

**The Next Chapter: A Practical Guide for Individuals, Families, Communities,
Social Workers, and Organizations Supporting Indigenous Youth Aging-Out of Care**

by

Robert Mahikwa

B.S.W., University of Victoria, 2016

S.S.W., George Brown College, 2013

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of:

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

in the School of Social Work

© Robert Mahikwa, 2018
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis must not be reproduced in whole or in part
by photocopy or by any other means without the permission of the author.

**The Next Chapter: A Practical Guide for Individuals, Families, Communities,
Social Workers, and Organizations Supporting Indigenous Youth Aging-Out of Care**

by

Robert Mahikwa

B.S.W., University of Victoria, 2016

S.S.W., George Brown College, 2013

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Jeannine Carrière
Supervisor
School of Social Work

Dr. Billie Allan
Committee Member
School of Social Work

Abstract

This research utilized Indigenous methodologies rooted in oral traditions, storytelling practices, and the Medicine Wheel teachings to examine how individuals, families, communities, social workers, and organizations can assist Indigenous youth who are aging-out of foster care and are transitioning into adulthood. The methods of inquiry included five one-on-one Story-Sharing Sessions with Indigenous adults who previously aged-out of care in British Columbia, and two Talking Circles comprised of ten Community Helpers including Elders, Mentors, Educators, and Foster Parents; and fifteen Delegated Aboriginal Agency Social Workers who worked directly and/or indirectly with Indigenous youth in and from foster care. This research was person-centered, strengths-based, and solutions-focused, and re-framed ‘aging-out of care’ terminology as ‘a transition into adulthood’ to honour the sacred life-cycle teachings of the Medicine Wheel. The core aim of this research was to aid in the development of a highly adaptive practical guide and theoretical framework for supporting Indigenous youth in and from care.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures	vii
Glossary	viii
Acknowledgements	x
Dedications	xi
CHAPTER ONE: OPENING THE CIRCLE	1
Acknowledging the Territories	1
Self-Location and Connection to the Topic	1
An Overview of Child Welfare and Aging-Out in British Columbia	2
Catalysts for Change	3
Overrepresentation in the Child Welfare System	4
Cultural Disconnection While Being In and From Care	5
Delegated Aboriginal Agencies	5
My Research Question	6
Purpose of this Research	6
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	7
Issues and Barriers Faced by Indigenous Youth Aging-out of Care	7
Proposed Solutions in the Literature	8
Addressing the Gaps	9
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN	11
The Medicine Wheel as a Conceptual Framework	11
The Medicine Wheel and my Research Paradigm	12
<i>Ontological Lens</i>	13
<i>Epistemological Framework</i>	13
<i>Methodological Discourses</i>	14
<i>Axiological Compass</i>	14
Disclaimer Regarding Representation	15

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY	16
The Research-Process in Four Phases	16
Methods of Inquiry	16
Recruitment	16
THE STORY-GATHERING PHASE:	17
<i>One-on-one Story-Sharing Sessions</i>	17
<i>Talking Circle Sessions</i>	18
<i>Guiding Questions</i>	19
<i>Risk Management</i>	19
THE STORY-TRANSCRIBING AND STORY-SUMMARIZING PHASES	20
<i>Data/Story-Handling</i>	21
<i>Confidentiality</i>	21
<i>Informed Consent</i>	22
Ethical Considerations:	22
<i>Power-Dynamics</i>	22
<i>Dual-Role Relationships</i>	23
<i>Right to Withdraw</i>	23
CHAPTER FIVE: THE ONE-ON-ONE STORY-SHARING SESSIONS	24
Entering with an Open Mind and an Open Heart	24
The One-on-One Story-Sharing Sessions and the Story-Sharers' Stories:	24
<i>Story-Sharer #1 – “Wàwàtesì” (Firefly)</i>	24
<i>Story-Sharer #2 – “Makwa” (Bear)</i>	29
<i>Story-Sharer #3 – “Gaagaagiwag” (Raven)</i>	34
<i>Story-Sharer #4 – “Anìdjàni” (Doe/Deer)</i>	38
<i>Story-Sharer #5 – “Nànòkàse” (Hummingbird)</i>	43
Summary and Acknowledgements	47
CHAPTER SIX: THE TALKING CIRCLES	48
<i>Talking Circle #1: Community Helpers</i>	48
<i>Talking Circle#2: Delegated Aboriginal Agency Workers</i>	59
A Personal Reflection	70

CHAPTER SEVEN: FINDINGS AND TEACHINGS	71
THE STORY-INTERPRETATION PHASE	71
Analysis	71
Findings	72
<i>Bundle #1: Goals and Outcomes</i>	75
<i>Bundle #2: Supports and Services</i>	76
<i>Bundle #3: Values, Principles, and Philosophies</i>	78
<i>Bundle #4: Essential Resources</i>	80
Potential Obstacles and Barriers	82
CHAPTER EIGHT: CLOSING THE CIRCLE	84
Significance of this Research	84
Limitations	85
Areas for Further Research	85
Concluding Thoughts	87
My Future Plans	88
References:	89
Appendices:	97
<i>Appendix #1: Participant Consent Form</i>	97
<i>Appendix #2: Confidentiality Agreement for Additional Person(s) Form</i>	99

List of Figures

Figure #1: Medicine Wheel Teachings	11
Figure #2: My Research Design	12
Figure #3: The Findings (Hand Drum)	72
Figure #4: The Findings (Wheel Variation)	73
Figure #5: The Findings (Expanded Variation)	74

Glossary

Aging-Out/Aged-out of Care: the moment when a youth in foster care reaches their 19th birthday and is no longer eligible for child welfare supports and services as decreed by the *Child, Family, and Community Service Act*.

Child, Family, and Community Service Act: provincial legislation that governs child welfare supports and services throughout British Columbia.

Circle Member(s): a term that refers to research participant(s) who contributed to one of two Talking Circle sessions specifically conducted for this research.

Delegated Aboriginal Agencies [DAAs]: a branch of the Ministry of Children and Family Development in British Columbia that focuses on providing culturally-informed child welfare supports and services consistent with Indigenous ways of protecting and nurturing Indigenous children, youth, families, and communities.

In Care: an ascribed status to youth under the legal care and fiduciary guardianship of the Ministry of Children and Family Development in British Columbia.

Indigenous: refers to any person(s) who self-identifies as having ancestral, cultural, and wholistic connection to, and attachment with, First Nations, Métis, and/or Inuit, Peoples, lands, and traditionalisms across Turtle Island.

Medicine Wheel: an iconography and teachings of which are considered highly sacred among many Indigenous Peoples, and which may vary from person to person, family to family, community to community, and Nation to Nation.

Ministry of Children and Family Development [MCFD]: the governing body that implements and oversees child welfare services in British Columbia.

Oral Traditions and Storytelling Practices: sacred traditionalisms among most Indigenous Peoples whereby knowledge is passed verbally from one generation to another through the sharing of stories between two or more peoples.

Story-Gatherer: a term referring to ‘the researcher’ in this specific report.

Story-Sharer(s): refers to any research participant(s) who contributed to at least one of the one-on-one Story Sharing sessions specifically conducted for this report.

Story-Sharing Sessions: one of two methods of inquiry utilized in this research whereby Story-Sharers shared their personal stories about transitioning out of foster care at the age of 19 in British Columbia.

Talking Circles Sessions: the other of two methods of inquiry utilized in this research whereby a group of individuals shared their stories about working directly and/or indirectly with Indigenous youth in and from foster care.

Traditionalisms: refers to any time-honoured, well-established, and sacred cultural beliefs, objects, and practices based on a specific set of Indigenous values and philosophies also referred as ‘Indigenous ways of being and knowing’.

Transition into Adulthood: another way of referring to ‘aging-out of care’ but more aligned with the sacred life-cycle teachings of the Medicine Wheel.

Tribal Journeys: an annual canoe journey that runs approximately 1-2 weeks along the western coasts of Alaska, British Columbia, and Washington state.

Wholism/Wholistic: a worldview that conceptualizes all aspects of animate and inanimate life as inter-related, inter-dependent, inter-connected, and intra-reliant.

Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by acknowledging my sincerest gratitude to Coast Salish, Nuuchah-nulth, and Kwakwaka'wakw Peoples for allowing this research to be conducted on their traditional and unceded lands and territories, otherwise referred to as Vancouver Island. I would like to extend this acknowledgment to each of the five one-on-one Story-Sharers and twenty-five Talking Circle Members who contributed to this research. In addition, I would like to acknowledge Ruby Barclay, Dr. Cyndy Baskin, Jody Bauche, Ron Bonham, Courtney Defriend, Dr. Jacquie Green, Dr. Rob Hancock, Dr. Sharon Hobenshield, Sara Jones, Linda McCandless, Emily Muth, Dr. Todd Ormiston, Ivy Richardson, Loren Sahara, Jason Simmons, Dr. Chris Turner, Ryan VanHasstert, Tina Williams, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for their amazing support and contribution to this research. To my supervisor, Dr. Jeannine Carrière; and to my committee member, Dr. Billie Allan, I am sincerely grateful for your guidance, patience, wisdom, and words of encouragement. Finally, and certainly not least, I would very much like to thank my family, and partner Teresa, who stood by me mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually throughout all aspects of this journey. *Chi'miigwetch* to all my relations for everything you do, and for everything you have done for me and others.

Dedications

I dedicate this research to every Indigenous child and youth in and from foster care here in British Columbia and across Turtle Island. To the next seven generations of young people, it is my hope that this research will have contributed to a better quality of life for you, your family, and your community. I sincerely hope that the issues of today do not exist for you in the future. It would mean a lot to me to know that you are doing well. Moreover, I would also like to dedicate this this research to every hardworking and compassionate foster parent, social worker, and community helper out there genuinely supporting all children and youth in and from care.

Finally, I would like to dedicated this research to you, the Reader. The findings and recommendations presented this report may be seem challenging to fully implement, which is why I believe it will take all of us working together to help achieve what needs to be done. We must continue to support each other's resilience, commitment, and perseverance; and I want to rise my hands and heart to you for being a part of this journey together. I hope that you will be filled with inspiration and motivation upon reading this report just as I too felt while putting it all together.

CHAPTER ONE: OPENING THE CIRICLE

Acknowledging the Territories

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional and unceded territories of Coast Salish, Nuuchah-nulth, and Kwakwaka'wakw Peoples on whose lands this research was conducted, and to whom I offer my sincerest *chi'miigwetch* for allowing this work to occur.

Self-Location and Connection to the Topic

My views on 'aging-out of care' are shaped by my self-location and history with this topic. I identify as carrier of mixed Indigenous and Settler ancestry (Anishinaabe, Algonquin, Métis, French-Canadian and American) and my connection to this topic began when I met a Métis youth named 'Charlie' who was weeks away aging-out of foster care. At the time, I was a newly employed youth outreach worker at a local Aboriginal Friendship Centre where I served many Indigenous youth in and from foster care, and their families. Many of these young people were residents at a local youth transitional housing, which was where I met Charlie.

The transitional house was a safe space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth ages 13-18 who were struggling with homeless, addictions, and/or mental/emotional health concerns. Charlie, who was a frequent resident for many years, had come to rely on our supports and services. The transitional house offered young people access to private bedrooms, shared-bathrooms, a shared kitchen, free meals, free Internet access and printer, a common-space, free transportation to and from work or school, 24-hour staffing, and access to professional counsellors, Elders, youth mentors, and so much more. For Charlie unfortunately, aging-out of care also meant aging-out of these support and services. I was always told by the people who knew him best that 'nothing ever scared Charlie', but when I met him, he seemed absolutely terrified of aging-out of care and I did not know at the time how to help him and I felt compelled to do something about it.

At the time, I was not familiar with challenges associated with aging-out of care and so I did not feel fully equipped to support Charlie with his situation. I then turned to researching aging-out of care resources and I soon discovered that most of the supports available to young people help them with getting a job, opening a bank account, securing housing, and applying for post-secondary education and funding upon leaving foster care. All of these supports seemed quite useful, but as someone who worked with Indigenous Peoples, I also noticed that very few resources were specifically supporting Indigenous, First Nation, Metis, and Inuit youth aging-out of care. Charlie ran away from the transitional house before I could share the resources I had found for him. I think he left to avoid saying goodbye, but I also he left because he felt overwhelmed about aging-out. I never found out what happened to Charlie, but I sincerely hope he is doing well.

An Overview of Child Welfare and Aging-Out in British Columbia

In British Columbia [BC], all child welfare supports and services are implemented by the Ministry of Children and Family Development [MCFD], which is further governed by the *Child, Family, and Community Services Act* (1996). MCFD provides a wide range of specialized supports and services aimed at protecting the health, safety, and wellbeing of children and youth who are under the age of 19. These resources include access to social workers, mental health practitioners, funding for post-secondary education, youth housing, counselling, family supports, and foster care.

For most people, MCFD is also associated with the protection of children and youth who are victims of physical, emotional, mental, and/or sexual abuse, as well as neglect, perpetrated by their primary caregiver(s). When this occurs, MCFD often remove the child(ren)/youth from the primary caregiver and places the child/youth into foster care if placing them with extended family members is not possible. This process is what most people are referring to when they say that ‘a child or youth has entered into *care*’. The term ‘care’ often refers to ‘foster/MCFD care’ in BC.

Ideally, all Indigenous children and youth are returned to their birth family when the situation becomes safe to do so. In the meantime, while they are in MCFD, they remain eligible for child welfare supports and services, but only up until their 19th birthday. This is age when the BC government views young people as becoming legally responsible, self-managing, and self-regulating adults. In other words, when youth turn 19 they are considered ‘too old’ for child welfare supports and are immediately ‘cut-off’ from accessing most (if not nearly all) MCFD resources. This is what is collectively referred to as ‘*aging-out of care*’. For most, the transition from adolescence to adulthood is an already daunting task, but when it comes to Indigenous youth in and from MCFD care, this transition can be particularly risky, even life-threatening.

Catalysts for Change

Upon researching this topic further, I soon realized that Charlie’s struggles with aging-out of care seemed to be common among other Indigenous youth in BC, albeit with tragic outcomes. I learned about *Alex Gervais*, a Métis youth in care who in 2015 was so terrified turning 19 in just a few months that he jumped from the Super 8 Hotel window in Abbotsford where he had been placed by MCFD (Meissener, 2017; Stueck, 2017). I learned about *Paige Gauchier*, a 19-year-old Indigenous woman who in 2013 overdosed in the shared-bathroom of her rooming-house in Delta where she too was placed by MCFD after aging-out of care (Culbert, 2016; Adams, 2015). I then read about *Patricia Lee Evoy* who at 19 was found deceased in a Burnaby apartment only a few months after she too aged-out MCFD supports (Rankin & Brend, 2016; Sherlock 2016). Finally, I learned about *Santana Scott Hunting-Hawk* who died from a fentanyl overdose a mere seven months after aging-out of care and was found in a small tent in Surrey near a busy highway (Culbert, 2016). These young people had friends and family who loved them very much, and their stories gave me the final push I needed in order to make this my thesis topic. These are just some

of the stories we know about, but we also know most go unreported. One death by suicide or overdose of a young person from care is one death too many. I think we all have a responsibility to care for our young people and hopefully this research will help inform what needs to be done.

Sadly, mental health issues, addiction, and death by suicide are common outcomes for Indigenous youth who have aged-out of care (Evans et al., 2017; Barker et al., 2014; PACY, 2012; Simard & Blight, 2011; Carrière, 2010; Fluke et al., 2010; Trocmé et al., 2004). According to a recent BC Coroners (2018) report, approximately 68 Indigenous youth died in and from care between 2011-2016: of whom 15 died within two-years of aging-out and 44 died between the ages of 20 and 25. Although MCFD provides a wide array of child welfare supports and services to youth in and from care, one cannot deny that the outcomes are simply unacceptable.

Overrepresentation in the Child Welfare System

Indigenous children and youth are notoriously overrepresented in the child welfare system (MCFD, 2018; Sinha & Kozlowski 2013; Statistics Canada, 2013; Gough, 2013; PACY, 2012; Carrière, 2010; Fluke, Chabot, Fallon, MacLaurin, & Blackstock, 2010; Blackstock, 2009). According to Statistics Canada (2013), nearly half (48.1%) of all children and youth in care across Canada are Indigenous, and, as noted by Gough (2013), the majority of whom are located in BC alone. Some scholars have argued that the reason behind this overrepresentation is because the child welfare system is rooted in westernized approaches to child protection, many of are considered incongruent with Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Carrière, 2010; Blackstock, Trocmé, & Bennett, 2004). It is also widely agreed that there are more Indigenous children and youth in care today than the number of Indigenous students previously enrolled in the residential school system across Canada (Canadian Press, 2011). This reality may be truly haunting for some people given the devastation this history has had on Indigenous Peoples.

Cultural Disconnection While Being In and From Care

In addition to being overrepresented in the child welfare system, another growing concern is that Indigenous youth are feeling increasingly disconnected from their cultural identity and traditionalisms as a result of being in care. Part of the problem is that most Indigenous children/youth are being placed into non-Indigenous foster homes (MCFD, 2015) and then transition out of foster care into predominately white, westernized, urban societies (Carrière, & Richardson, 2013; Carrière, 2010; Blackstock, 2009; Richard, 2004). Scholars also posit that a disconnected from one's Indigenous cultural identity, community, and traditions can in turn contribute to the high rates of mental health, addiction and suicide issues considered common among many Indigenous communities (Evans, White, Turley, Slater, Morgan, Strange, & Scourfield, 2017; Meissner, 2017; Culbert, 2016; Merail & Brend, 2016; Barker et al., 2014; PACY, 2012; Simard & Blight, 2011; Carrière, 2010; Fluke et al., 2010; Richard, 2004; Trocmé, Knoke, & Blackstock, 2004; Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2000). I wonder what Alex, Paige, Patricia, and Santana would have said about this. Did they feel this cultural disconnection too?

Delegated Aboriginal Agencies

Fortunately, Delegated Aboriginal Agencies [DAA] were created in BC as a response to the concerns surrounding the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the child welfare system and their lack of cultural connection while being in and from care. DAAs' primary objectives include providing culturally-grounded decolonized child welfare services that are implemented by, with, and for Indigenous Peoples. Although these services have been largely successful, many scholars have criticized the federal government for not going far enough to fully decolonize the Canadian child welfare system as a whole (Simard, & Blight, 2011; Carrière, 2010; Blackstock, 2009; Carrière & Strega, 2009; Richard, 2004; Trocmé, et al., 2004). For example,

according to Fluke et al (2010), the federal government offers significantly more funding and resources to child welfare organizations located in urban settings when compared to Indigenous child welfare organizations such as DAAs that are located on-reserves. In fact, there only 24 DAAs currently in operation (most of which are on reserves) across BC, whereas MCFD has approximately 200 offices despite overrepresentation and cultural disconnection of Indigenous children and youth. If it truly does take a village to raise a child and clearly DAAs and MCFD workers cannot do this work alone. How can each of us one of us pitch in to help? This burning question stayed with me for a really long time, and eventually became my research question.

My Research Question

“How (if at all) can individuals, families, communities, social workers, and organizations utilize culturally-informed transitional practices to support Indigenous youth who are aging-out of foster care and transitioning into the adulthood stages of their sacred life-cycle?”

