

# FNCARES



First  
Nations  
Children's  
Action  
Research and  
Education  
Service

# 2019-2020

# ANNUAL REPORT



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION



First  
Nations  
Children's  
Action  
Research and  
Education  
Service

This report reflects activities from April 2019 to July 2020

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**First Nations Children's Action Research and Education Service**

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## ABOUT US

Established in 2013 by Cindy Blackstock, the First Nations Children's Action Research and Education Service (FNCARES) is a partnership between the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada and the University of Alberta's Faculty of Education. Drawing on well-established research on the structural drivers of disadvantage for First Nations children, youth and families, we focus on translating research into practical, community-based solutions, and on involving children and youth in this process. We respect and support First Nations self-determination and are committed to engaging communities as partners and co-researchers in all stages of each project.

FNCARES organizes and hosts numerous public events each year, including lectures, workshops, film screenings, panel discussions, book launches and other educational events that are free and open to the public. We also develop resources to educate about the structural drivers of disadvantage and promote further discussion and action concerning culturally based equity for First Nations children and youth.



Cindy Blackstock (Director) and Spirit Bear



Melisa Brittain (Research Associate)



First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada

## A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

2020 has been a challenging year. As the world copes with a pandemic, new opportunities to deal with the systemic discrimination that predisposes First Nations and other groups to higher COVID-19 risks and other challenges arise.

In this context, the work of FNCARES has become even more important. Thanks to the support of the University of Alberta's Faculty of Education, we have been working with researchers at the University of Ottawa to describe teacher perceptions of the effects of engaging children in addressing systemic racism affecting First Nations children. This exciting work, led by Dr. Nicholas Ng-A-Fook and Lisa Howell, and funded by SSHRC, will be published soon, and presents a great opportunity to learn how to educate and engage children in a way that prepares them to address systemic racism.

We were also proud to collaborate with the University of Alberta's Faculty of Law and law professor Hadley Friedland to have a discussion on the *Act Respecting First Nations, Métis and Inuit children, youth and families* and its implications for Indigenous children in Alberta.

In addition, Melisa Brittain has been collaborating with youth formerly from care in Alberta and other experts to create a free learning guide to accompany the film *(Dis)placed: Indigenous Youth and the Child Welfare System*. This film centres the voices and experiences of youth formerly in care in a way that can inform positive practice in child welfare, health, education, employment and other fields.

FNCARES was about to host a teddy bear tea party in March 2020 to share Spirit Bear's third book, *Spirit Bear: Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams* with children in Edmonton when public health measures required that we cancel the event. Based on a true story, the book shares how children of all diversities came together to learn about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. While we could not have an in-person event, we are busy working with education partners in Alberta to do something special for children featuring Spirit Bear in the fall. Details coming soon!

You can also look forward to another edition of the *First Peoples Child & Family Review* and other COVID-safe learning materials that are produced in collaboration with the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada.

All of this good work would not be possible without the support of the University of Alberta, our many partners and Melisa Brittain, who has worked tirelessly this past year.

Wishing you all good spirits and good health!

Cindy Blackstock

# ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT THIS YEAR

## Education and Engagement Events

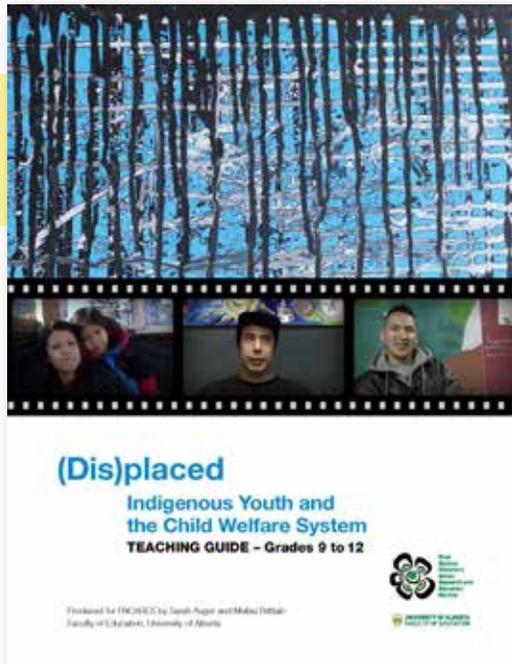
### Launch of Teaching Guide for Grades 9 to 12

On March 13, 2019, FNCARES launched a teaching guide to accompany our film *(Dis)placed: Indigenous Youth and the Child Welfare System* at an event at the University of Alberta. Hosted by the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Education, the event began with a screening of the film, followed by a short presentation by co-authors Sarah Auger (doctoral student in Educational Policy Studies, University of Alberta) and Melisa Brittain (FNCARES) and a Q&A with the audience.

