as a field and at Brant CAS, child welfare needs to include ongoing dialogues and reflection about power in more concrete terms.

What I find so interesting is that even though community-based child welfare services was not the new panacea as proposed in the late 1990’s provincially, the idea was not completely tossed out the window

either. In essence, it has stood the test of time. Within Brant CAS specifically, it has outlasted many pendulum swings, often coexisting alongside other service models (including ORAM), and withstanding various changes in the CFSA. The prevalent discourse of saving children through an expert driven child welfare model has remained in question and the possibilities for knowledge within a new discourse have been developing through community-based child protection. “When we look outside the boundaries of discourses, we may discover practice questions which help us reflect on power and possibility” (Rossiter, 2005). Maybe the definition of community-based child protection needs to remain fluid and evolve over time rather than become a stagnant and rigid model of practice?

I know that on that early spring day when I hit that child with my car, the window I looked out from and how others looked through my window changed forever. Suddenly I was no longer the professional, I was simply another human being, sharing in the pain of the child and the family with the neighbours within the community. I was able to be something else other than that powerful CAS manager, and the families were able to see into my window differently. My relationship with community members had changed as we were now able to relate to each other in a way that further developed trust. As a community, we experienced shared humanity and our relationships deepened as a result. As trust developed, opportunities

to share power were created. I was able to begin to move from warden to neighbour. I wonder if this will be a never-ending journey as it may feel at any given time I am acting as a warden rather than a neighbour. I only attend the NBRC as part of my role as a child protection manager with Brant CAS and I reside elsewhere. Perhaps I will never quite achieve neighbour status, I may be only neighbourly, or at minimum I can – as much as possible – resist the role of warden.

The issue of surveillance and being more like a warden will always be an area of concern. This relates to the on-going debate with respect to social workers as agents of social control rather than social change. How a child protection worker understands this role, acts on this, and interacts within the community must constantly be questioned and examined. The panopticon concept implies that social control exists whether I am looking out my window or not. How child protection staff persons are perceived through this window will impact on the relationships that develop and whether child protection staff persons contribute to further oppression. Within the child welfare field, we must always endeavour to scrutinize when we may be more like wardens than neighbours. My window still gets dirty from time-to-time, and I will always need to take a moment to clean it. Sometimes, when the sun is too bright and I am blinded by the reflection, I will need to work harder to look past the light to uncover what I might not

be able to see. Why don't you take pause for a moment and ask yourself

“What window do I look out from and what do I see?”

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APPENDIX A

“Paramount purpose

1.(1)The paramount purpose of this Act is to promote the best interests, protection and well being of children.

Other purposes

(2)The additional purposes of this Act, so long as they are consistent with the best interests, protection and well being of children, are:

1. To recognize that while parents may need help in caring for their children, that help should give support to the autonomy and integrity of the family unit and, wherever possible, be provided on the basis of mutual consent.
2. To recognize that the least disruptive course of action that is available and is appropriate in a particular case to help a child should be considered.
3. To recognize that children’s services should be provided in a manner that,
 - i. respects a child’s need for continuity of care and for stable relationships within a family and cultural environment,
 - ii. takes into account physical, cultural, emotional, spiritual, mental and developmental needs and differences among children,
 - iii. provides early assessment, planning and decision-making to achieve permanent plans for children in accordance with their best interests, and
 - iv. includes the participation of a child, his or her parents and relatives and the members of the child’s extended family and community, where appropriate.
4. To recognize that, wherever possible, services to children and their families should be provided in a manner that respects cultural, religious and regional differences.
5. To recognize that Indian and native people should be entitled to provide, wherever possible, their own child and family services, and that all services to Indian and native children and families should be provided in a manner that recognizes their culture, heritage and traditions and the concept of the extended family. 1999, c. 2, s. 1; 2006, c. 5, s. 1” (CFSA, R.S.O. 1990).

APPENDIX B

The CFSA, in Section 15(3), also defines the function of Children’s Aid Societies to include:

- “(a) investigate allegations or evidence that children who are under the age of sixteen years or are in the society’s care or under its supervision may be in need of protection;
- (b) protect, where necessary, children who are under the age of sixteen years or are in the society’s care or under its supervision;
- (c) provide guidance, counselling and other services to families for protecting children or for the prevention of circumstances requiring the protection of children;
- (d) provide care for children assigned or committed to its care under this Act;
- (e) supervise children assigned to its supervision under this Act;
- (f) place children for adoption under Part VII; and
- (g) perform any other duties given to it by this or any other Act.
R.S.O. 1990, c. C.11, s. 15 (3)” (CFSA, R.S.O. 1990).