Purpose of this Research

The purpose of this research is: [1] to raise awareness about, and find solutions to, the issues and barriers faced by Indigenous children and youth in and from care; [2] to leverage the voices, insights, and perspectives of those who previously transitioned out of MCFD care at the age of 19, as well as those who support these individuals either directly or indirectly; [3] to help empower Indigenous children, youth, families, communities, social workers, and organizations by highlighting culturally-informed ways to support Indigenous youth in and from care; [4] to assist in the further decolonization of the child welfare system in BC, and indeed across Canada as a whole if possible; and [5] to development a set of practical guidelines informed by a theoretical framework that can be applied within a variety of personal, professional, social, cultural, and academic settings involving Indigenous youth in care and those who are transitioning out at 19.

CHAPTER TWO: THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Issues and Barriers Faced by Indigenous Youth Aging-Out of Care

It is believed that a disconnection from one's cultural identity and cultural traditions can lead to mental health concerns, addiction, and death by suicide, especially among Indigenous Peoples (Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2000). Many scholars and youth also appear to agree that Indigenous youth are at significantly higher risk of becoming impoverished, homeless, un(der)employed, un(der)educated, incarcerated, over-reliant on social services, mentally unwell, emotionally disrupted (manifesting as depression or anxiety), misusers of legal and illegal substances, and/or suicidal after leaving foster care at the age of 19 (Evan et al., 2017; Gomez, Ryan, Norton et al., 2015; Barker et al., 2014; Mendes, Baidawi, & Snow, 2013; PACY, 2012; Jackson, O'Brien, & Pecora, 2011; Carrière; 2010; Naccarato & DeLorenzo, 2008; Rutman, Hubberstey, & Feduniw, 2007; Tweddle, 2007; Cashmore & Paxman, 2006). This is likely to do with one's feelings of cultural disconnection and cultural alienation as a result of being in care (PACY, 2012; Simard & Blight, 2011; Carrière; 2010; Blackstock, 2009; Carrière, & Strega, 2009; Blackstock, Trocme, & Bennett, 2004; Richard, 2004; Cross, Simmons, & Chase, 2000).

For instance, Barker et al (2014) reports that nearly half [49%] of all youth living on the streets of Vancouver had some form of MCFD involvement in their lifetime, and that majority of whom [55%] also identified as having Indigenous ancestry. In addition, Rutman et al (2007) found that most employment opportunities available to youth after foster care were low-paying service positions with very little (if any) benefits or job security. This is likely due to the fact that according to a recent MCFD (2017) report, approximately 55% Indigenous youth leave foster care at 19 without a high school diploma, and that only 17% of them are expected to secure employment within six months of their 19th birthday. Although it may be difficult for most studies to

demonstrate a direct correlation between these outcomes and being in care, it is arguably just as difficult to ignore the uncanny relationship and frequency between these factors and outcomes.

Furthermore, the disparities faced by Indigenous youth in care here in Canada are not necessarily unique to this country alone. The findings in the literature have also been consistent with other from around the world including the United States (Gomez et al., 2015; Jackson et al., 2011; Naccarato & DeLorenzo, 2008; Reilly, 2003), and Australia (Mendes et al, 2013; Cashmore & Paxman, 2006). For example, international studies emphasized that ‘learned helplessness’ (Gomez et al., 2015), post-traumatic stress disorder (Jackson et al., 2011), and a lack of life skills (Naccarato & DeLorenzo, 2008) are particularly prevalent among youth in and from care in the United States; and that emotional disorders (Cashmore & Paxman, 2006), and inadequate housing options (Mendes et al., 2014) are also present among aged-out groups in Australia. Although these findings occurred from within an international framework and socio-political context, I believe these same international findings are transferable and relevant within a Canadian context as well.

Proposed Solutions in the Literature

Fortunately, there are also several proposed solutions in the current literature. For instance, Johnson (2014) calls for more trauma-informed training for social worker and child welfare practitioners, and Naccarato and DeLorenzo (2008) advocates for greater life skills training programs supporting young people in and from care. Some have also called for an increase in peer-to-peer mentorship opportunities such as Big Sisters/Brothers (PACY, 2012; Rutman et al., 2007), and others are calling for greater consistency among foster families and workers (Cashmore & Paxman, 2006). Although these solutions were found in the literature, not all of them were specific to supporting Indigenous Peoples. That said, I believe each these solutions could be beneficial to Indigenous youth, and could be adapted to better reflect Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Personally, I feel called to advocate for greater improvements to how social workers in Canada are being trained (Dumbrill & Green; 2008); Thomas & Green, 2007; Sinclair, 2004; and Thomas, 2003), and the importance of providing culturally-informed transitional practices that help foster cultural [re-]connectedness among Indigenous youth who are leaving care at the age of 19 (Simard & Blight, 2011). Blackstock (2009) also recommends that we openly address the cultural and racial biases within child welfare policies and practices either against or in contrast to Indigenous Peoples. Clearly, there are many voices offering a variety of solutions in the literature; however, there are a number of gaps in the same literature that also need to be addressed.

Addressing the Gaps

The first major gap I noticed in the literature was related to *privilege*. It appeared to me that much of the literature disproportionately privileged non-Indigenous voices and perspectives over Indigenous ones. The PACY (2012) report is particularly unique because it is one of the few studies that is almost entirely comprised of voices, perspectives, and stories from youth themselves who are or were in foster care. However, the majority of this report (approximately 92%) on voices are non-Indigenous youth voices yet it acknowledges that Indigenous Peoples are overrepresented in the child welfare system. One possible reason for this gap is that most western researchers have a longstanding history of conducting research *on* Indigenous Peoples rather than *with* Indigenous Peoples which in turn silences these voices and perspectives (Smith, 2001). To help alleviate this outcome, I wanted to conduct my research from a position that helps leverage and center the voices and perspectives of Indigenous Peoples directly, and especially the voice and perspective of Indigenous youth (now adults) who previously left foster care at 19 here in BC.

The second gap I noted in the literature was that most studies appeared to be disproportionately more problem-focused rather than solution-focused, which I think this is

understandable given the breadth of issues, challenges, and barriers faced by Indigenous youth transitioning from foster care. Indigenous research paradigms on the other hand are typically *solutions-focused* for purpose of benefiting Indigenous families and communities directly (Wilson, 2013; Absolon, 2010; Kovach, 2009; Stewart, 2009; Wilson, 2008; Verniest, 2006; Absolon & Willet, 2004). To help resolve this gap, I aimed to conduct my research in a manner that sought the solutions to my research questions rather than solely examining the causes of the problems.

The final major gap I noticed in the literature was that most of this research was conducted using westernized research methodologies rather than Indigenous approaches. The challenge here is, as many scholars have argued, that research on topics that directly involve Indigenous Peoples should be gathered, analyzed, and delivered using Indigenous approaches to research ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies, and axiologies (Absolon, 2010; Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2009; Lavallée, 2009; Wilson, 2008; Absolon & Willet, 2004; Smith 2001). As such, to help bridge this gap in the literature, I designed my research using a culturally-informed research paradigm that was rooted in and informed by Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

In summary, to address the gaps in the literature, I conducted my research using a methodology that is strengths-orientated, person-centered, and solutions-focused, as well as consistent with and informed by Indigenous ways of knowing and being. I also conducted this research in collaboration with, by, and for Indigenous Peoples who previously left care at the age of 19, and those who work directly and/or indirectly to support Indigenous youth in and from care.

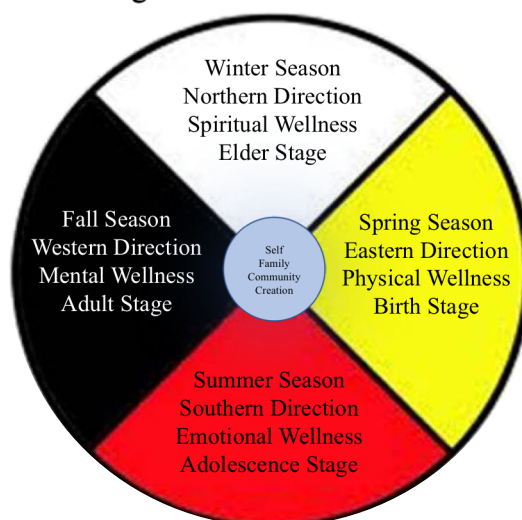
In this next chapter, I detail each aspect of my research design which was constructed to help fill the above gaps in the literature as well as provide answers to my research question. This all said, I think it important to acknowledge that the research in this report itself is not without its own set of gaps and limitations, which will be discussed further in Chapter Eight.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

The Medicine Wheel as a Conceptual Framework

The Medicine Wheel and its sacred teachings have existed among many Indigenous Peoples since time-immemorial, and although its traditionalisms may vary from Nation to Nation or person to person, its iconography has remained largely consistent. Figure #1 is a visual depiction of how I was taught to view and understand the Medicine Wheel, which is important for you to aware of this because so many aspects of the Medicine Wheel have informed my research design.

Figure #1: Medicine Wheel Teachings

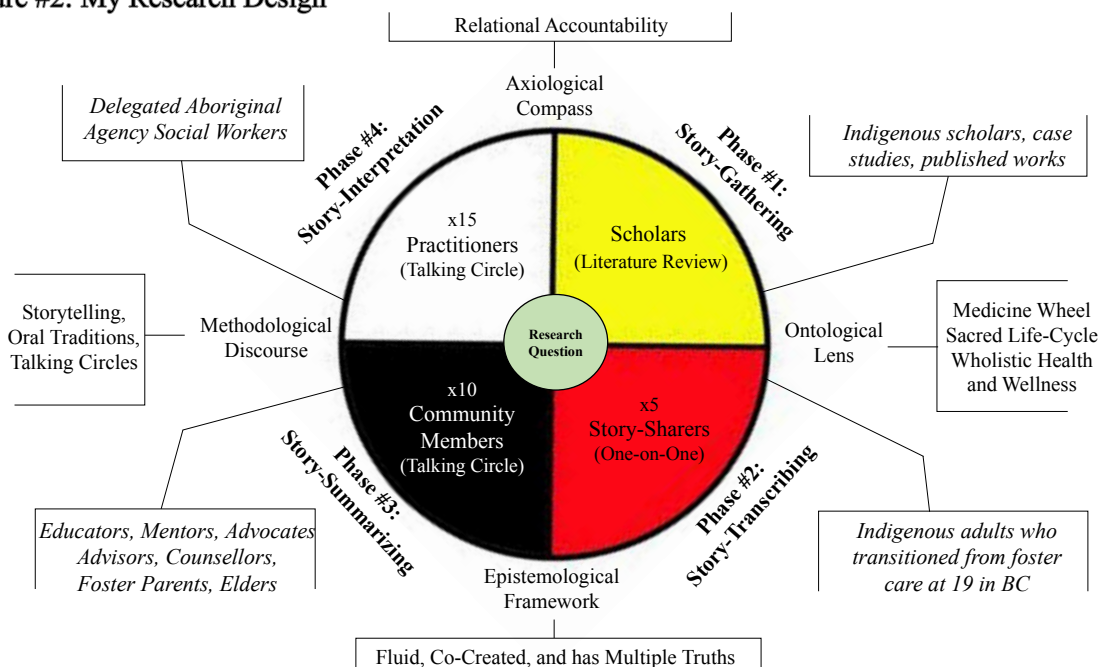


The Medicine Wheel as it is presented here as a perfect circle made up of four equal quadrants, each of which represent a variety of traditional teachings that honour the four sacred seasons (*spring, summer, fall, winter*), the four sacred directions (*east, south, west, north*), four realms of wholistic health and wellness (*physicality, emotionality, mentality, spirituality*), and the four sacred stages of a person's *life-cycle* from birth, adolescence, adulthood, Elderhood. The intersecting lines at make up the Medicine Wheel represent the innate equality of all living persons, places, and things (including those in the spirit-realm), as well as the belief that all aspects of animate and inanimate life are inter/intra-related, inter/intra-connected, inter/intra-dependent, and inter/intra-reciprocal. I believe the Medicine Wheel and its teachings are sacred.

The Medicine Wheel and my Research Paradigm

The four elements that inform and shape a *research paradigm* are the researcher's ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology (Wilson, 2013; Absolon, 2010; Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2009; Absolon & Willet, 2004; Wilson, 2008). For this report my research paradigm was constructed and informed by the Medicine Wheel teachings, as depicted Figure #2:

Figure #2: My Research Design



The incorporation of the Medicine Wheel in research is actually quite common in literature today (Baskin, 2016; Carrière & Richardson, 2013; Simard & Blythe, 2011; Wenger-Nabigon, 2010; Absolon, 2010; Lavallée, 2009; Twigg & Hengen, 2009; Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Isaak & Marchessault, 2008; Thomas & Green, 2007) and I feel that the Medicine Wheel is also ideal for my research design. This chapter further describes how the Medicine Wheel teachings have informed the construction and implementation of my research paradigm which in turned informed my research process and at each of the four story-phases, as discussed in Chapter Four.

Ontological Lens

My ontological lens for this research was based on a *wholistic worldview* wherein all aspects of animate and inanimate life in the physical and spirit realms are considered inter/intra-related, inter/intra-connected, inter/intra--dependent, and inter/intra—reciprocal (Baskin, 2016; Graveline, 1998). Personally, I prefer to use the term ‘wholism’ instead ‘holism’ to express this worldview because for me *wholism* is a viewpoint that sees everything as the sum of all its parts, whereas holism feels more commonly associated with religious beliefs associated with holiness. Furthermore, the term ‘aging-out of care’ carries a lot of negative weight to me because it feels like it refers to someone leaving a ‘caring place’ because of personal factors about which they have no control (i.e. their age). in lieu of using ‘aging-out of care’ terminology, I preferred ‘transitioning into adulthood’ as a way pf celebrating young peoples’ entrance into the next stage of their *sacred life-cycle* (Anderson, 2011). For many Indigenous Peoples, young people become adults based on their stage of life and not necessarily because of their ascribed age (Anderson, 2011). These perspectives are also consistent with a Medicine Wheel ontology.

Epistemological Framework

For many Indigenous Peoples, new knowledge emerges as a result of ancestral teachings that are cosmically transferred to us via our dreams, intuition, and higher senses. This is especially true while participating in certain ceremonies because these are the moments when we are closest to Creator and the spirit realms (Hirt, 2012; Absolon, 2010). The ceremonies such as vision quests, fasting, sweatlodges, meditation, smudging, and Bighouse dancing help us activate our senses and thus uncover and receive new knowledges. Indigenous knowledges are also considered fluid (Wilson, 2013) because they are comprised of multiple intersecting truths that come from multiple sources and peoples and influenced by one’s own life experiences and self-locations (Moosa-

Mitha, 2015). For most Indigenous Peoples, knowledge acquisition occurs through *oral traditions and storytelling practices* which is when knowledge/teachings are exchanged, or passed along, from one generation to another (Thomas, 2015; Lavallée, 2009). This practice aligns with research because research itself is considered a story-gathering/story-sharing process (Kovach, Carrière, Barrett, Montgomery, & Gillies, 2013). As a result of this ontology, some of the terms in this report such as ‘*data*’, ‘*findings*’, and ‘*the research participants*’ are also referred to as ‘*story*’, ‘*teachings*’, and ‘*Story-Sharers*’. Words carry meaning and for me these changes essential.

Methodological Discourse

Given my ontology and epistemology, I utilize oral traditions and storytelling practice as my methodology for this research. Like the Medicine Wheel, oral traditions and storytelling practice also appear to be common among the current literature (Thomas, 2015; Kovach et al., 2013; Wilson, 2013; Stock, Mares, & Robinson, 2012; Rodriguez et al., 2011; Simard & Blythe, 2011; Lavallée, 2009; Wilson, 2008; Absolon & Willett, 2004). In this research, I conducted five one-on-one Story-Sharing sessions (similar to a one-on-one interview session, only without the back-and-forth dialogue exchange), and two Talking Circles. The one-on-one sessions were facilitated with five Indigenous adults who were previously in MCFD until the age of 19, and the two Talking Circles were comprised of ten various Community Helpers, and fifteen Delegated Aboriginal Agency social workers respectively. More on this in Chapter Four.

Axiological Compass

The axiology of my research was rooted in what Wilson (2008) refers to as ‘*relational accountability*’ which calls upon me to conduct this work (and myself) in manner that consistently honours my relationship with and connection to all parties who contributed to this study as well as their families, communities, and Nations. My axiology also respected the self-determination of

each Story-Sharer and Circle Member, as well as your own right to self-determination, as the Reader. It is for this reason that in this research I reframed the term *storyteller* to a '*story-sharer*' because for me word '*sharing*' denotes an image of someone making an offering to another person who in turn may choose whether or not to become an active recipient said offering. As the Reader, you can choose to be an active Listener; however, in doing so you are also accepting the responsibility of becoming a *knowledge carrier* of the stories and findings presented in this report. In this same spirit, I provided the full story-summary transcripts in this report exactly how the Story-Sharers/Circle Members intended them to be presented so that you can review these same stories yourself and to determine your own findings and recommendations as you see fit. These stories are the same information from which my analysis, findings, and recommendations emerged.

Moreover, the axiology of this research was also informed by University of Victoria's (2003) *Protocols and Principles for Conducting Research in an Indigenous Context*, and the Hulitan Family and Community Services Society's (2015) *Traditional Native Code of Ethics*; and was approved by the Human Research Ethics Boards at the University of Victoria, Vancouver Island University, and the Ministry of Children and Family Development of British Columbia.

Disclaimer Regarding Representation

I would to offer a brief disclaimer regarding personal and cultural representation in this research. As the Reader, it is important to acknowledge that the values, opinions, beliefs, traditions, cultural practices and/or perspectives presented anywhere in this report are recognized as the sole ownership and responsibility of the individual person(s) who expressed them. As such, these viewpoints do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints of any other particular person(s), group(s), peoples, communities, or Nations, nor any profession(s) or organization(s) to which said speaker(s) may or may not be directly or indirectly affiliated. This includes myself as the Story-Gatherer.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

The Research-Process in Four-Phases

The research process occurred over four key phases: [1] the *Story-Gathering phase* whereby Story-Sharers' and Circle Members' stories were gathered in-person and audio-recorded for accuracy; [2] the *Story-Transcribing phase*, which involved transcribing each sessions' audio-recordings verbatim; [3] the *Story-Summarizing phase* wherein participants and I co-created an anonymized version of their individual stories (which is included in full in this report as approved by each of the participants respectively); and [4] the *Story-Interpretation phase* wherein I analyzed the Story-Summarizes into the findings and recommendations presented in Chapter Seven.

Methods of Inquiry

Two key methods of inquiry were employed in this research. The first method comprised of five one-on-one confidential Story-Sharing sessions between myself (the Story-Gatherer) and individual Story-Sharers (research participants) who identified as Indigenous adults who previously transitioned out of foster care in BC at the age of 19. The second method of inquiry included two separate Talking Circle sessions. The first Talking Circle comprised of ten Community Helpers such as Elders, Educators, Counsellors, and Foster Parents who work directly or indirectly to support Indigenous youth in or from care; and the second Talking Circle was comprised of fifteen Delegated Aboriginal Agency [DAA] social workers.

Recruitment

Recruitment for the five one-on-one Story-Sharing sessions and the two Talking Circle sessions were conducted separately because the eligibility criteria for each differed substantially. Eligibility for the one-on-one Story-Sharing sessions stipulated that Story-Sharers must [1] *self-identify as an Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nation, Métis, and/or Inuit persons*; and [2] *have previously transitioned out of foster care in BC at the age of 19* in order to participate in a one-on-

one Story-Sharing session. My initial recruitment plan included a postering-campaign and cold-calling strategies; however, these approaches proved largely ineffective because they prevented me from developing a truly authentic relationship with communities and potential candidates. I later adopted a more *relational-approach* to recruitment whereby I became an active member of the communities where potential participants may have resided or were otherwise connected. This relational-approach definitely proved to be far more effective than initially anticipated.