*(Dis)placed* features the voices of Indigenous youth as they reflect on their prior experiences with the child welfare system and share their multiple strategies of resistance to colonial assimilation. Designed for students in Grades 9 to 12, the teaching guide can easily be adapted for colleges, universities and a general audience.



Sarah Auger, teaching guide co-author



**Free online copy of the Teaching Guide:**  
[fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/displaced\\_teaching\\_guide\\_0.pdf](http://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/displaced_teaching_guide_0.pdf)

## Celebrating Spirit Bear's Second Book with Elementary Students

On June 13, 2019, Spirit Bear and Cindy Blackstock joined 180 elementary students at the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton, Alberta to launch Spirit Bear's second book, *Spirit Bear: Fishing for Knowledge, Catching Dreams*. Students brought their own teddies to cuddle, donned their bear hats and settled in to listen to a lively reading by special guests: Elder Wilson Bearhead (Nakota, Paul First Nation); Del Graff (Alberta's Child and Youth Advocate); Dr. Muna Saleh (Concordia University); Janis Irwin (MLA, Alberta); Megan Neudecker-Merpaw (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, Alberta); and Deb Barron (Elk Island Public Schools).

After the reading, students from Elk Island Public Schools performed "A Place Like This," a song created by elementary music teachers with the guidance of Elder Wilson Bearhead that tells a story of where Elk Island Schools lie in Treaty 6 territory. Afterwards, Cindy Blackstock interviewed Elder Wilson Bearhead about what ancestral knowledge has taught him that we cannot learn from books. The celebration ended with the announcement of winners of the Shannen's Dream drawing contest. Thank you to all the students and teachers who participated, to MC Charlene Bearhead, to our amazing volunteers and to FNCARES Assistant Event Coordinator extraordinaire, Kaitlyn Walcheske.

Get a free e-copy of Spirit Bear's second book, *Fishing for Knowledge, Catching Dreams*, and a free online learning guide for the book at [fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear-fishing-knowledge-catching-dreams-0](https://fncaringsociety.com/spirit-bear-fishing-knowledge-catching-dreams-0)

Watch a video of the performance of "A Place Like This" at [vimeo.com/349126183](https://vimeo.com/349126183)



*Above left:* Singers and Readers at Spirit Bear's Edmonton book launch; *Above right:* MLAs Rakhi Pancholi and Janice Irwin with Dr. Muna Saleh; *Right:* Cindy Blackstock and Spirit Bear interview Elder Wilson Bearhead

## Bill C-92: The Good, the Bad and the Unknowns

On November 6, 2019, FNCARES partnered with the Wahkohtowin Law and Governance Lodge, the Indigenous Law Students' Association and the Faculty of Law, University of Alberta, for a panel discussion on *Bill C-92, An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* with Dr. Hadley Friedland and Dr. Cindy Blackstock. *Bill C-92* came into force on January 1, 2020 and allows for First Nations and other Indigenous Governing Bodies to put their own child and family services laws in place.

It was standing room only as Dr. Friedland began by pointing out that this law is "a huge step forward" as the "first official government recognition of a Section 35 Aboriginal right to Indigenous Peoples' jurisdiction over child and family services." However, she cautioned that there is uncertainty about how this law will play out and laid out numerous concerns and recommendations. Cindy Blackstock expressed a key concern about the federal government's lack of commitment to funding. Those seeking jurisdiction have one year from entering into coordination agreements with the federal government to come to an agreement about funding. Blackstock recommends: "If you are going to go down this road, please negotiate your funding agreement first. Do not trigger that coordination agreement until after you have the funding sorted out."