This relational-approach help identify 20 potential candidates, of which 13 who were directly notified expressed an interest in participating in this research. From this group, 5 Story-Sharers ultimately participated, 4 individuals were later determined to be ineligible, 3 individuals had scheduling conflicts, and 1 candidate withdrew.

I followed this same relational-approach when recruiting for each of the Talking Circles, which lead to 21 individuals being identified as potential candidates (all of whom were notified and invited to attend the first Talking Circle), 10 of whom ultimately participated in the session, whereas 5 individuals who also agreed did not show on the day of the session, 2 individuals withdrew due their participants due to scheduling conflicts, and 4 never responded to the invitation. For the second Talking Circle however, I was fortunate to have developed a connection with a local helper who helped me recruit the 15 DAA workers who ultimately participated in this study.

THE STORY-GATHERING PHASE

One-on-One Story-Sharing Sessions

Each Story-Sharers met with me one-on-one in a location of their choosing (often somewhere in the community). During our first meeting together, we introduced ourselves, determined eligibility and interest, and discussed the Story-Gathering process in great detail. If the Story-Sharer agreed to proceed with participating in the research after this initial meeting, we then reviewed *the Participant Consent Form* (Appendix #1) and I answered any questions or concerns

they might have had about this work and/or about myself as the Gatherer. If after all of this they still agreed to participate in the research, then the location, dates, and times for each Story-Sharing session was mutually agreed upon in advance.

The one-on-one Story-Sessions typically began with a smudge, opening a prayer, and/or at a couple calming words to help ground ourselves prior to each session because I really wanted to set a harmonious tone for this sacred work to occur between us. In many ways, these Story-Sharing sessions were themselves a ceremony between the Story-Sharer and I. The duration of each one-on-one sessions was approximately 45 minutes to 2 hours, and each were audio-recorded for accuracy. Snacks and light beverages were also provided. At the end of each session, I checked-in with each Story-Sharers to ensure they still felt comfortable about sharing their story, and I asked whether they wished to continue participating in the research process. Fortunately, all Story-Sharer expressed a sense of relief and gratitude for having shared their stories in this research.

Talking Circles Sessions

Both Talking Circles were conducted in nearly identical circumstances and both followed nearly identical protocols and guiding question. Each Circle Members received a copy of the *Participant Consent Form* (Appendix #1) prior to attending their Talking-Circle sessions, and Circle Members were offered at least one-week notice before each the session. Like the one-on-one Story-Sharing sessions above, both Talking Circles sessions were audio-recorded for accuracy, and snacks and light beverages were provided. Each Talking Circle also followed a number 'circle protocols' such as seating all members in a circular arrangement, passing an Eagle feather so that each attendee had an opportunity to speak, and mutually agreeing to uphold each other's confidentiality during and after each session respectively. Guiding questions were also provided in advance and all members retained the right to pass on answering questions if they so wished.

Guiding Questions

I provided a number of guiding questions in advance but I did not want to overly rely on them during each session so that Story-Sharers and Circle Members could share their stories in a manner that was free-flowing and self-determined. Moreover, this decision was consistent with a methodology that was rooted in oral traditions and storytelling practices (Thomas, 2015; 2000). However, please note that the guiding questions below were framed as ‘aging-out of care’ because the notion of translating this terminology within a ‘sacred life-cycle’ context occurred to me much later in the research journey. These guiding questions also differed between the one-on-one and the Talking Circles sessions given the differences between criteria and perspectives in the room. For the Story-Sharing sessions, the guiding questions included: [1] *What was it like for you to age-out of care?* [2] *What supports (if any) were available to you?* [3] *What (if any) supports do you wish you had then?* [4] *How has this experience shaped you today?* and [5] *Is there anything else not yet said that you would like to add?* However, the guiding questions for the Talking Circle sessions asked: [1] *What (if any) are the issues, barriers, or challenges faced by aging-out Indigenous youth?* [2] *What (if any) supports and resources could or do help Indigenous youth aging-out of care?* and [3] *Is there anything we missed?*

Risk Management

Three potential risks were identified to each Story-Sharers and Circle Members prior to their sessions. This information was detailed in my *Participation Consent Form* (Appendix #1) and again discussed in person. The first risk identified that participants *may experience a level of physical, emotional, mental, and/or spiritual discomfort or distress either prior to, during, and/or after sharing their stories (or as a result of hearing others’ stories, if applicable)*. To help reduce this risk, participants were advised to express the information that they felt comfortable sharing

and to review their Story-Summary prior to approving them. Each participant was also advised to have a safety plan in place prior to sharing their stories (or prior to hearing others' stories). My smudge kit and a number of resource information were also available to participants as needed. All participants were also invited to have an additional support person present with them during their sessions if they so wished, who then completed the *Confidentiality Agreement for Additional Person(s) Form* (Appendix #2) prior to our session together.

The second risk identified to all Story-Sharers and Circle Members was that participants' *personal information, consent forms, audio-recordings, and/or original transcripts may be obtained by an unapproved third-party without the participants' knowledge or consent*. To help manage this risk, no identifying characteristics were listed in original transcripts, nor were any identifying features indicated in file or folder labels. Consent Forms could also be completed via oral agreement in lieu of having to sign the documents, and all documents were stored in a secure lockbox, and all digital files were password-protected.

The final identified risk pertained to the Talking Circle sessions wherein I noted that it would be impossible for myself or others to guarantee that all attending parties would mutually respect each other's confidentiality. As such, as with the above, participants were advised to only share the information in which they comfortable sharing in a public forum.

THE STORY-TRANSCRIBING AND THE STORY-SUMMARIZING PHASES

During the Story-Transcribing phase, I transcribed each of the audio-recordings verbatim, minus any identifying features or characteristics, all while doing my best to maintain the spirit and energy of each speakers' voice, tone, and mannerisms in written form. I then met with each Story-Sharer and Circle Member to co-create a comprehensive and anonymized *Story-Summary* of the transcript. Each participant had an opportunity to make edits and revisions to their own Story-

Summaries as they saw fit, prior to approving them for their full inclusion into this final report. As such, each story presented in Chapters Five and Six is done so in the manner in which each participant approved. This was most important to me because these stories are their own, not mine.

Story (Data) Handling

All printed materials such as the signed consent forms, were safely stored in a secure lockbox, and all digital files were password-protected (encrypted) and stored on a memory stick located in the same lockbox. No identifying names or characteristics were listed in any transcripts, nor on any of the digital file names or folders. All items would be held for up to two years upon completion of this research in accordance with the University of Victoria research policies and practices. After which time, all digital files and printed materials would be permanently destroyed and/or deleted. To me, this information is an extension of the participants themselves and so I handled this material with relational accountability to them, as discussed in Chapter Three.

Confidentiality

As an ethical social worker and researcher, I am committed to upholding participants' privacy and confidentiality, especially given the potentially sensitive nature of this research topic. Maintaining confidentiality was also important to me because when it comes to working with small communities in and around Vancouver Island, most are relatively close-knit and rural, which Wiles, Crow, Heath, and Charles (2008) note can lead to high rates of gossiping between members. I also detailed in my *Participation Agreement Forms* (Appendix #1) the boundaries and limitations of confidentiality (i.e. Duty to Report). One Story-Sharer requested an additional support person to present during the one-on-one session, as such, the additional support person completed the *Confidentiality Agreement for Additional Person(s) Form* (see Appendix #2) prior to the session, which was also authorized by the Story-Sharer themselves.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was continuously sought throughout the research process by way of two key approaches. The first approach included the *Participation Consent Form* (Appendix #1) which detailed all aspects of the research process for participants to review at their discretion. No time limit was officially set for this process to occur and questions were indeed welcome at all times. If a member agreed to participate in the research, they had the choice of expressing their consent either verbally or in writing (see Appendix #1). The second method of ensuring informed consent occurred during the Story-Summarizing Phase. This was where participants had an opportunity co-create their Story-Summaries with me so that they would be fully aware of exactly what information they wanted presented in full in this report prior to its official public release. During this co-creation process, participants retained the right to make changes to their Story-Summaries. This arrangement was also employed in honour of Indigenous Peoples' rights to self-determination, and in honour mutual collaboration and reciprocity.

Ethical Considerations:

Power-Dynamics

Scholars have argued that most western literature place the Researcher as the dominant omniscient authority figure over their participants who are viewed as passive suppliers of information and data (Daley, 2010; Wilson, 2008; Smith 2001). However, in this research I positioned the Story-Sharers and Circle Members as the *Experts*, and myself as a willing and unknowing *Learner* to reflect Indigenous approaches oral traditions and storytelling practices whereby the storyteller is viewed as *the Teacher*, and the listeners are viewed *the Learners* (Thomas, 2015). Moreover, during each Story-Sharing and Talking Circle sessions I deliberately and consciously positioned myself as physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually as a mutually respectful non-dominant listener the room by, for example, seating myself at the same

eye-level as the Story-Sharers or Circle Members and by employing body language that expressed openness and curiosity at all times. In addition to this, during the Story-Summarizing phase, I consistently positioned the Story-Sharers' and Circle Members' recommendations in high regard because I viewed these individuals as sovereign proprietors of their personal stories.

Dual-Role Relationships

As an employee of Vancouver Island University who works closely with Indigenous students, families, communities, and local organizations across Vancouver Island, the potential for a dual-role relationship (whether real or perceived) was possible. I discussed these matters openly with each Story-Sharer and Circle Member while reviewing the consent forms for this research (Appendix #1) where I stated that of actions or decisions by Story-Sharers or Circle Members would have no impact on the quality of my current or future professional services available to them at the University. I provided the contact information for my work supervisor and advised that they would be free to work other support peoples at the University at the participant's discretion.

Right to Withdraw

At all times, participants retained the right to withdraw from this research, either with or without an explanation, at any point prior my oral defense date. If in the event a participant withdrew from the research, all printed and digital materials would be permanently destroyed and/or deleted, and removed from the final report. As for Talking Circle Members, although I would not be able to remove their voice(s) from the audio-recording, I did explain that I could remove their respective section(s) from the transcripts and final report. In addition, participants would still receive their honorarium even if they decided to withdraw from the research early. The aim here was to honour participants' rights to exercise their self-determination at all times. In short, no harm would come to participants at any time if they choose to withdraw from the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE ONE-ON-ONE STORY-SHARING SESSIONS

Entering with an Open Mind and an Open Heart

I knew from the very beginning that I wanted to feature each of the Story-Summaries in full and in their very own chapter. I wanted to present these stories in this way rather than tucking them into the Appendices and potentially overlooked. To me, these stories are the most important part of this research because they come directly from the people who lived them directly. To me, they are the experts of their stories. Moreover, my analysis and recommendations presented in Chapter Seven were directly derived from the Story-Sharers and Circles Members' stories which are presented here so that you as the Reader can have an equal opportunity to review these same stories in your own way and in turn derive your own analysis and recommendations as you see fit.

As the Reader, I also encourage you enter this chapter with an open-heart and an open-mind and acknowledge our Story-Sharers' strengths and resilience as you read their stories. One of the ways in which you might do this would be to smudge or offer some tobacco beforehand. You might also want to play some nice music in the background or sit in nature while you are reading these stories. Make this time a ceremonial experience for yourself just as the Story-Sharers and I made the research process a ceremonial experience for ourselves too. However, if for any reason you do not feel fully ready proceed with these stories in a wholistic way then I encourage you to skip ahead to Chapter Seven where I present my analysis and findings. That said, if you are indeed ready to go forward in this good way, then please continue reading.

The One-on-One Story-Sharing Sessions and the Story-Sharers' Stories:

STORY-SHARER #1 – “WÀWÀTESÌ”

This first story comes from *Wàwàtesì* (Firefly), a young woman aged 19 who very recently transitioned into adulthood away from foster care. *Wàwàtesì* seemed so quiet, shy, and reserved at first, yet by the end of our time together her spirit completely filled the room. I witnessed *Wàwàtesì*

as a truly amazing and resilient young woman, and I think her story is especially important for this research because at 19 she just recently transitioned away from foster care and into the next phase of her sacred life-cycle. It for this reason that we begin this chapter with Wàwàtesì's story:

"I was put into care at the age of 3 and I have been in so many foster homes in my life, I've lost track of them all. I remember being younger and people were talking about the 'good' foster families out there and I sat there and was like, 'Where are they? Let me come live with you'. That was really hard actually. There was this one foster family that I actually enjoyed. I was there for like 3 or 4 years before I went on into independent living. My foster mom was great. She helped me with so much. She helped me work through trauma and I don't know, she was this sweet old lady and was pretty much like a grandma to me. I didn't have grandparents growing up. I had my birth mom, who was like both my mom and my dad really. She's a great person and I miss her.

When I was younger, my birth mom worked two jobs to try and keep up with paying the bills...and support an alcohol addiction. Still, it didn't matter what the social workers said or what anyone else said about her, to me she was never a bad parent. She was there when she could be, and she was always there if I needed someone to talk to. I could call her up at like three o'clock in the morning and she'd answer. She'd be sleeping, but she'd answer. She is the best person in the whole world. I wish she was there for me more because I feel like I wouldn't have been in care. She always tried her best.

I eventually went into independent living and it was a bit harder for me because there was no direction or guidance saying 'this is what you are going to be doing now' or anything like that because the social workers were just kind of like 'Well, alright we found you a place. Have fun'. I mean, I could talk to the social worker I was with if I needed anything, but I swear I spent more time talking to her voicemail than I did to her directly, so eventually I just stopped leaving voicemails. I wanted a social worker who took into consideration my feelings, and someone who would take what I was saying seriously. If I'm asking

for help or saying that something's going on at home, I'd want them to at least listen instead of going straight to the foster parents.

When I aged-out of care, I didn't get a whole lot of help. I didn't feel like I had any support. It just felt suddenly like, 'Oh my god I'm an adult now. I'm all alone.' I felt like I was just thrown into the deep end and left there. I asked for help but I just didn't feel like I was getting heard. Nobody was checking up on me. Nobody was doing this or that.

The first thing I wanted to do was get a job. If I could get a job then I could do anything and I'd have money that I could put aside to be able to get my own place. Getting my own place was one of main things that I wanted to do because I wanted to feel independent. I wanted to feel like 'I made it'. So yeah, I moved into independent living, got my own place, and was given some money, but it was sort of like, 'here's your rent cheque and here's your support money, talk to you in a month for your next cheque.' Soon I was on my own, I didn't know what the heck I was doing. That was hard.

High school was pretty hard for me too. I tried to make friends but I was the weird brown kid that no one wanted to talk to. It was nice to have a First Nations social worker later on who understood the struggles of being not only a youth in care, but First Nations too. When I was aging-out, they had this big ceremony for everybody that was aging-out. We got blanketed, we got a cedar headband, and gifts. I think the ceremony was the only thing I looked forward to when I was aging-out. They had cultural songs and dancing. It was nice. But it was kind of embarrassing too though because they put us in a line and had people say what they liked about us. I cried when my birth mom stood up. I'm actually going to cry now just thinking about it. I wasn't sure if she was going to make it to the ceremony. It meant a lot to me actually that she did. I still have the blanket and cedar hat. They're put away in a special box with my smudge stuff too.

In the foster home I was in at the time, going to cultural gatherings was something that had to be earned. I had to have all of my weekly chores done like finish the dishes, clean my bedroom, and the dog had to be walked, and then if I was lucky I got to go sing and dance. I was once part of a cultural drumming

group when I was in care. It was nice to learn the songs and dances but I don't remember all of them anymore. I've gone to cultural groups a couple of times with the family but it's so different now. All those kids have an iPad and tablets now and their headphones are plugged in all of the time. There were a couple of times when I was able to get them up and dancing or singing, but usually they were just plugged into their devices.

I think preparations for aging-out should start at least a couple of months before someone actually ages-out because it can take a while to try and find funding or like, get a job and save up enough to get your own place. The planning for that should also include either getting on welfare or getting on AYA (Agreements with Young Adults), or like, getting into independent living and having more supports other than just cheques only. Like all the support that I'm getting now, it's something that I would have wanted when I was in independent living such as having a youth support worker, having a drug and alcohol counsellor, and having a life skills support worker. Pretty much anybody that can help you. Like someone that could help guide you in the right direction, because when I aged-out I didn't know how to do crap all.

I have a life skills worker now that I work with almost every day throughout the week. He's taught me how to budget, and I learned how to get my own bank account. He's taught me so much but I know there's still so much more I have to learn too like how to go get furniture for my new place. Budgeting is one of the main things that I have to work on throughout the next couple of months. I want to learn how to do my taxes too. Oh, and there's baby stuff too I have to learn being pregnant and all. But the workers I'm seeing now are great!

I wouldn't have known anything about renting a place if I didn't have these workers. I'd still be lost and confused. I'm still kind of am lost and confused, but I've got people to help me now. I am very proud of myself. I think we need more life skills workers out there because you're not going to know everything as soon as you turn 19. Just because you have a piece of I.D saying that you are an adult doesn't mean you are one (Wàwàtesì laughs). It's great when you learn life skills. Like maybe when you turn 18 is when you should start seeing a life skill worker

and when they should start helping you get prepared for living on your own, or you know, maybe you want to find a roommate and they're going to tell you don't just go up to some random person and ask them to be a roommate (Wàwàtesì laughs again). You're going to want someone that you can click with. But a life skills program, that's something that everybody needs, not even just the people who were in care, but like people too who are getting ready to move out of their parent's home. They just don't teach us this stuff at school you know.

I think it would be cool too to have a life skills program like this incorporate more cultural things too. Like it would be so cool to learn about how do my taxes and also learn more about cultural things. Like when I got my smudge kit and I was like, 'Oh, so what do I do with this?' because I wasn't in a First Nations' foster home and I didn't know who to ask about that. To have someone you can talk to that can help you learn how to find the resources you need to learn more about your culture, that would be great.

After I started seeing different support workers I don't go partying anymore, not only because I'm pregnant, but because I just don't feel the need to go out like that anymore. I have a lot more things to do with myself these days, like I'm going to school now, I joined a cooking group, I go on nature walks, and kickboxing. I just really like having someone to have coffee with sometimes, though I don't drink coffee when we go (more laughter). Just being active and social is a lot more helpful than most might think it is.

I feel good talking about my story like this. I used to write it all down in a journal but being able to share it feels a lot better actually. It's nice to know that somebody's listening and that someone wants to know. So thanks for listening!"

As a Life Skills Coach who has integrated cultural traditionalisms into his life skills training programs, it is easy to see why Wàwàtesì's story really stood out to me. I appreciate her emphasis on the importance of ensuring that youth have opportunities to engage in life skills programming, but also opportunities to engage in social activities too from time to time. As discussed in my literature review, Naccarato and DeLorenzo (2008) called for greater life skills opportunities for

youth in and from care, and PACY (2012) and Rutman et al (2007) emphasized the importance of providing social outlets and mentorship opportunities such as Big Sisters/Brothers for young people in and from foster care. Wàwàtesì's story reminded me that it takes all of us helpers to support someone who is transitioning from foster care and into adulthood and not social workers alone. Chi-miigwetch to Wàwàtesì for her contribution to this research and best of luck to her as she continues her ongoing journey toward adulthood, and beyond.

STORY-SHARER #2 – “MAKWA”

This next story is from *Makwa* (Bear) who is a very wise and very jolly-souled man in his late-40s, soon to be early 50s. Makwa spent the majority of his early years in MCFD care until the age of 19, I remember the first day I met Makwa because I felt right away that his magnetism was unmatched by anyone else I had ever known. Makwa has a gift of making people feel instantly welcomed like they are a member of his family. Makwa is also a very gifted storyteller in person and I hope this is reflected in his Story-Summary below as you are reading it. I am truly grateful to Makwa for his participation in this research and it is a genuine honour and privilege to share his story with you now. Here is Makwa's story:

“I was 5 years old when I went into care and I had seven or eight placements before the age of 14. I’m an old man now, nearly 50. What a thing to have experienced as a young person. It was hard and I have come a long way. You think you know how to be responsible when you are a teenager, but are you kidding me!? Just because you have a driver’s licence you think you’re ready to go out on your own? Well try it. You’ll see how fun it is.

I was a chronic runaway when I was in care, always getting bought home by the police, always going into emergency services and having them bring me back home. There was this one time when I was over in Vancouver and I refused to come home, so my foster parents had to pay to fly me all the way back over to the island just to make sure I got home. In school, I was always skipping classes

and the foster parents would have to find me and come get me. Unfortunately, it was the streets of Vancouver where I would go. A never-ending vicious cycle, but a cycle I'm glad I grew out of when I realized that my life deserved better.

I always knew that I had a safe roof to go home to and I didn't really want to be homeless. But my foster family couldn't discipline me anyway, really. They did ground me once and took away my shoes, but that only worked for so long. But I have a good connection with my foster family now.

A good foster family is caring, compassionate, understanding, and easy to talk to. If a family was easy to talk to, then I would open up to them, and if not, I would be shut off and withdrawn and a total mess. Patience and understanding too are important. I remember a time when I visited my birth dad. I could hear that they had the music cranked up and so I didn't want to go in. I was maybe eight or nine years old. I ran away back to the foster home and snuck in through the basement door. I crawled into my bed and went to sleep. My foster mother at the time came downstairs the next day and found me in my bed, 'What are you doing here? I thought I sent you to your dad's?' I told her I was too afraid to go to into the house and she said, 'Okay sweetie. Get up, get dressed, wash up, and then come upstairs for breakfast.' So, I did. That was the year when they gave me a camera for Christmas. I captured a lot of childhood memories with that camera, and I like looking back on these pictures still to this day.

The disconnection I felt because of being taken away from my parents has been with me ever since. I used to ask myself, 'Why did this happen to me? Why was I taken into care? Why was I cheated? How could I go through this? How can my family go through this?' I had a really hard time to put all of that to rest over the years. But actually, part of what helped was having a Big Brother outside of the foster home that could take me out swimming, or go for a walk, go have some coffee, or just go for some one-on-one time together. Activities like that really helped me a lot to thrive. You can't always be 'just another foster child'.

When I asked my social worker why I was in care, her response was that she knew a lot about my family's history and what my mom had gone through, and that I needed to be in care so she could care for herself. I didn't know what

she meant at the time. But (long pause) my world really fell apart for me when I was 11 because this was when my biological mother passed away. The social workers and my foster family didn't allow me to go her funeral to say goodbye. They were probably trying to protect me from seeing her and thinking this was best for me. She had her struggles, sure, but to not allow a child to say goodbye to the only woman who brought him into this world...? That's cruel.

It was at 18 when I really started doing something about leaving care, but we didn't know where to start. I had no I.D., no birth certificate, no social insurance number, and no medical card. We talked to my birth family and that was the first time we had ever gone to my reserve. We started working with the Ministry too, to try and put things together, but it was my foster parents who helped me move out, slowly, and step-by-step. It wasn't just, 'Bye, my job's done now, you need to move out!' No, they let me stay with them until I was 21 and helped set me up in my own place. They went grocery shopping with me – I didn't know anything about grocery shopping. They taught me how to bank, buy food, and do all that stuff. I got this bank book with a few dollars in it and boy was that a help! This made the transition a lot easier for me but starting a little earlier I think would have been better because it would have helped me develop budget strategy skills much sooner. You need to know how to budget money in order to make it out there. It's all about being responsible.

On my 25th birthday, the Ministry gave me a box. It had everything in it. Everything! Everything anyone ever wrote about me while I was in care. Everything about my birth family. Everything I did. Everything. It took me quite a while to open up the box and actually start looking through the material. I needed a lot of support from people around me to help with this so that I wasn't going through it alone. Probably wouldn't have survived it if I had tried to read it all on my own. This was how I found out I wasn't born in BC! What a thing to find out. I believe that all youth in care are entitled to all this information, but I've often wondered when it would be a good time for someone to see this. It should really be only if you are strong enough and capable enough. You really got to take it nice and easy, and you really need to ask people if you need help.

But social workers should be asking too, 'Are you okay? Are you in a good place? Are you stable?' before letting you see this stuff because it is going to be a lot that's going to impact you: the good and the bad, and acceptance is the key.

When I went through that box, that's when I first learned that my mom was incapable of taking care of her kids because she attended residential school. Wow... (Makwa whispering). My mom went through that stuff? I had no idea. Knowing this became like the missing link through all those years that I was in care. Knowing this is what helped me really understand that my mom was not a bad parent, but that for her to go to residential school and then lose her kids, (more whispering) that's something that really happened to her and that still runs through me to this day. It all made sense at that moment. I saw a video online about residential schools and what it was like. It certainly took my breath away that this is where my parents grew up. That was actually the hardest part for me, and it still is. I thought about going back to see where the old residential school was, but I don't know if I could ever take such a gigantic step.

I've always believed that things should happen in stages but only as long as you can manage, think about them logically, and feel them in here (Makwa gestures to his heart). I had to do a lot of that. It just took a lot of work and preparation. But you also have to have guidance through all of that too. You shouldn't have to go through it alone. Social workers, counsellors, friends that know that you are or were in care, teachers, people around you every day. They must be willing to meet you, guide you, stand with you, and walk with you.

I did a ceremonial burning of my papers from that box when I didn't want them anymore and I let them go back to the Creator. It's a good way for releasing a lot of the pressure and pain. I still do this ceremony every now and again in my life. I learned to do this, and smudging, during my healing work. It brought up a strong sense of connection to my culture which I didn't have before this time in my life. I never really heard drumming up in my community before but they're really stepping out of those boundaries now that the language is being brought back. That's what they are doing up there now – the drumming, the smudging, the going for cold swims. I didn't know back then that First Nation Peoples do

cold swims when they lose a member of their family. I started doing this ceremony in the ocean back in 2004. This was tremendously helpful to release the heaviness that was inside me for so long. When I did those cold swims, it really helped me to heal things from the past. It helped me to release not being able to get to say goodbye to my birth mother.

As one of my Elders used to say, (Makwa taps the table) 'don't ever forget where you are from. It's a good thing you can learn what the white man does and how he does it, but don't you ever forget where you're from. You're from this community. You're a part of so many lives here. This is where your roots are. So though you're living up there now, this is where you came from first.' I am happy to be more connected to my culture now but it has taken a long time. I think culture should be introduced to youth in care especially if you are First Nations. It's a part of your identity. I think it is really a deep part of your person and who you are. They sort of go hand in hand. You've got to know who you are. Your culture, your background, your history, your grandparents and all of that. Being in care is part of my identity too and will be forever.

It doesn't matter what culture you come from or what age you were when you were in care, if you mention that you were in foster care, I will be the first one to come up to you and say, 'Hey, I can relate to you. I was a foster kid too.' I just become instinctively drawn to you if you were in foster care too at one time.

What I would tell young people today who are in care, is there's nothing wrong with being in care. I once thought there was, but I obviously I was wrong. If you are in care I would recommend going to the Ministry and saying, 'I need to meet with you right now. I know that you are busy, but I need to set-up some kind of meeting with you because I'm going to age-out one day and then what are you going to do? Your job will still go on, but what am I supposed to do?' You are a team. You're not just one person. Everyone needs to be active and helping the youth in care. Involve Elders too because they have a lot of wisdom and knowledge. I've learned a lot from them. We're all human beings. Start preparing for aging-out early because when it is too late, bad things happen."

Makwa's story is a powerful example of how important it is for youth in care to maintain a positive relationship with their birth family. It also demonstrated to me how important for youth to be supported beyond the age of 19 or until they are ready to make that transition. I felt inspired when Makwa talked about how practising ceremony today helps him heal from the difficult events of his past. Makwa's story also reminded me that it can be challenging for social workers to balance 'the best interests of the child' and being fully transparent with young people. I learned a lot from Makwa, and I am wholeheartedly grateful to him for offering his story to this research.

STORY-SHARER #3 – "GAAGAAGIWAG"

Gaagaagiwag (Raven) is a young woman in her early 20s who is strong leader and a strong role-model in her community. *Gaagaagiwag* is also a very compassionate youth mentor for young people in and from care. She is also quite skilled at being witty, humourous, and highly sarcastic (in a good way). I had many laughs with *Gaagaagiwag* during our time together. Furthermore, I really appreciate the opportunity to present *Gaagaagiwag*'s story here because I believe it offers us a unique perspective on how racism, lateral-violence, and identity politics can occur within families and communities when Indigenous youth are transitioning out of foster care. *Gaagaagiwag* taught me a lot about what it means to 'walk in two worlds'. Here is her story:

"Being in care was a horrid experience. Just kidding! It wasn't horrible. I mean, it was fine. I've been in care all of my life so it's not like it was anything new for me. Actually, it was. Aging-out of care was much harder for me. Like one of my friends who was also aging-out at the time was having appointments and just getting everything under control, figuring where she would live afterward and how everything would work out. She had all these sources to go to if she needed help, whereas for me, everyone just expected my foster parent and I to know what to do, but we were just kind of sitting there fumbling around in the dark.

My aging-out was kind of like my adoption party too because I was being adopted by my foster mom afterward. One thing that really bugged me about

aging-out was the racism toward my adopted mother. My adopted mom is a white woman and when people found out that she was adopting me, it felt like some of my mentors started favouring other children and ignoring me, and it was confusing because I didn't know where I stood with everybody anymore. I had friends and mentors who looked at me one way and then all of a sudden could feel how their thoughts toward me, and their mannerisms, just got cold. It was really hard but at the same time was I was like, 'Whatever. I'm not going to stand for it. This is my choice. This is my life. Accept it or don't'. My biological parents were fighting against the adoption and they got our band involved saying, 'We can't have an Indigenous child being adopted by a white woman!' It really took a toll on me because I wasn't ready for everybody to start giving us their opinions.

As an Indigenous child you learn about racism. I got bullied a lot in school for being Indigenous. I had a couple of comments like, you know, 'the token Native girl'. A lot of my white friends called me 'their little Indian' and I was like, 'You know I'm a lot more than my skin colour, right?' But nobody could move past it and it slowly weighed on me. I became depressed and I had suicidal tendencies.

When I first learned about residential schools, I just had to know more about them so I did my papers on it for my English and History teachers, and I realized that there was a lot of racism towards Indigenous people. But in that meeting between my adopted mom and my biological family and my band, there was so much racism toward the white man, and the only white person in that room was my adoptive mother! I was like, 'Racism goes both ways, and until you see that, nothing is going to get fixed between our peoples'. There's been so much hurt and people identify this with what a particular skin colour did to us, whereas my thought process is that it was their ancestors that did these things to our ancestors but they're trying to make things right between us now.

Also, people have been adopted into tribes, it's happened in places before! Whereas when I brought it forward to my community they were like, 'No she's white, we can't do that.' This is my choice, my life, and my family! I had people from my community coming up who said, 'I knew you when you were just a baby and I changed your diapers!' and I was like, 'That's cool, but where were you

when I needed somebody to take care of me?’ My adopted mom is white but she has the heart of an Indigenous woman. Also, she’s a woman, she’s sacred, and she taught me more about my culture than my actual family anyway. She’s the one that made it possible for me to develop that connection with my culture! This woman raised me since I was 7, and how dare they tell us she’s not the right skin colour when she’s been on Tribal [Journeys]! I’m still a little uncomfortable being around my biological family because we’re just so different and I have trouble relating to them most of the time. But I’ve just come to terms with it.

My grandmother was the first person in my birth family to appreciate and acknowledge my adoptive mother. She thanked her for loving, teaching, and fighting for me when it seemed like no one else was there for me. So of course, my grandmother was my favourite person in the whole wide world.

I also had this friend who was like a big sister to me. Such an inspiration and I ended up being really good friends with her. Actually, her foster mom and my foster mom eventually became friends too. They were like, ‘Yeah, so we’re going to head out on this thing called Tribal Journeys next week, and I just wanted to see you before I left’. She came back about two weeks later and was like, ‘Tribal Journeys was so amazing and you need to go on it next year!’ and I’m like, ‘Nooo, my mom’s white, I don’t want to.’ My friend was like, ‘...but you’re Native!!’ and I’m like, ‘That doesn’t matter, I don’t want to go.’

However, when I was twelve...no, eleven, my adopted mom was literally like, ‘Your totes are packed because you’re going on Tribal Journey,’ and like, ‘Go get cultural and learn something about yourself.’ Of course, I was like, ‘Yeah, no, this isn’t happening. I am not Native! I am white! Leave me alone!’ See, I was never raised on my reservation to know my family, culture, or community. I was raised in a white home, and in a white school, and as far as I was concerned, I was just super tanned, like someone over-cooked me is all (Kokokoho laughs).

You see, as a kid, I saw my birth family go through a lot alcoholism and abuse. I was like, ‘I don’t want to be a part of that family, lifestyle, this culture, if that’s how it’s going to be everywhere I go, because you know, that’s all you see about Native people!’ And then I come into this white home with a white woman

who is loving and caring. As a child, you feel safe, loved, and well-cared for. It messes with you a little because you see it as the white man being 'better and safer' than in an Indigenous home. But then you go on Tribal Journeys and you see this whole other side of Indigenous peoples and culture and you're like, 'Whoa! This is what I've been missing?! What the hell?!'

When I finished Tribal Journeys I was like, 'I know who I am!! I'm an Indigenous woman! I am going to grow up, go to school, go to college, and I'm going to work with other Indigenous youth to help them realize that it's not horrible being a Native and that this is not your only label in life, and that this is not the only thing you have to be or be known as'.

Let's just be honest, as a teenager, I was a pain in the ass and on Tribal Journeys it was the same at first (Kokokoho laughs again). I didn't want to be there, so I just lived off chips the whole time because I refused to eat the salmon and sandwiches. I was super picky and of course my stubbornness was just as bad back then if not worse. So I was sitting there and everyone was like, 'You need to eat something healthier!' I hated salmon and fish because I once had a tuna fish sandwich that had those little bones in it. It was really traumatic for me actually.

But what I saw on Tribal Journey's was the strength. The ability to be sober and clean and happy, and to know that your culture is 'good enough'. That the people around you in your canoe-family are enough to help you get through anything, and for me, that was a big thing to see because as a kid in care you don't always get to see a healthy family unit. Tribal Journeys also taught me that family isn't always blood. Family is about who's there for you. It's about who's going to be there to pick me up when I am at my worst, and who's going to love me at my worst. I think that's one of the biggest things I teach these youth now, which is that this is your family and that if you need me, I'll be there.

But then I started loving Tribal Journey and it became the only thing that made me get through the school years waking up every day saying '153 days until Tribal Journeys...140 days until Tribal Journeys...129 days and I can leave and be free.' It's really true that being out on that water is mind-blowingly good medicine. Each time I attended Tribal Journeys, it reminded me that it's okay to

be Indigenous and, that it's okay to be white too! It's okay to be whatever you want to be! I was raised in a white home but I now have this Indigenous perspective too. Maybe combining the two could help me possibly change the world and bring a different view on things! I think being exposed to Tribal Journeys while I was in care was one of the things that saved me. It saved my life. When I talk with the youth now and do my little check-ins, I always ask, 'What are you looking forward to most this year?' and it's usually, 'Tribal Journeys!' To me, that fixes a lot of things because it gives me hope for them, and it gives me hope for me too.

On Tribal Journeys you get to see people helping people, teaching people, how people learn from you too, not to mention all the cultural dancing and singing every night. It's just so amazingly powerful and strong. I think one of the biggest things a youth in care can learn is to trust and to love, and to know that you have a family. For me that's what I learned. So now, ever since I was eleven, being on the beach has been the best place for me because it's close to the water. I don't have my own tribal canoe...yet. But I will! And it'll be a traditional one."

What I learned from Gaagaagiwag's story is that it can be profoundly transformative to a young person's self-esteem, self-worth, and sense of belongingness as an Indigenous person when they are presented with positive cultural role-models and positive images of the culture. Moreover, I noticed that Gaagaagiwag developed her own cultural connection at an early age thanks to the encouragement of her foster mom rather than waiting and trying to introduce this connect to her when she was already at the point of transitioning out of care. Gaagaagiwag's story also taught me that although hate and racism can occur laterally, so too can love and healing even between different cultures and Nations. *Chi-miigwetch* to Gaagaagiwag for sharing her story.

STORY-SHARER #4 – "ANIDJÀNI"

Anidjàni (Doe/Deer) is quite an accomplished young woman in her mid-to-late 20s who now works for an Indigenous organization supporting Indigenous youth in and from MCFD care. Anidjàni is a self-starter, as well as a highly successful Indigenous entrepreneur whose story also

demonstrates that the journey toward adulthood does not always follow a straight and forward pathway, and that this journey can be far from easy for young people. As someone who now works with Indigenous youth transitioning from care, Anìdjàni's story offers a unique glimpse into the realities of youth today and their own transition into adulthood. Here is her story:

The first time I was taken away was when I was 4 years old, but I had been in and out of care kind of flopping back and forth between my family and placements the whole time. I was actually just having a conversation with one of my social workers recently and she said that I was always in tune with what was going on around me. I don't know, maybe I saw the whole picture or something but I knew that when I had family visits and my parents didn't show up, that that wasn't on me, and that it was on them. Even at a young age, I always knew that I loved my family and that they loved me back, but I also knew they weren't healthy and I knew I couldn't be with them as a result, and I was okay with this.

I ended up becoming a permanent ward around the age of 9 or 10, and I went into this one family's home and ended up staying with them until I aged-out. I feel extremely blessed to have been in their lives. I still talk to them now actually. It was a white family, a wealthy home, but I don't think that that changed their perspective on how there were going to care for me. They were just really supportive people and they've always been there for me. I really felt like I was a part of their family. Thinking back on it now, that was a big thing for me, and they're probably the reason that I am alive today.

My foster mom was a Christian, but not religious. She was more like 'there's a relationship between her and god' and I think her Christianity played a part in how I felt connected with them. There was this little church on a nearby reservation that my grandpa and grandma attended. I think it just gave the three of us that connection and like a reason to come together from time to time. My foster mom even invited my birth family to come over sometimes and I was able to attend family events outside of the foster home. I think they tried to keep us all connected because they understood that family was really important to me.

Apparently at like age 17 or 18, when I was close to aging-out, my social workers and I had the 'what are you going to do afterwards' talk, but I don't remember. It may have been the way that it was presented to me because I remember going to meetings at the MCFD office and meeting with my social workers, but I can't ever recall what those conversations were about. It may have also been my mindset at the time because I was more interested in graduating high school, my boyfriend, and my friends. The idea of thinking about what I was going to do in the future just wasn't important to me. I was more focused on what was I doing in the now and that day. It could also have been life circumstances because at that point in my life I didn't really need to be independent.

I also recently requested my file from MCFD, so they're getting all that organized for me. I'm actually going to be able to see all their notes and everything going on all the way back from the first time I was taken into care, to my teens, to when I became a permanent ward, to when I aged-out. It's kind of exciting because I feel like I have blocked out a lot of my childhood.

I moved into supportive independent housing just prior to aging-out. It was a bachelor suite that had everything there and a worker downstairs if I needed them. I had a boyfriend at the time, but I wasn't looking toward the future. I knew I wanted to do something with myself, but my boyfriend wasn't supportive. He wasn't doing anything himself, so it didn't motivate me to do anything for myself. So I ended that relationship.