Video of the lecture is posted on YouTube and has been watched over 1,800 times to date: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7tMq0ta0D0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7tMq0ta0D0)



*Above left: Dr. Shalene Jobin introducing speakers; Above right: Dr. Cindy Blackstock (l) and Dr. Hadley Friedland (r); Right: Standing room only*



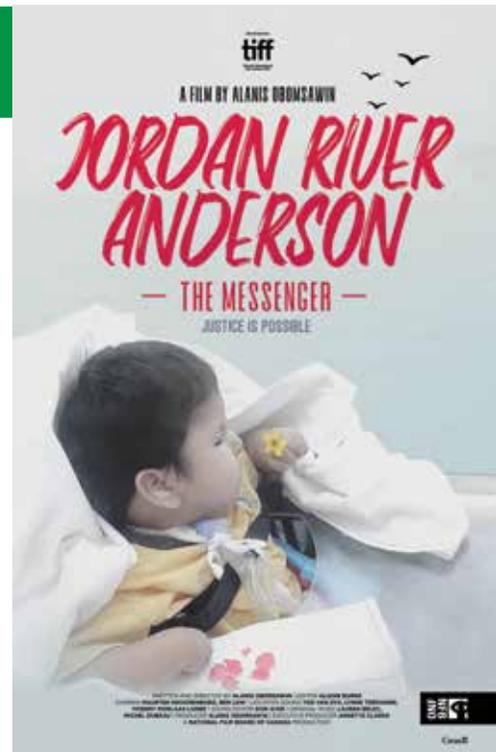
## Film Screening and Panel Discussion: *Jordan River Anderson, The Messenger*

On March 8, 2020, FNCARES partnered with the Metro Cinema, the NFB and others to bring legendary Abenaki filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin to Edmonton to screen her most recent film, *Jordan River Anderson, The Messenger* (NFB, 2019). After the screening, Deanna Wolf Ear from the First Nations Health Consortium joined Alanis Obomsawin and Melisa Brittain on stage for a lively and informative discussion with the audience about the making of the film and the implementation of Jordan's Principle.

Jordan was a child from Norway House Cree Nation born with complex medical needs who lived out his five years in a Winnipeg hospital because neither the federal nor provincial government would pay for his in-home care. As a result of Jordan's short life, and the unrelenting work of his family and many others, Jordan's Principle was created in his memory. Jordan's Principle is a child-first principle ensuring First Nations children get the services they need when they need them.

During the discussion, Alanis Obomsawin spoke about the process of listening to the stories of First Nations community members prior to beginning any filming, about the power of storytelling to address the inequities faced by First Nations children, and about how things have improved for First Nations children since she directed her first film, *Christmas at Moose Factory*, in 1971. Deanna Wolf Ear spoke about the work the First Nations Health Consortium is doing with First Nations communities in Alberta to ensure their children get the resources and services they need, and the challenges that remain as the federal government continues to resist fully implementing Jordan's Principle.

To learn more about Jordan's Principle, visit [fncaringsociety.com/jordans-principle](https://fncaringsociety.com/jordans-principle). To access the film, visit [nfb.ca/film/jordan-river-anderson-the-messenger/](https://nfb.ca/film/jordan-river-anderson-the-messenger/)

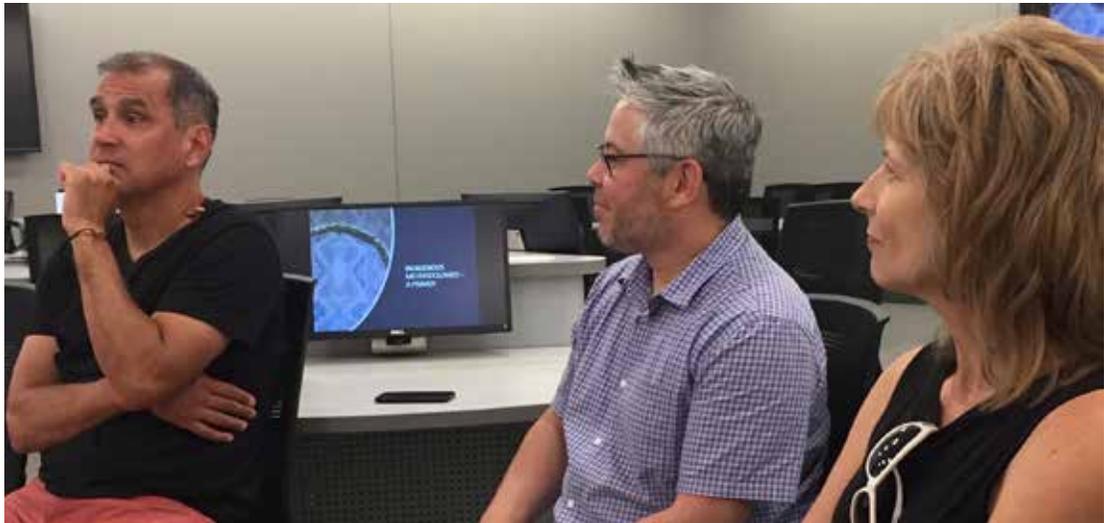


Left to right: Deanna Wolf Ear, Alanis Obomsawin, Melisa Brittain (photo by Geraldine Carr)