But as I got closer to aging-out, I remember thinking that this was my last 6 months, and then this is my last 3 months, and then I had like a month left until it'd happen. I don't know if I remember the exact day that I left care, but I knew I had to leave the supportive housing afterward. I was full of mixed feelings because I was graduating high school and I was really proud of myself, but I was also feeling afraid of the unknown after turning 19.

At that point, I moved in with my grandma, but it was also around this time that I lost my job when my grandpa passed away. That was really hard on me. I told my boss that I needed time off so that I could help my family plan the funeral. They agreed. But two weeks later, I called my boss and I was like, 'Hey, I'm ready

to come back to work,' and she's like, 'No, you took way too long. You're done'. I was shocked. Looking back, I think if I knew more about the rules around this, I probably would have stood up for myself more or handled things differently.

I always see on social media people saying, 'I don't know what I would do without my mom' or 'My mom is the best mom ever.' I just don't feel that way about my mom. I mean, yes, my mom loves me, and she is probably the person who loves me the most, but I didn't have someone to talk to because she doesn't have those parental skills. And so, not having someone to go to and talk to, or ask questions about how I should live as an adult now was really hard.

So, while I was living with my grandma I ended up meeting someone. We were completely in love. Growing up, I wish I had more knowledge about relationships. Like three months into our relationship, we decided to have a baby and I got pregnant. But like five months into my pregnancy the relationship wasn't working. I didn't know how to be a good partner, and I don't think he knew either. No communication skills so we ended up splitting. But we still talk to this day.

After that, I ended up on welfare. I still had no idea what I was doing. I just knew that I was pregnant and I couldn't get a job because no one would hire a pregnant woman for like only three months. So, I ended up moving in with a sibling. We moved in together and at that point I was really working on myself and like learning about how to be an adult. About a year after my baby was born, I was like, 'Okay, I want to get my own apartment now,' and that's what I did.

I was still on welfare and I didn't know what I was doing, but I just knew that I had to do something. It was hard, especially being on welfare. I ended up having to live off of \$100 a month after my bills, food, diapers, and everything else were paid for. There were a lot of food bank trips, a lot of asking for donations, and although I didn't like that, I think it gave me a broader perspective of what it's like to be on that side of things, especially in the work I am doing now supporting our current Aboriginal youth aging-out of care.

I eventually left that apartment and had gone back to living with friends until I found my own place. It was hard but I knew I just needed to do to focus on me and my baby. Eventually, I got another apartment for just the two of us. I got my

own licence and I wanted a car. It was at that point when I was like, 'I don't want to keep living off of \$100 a month anymore.' I eventually secured subsidized daycare and I got a job in fast food. I can now say that I finally got off welfare.

However, it wasn't long after that when I realized that I was making the exact same amount of money working part-time as I did on welfare. As a mom, I couldn't work full-time so I was like, 'What if I go back to school?' I think it was the first time in my life where I was thinking about what I wanted to do in the future instead of just 'right now'. It's almost like I became an adult at 23 instead of 19 when I aged-out. I walked to the college and was like, 'Hey, I don't know what to do, but I want to do something'. I spoke with an advisor and I ended up doing a community support worker diploma because I knew I wanted to help people.

It was in college that realized I wanted to work with youth who grew up in care and aged-out. Working with Aboriginal youth was always a goal. I've always really liked how Aboriginal societies and organizations are here for our youth, and how Aboriginal people are working in these organizations. I don't know, it just feels more connected. When I finished college, a friend and I helped create an organization that now provides healthy and positive resources to young people in communities across BC. We started a group that brought in youth from around the community together and we asked, 'What do you want from this organization - from colour schemes, to the name, and what services it'll offer.' I think this was a huge achievement in my life actually and I like being able to help see it grow.

As far as culture goes, in high school, I partook in cultural activities wherever I could and this was something my foster mom really encouraged me to do, such as learning the language. It didn't benefit me back then but at least now I can teach what I learned to my child, which is really nice actually. As an adult, I learned that my grandmother is from one Nation and my grandpa was from another. I know my own band, but I don't have any cultural information about my dad side of the family. I made a family tree, which was really interesting, but we weren't able to ever go up to these communities. There was actually talk when I was really young about me going to my home village, but there is a lot of alcoholism and stuff like that out there, and my grandmother decided that it wasn't

safe. I know a lot about this town's culture and traditions, but I don't really know a whole lot about my own; and I don't really know how I feel about that.

I don't know if culture is something Indigenous youth who are aging-out are overly interested in. They seem more focused on finding a job, getting income, you know getting their own place, relationships, and that kind of stuff, which I can connect with because that's how I was when I was that age.

But yeah, I graduated high school, I graduated college, I helped start an organization for youth, my child is doing well, and I am financially stable. I'm all grown up now and I'm more independent. I did it! I feel like it's been a good journey and that I've tried really hard to take things in and learn from them at each next step. I'm proud of myself.

Anidjàni's story demonstrated to me that (re-)connecting young people with their Indigenous cultural traditionalisms is not necessarily their highest priority while transitioning out of care foster care because the importance of addressing their essential needs in life (i.e. obtaining housing, employment, and a bank account) were much more crucial and time-sensitive at this stage. I also found it curious when Anidjàni said that her social worker(s) and she discussed 'aging-out of care' and yet Anidjàni has no memory of these conversations because mindset was more focused on other present-day concerns rather than future planning. It appears the 'mindset' is a key factor here because once Anidjàni set her mind to it, she became quite successful in her personal life, academic studies, and professional career. *Chi-miigwetch* to Anidjàni for her commitment to supporting Indigenous youth in and from foster care, and best wishes to her on-going current and future endeavours. I hope this report will provide further aid to her already exceptional work.

STORY-SHARER #5 – “NÀNÒKÀSE”

This final story comes from *Nànòkàse* (Hummingbird), who is a professional helper, healer, and role-model in her community. *Nànòkàse* not only transitioned out of care at the age of 19, she is also a residential school survivor. Today, *Nànòkàse* supports Indigenous (and non-

Indigenous) Peoples from all ages and walks of life. I sincerely wish everyone could have the opportunity meet Nànòkàse's in person because her energy is very calming, warm, and welcoming, and she is incredibly genuine. Nànòkàse is an inspiration for me and I am truly grateful and honoured that she agreed to share her amazing story with us. Here is her story:

"I went to residential school, but I then went into foster care when I was 12 years old. I attended local high school but after grade nine I really just checked-out. I would go to school but I didn't have any friends, and in grade ten, eleven, and twelve, I was hardly there just because I didn't feel connected to anybody. I was adrift. Very lost. After that, I went out on my own at 16, and I was extraordinarily vulnerable and really got into drugs and alcohol. Even though I had a supportive foster family. I lived a highly at-risk life.

I still have a close relationship with my foster mom. She was a single mom and so we really struggled with poverty and things like that, so I started to leave by the time I was 16 because I felt like my foster mom had so many challenges and stresses in her life that maybe with one less stress, which was me, it would be better for her. Of course, I didn't talk to her about it, I just kind of eased my way out. But yeah, I was feeling really lost and I had to grow up very fast. I think I was treated like an adult at 16 because I was pretty much on my own and was expected to make adult decisions back then. I just kind of floated my way along.

When I was 19, I aged-out, and I remember writing to the department of Indian Affairs because I heard that I could get my education paid for. What I wanted to do at that time was to go commercial fishing and I was told I could get my licence for free or something like that (Nànòkàse laughs). So, I wrote a letter to the Department of Indian Affairs and I still have the letter they responded with that said something like, 'We don't know what kind of rights you're talking about, but you have just as much rights as anyone else in Canada'. That was their response. I was just so ashamed to receive this letter.

When I had come out of residential school I had this complete cultural self-hatred within myself. I didn't want to know anything about my people, my history, and if anybody asked me I would change the subject. I did eventually did apply for

post-secondary funding when I was 25, and today I am a University graduate. I did eventually go fishing for four years, My Father was a commercial fisherman and he died when I was very young. In fact, we went into one of the territories that he fished, and that was the first time in my life I felt a connection to my birth mom and dad. I remembered being in the fishing boat with them as a child. Beautiful memories but also harsh memories.

When you're talking about practicing introduction protocols, sometimes it can be very painful for aged-out youth who don't know where they come from, and not only painful, but shameful. In my day, we really had a negative viewpoint of ourselves as "Native Indians." Today, there seems to be much more pride and honour with the revitalization of traditions and culture. I didn't even know my true Nation until I was 19. I always thought I was from a different First Nation because that's all we learned about in the elementary school textbooks. We carry a lot of shame, and sometimes we are shamed by our own people because we don't know, but we can't know what we don't know. It just depends on our experiences, but it can be extraordinarily painful. So, to build on self-esteem through culture is, I think, a key healing mechanism. As my spiritual teacher says, 'Love will move mountains, so let us move them together.'

I think the biggest thing was the vulnerability at 19, and just being so at risk after aging-out. I became a mom at 18 and 22, and just never knew how to be a parent. I'd shut down emotionally. I didn't know how to show affection to my children because I grew up in such an authoritarian environment in residential school. At residential school, we had ten bells a day we had to adhere to, so instead, as a mom, I had little to no rules with my kids, which just created havoc because there were no boundaries, no consistency, no routine. These were some of the barriers I faced.

When I started my healing journey over 20 years ago, it was through a Cree ceremony because that was all that was really available to me in the places where I lived. The very first spiritual ceremony I ever did was go into the sweatlodge. This terrified me because I am terrified of the dark and it's not our west coast tradition to do sweatlodge ceremonies. But it wasn't so much the sweatlodge

ceremony that impacted me, it was the connection I felt to all of the love that was inside that space. It was for me the first time I think I ever connected to my spirit in a humane sort of way. It was there where I got to connect to my heart and I prayed for what I needed in my life. I missed out on my youth and I didn't have Elders to turn to for guidance. I loved the love that flooded that lodge.

Still though, as a youth, I don't think I would've attended any ceremony because I still had that lack of love for myself and I still carried that cultural self-hatred back then. I'm pretty sure I would've turned away from it. I think anything we can do to connect ourselves back to Spirit is important because that's what was taken away from us in residential school, and you know, that's what really can save us in the end.

You know our paths can go in so many different directions and for me, I don't get an opportunity to practice my traditional ways because I am so far from home. I meditate and that's what really feeds my spirit and my soul today. It helps me to live by my spiritual values. I don't have the bells and whistles of my culture, but I feel like I strive to live by the spiritual values and spiritual principles I believe are universal: like love, respect, integrity, humility, and peace. But there's also a part of me that really yearns for my culture. Like knowing the Woman's Dance. I don't know the Woman's Dance. I remember my mom teaching me when I was very young, but she died within a year later so I never ever had an opportunity to learn it from her. For me, it's such a beautiful dance. I have had other opportunities to learn it, and I've taken people up on those opportunities, but it was a one-day class kind of thing and then no access to it yet again. So, there's still a really deep part of my heart and soul that needs to learn that dance. I want to be able to do that because for me it would be like my spirit's flying, based on the little bit of experience I have doing it. It felt like my spirit was flying."

Nà̀nòkà̀sè's story was deeply emotional for me because I felt like I could relate to when she talked about not being able to practice her cultural ways because she is so very far away from home community. Nà̀nòkà̀sè's story taught me that when it comes to supporting the cultural connections

of Indigenous youth in and from care, that it is okay to incorporate other cultures' traditions because each can carry so many different spiritual approaches and teachings that can help in this process. Nànökàse's story also sheds light on the challenges associated with overcoming internalized cultural shame and the impacts of intergenerational traumas caused by the residential school system. *Chi-miigwetch* to Nànökàse for her of unconditional love and compassion.

Summary and Acknowledgements

Chi'miigwetch to all of our one-on-one Story-Sharers for offering their wisdom, insights, and teachings. From these incredible stories I learned that not all transitional solutions need to be rooted in culturally-informed ways of knowing and being, and that foster parents and social workers seem to just as unsure about knowing how to support Indigenous youth who are leaving care at 19. This reminded me of how I felt when I was trying to support Charlie with his transition.

Moreover, after reading these stories it seems to me now that the importance of (re-)connecting young people to their cultural traditionalisms and identity is not necessarily as important to young people as I had thought. A higher priority seems to be around ensuring young peoples' basic needs are attended first having access to housing, secure employment, official government I.Ds. and/or Status Card upon leaving care at the age of 19. It seems this cultural (re-)connection piece needs to occur much soon in a young person's life and well before they are transitioning away from care / into adulthood. It seemed evident to me that social outings and mentorship opportunities are super important to a young person's self-care and personal development. I also learned that the importance of proving positive cultural role-models and positive examples of Indigenous traditionalism can truly inform a young person's sense of self-love, self-esteem, self-worth, and belonging going forward. Again, *chi'miigwetch* to each and everyone of our Story-Sharers for invaluable contributions to this research.

CHAPTER SIX: THE TALKING CIRCLE STORIES

The Talking Circles and the Circle Members' Stories

As the saying goes, 'it takes a village to support a child', which is why I conducted two Talking Circle sessions in addition to the above five one-on-one Story-Sharing sessions. This first Talking Circle comprised of 10 Community Helpers such as Elders, Counsellors, Educators, Career coaches, Youth Workers, and Cultural Mentors who work directly and/or indirectly to support Indigenous youth (and in some cases adults) who are or were in foster care. Interestingly, at least two members of this circle had themselves previously transitioned away from foster care at the age of 19. Please note that the guiding questions for this Talking Circle were framed as 'aging-out of care' instead of 'transitioning into adulthood' because it had not occurred to me until much later in the research process the importance of reframing this language.

TALKING CIRCLE #1: COMMUNITY HELPERS

What (if any) are the barriers and challenges facing Indigenous youth aging-out of care?

COMM. SUPPORT #1: *Well I have been living in a remote community for almost two decades and if you are an Aboriginal youth transitioning from care, the support systems aren't in place and the youth remain in the community without any sense of direction. The young girls also tend to have more difficulty once they've age-out. They tend to get into families and that's their focus as far of moving on with their education. As for self-esteem and skills, our youth become disconnected every time they move from one foster home to another, and it takes them months to get re-grounded and build relationships. But then, boom, something happens and then they're gone again. And then six months later they come back and are seeking help but their file doesn't come for another two months because it's moved so many times that nobody even knows where that file is. So those are some of the issues I've experienced, and I don't see a change and it's heavy on my heart.*

COMM. SUPPORT #2: *From my experience, some of the issues are a lack of feeling a sense of belonging anywhere. I supported two students who aged-out of care with their application for further education because once they were out of foster care, that was it for them. No more supports. One had a really close relationship with their foster family and so they felt a sense of family; but for the other person, the family couldn't wait for them to leave. I notice that with students I work with who had been in foster care, it was like they were looking for family and that sense of belonging with others. I can only imagine that they are feeling adrift. They are really looking for a sense of connection. One of the biggest issues quite often is trust. They want to trust others, but they don't want to trust either.*

COMM. SUPPORT #3: *I have seen foster families being approved who were from a significantly different cultural background from the Indigenous children and youth in their care. I'd say it's probably around 95% of the people in care are with non-Indigenous foster families. I once asked a potential foster family 'what motivated you to become a foster parent?' and she said, 'Oh, the Pastor sent us down here because he told us that the Indian people don't know how to look after their children.' There aren't enough Aboriginal foster parents and they make it so difficult for some Aboriginal families to be approved, especially if they have a history with MCFD or any prior struggles with addiction, even if those struggles are from several decades in the past. Both of which are common among Aboriginal families, so this is a real problem. It says right in the policy that the foster parents are supposed to bring Indigenous children to cultural events but most of the foster parents never do. So the system is broken and it needs to be healed, changed, and turned upside down. All the money goes to the foster parents, and none of it goes to the parents who are living in poverty. Most kids are removed because of neglect due to poverty and very rarely because of abuse. Poverty is the crime.*

COMM. SUPPORT #4: *Finding a sense of identity. This is important for anyone! If you don't know where you come from how will know where you want to go? When you are put into care, you are severed from all that. So yeah, feeling*

connected spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically, and just knowing who are you is a giant challenge when you are being forced into the world with no supports. And I don't see lot of transition planning, and no permanency planning, and what happens to those kids who sign Youth Agreements once they are adults? Or what about those who are in independent living situations where they are in group-homes and don't have a foster parent to go to? Who's the parent then? Who takes responsibility to raise them and instill those values and the teachings?

COMM. SUPPORT #5: *I think challenges I've seen, or been a part of these last few years, is individuals getting caught behind the red tape in the process of aging-out of care, or that some of these challenges are being addressed at the last minute – missing deadlines, and not having the resources that they need to move forward. Even something as simple as having an I.D., or a Status card. A lot of doors are closed on urban Indigenous people who don't have their Status cards renewed. Many funders and applications overly rely on this actually. So, I see that as a big barrier when they are knocking on my door asking, 'Can we get our card?', but then the resources to go across the water (to the mainland) to get this done are none. That's what I've noticed. Not only that, but racial profiling too is huge when they age-out of care because doors are closed to them when they want to secure housing or jobs for themselves. Even a safe place to practice and learn about their culture. That's on the top of my mind right now.*

COMM. SUPPORT #6: *I see the challenges in the education system and with MCFD. The majority of the time I feel it's about money and it's not about the child's needs, and there's really nothing to hold the school system or the foster care system accountable. The school system and the Ministry develop cultural plans that are supposed to help navigate our kids to get in touch with their culture. As an Elder, I've gone through a process of developing a plan. We went through the whole process, we all signed on the dotted line, and we committed that we were going to work together to ensure the child gets what they need from the community, their culture, and the teachings. Everyone was in-agreement, including the*

parents. But once the adoption took place, I never heard back from any of them. So it's the Ministry, the school system, and everything around it. They develop different programs to try and help us, but they will have somebody trained and in place for us for a short while and make progress, but then the funding is gone and we and the child are out on our own again. So, we need to develop something that's sustainable and I believe we are moving in that direction.

COMM. SUPPORT #7: *It's such a complex question. I think about the kids we serve and I think about how untethered their lives have been to anything and everything. I met a young man last year who was in 26 different placements over a two-year period while in care. That's more than one a month! How does that young man begin to have a sense of belonging, or some sense of identity beyond what he makes up in his head after being bounced around like that? Right now, it feel like it's more like a database of numbers and columns. I feel like what happens is that we begin to realize that when the youth are 18 and a half and aging-out soon; and then whoosh...they free-fall and have no sense of self, no sense of identity, or culture, or their people, and because of this, have no sense of direction, and or a vision that says, "You can go beyond this void and there's something there for you." That's so scary, and so many of our kids go into a cocoon of self-loathing and self-destructive behaviour so that they don't have to face what comes next. I think one of the things that hits youth most after they've aged-out is loneliness. They get left behind and they don't know where to go. Those are some of the major challenges I see around developing that self-concept, developing trust, and the belief that there's something better out there for them.*

COMM. SUPPORT #8: *In school I see kids crying thinking their parents hate them because they were in care. I see the pain in our kids. This is trauma, and when they have trauma, they're not connected to who they are and how they should act, so they are reactive. When they think of being Aboriginal they think of trauma and sexual abuse, drinking, and residential school, and it just seems like such a big wall of ugliness that kids don't want to be connected to it and that's not really*

building their self-esteem. So they're often just floundering and often isolate themselves and then they end up drinking and not having the self-esteem to face the challenges of just living and being a functioning adult. We need to have kids connect to who they are in a good way, but the hardest thing is that we don't have enough resources to have a cultural worker like an Elder available from every Nation supporting Aboriginal kids (other than once in a while at events). I think there needs to be better resource for children to connect with where they're from and I think that takes a community effort because that's too big of a thing for one person to take on. So we have people not connected to culture, to the land, and who they are, and then they're attacking themselves. It's hard because for me it comes down to funding and there's lack of resources to draw on. People who are cultural are in high demand and so it's hard to fill those positions.

COMM. SUPPORT #9: *I know a lot of Aboriginal youth that get traumatized by some of the things taught to them in school about the history of Aboriginal Peoples. Elders are somebody they can come and talk to but some of these Elders were in the 60s scoop and you know they too are trying to find their identity. Social services can only give some information about their past and there's just so many things that were hidden from them and now they're not allowed to have this information, which is terrible. Some of these Elders aged-out and they're older now and they're seeking their identity too, and that information is being withheld from them and that's another traumatic thing.*

COMM. SUPPORT #10: *I think for me it's about what kind of foster homes youth are coming from when they are aging-out. Are they coming from foster homes that was really caring and still have a relationship with them in the future, or are they coming out of a foster home where they might have just been getting the money? And for the youth that do have challenges, it could be right down to not having a bank account, or they don't know the first thing about looking for a house if they don't have the support of anyone to help them do that.'*

What (if any) are some of the ways in which culture, cultural practices, and / or non-culturally-specific supports can help resolve these challenges?

COMM. SUPPORT #10: *It's not always cultural stuff. I've helped get Status cards, find housing, get them on welfare because they don't have a job yet or anything, knowing how to budget and monitor their money, and right down to the nitty-gritty that other people haven't had that given to them. If foster parents haven't done this by the time the youth are 18, I don't know if there could be some sort of way this could be instituted as a policy to ensure that this is happening for all youth in care. Like maybe in the last twelve months that the child in your care you must ensure that you have set-up those steps to help them get on their way after they've aged-out. As far a culture goes, I find students who come to school and learn about their culture describe it as enlightening to know where my people come from and then they have a new sense of connection just knowing a history of their people. And yeah, I think it's that self-worth and identity in knowing who they are and where they come from that's so important. Like self-locating protocols is an easy-to-come-to-grips option with where they come from.*

COMM. SUPPORT #9: *It's good for us to know our history. But when it comes to supporting young people aging-out of care or going to school, it's kind of hard for me to talk about something that I don't have experience with, and so I simply listen and try to give a little feedback. It's not always counselling that they want, just a listening ear. But I think for me, for future Elders, I think it would be nice if they took courses to understand the trauma of young people. But I also want to mention that foster parents I worked with did try to have rules with the youth, and at least tried to give some sense of responsibility like making their bed, or helping with the dishes, but for most youth in care, they just wanted to know where they come from, who their parents were, and about their culture. They might not do something about it right away but at least they have the information, and when they feel secure enough they might go and seek it out. Knowing your identity is so important and I think they are seeking out the language.*

COMM. SUPPORT #8: *I guess the first thing that came up in my mind is 'connection is the correction'. When our young people connect to self they start to share a lot more and so I start with kids in grades two or three and go into the forest to meditate in the park and teach them about plants so that they are shown how to respect the land, how to use the land, and to help them connect to who they are. I also think healthy family members should be listed in youths' file so that if they want to reach out they'll have someone to get a hold of. I think schools should have cultural days that switch between different cultural groups like Métis days or Coast Salish days because I believe that what you see reflected back to you adds to your self-esteem. Kids need to feel proud of who they are and where they come from. For me, the foster homes really need to support culture because it supports identity, and they should be part of that and told over and over again as they grow up so they know where they're from, they know their family names, they know that when they do reach out they'll have a group of people they can connect to and that may even have resources for where they can go to learn about their culture. It takes a community effort so that families, kids, and the community can come together to dance, sing, drum and share. That's a good start.*

COMM. SUPPORT #7: *I think the two pieces that are missing a lot of the time are love and acceptance. It's about giving young people love and acceptance and without the expectation of it being reciprocated. It could be through a caring glance, a hug, or time and space. Even the most broken person can give and receive it. They may hide it, they may respond negatively to it at first, but they can't deny it. I genuinely think that when the system becomes so bureaucratic that it becomes a tick-box thing, you lose the intimacy that's required to forge relationships that create belonging. Because when we are talking about culture, what I think we're really talking about is belonging, and so it's about relationship-building. It's about creating some sense that 'you have a people'. The people may not be your blood but they are your people, and that is something that is missing in the system, is missing in school, and it's missing in society quite frankly. But when I think about culture, I see the benefits of kids going on Tribal*

Journeys and the impact this can have on their spirit. So, creating as much opportunity as this as we can is so important. The system can't continue to see the kids as cattle that are being protected until they're old enough and no longer their responsibility. It has to see youth in care as people, worthy of love, and then expect this too, in the foster families. You have to know the people who you are trying to connect with. You can't just throw out a blanket and hope that it'll keep someone warm in their spirit. It feels to me like we need to treat youth in our care as though they are our own child. Take the 'foster' out of it and just 'parent'. To begin those conversations, to talk about their worth, and to hold space for them and know that they are capable of holding space too, and then to be in that space with them. You have to know the person and it takes time, it takes commitment, it takes energy, and this really should begin from the age of 2 and not when the youth is months away from aging-out. Culture is a huge component of that but it's not the only component of that. There's the practical stuff too like a driver's licence because youth need to be self-sustainable in those ways too. Youth need to have some practical skills like how to interview, how to sit, how to talk, and you know, those are things that a parent might provide.

COMM. SUPPORT #6: *I truly believe the system needs to change. The system prevents the workers from doing the work that's in their hearts. My presence as an Elder is to let students know that I'm there to support them whether they need someone to talk to, or someone to open up to. It's about relationships and helping them feel accepted and acknowledged for exactly who they are. It doesn't matter what Nation they come through. Whether you are First Nations, Aboriginal, Métis, whatever, all of us, we all have a need to be respected, cared for, and loved. We all have purpose. All of us, no matter who you are, has a spirit and something to offer. We all have a purpose here on earth and we have to just get through all the systems that hold us back. We need to go back to our way of life and parenting and looking after the spirit from conception right to death. I have young people in my family who are in care. We developed a relationship with the foster parents and they have now become our extended family. That's what we*

did historically. We don't have to make it so complicated. It's about helping the young people feel valued, and appreciated, and acknowledged. It's about connecting with our spirit through compassion, empathy, and just being a part of somebody's life. It's about opening our doors and saying to young people, 'Tell me how I can walk beside you and I will'. We have to stop developing programs and just be human beings working together. We can learn from each other, and nurture each other.

COMM. SUPPORT #5: *I honestly think that culture plays a big role in youth aging-out because of who we are but because of the residential schools they have lost a lot of their cultural ways and it's time now to re-build those bridges. I see it happening with Delegated (Aboriginal) Agencies. They have programs for First Nations children to be introduced back to their homes and into culture when aging-out. We need more people to gather with and teach our youth what it means to be First Nations. So yeah, I think culture plays a big role in how they age-out and how they carry themselves while they're transitioning. If the Delegated Agencies are reconnecting our kids in care back to their territories and communities, then I think MCFD needs to start doing this too.*

COMM. SUPPORT #4: *I was just thinking, it's always so weird to me sitting in a circle with adults only talking about what youth need and want. I always find that really odd. I don't think we listen enough to our youth, we don't hear them, and we don't make space for them to share their voices on what their needs and wants are. We need to learn to listen more, and when we create that space I think they will tell us exactly what they need. I also really liked what you said about how 'fostering' needs to be taken out and 'just parent'. I think we program the hell out of these kids, but what they really need is that love and that support.*

COMM. SUPPORT #3: *Thank you for bringing up the word 'love' earlier, because I think that love heals everything. I also think we can support Indigenous youth from care by helping them to connect with their spirit. This can be done*

through ceremony, or traditional dancing, but also through healing trauma and sustained sobriety. But we first must heal any self-hatred or cultural shame.

COMM. SUPPORT #1: *I think there's a real disconnect between Aboriginal communities and the Ministry of Education when it comes to cultural activities and partaking in culture. We have students that are taking drama, phys-ed, and cooking courses, but when they go missing school because of a potlach gathering where the youth is dancing, singing, cooking, working on building relationships with their family or community, and all kinds of life skills activities – plus they've prepared for those activities like making the drums, making the dancing shawls, and making the paddles and stuff like that, when they come back to school, their teacher says, "Oh, you missed five day of school. You're going to lose a letter grade." Can't we somehow give credit for that? Make that part of a course! I've seen aged-out students lacking in credits because they one or two courses short.*

Is there anything we missed still needing to be said?

COMM. SUPPORT #8: *Foster families should start younger and have a plan for that child that follows them throughout care so that they know who they are by the time they age-out. But to do this, they have to have opportunities to experience their culture, and foster families and MCFD need to support them in finding people from their own culture to teach. Maybe it should be the responsibility of the foster home to learn the protocols, and put this into the plan.*

COMM. SUPPORT #6: *I have a hard time with how the system works for our children. Our children are re-living what we lived through in residential schools, in a sense. I don't know if what we are doing here today in this Talking Circle is going to make a difference, but if we could get rid of the system and just have a relationship with the staff that are out there, I think there'd be a lot benefits for the children. All that money out there to fix this, but if they gave it to us to do our system, we wouldn't need it any more after that. In our ways, when a family or a*

couple couldn't have children, children were given to that family and they stayed in the community. When couples became parents, they were guided on what to do.

COMM. SUPPORT #7: *One thing I'm not sure if we touched on yet are the challenges faced by many kids in care in regards to mental health, substance abuse, and learning difficulties. Many youth I come across are struggling with at least one of these issues in their life.*

COMM. SUPPORT #1: *I'd just like to add that although there have been many issues for Indigenous youth aging-out of care, there are also these successes. I know of a student who aged-out who is now heading to University at age 20. But it's still a struggle for him because he's aged-out of the system. He was in care for seven years, but luckily he had grandparents to look after him.*

COMM. SUPPORT #9: *A lot of our Elders know their culture but it's the teaching part they struggle with because they never really had to share it. But not really knowing how to share their culture with their children or with others makes it difficult because they haven't taught their children how to go out without those teachings. Sometimes, young people might not listen to their Elders or they might be disrespected. That's why it's hard to get some of our Elders to share this.*

COMM. SUPPORT #6: *I truly believe that we need to take the word 'culture' out of the system and replace it with something different because everybody defines culture differently. We even have differences among First Nations what that means to us is our beliefs and values, but the system doesn't know what these are. So when we say culture to the staff, what does that word mean to them? It's important for them to take a look at what does that mean to them. Our creator provided us many different Nations with different cultural ways but with the similar teachings around, respecting the individual spirit is more universal. The key to reconnecting with one's spirit is to create opportunities for the child or youth to participate in open ceremonies so that the individual can connect to their*

spirit and to know what it feels like. Instead of teaching social workers about the culture we must instead teach the importance of taking care of our young people's fragile spirit while they are in care and to value all the individuals.

Chi'miigwetch (thank you) to each of our Community Helpers for sharing their personal, professional, and cultural insights and perspectives with us in this research. I really appreciated the group's emphasis on the importance of relationship-building, authenticity, and fostering youth-led and/or community-led programs and services when comes to supporting Indigenous youth in and from care. This group was particularly passionate about holding social work educational institutions and MCFD organizations accountable for the work they do. I also noticed this group was especially adamant that treating Indigenous youth with unconditional love, respect, dignity, and acceptance essential, and that need for life skills developmental programming while youth are in care, as well as the need for developing cultural connections early on in a young person's lifetime are truly crucial. *Chi'miigwetch* to our Community Helpers because I believe that we can learn a lot from their insights and contributions in this research.

TALKING CIRCLE #2: DELEGATED ABORIGINAL AGENCY WORKERS

This next Talking Circle is comprised of fifteen various DAA social workers, guardianship workers, permanency workers, youth mentors, intake workers, Elders, and family support workers. In addition to this, at least one member of this group had also previously transitioned away from foster care at the age of 19 and into adulthood. When most people think of child welfare in BC they think of MCFD and DAAs and so I very much appreciated their contributions to this research. It is a unique gift for us as Learners and Readers to hear from these professional viewpoints on how individuals, families, communities, social workers, and organizations can best support Indigenous youth in and from foster care. Here is what our DAA members had to share with us:

DAA #1: *In my experience working work youth who are about to age-out of care, a lot of them lack essential life skills. We work really intimately with kids in care and we provide quite a bit of services and I've seen them fearful and panicked about aging-out and about what that's going to look like for them when those services decrease. I think a lot of them are not mentally prepared to go into a world where all these life skills are just supposed to be known to them, so they struggle with that and for them, with their loss of culture, they try and identify with the community which tends to be a lot of peers where they are not feeling judged. I think we have a number of culturally-specific services in place for kids that age-out of care, but I think we could definitely implement a lot more support services so that youth feel they belong in a community, which doesn't stop at 19.*

DAA #2: *I've worked with teenagers and I think about what they're going to face when they age-out eventually. I think one of the biggest things is that when youth age-out of care, they don't really have that 'forever-home' if they haven't been living with their family and don't necessarily have those people to forever-support them after 19. I mean, I'm in my early 30s and my mom still supports me all the time. I think one of the things we focus on is trying to keep kids as connected to their family as much as possible even if there are safety concerns that we need to mitigate, and we do, so that as they grow up in care they are still connected to the people who are going to love them their whole life, and so they can go back to those people as supports, teachers, and guides when they are adults.*

DAA #3: *I've been working with one youth now who is 16. I'm really worried about him, but I'm hopeful though because he's been included in a lot of programs in the community growing up. I think that the community is really advanced when it comes to keeping Indigenous practices in there for kids. I think a barrier sometimes for youth is that a lot of things were missed. Like, we didn't do any assessment because when they are in and out of care a lot it's hard to catch these things when they're not consistently placed. We also try to work with the family as much as we can, but if the family's not doing the things too it's hard to keep track*

of them; but we want to keep the kids connected to family. It's almost like being caught between a rock and a hard place.

DAA #4: *The importance of role-models and mentorships that can come through a variety of different supports is often overlooked. I feel like when children do age-out, there's not that connection to mentorship or those role-models. So, I feel like keeping those connections to healthy relationships and having supports through their parents and whatever it is that carries people throughout adult. For example, I'm in my late 20s and I still have that support through my mom and father and different relatives as well. So that's something that came to mind to me. It's really about upholding that support.*

DAA #5: *I've worked on quite a few teams that support youth who were aging-out. That was a challenge. It was difficult work. I feel that the youth lacked education and simple life skills after aging-out. I'm thinking of one girl in particular who aged-out and there was really no plan for her. Her placement broke down, she was out on the street, and we were directed to 'get her signed up for welfare and see if she can stay with one her older siblings, and then close the file'. That's it. She didn't even know how to open a bank account, cash her welfare cheque, or anything like that. So I saw a lot of the teens end up in criminal activity or pregnant right away and that was just sad because there's like so much more out there for them. They just didn't have the support and I think something that would be good is maybe we could try and follow them for a few more years after they age-out. I don't know. I don't think it's an easy solution, but when they're in and out of care so often and then there's such change up with the workers all the time, there's no consistency and it's hard for a new worker to come in and just pick up where everyone left off. You've got to build that rapport and figure out how to work with them because everybody's needs are different.*

DAA #6: *I worked with this one youth that aged-out but I also ran into a lot of resistance with her. The process was done through the agency and I encouraged her to follow through with the steps that needed to be done. But once she aged-*

out...nothing. It was hard. The door is always open at the agency to any child that had contact with us no matter what age they are now. Faces change all the time but at least the agency has a history of who the child is. The individual that I'm speaking of now has her own child and she lives on her own. I also went through the process of setting her up with disability, social assistances, and shared living accommodation because I knew that at that time in her life she wouldn't be able to do it on her own. Now she's thriving, as far as I know, and she comes back to visit once and a while. She seems happy to see me, so that's a positive. I think one of the biggest things is for children and youth to know that we are not the bad people. We're here to support them. Our caseloads are heavy and we don't get to see them like we want to. Also, as social workers – depending on what role you are playing in their lives – you are their parent. You are the one that's supposed to be holding their hands through the hard time and the good times. I try to do that with the children I work with, but my role has changed and I don't get the same connection as did before. The roles change all the time, but no matter where the youth were in the agency, in foster homes or a youth home, somebody's always here to support them in hard times. I think that's the big part for us as Xwulmuxw people, we thrive in our families because that's how we're brought up. But it's not just our parents that raise us, it's the community as a whole. As social workers, we are their community even if for a short time. We do our best to support the children and youth that are in our care, and it's hard. It's hard work.

DAA #7: *I think some of the challenges and barriers for the youth when they age-out is having the fear that they're going to lose their supports. But I also see that life skills and education are definitely a challenge for them, like filling out forms or trying to understand what someone is saying to them. Many need the support of having someone sitting with them to explain what the other person is saying. I would probably say that keeping in contact with their family, and especially with the cultural ceremonies, teachings and all that is the best.*

DAA #8: *I really have to say that some of the challenges and barriers for the youth aging-out would be finding a home, finding the income to cover the rent, and living alone because a lot of them are scared to be alone after being in a foster home where they had their security needs in place. I was connected with a couple of aging-out girls, and a lot of it was about being alone. As for cultural practices, it's a really tough issue because you learn your culture, your cultural teachings, and your beliefs and values at home. This was instilled into me by my parents, and my grandparents starting from childhood to now. I can recall when I was like 4 years old going to the longhouse and learning the teachings from my grandparents and my parents about how to walk as Xwulmuxw people. But everybody has their own way of looking at it.*

DAA #9: *When it comes to programs for kids aging-out, I think the root of the problem is structural and so it really doesn't have a lot to do with the youth themselves. I always hear big complaints from people out of care that, 'I don't see my social worker a lot' or, 'There's always a different social worker.' They have this trauma and the system is creating more trauma by having to worry about what are they going to do when they age-out. I also think the big barriers are funding and structure and the number of children or youth each social worker has. It's just not manageable to what each one of these kids deserves and needs. I can also really see in the eyes of the youth that they just want to belong. They want someone to care for them. Culturally, family is the most important, and historically, family included extended family members even if they weren't blood-related. Our belief is that we all come from the Creator and we're all created equally from one bloodline. I think it's important for youth to be connected to Elders too, but youth are youth, and you can't force them to do that. But if you surround them with programs and environments that nurture them, then they will see where they are loved and cared for. So if there was more of that, I think they'd feel less anxiety and less trauma when it comes to aging-out because they'd know they have those support systems to get them through it. But I know there's a lot of these kids who've aged-out and they've been in the system for a very long period of time. There's*

also a cohort of people that have invisible disabilities that may or may not have been identified while in care. I think there's always room to improve. But our agency is family-focused, culture-focused, and we start them young in groups to encourage culture. But like many of the people that I work with here have said, 'Culture is not something you're taught, it's something that you live'. So you know, it's a matter of allowing these young people to live in their culture and experience it, not as a child in care, but just as anyone else out there.