## Research

### **“Just because we’re small doesn’t mean we can’t stand tall”: Reconciliation education in the elementary classroom**

This SSHRC-funded research project (2018–2022) studies the impacts of the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society’s social justice–based reconciliation campaigns on elementary students and teachers. Led by Dr. Cindy Blackstock (McGill University) and co-investigators Dr. Nicholas Ng-A-Fook and Dr. Susan Bennett (University of Ottawa), this project will advance knowledge about implementing a social-justice reconciliation approach within elementary school curriculum frameworks and standards, and create knowledge and resources that school boards and educators can use to implement this education in elementary classrooms.



*Left to right: Dwayne Donald, Nicholas Ng-A-Fook, and Sylvia Smith at University of Ottawa*

In June 2019, FNCARES joined other research team members and Caring Society colleagues on Algonquin territory for a two-day-long Indigenous research methods retreat. Day one featured workshops by Dr. Margaret Kovach on Indigenous Methodologies, Dr. Dwayne Donald on ethical relationality, and Andrea Auger on the Touchstones of Hope reconciliation framework at the University of Ottawa. On day two, researchers travelled to Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg’s Cultural Centre, where attendees learned from Elder Peter Decontie, Anita Tenasco (Director of Kitigan Zibi Elementary School) and other education leaders and community members during a day-long sharing circle that sought to establish and deepen relations and knowledges crucial for conducting research that involves Kitigan Zibi teachers and students.

Between the fall of 2019 and Spring of 2020, University of Ottawa team members conducted and transcribed teacher interviews and analyzed data. Initial findings indicate that elementary students involved in the Caring Society’s campaigns in their classrooms demonstrate empathy when they learn about inequities for First Nations children and realize the power of



*Left to right: Melisa Brittain, Lisa Howell, and Jennifer King at Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg Cultural Centre*

their voices in speaking out against injustice. Teachers reported that students were able to make connections between colonialism and current injustices and took leadership roles in campaign events; the campaigns also gave students the opportunity to realize they are agents of change and can have an impact on their future. Teachers from First Nations-run schools noted that participation in the campaigns could be confusing for First Nations students, who experienced support from other children at campaign rallies but experienced racism from members of the public once they left the larger group. Teachers think their First Nations students would benefit more from sustained relationships with non-Indigenous students both before and after campaign events. All teachers indicated a desire for more sustained engagement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, teachers and communities.

In the coming year, researchers will design, deliver and evaluate professional development workshops and sample lesson plans based on these findings, and disseminate research findings through academic papers and conferences. The project will also produce educational videos and an open access resources page for scholars, educators and the general public, and create an online portal for teachers to connect with other educators and mentors as a method of sharing resources and strategies and of developing ongoing relationships towards meaningful reconciliation.

# Resource Development and Distribution

## Learning Guide for Professionals Working With Children and Youth

This new learning guide is designed to accompany our documentary film *(Dis)placed: Indigenous Youth and the Child Welfare System*, which features the voices of Indigenous youth reflecting on their prior involvement with the child welfare system and on their multiple strategies of resistance to assimilation and state control.

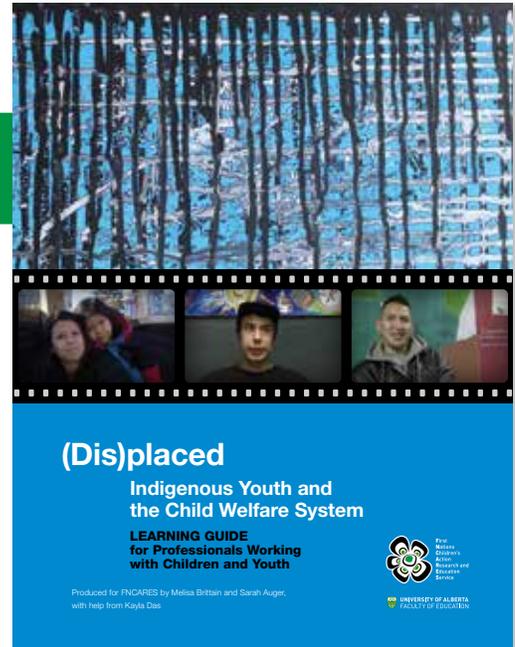
The guide was created for those working in the child welfare system and other allied professions involved in providing services to Indigenous children and youth impacted by the system. This can include people working directly with Indigenous children and youth, people working in the justice system, policy makers, educators, and government and agency employees involved in any aspect of Indigenous child and family services.

The guide is divided into four themed sections that provide crucial background information in the following areas:

- the connections between Canada's colonial history and the ongoing inequities and discrimination that have led to the alarmingly high numbers of Indigenous children in the child welfare system;
- the importance of cultural continuity for Indigenous child well-being;
- the practice of moral courage in child welfare;
- taking action towards social justice for Indigenous children in solidarity with Indigenous communities.

Each of the four themed sections of the learning guide include suggested activities and discussion questions, making it ideal for running workshops for professionals. It can also be adapted for less formal group or individual learning. The guide's references and additional resources sections provide learners with links to hundreds of sources to help them more easily expand their knowledge beyond the content of the film and the learning guide.

The learning guide is available for free online at [fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/displaced\\_learning\\_guide\\_for\\_professionals\\_-\\_online.pdf](https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/displaced_learning_guide_for_professionals_-_online.pdf)



## Information Sheets

In collaboration with the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society, FNCARES regularly creates reader-friendly information sheets that make our research and other materials accessible to the public.

See two of our info sheets here:

- *First Nations Child Poverty: A Literature Review and Analysis – Summary of Chapter 3:* [fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/chapter\\_3\\_information\\_sheet.pdf](http://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/chapter_3_information_sheet.pdf)
- *First Nations Child Poverty: A Literature Review and Analysis – Summary of Chapter 5:* [fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/chapter\\_5\\_information\\_sheet\\_2.pdf](http://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/chapter_5_information_sheet_2.pdf)



## Film Distribution



Vtape, Canada's leading artist-run, not-for-profit distributor of video art, has done an excellent job of distributing *(Dis)placed: Indigenous Youth and the Child Welfare System* since 2017. In 2018, FNCARES signed with a second distributor, McIntyre Media, to help get the film into more educational institutions. The film has been distributed to diverse organizations,

including college and university libraries, school boards, public libraries, teachers' associations, child and family service organizations, government departments and film festivals. Both distributors make the film available through multi-year streaming copies, DVDs and as one-time screening rentals. It is available at a reduced rate to community organizations through Vtape. All proceeds from the film are donated to non-profit organizations serving Indigenous youth.

In April 2019, *(Dis)placed* screened at the Storytellers Film Festival in Opaskwayak Cree Nation (The Pas, Manitoba). In May 2019, organizers of the Indigenous Thought: Indigenous Social Work Conference at University nuhelot'ine thaiyots'i nistameyimākanak, Blue Quills (St. Paul, Alberta) screened the film and invited FNCARES to begin the talking circle. FNCARES also partnered with Charlene Bearhead to show the film during the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual National Indigenous Education and Reconciliation Network Gathering in Fredericton, New Brunswick, where we distributed printed copies of the teaching guide to educators from across Canada.

Learn more about the film and how to preview and purchase it at [www.kingcripproductions.com/displaced.html](http://www.kingcripproductions.com/displaced.html)

## Publications

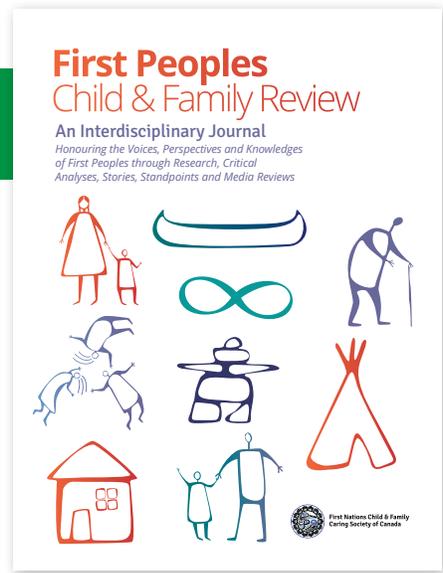
### Online Journal: *First Peoples Child & Family Review*

#### Editor-in-chief: Dr. Cindy Blackstock

This journal is peer-reviewed and interdisciplinary, centring the voices of Indigenous peoples on research, practice and policy concerning First Peoples children and families. The journal is hosted through the Open Journal System (OJS), which allows for open access to research and publishing. Recent editions include a 15-year anniversary celebration edition featuring a reprint of the journal's 15 most popular contributions and an audiovisual edition that challenges the prevalence of written knowledge in academia, showing how other ways of knowing are just as powerful.