DAA #10: *(respectfully passed on the opportunity to share)*

DAA #11: *I've had a couple of youth that have aged-out and it's a sad process because you can't support them fully to the best level you know that they need. I mean, I have children of my own that are adult children, and my oldest child didn't leave my home until she was 30. I can share an experience of a youth who aged-out, and she came back to the agency like 6 months later. She came here after hours and she wanted some support from us and it was sad because you know you can only help her with her emotions in that moment. She's looking for help like, 'What am I going to do? Where am I going to live? I can't live with my family' It's a different life when you come into care because you're dealing with trauma, and you're dealing with those immediate things, and when they turn 19, they're still trying to come to grips with why they were in care in the first place. It's not like they're ready to even look at what is like to be an adult and live on their own and what their education looks like, or planning families, and so on. We need more supports for the trauma that they deal with when they come into care and when they leave. They're just not ready at 19 years old. I think for us to expect that kids are going get connected to culture and families and community and stuff like that, we first have to deal with the trauma of when they're moving from care. I just think that's a long process and we never as social workers get to touch base with them because we're like always crisis-driven. We're always dealing with our 20 other files that we have and when it comes time for that 19-year-old to age-out, it's kind of like, 'Sorry but, (gestures a reluctant shrug).' For social workers, it's often a*

rotating door because this job is tough, and youth just don't have that consistency with a worker to support in their transition.

DAA #12: *I started as a guardianship worker and I had a young girl who got pregnant only few months before she was aging-out, and there was no planning done for her. I think it was her being scared and thinking, 'I can get more support if I have a child'. It was major crunch time, and I felt that we pushed so hard but she was just not mentally ready. She aged-out at 19 and she ended up being a mom on welfare because the system failed her. I still connect with her and she's a successful mom now and she still has her child because she connected with her family from her community and they were able to take her in. I'm so thankful for that. I was lucky enough to have her on my caseload for years and we were able to do successful planning together. But I also know of a youth who was put in a hotel after they aged-out because she had nowhere to go and she was given only a few weeks to find a place to live. I feel like I'm always fighting against the system, but my heart is always with my kids. What angers me the most when I hear someone say 'this is my file.' These are human beings. These are children. They're not files. Also, when I meet with my kids I talk about my teachings and I talk about what I've learned so I can pass that along. That's how I incorporate my culture into my work, and I'm also always trying to learn about the local Nation and culture too. That's why it's important to have our community members working with us and to have our allies too that work alongside us. Was I ready to move out at 19? – hell no. It was my family who encouraged me to move out. So thank you for doing this because it needs to be out there.*

DAA #13: *I once worked with a young lady who had a connection to her family and community but she just wasn't in a place to go back there though she always knew she could. I'm shocked that there isn't more youth housing here for our kids. As for culture, a lot of youth aren't open to it because they don't know it so they are afraid of it. I've got youth on my caseload now that don't want anything to do with culture. That makes me feel really sad. It's about that sense of belonging.*

They need this to be able to be successful. And I think when you look at permanency it's about having a safe and positive role-model who is that supportive person that's going to love them unconditionally and let them into their home. Hopefully that person can be family, but it's not always family. In some cases, their family cares but they don't have the space to take their people back. I think the main things that I see facing our youth is their self-worth, worthiness, and belonging. That's so important. As a social worker, I need youth to know that I care because youth need to hear those messages because some of the messages they give themselves are not very nice because of all of the trauma that they've gone through. So I always tell them, 'I care for you. I'm not just your social worker. I care about you and about what happens to you even if you don't believe that.' It is the messaging that we need to give to our youth about how important they are. And I wish did have more money, and youth housing.

DAA #14: *My experiences have been a bit different. In the homes where I work at, we don't always have youth from the local community, so it's really hard for them to find culture when this is not their land and it's really hard for them because they crave it. It's internal, it's a feeling, and we can't send them back because of the policies and so there this constant feeling of loneliness. And if they don't have siblings then they're really alone out there and have nobody. It's about letting them find their people, whoever that might be. Maybe those people aren't exactly who their workers want them to be with, but to acknowledge and to include them as much as we can because they are the people that youth have chosen and we need to make them part of the care-plan. I think as a social worker its knowing who's in those children's lives and making them safe allies. It's about giving youth a chance to make informed decisions. But I think that culture is a really touchy topic. For example, I powwow dance. I'm not from the Cree territory or from the Plains, but I powwow dance because it supported me to be on the Red Road. So being okay with whatever culture that they choose to identify with and not letting our own personal bias guide our work. I also think that as social workers it's about putting yourself out there and knowing who and what is around you. Social*

workers should also be transparent because when you're 19 and you find out all this stuff was hidden from you, that's another trauma. We think we're going to withhold information because it's the best for the youth up, but when you do that, it contributes to their trauma and then it makes them re-evaluate their life. Finally, I don't know if we in this community have our own cultural practices but for some youth aging-out elsewhere, they put their kids in a canoe when they age-out and they'll walk them into their territory with their songs and the community welcome the youth back. It's very powerful to watch.

DAA #15: *I've had experience with children or youth aging-out, I've had experience with a couple of our youth who chose to turn towards culture, and I've had experience with one youth who didn't want family or culture and that's what I found the most challenging. I got this one youth involved with an Elder and I'm really fortunate that I got to witness all their changes even after they aged-out. They're doing really good now. I also knew another youth who was breaking into things and it was really challenging because this youth didn't have any culture or any contact with family, but the youth wanted to learn to bake and make Indian bread. That one youth, today she's calling us mom and dad and she introduces us to her kids when they come around as grandma and grandpa. There's no other feeling that can describe it. It just really makes me happy.*

DAA #4: *I just want to add one more piece. I think the landscape of social work is changing toward a more administrative assessment-based practice. A lot of youth are feeling like they are just a number. How do we keep our practice within the roots of social work values on a daily basis when we it is drastically changing? It's very tough. So, that's a huge challenge for the field too.*

DAA #3: *We could use more prevention dollars for sure, and there's so much paperwork that I don't have the time and attention I'd want with families and I go home feeling guilty every night. It's not culturally appropriate for me to go visit and I have to do this assessment really quick. I want to spend time and be*

relational with them because that's who I am and that's appropriate to my culture. But unfortunately, I can't because the system is so administrative now and it's not set up that way so it causes disconnections. I feel disconnections between myself and the family. I can't connect with them as well as I can, and I'd like to be able to support families and the children by connecting with them as deep as I can go.

DAA #1: *I think even 16 is too late to start preparing for aging-out. It really is. The idea that a child could potentially have lived up to 16 years' worth of trauma and think that we could fix it all in three years is entirely backwards. We need to put in more years of healing into these children considering what they've actually been through regardless of if its Indigenous or non-Indigenous communities, we have to remember attachment theory. Children don't thrive without it and sometimes these kids age-out thinking about all of the people that have come into their lives and have walked out, including workers. I saw how often they switched workers, and how often they switched homes, and to youth it was that desire to want to be wanted and to be loved but the motivation to actually attach themselves to people started to decline, so they get into unhealthy relationships because their idea of a healthy relationship was getting out there and getting pregnant by whoever would give them that attention. So sometimes we just need to be aware as workers that when children enter our offices we may be the only example of what a healthy relationship is, even if it's just for a short while. We really need to think about how we are going to connect to this child and make a very long-term commitment to them. But we also need to find a mentorship program or something or somebody that can be there for them.*

DAA #12: *I wanted to say that working for a Delegated Aboriginal Agency is really fortunate in that we can sometimes work outside the box, and I think that's a huge positive for us. It's like our family is right here because we all know each other so well. We spend a lot of time with each other and everybody's so supportive. This is the family I know and I think we can all come together as one.*

DAA #13: *Workers do get busy and I think there needs to be some sort of mandate for when these young kids go into care and have nobody to reference themselves off of that looks like them. Like if it's a young girl, we rarely see Pocahontas in the commercials, we always had Cinderella and I don't look like Cinderella. So it's really hard to grasp what being Indigenous and having a culture and heritage means if they don't have those references around them to see at a young age. Then when they get switched to a DAA and we're all about culture, they've had nothing like this before that it's no wonder youth are hands-off about culture as they grow up. So I think that in some ways there needs to be a mandate that ensure that Indigenous children who are going into care are paired up with an Indigenous adoption or a local Indigenous family. But the kids that are in care don't always have that luxury.*

DAA #8: *I wanted to close by sharing that with our children in care, we build genograms to show their history, their connection, and their cultural ties. Like knowing the mask ceremony, the history of the songs, where to get a traditional name, and who are the ring-leaders of the family that they can go to get all of this history and know where all of the ties they're connected to are.*

DAA #15: *I just wanted to add that I'm glad my co-worker brought this out too, that I like where DAA work is going and especially with permanency for our children in care. I'm glad we have our weekly meetings and talk about permanency for each child and I see a lot of good things coming out of the permanency program. I hope that we will be seeing even more cultural programs in the future.*

Based on what I heard in this Talking Circle, I find that we continue to see a common thread toward the importance of implementing a life skills program, keeping Indigenous youth connected with their birth family, and the need for (re-)connecting young people to their Indigenous cultural identity. In addition to this, it seems evident to me that the importance of providing unconditioned love and acceptances within a trauma-informed practiced framework is indeed paramount.

Curiously, several Circle Members in this group admitted that they too were not ready to move-out on their family homes at the age of 19 yet it seems that child welfare's policies and practices contradict these expectations of young people in foster care. I also would like to point out that DAA Circle Members were particularly adamant that barriers and challenges faced by Indigenous youth in and from care are the primary result of structural problems (i.e. heavily caseloads, unreliable foster home, and frequent turnover among social workers) and not the faults of the youth themselves. Moreover, several Circle Members indicated that Indigenous child welfare organizations are severely under-funded and under-resourced when compared to MCFD agencies. This criticism is also consistent with my literature review. So, there are lots to think about here going forward. *Chi-miigwetch* to our Circle Members for contributing their words and professional insights, recommendations, and case examples to this research.

A Personal Reflection

I found the similarities between of the Story-Sharers' and Circle Members' stories quite curious. Many seemed to agree that youth are at particularly high risk upon leaving foster care at 19, especially if their sacred transition into adulthood isn't properly nurtured, namely, if their connection to culture goes unmentored. I also found it curious that many of these perspectives also seemed consistent with the literature. For instance, that systemic structural problems are indeed the problem, and not the youth themselves (Fluke et al, 2010; Blackstock, 2009; Richard, 2004), and that the ways in which social workers are trained needs to be reformed (Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Thomas & Green, 2007; Sinclair, 2004) so that child welfare practice is more *relationally-oriented* (Carrière, 2010), *trauma-informed* (Johnson, 2014), and *culturally-rooted* (Simard & Blight, 2011). Thank you once again to each and every single Story-Sharer and Circle Member because without their generous contributions this research would never have existed.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THE STORY-INTERPRETATION PHASE

Analysis

I gathered these stories from an ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology that was rooted Medicine Wheel teachings and from an Indigenous approach to conducting research. As previously discussed, my epistemology viewed knowledge as ‘fluid’ because knowledge is derived from multiple peoples and sources who carry multiple perspectives, experiences, and self-locations. In Chapter Three, I also discussed that the creation, discovery, and uncovering of ‘new’ knowledge emerges from participating in a number of cultural ceremonies and traditional practices such as vision quests, fasting, meditation, smudging, spirit bathing, and sweatlodges, because these ceremonies help bring us closest to Creator and our divine intuition. For me, this is an ideal realm for critical self-reflectivity to occur, especially when ‘testing’ or exploring these how new ideas or new knowledges fit or work in practice. In this research, I utilized this very same approach of connecting with my spiritual intuition through ceremony when conducting my research analysis.

My analysis began with me connecting to this mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual intuition as I re-reviewed each of the audio-recordings and Story-Summaries. I paid close attention to the voices and the emotional tones of the Story-Sharers and Circle Members as they shared their stories. I also wrote copious notes to track my thoughts and feelings throughout this process as I honed in on key moments in their stories that really stood out to me as common themes, issues, and recommendations. Following this process, I then grouped and colour-coded similar comments together into themes using a self-reflective process that then led these grouped-themes into four key bundles: [1] *Essential Commitments*, [2] *Values, Principles, and Philosophies*, [3] *Supports and Services*, and [4] *Goals and Outcomes*. These becomes the findings from this research.

Findings

Below, I have utilized the metaphor of a hand-drum and a mallet to discuss my research findings. The hand-drum and mallet are considered sacred teaching tools in many Indigenous ceremonies. In this research, the *mallet* represents the work of the individuals, families, communities, social workers, and organizations supporting Indigenous youth in and from foster care. The *reverberations* from the mallet and drum head represents the [7] *goals and outcomes* that Indigenous youth (with help from the above individuals) should be aiming to achieve when transitioning out of foster care and into adulthood at the age of 19. The *drum skin* represents the [12] *supports and services* that these individuals can utilize to help achieve the above goals and outcomes, and the *frame* around the drum represents the [12] *values, principles, and philosophies* (in addition to Indigenous ways of being and knowing) that help inform the above supports and services. And finally, the sinew straps that hold everything together represent the [12] *essential commitments* that help make all of the above possible. Figures #3-5 are visual representations to help further articulate these findings:

Figure #3: The Findings (Hand Drum)

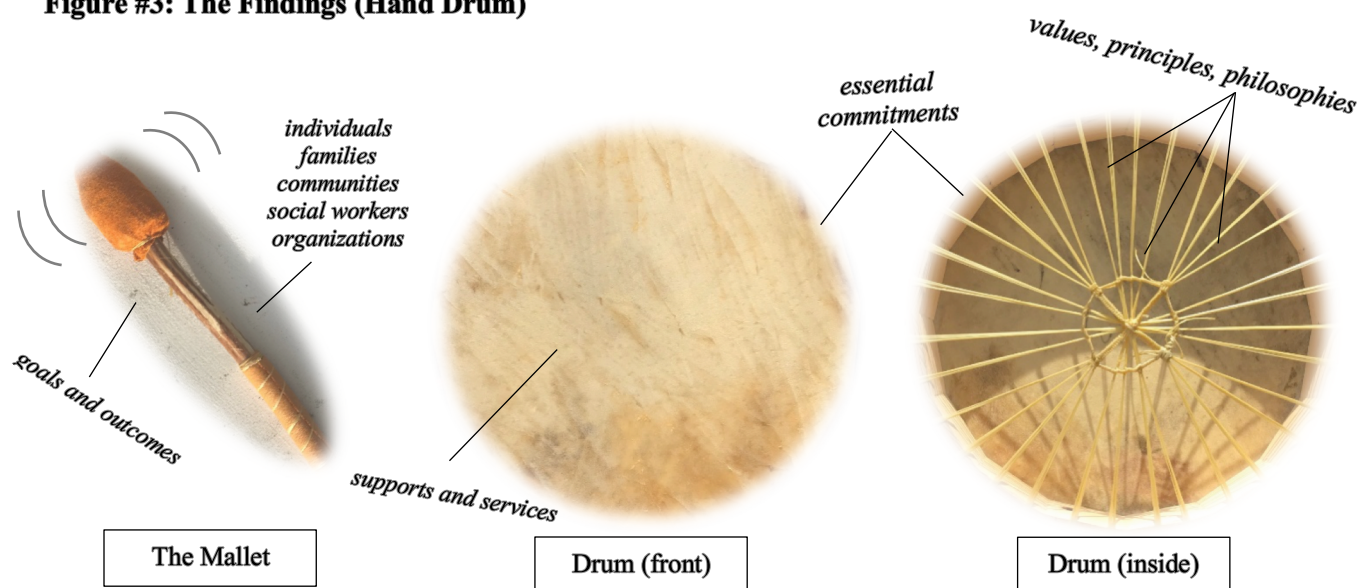


Figure #4: The Findings (Wheel Variations)

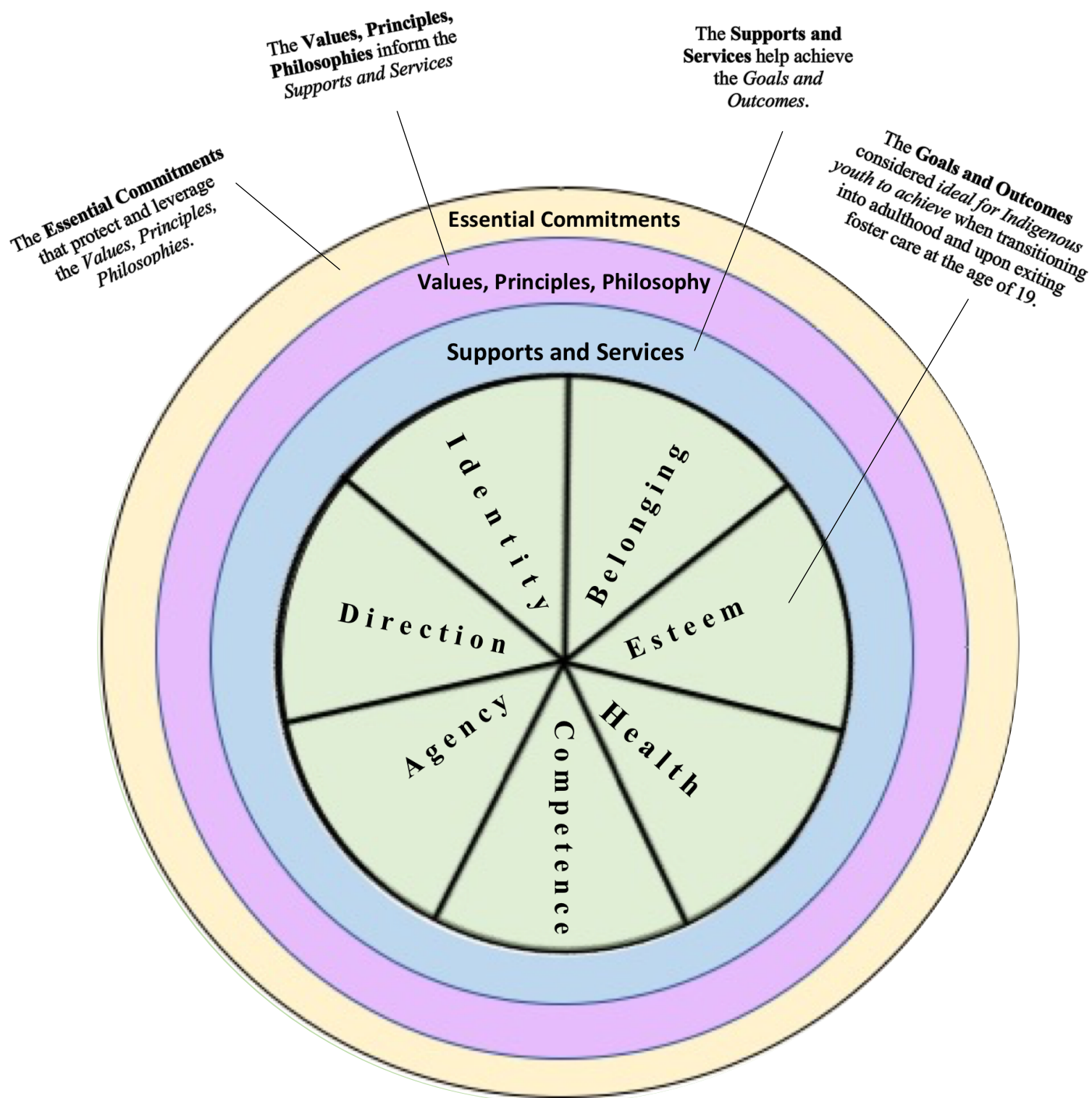
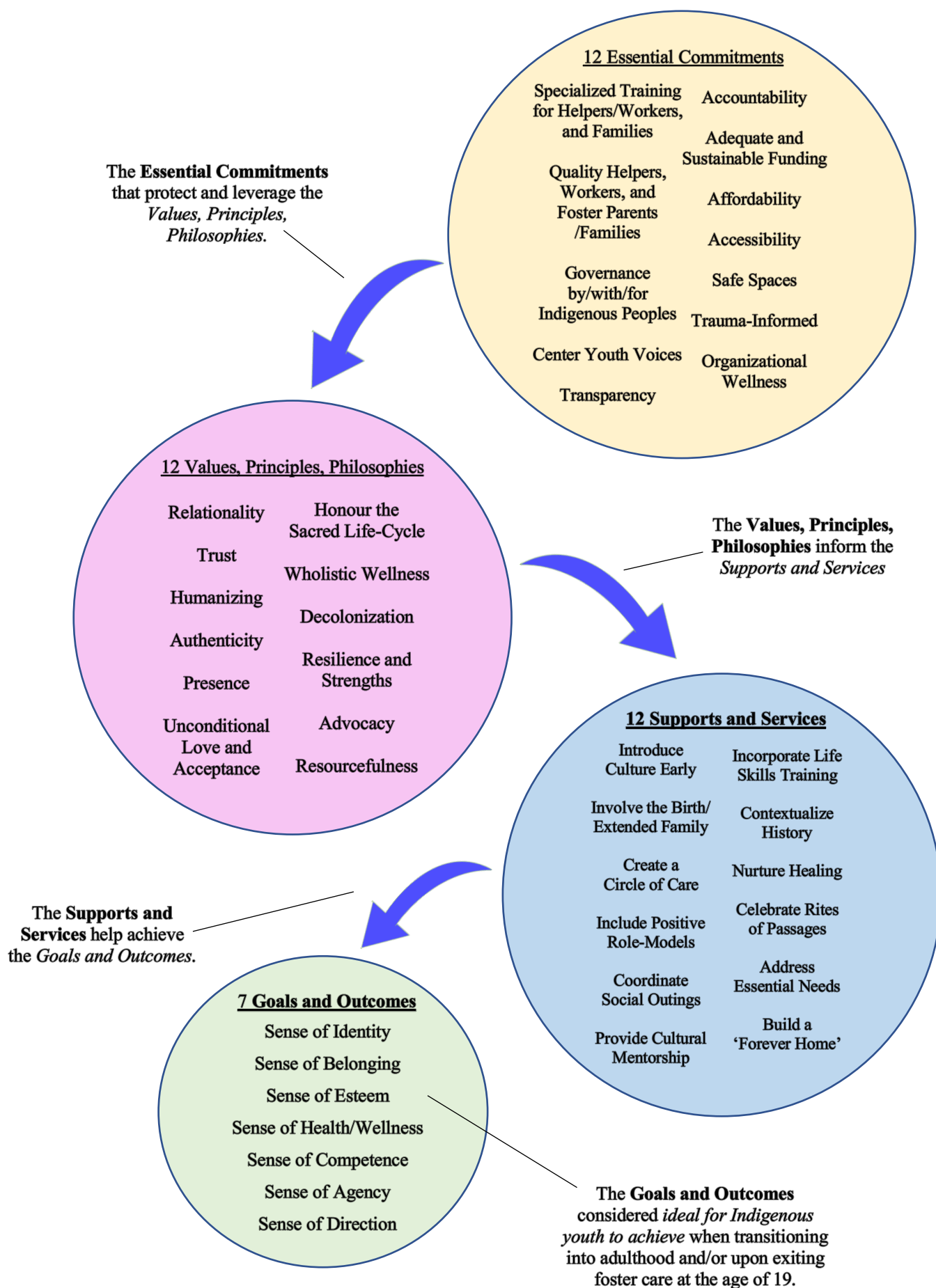