To access current and archived editions of the journal, visit: [fpcfr.com/index.php/FPCFR/index](http://fpcfr.com/index.php/FPCFR/index)

**Call for Submissions:** Special Edition by Children & Youth Celebrating Shannen's Dream!: [fpcfr.com/index.php/FPCFR/announcement/view/21](http://fpcfr.com/index.php/FPCFR/announcement/view/21)



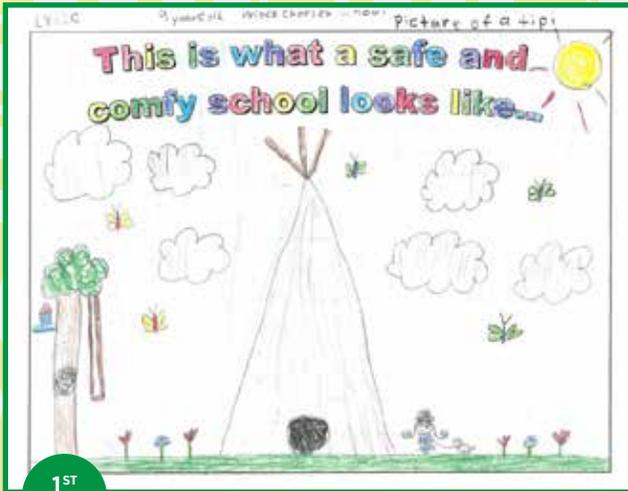
### Indigenous Knowledge Portal

The Indigenous Knowledge Portal is a searchable database hosted by the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society that provides access to resources on Indigenous children and families in Canada. The database includes an annotated bibliography of journal articles, literature reviews, reports, guides, films and books, and links to all the Caring Society's educational resources as well as to external resources. It also provides links to all legal documents generated by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal on First Nations child welfare and to the *First Peoples Child & Family Review*.

Search the Indigenous Knowledge Portal at [fncaringsociety.com/ikp?keywords](http://fncaringsociety.com/ikp?keywords)

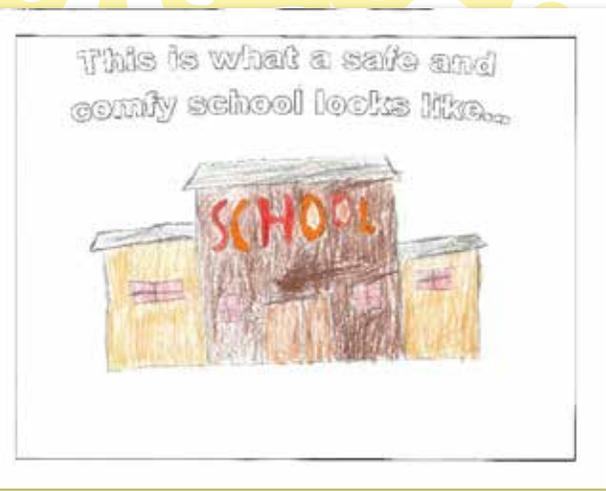
# WINNERS

from the art competition at Spirit Bear's book launch



1<sup>ST</sup>  
PRIZE

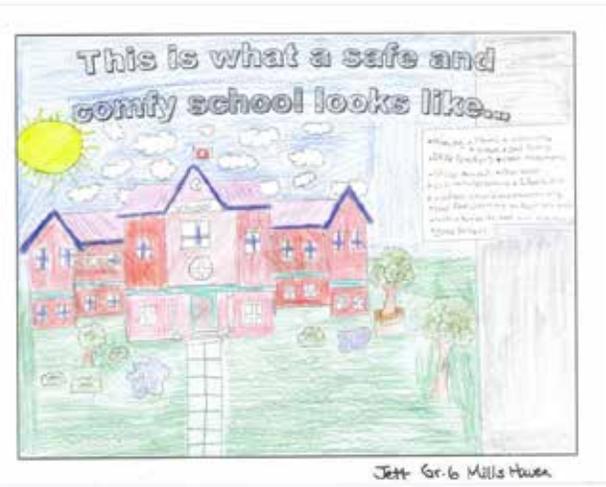
Lyric - Grade 3, Prince Charles School



Hannah - Grade 4, Westboro Elementary



Talia - Grade 3, Prince Charles School



Jeff - Grade 6, Mills Haven Elementary

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