Figure #5: The Findings (Expanded Variations)

Bundle #1: *Goals and Outcomes*

This research posits that individuals, families, communities, social workers and organizations should focus on the following 7 *goals and outcomes* when helping Indigenous youth before, during, and after their transition out of foster care and into adulthood:

Sense of Identity	Knowledge, awareness, and acceptance of one's own history, traits, culture, family origins, and other qualities which specifically distinguish themselves from others.
Sense of Belonging	A subjective and/or objective feeling of being connected to and accepted among a particular set or group or peoples such as family, friends, and community.
Sense of Esteem	Confidence in one's abilities, worth, and value.
Sense of Health and Wellness	The subjective and objective qualities of one's own mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health and wellness.
Sense of Competency	The level or amount of capacity one feels capable to employ their skillfulness, knowledge, and qualification within their personal, professional, academic, and cultural life.
Sense of Agency	The knowledge and protection of, and the ability to exercise, one's own rights, freedoms, and self-determination.
Sense of Direction	Awareness of one's 'calling' or 'purpose' in and the general or board notion of how to go about achieving it.

Bundle #2: *Supports and Services*

Based on the stories provided by each Story-Sharer and Circle Member, my research findings recommend that individuals, families, communities, social workers, and organizations can utilize the following 12 *supports and services* to help Indigenous youth achieve the above goals and outcomes as the youth transition away from foster care and into adulthood:

Introduce Culture Early	Any that help Indigenous youth to (re-)connect with their culture as early as possible to help establish a foundation for them to build from, and return to in the future. (Re-)introducing culture late is still preferable over not at all.
Involve the Birth-/Extended-Family	When and where possible, involve the birth-family and extended-family members, and nurture these relationships at all ages/stages before, during, after foster care.
Create a Circle of Care	Actively surround Indigenous youth by a wide variety of helpers, healers, and medicine people. These individuals may change as youth reach various ages and stages in their life.
Include Positive Role-Models	Provide a wide range of positive adults and peer role-models for Indigenous youth to look up to, relate to, and connect with. It is important that these positive influences and role-models also be Indigenous Peoples when and where possible.
Coordinate Social Outlet	Social outlets are paramount for young people in and from care because these experiences help them build healthy friendships, introduce them to different types of work or volunteer opportunities, and promote self-care.
Provide Cultural Mentorships	A ‘Cultural Mentor’ may include one or more people who can assist Indigenous youth with (re-)connecting with their cultural identity, cultural community, and cultural traditions.

Incorporate Life Skills Training	The need for providing life skills training opportunities is essential to better prepare young people for transitioning into adulthood. The number of topics for a life skills program is endless, but may include budget/money management, time management, self-care strategies, conflict resolution skills, communication skills, resume writing skills, etc.
Contextualize History	In an age-/stage-appropriate way, help Indigenous youth contextualize historical events such as: colonization, the residential school system, the 60s scoop, and the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, and lasting impacts these events have had on Indigenous families and communities.
Nurture Healing	Provide opportunities for Indigenous youth to experience wholistic healing at all levels: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, cultural, social, material, and relational.
Celebrate Rites of Passages	When a young person transitions away from foster care, it is important to celebrate it as a transition into adulthood by acknowledging and honouring this rite of passage with a cultural ceremony which may/should include key members of the young person's family, community, and friends.
Address Essential Needs	Ensure Indigenous youth's basic essential needs are met including access to healthy food, water, housing, clothing, health care services, transportation, education, identification, status-card(s), employment/income, a bank account, and so on.
Build a 'Forever Home'	Provide a safe and welcoming place and space that Indigenous youth can and want to return to as often as possible, even after they have transitioned away from foster care.

Bundle #3: *Values, Principles, and Philosophies*

To quote *Community Helper #7*, “you can’t just throw out a blanket and hope that it’ll keep someone warm in their spirit.” Similarly, in order for Indigenous youth to achieve the above goals and outcomes, the findings in this research further suggest that their supports and services must also be informed by the following 12 *values, principles, and philosophies* (in addition to Indigenous teachings and traditionalisms):

Relationality

‘Relationship’ is a core value at the center of many Indigenous teachings including the relationship between person-to-person, self-to-others, self-to-self, self-to-creation, and so on. Treat every interaction as contributing to a life-long relationship with that person, and know that your actions will have a rippling effect within their family, community, Nation, and the next seven generations. Relationship building is key to fully supporting to a young person in foster care.

Trust

Trust is absolutely fundamental to this work because it is at the core of every healthy and long-standing relationship. Helpers must be trusting of the youth and families they serve, and the youth and families must also be able to trust their helpers.

Humanizing

Move away from using overly clinical labels and terminologies such as ‘clients’, ‘caseloads’, or ‘files’, and instead treat Indigenous youth with humanity, respect, and dignity.

Authenticity

Say what you mean, mean what you say, and bring your whole self when supporting Indigenous youth in/from care.

Presences

Ground yourself in the here and now. Put away your notes and devices. Always offer your undivided attention and presence.

Unconditional Love And Acceptance	Uphold a practice and relationship that is rooted in unconditional love, kindness, acceptance, patience, empathy, and encouragement at all times.
Honour the Sacred Life-Cycle	Meet young people where they are at based on where they find themselves along their sacred life-cycle journey rather than meeting young people based solely on their chronological age. Be life-stage-oriented (ageless) and construct policies this way.
Wholistic Wellness	Honour and nurture young peoples' whole-self (physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, culturally, materialistically, socially, and relationally) and at all stages of their life-cycle.
Decolonization	Work in a manner that is decolonized, and one which also helps further decolonize one's self, others, society, policies, and the institution/organization/agency wherein you or others are supporting Indigenous youth in and from care.
Resilience and Strengths	A good helper is someone who stands up even when they have been repeatedly knocked down. Recognize, acknowledge, and activate the strengths and resilience within yourself and the Indigenous youth who are transitioning into adulthood. Transform deficiencies into abundance, victims into survivors, and help others do the same with and for themselves.
Advocacy	Advocate when systemic structural inequities impede a youth's full and healthy transition into adulthood. Being an advocate is essential and can truly make a difference in people's lives.
Resourcefulness	Think outside of the box, be solutions-focused, and network with other resources in the community. You cannot be all things, all of the time, to all people; work as a village.

Bundle #4: Essential Commitments

Lastly, these findings also posit that even the best and most well-informed, values-infused supports and services cannot fully help Indigenous youth who are transitioning out of foster care and into adulthood if the following 12 *essential commitments* are not securely in place (typically at the structural level), particularly in advance of doing this work if possible:

Specialized Training for Helpers, Workers, and Families	The complexities associated with transitioning away from foster care and into adulthood at 19 at vast and so specialized training should be required for all helpers, workers, and foster families working directly with Indigenous youth in/from care.
Quality Helpers, Workers and Foster Parents/Families	Even the best post-secondary training cannot guarantee the quality of workers, helpers, and foster parents. In addition to proper training, these individuals need to possess and maintain a high level of moral and interpersonal character and performance when supporting Indigenous youth in/from care.
Governance by, with, and for Indigenous Peoples	Given historical dynamics, all (or at least the majority) of child welfare supports, services, resources, hiring, and training programs involving Indigenous children, youth, families, communities, workers and/or helpers should be governed by, with, and for Indigenous Peoples either in full and/or in collaborative partnership with non-Indigenous groups.
Center Youth Voices	Everyone and everything should be centered on and around Indigenous youth's thoughts, perspectives, and opinions at all times. Honouring youth's self-determination is essential.
Transparency	Policies and practices related to Indigenous child welfare should be available for appropriate community scrutiny upon request.

Accountability	Communities demand congruency at all levels and stages of child welfare practices, especially when it involves Indigenous children and youth. An official and functional procedure should be in place whereby members of the community can report any grievances and have them heard and responded to appropriately and in a respectful and timely manner.
Adequate and Sustainable Funding	All supports and services should be adequately funded and resourced and be sustainable for all future generations.
Affordability	Supports, services, and resources should be affordable (if not free if possible) for Indigenous children, youth, and families.
Accessibility	Resources should be easily accessible such as being located within a reasonable commute, as well as accessible to peoples with visible and/or invisible disabilities.
Safe Spaces	All spaces and places should be safe. Safe spaces are places where Indigenous children, youth, families, and their helpers and workers are free to be 100% themselves and without fear of discrimination.
Trauma-Informed	Trauma-informed workers, helpers, policies, practices and workspace environments are those that help Indigenous youth heal from their trauma(s), rather than trigger, reinforce and/or re-perpetrate them. All aspects of child welfare should be committed to being trauma-informed.
Organizational Wellness	It is essential that organizations and the workers and helpers within them should be wholistically healthy, harmonious, well-organized, professional, and free from any negativity, corruption, and/or lateral-violence.

Potential Obstacles and Barriers

Our Story-Sharers and Circle Members have provided us with a wonderful array of insights, perspectives, and recommendations on how individuals, families, communities, social workers, and organizations can best support Indigenous youth who transitioning out of foster care and into adulthood; however, they also described a number of potential obstacles and barriers that might hinder or in some cases prevent these findings from being fully implemented in practice. Some of these obstacles and barriers are relatively manageable, and likely unavoidable, whereas others are largely systemic issues. Finding solutions to these much larger barriers goes well beyond the scope of this research alone. Nevertheless, it is important for all of us to be aware of these barriers going forward so that we can better prepare ourselves if or when they occur.

The first obstacle identified in the stories that stood out to me was *lateral-violence*. Lateral-violence occurs when a marginalized or oppressed person or groups attack another marginalized or oppressed person or group rather than directing their animosity and action towards the actual perpetrators of said marginalization or oppression rather than each other (Clark, 2015). Lateral-violence manifests as bullying, gossiping, blaming, shaming, resources hoarding, and/or physical harm. Sadly, lateral-violence is far too common among many Indigenous communities and families given the history of colonization and the residential school system; all of which can significantly impede our ability to support Indigenous youth as they transition into adulthood.

The second major barrier that stood out for me, especially during the Talking Circle sessions, had to with addressing the heavy workloads that our community helpers, social workers, and DAA workers are forced to endure, which can then lead to *compassion fatigue* and *burnout*. According to Thomas (2013) ‘compassion fatigue’ can be thought of as intrusive thoughts, avoidance behaviours, and a low tolerance for stress, whereas ‘burnout’ could be described as

feelings of hopelessness leading to an inability to effectively manage or function in one's work and/or daily life. Both can cause significant disruptions to helpers' abilities to be present with the Indigenous children, youth, and families they serve and therefore become far less able to meet their emotional and relational needs. We know from our Story-Sharers that Indigenous youth want and need their social worker(s) to be present, available, relational, and reliable as often as possible. To help overcome these challenges, all of us must come together to advocate for the changes we want to see in MCFD policies and procedures to better support the health and wellbeing of helpers and youth alike. In the meantime, please be kind to all of our helpers because many of them are compassionate peoples doing the best they can with tools and situations in which they are placed.

The *high demand for cultural mentorship* also stood out to me given the seemingly low supply of cultural mentors in most cities and communities across Vancouver Island. It also seemed apparent to me that there simply isn't enough funding available out there to sustain such invaluable work. As such, this obstacle truly demonstrates that in order for any of us to support Indigenous youth in and from care that we also need to support the health, wellness, and prosperity of the support and resources available to Indigenous communities.

Lastly, I noted that many of the Story-Sharers and Circle Members also emphasized the widespread need for adequate, accessible, and affordable *housing* and quality *employment* opportunities across the island. In fact, according to MCFD (2017), 56% of Indigenous youth who transition out of foster care at the age of 19 do so without a high school diploma, and that 83% are expected to be unemployed for at least the first six months after leaving foster care. This all said, even though solving these barriers goes well beyond of the scope of this research alone, it is my hope that this report will help inspire future scholars to examine these and other topics related to this work as part of a larger search to find potential solutions to these systemic issues.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CLOSING THE CIRCLE

Significance of this Research

I believe this research is significant because the findings emerged from Story-Sharers who themselves previously transitioned out of foster care, as well as those community/DAA helpers who work directly and/or indirectly to support Indigenous youth in and from foster care. Moreover, I believe the age-range of our Story-Sharers also contributed to the significance of this research because it provides Readers with a glimpse into how Indigenous child welfare has (or has not) shifted or evolved over time, as well as informed the above findings from a wider lifespan.

Another reason I think this research is significant is its *timeliness*. There have been many recent changes to how Indigenous youth in and from are supported in BC – even beyond the age of 19. For instance, as of last year, BC now provides a province-wide Tuition Waiver Program to youth from MCFD care which sponsorship young peoples' post-secondary tuition, supplies, and in some cases a living allowance (Schiewe, 2017). This incredible change reflects the recent changes to the *Child, Family, and Community Service Act* (1996) which now permit MCFD to provide additional transitional supports to Indigenous youth between the ages of 19 and 26. As such, clearly the timing for research could not have been much more ideal for all of us.

Finally, I believe this research is significant because the findings were intended to be highly adaptable to, and inclusive of, Indigenous ways of knowing and being that individuals, families, community members, social workers, and organizations can easily modify to fit within a wide range of personal, professional, familial, communal, cultural and social contexts. This consideration was important to me because it has been my hope that the Readers of this report will apply these findings within a variety of settings and situations to meet the specific wants and needs of the peoples and communities whom they are directly supporting and serving.

Limitations

This research is of course not without its limitations. For instance, some Reader might notice the fairly *low sample size* of Story-Sharers who previously transitioned out of foster care, especially given the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in foster care here in BC. Although I would agree with this point-of-view, I would also argue that the methodology for this research were rooted in quality relationship building over quantity, and that by having fewer Story-Sharers I was better able to offer my full presence and attention to each of them individually.

From the very beginning of this research I was hoping to see a notable inclusion of Two-Spirit Peoples' voices and perspectives. As such, I think this is a limitation of this research because I believe this would have strongly enriched the findings and recommendations. I have found that Two-Spirit Peoples' voices and perspectives are often missing in Indigenous research and I am now left wondering how their viewpoints might have (or have not) informed these findings.

Finally, I think for me one the biggest limitations of this research is that the topic and research question focuses almost exclusively on finding solutions to supporting youth transitioning out of care rather than addressing those much larger systemic issues and concerns such as preventing Indigenous children, youth, and families from ever entering into, or becoming involved with, the Canadian child welfare system in the first place. That said, it is indeed my hope that the findings in this report will help further decolonize the child welfare policies and practices that will in turn help break the cycle of those intergenerational colonial traumas that so often lead Indigenous children, youth, and families toward becoming involved with child welfare agencies.

Areas for Further Research

If I were to conduct this research again, I would begin by exploring whether there are any differences between how Indigenous males, females, are transitioning out of foster care and into

adulthood because it seemed to me from the Story-Sharers' stories, and from the Circle Members' examples, that the majority of young people leaving care at 19 seem to be predominately female. This dynamic leaves me wondering whether Indigenous females are more likely to leave care at 19, or whether young women are more likely than young men to reach out for help. Or perhaps it is because Indigenous males are more likely to couch-surf or live in shelters after leaving foster care? And so on. I think a sex/gender-based study into these questions might be a fascinating area of further research exploration and I really hope someone takes this up one day in the future.

As previously discussed, I wish we had an opportunity to hear more from members of the Two-Spirit Peoples community and their perspectives on aging-out of care/transitioning into adulthood recommended supports and service. Moreover, I would have been quite curious to witness how these perspectives may or may not have shaped the findings produced in this research. Yet again, I think this would be an important area for further research into these topics.

Furthermore, future researchers may also wish to conduct a longitudinal study that follows Indigenous youth from the moment they enter foster care, to the moments they transition from care, and throughout their sacred journey and life-cycle. Researchers may also wish to actually implement some the findings from this report to see how well they hold up in various rural and/or urban communities across Turtle Island and perhaps even the world including New Zealand.

In closing, I would like to share with you that I wish I had included *surveys* as one of my methods of inquiry because I think surveys could reached the highly transient and/or incredibly shy Indigenous youth who were unable to participate in this research. I think surveys also tend to be more private and anonymous for some people, although I do agree that are limitation in a survey's ability to foster that special relational bond between research participants (Story-Sharers) and the Researcher (the Story-Gatherer) which was a key feature of my methodology.

Concluding Thoughts

When it comes to being in foster care and eventually transitioning out, Indigenous youth seem to be facing an unbearable number of issues, barriers, and challenges at the age of 19 and after completing this research, I am feeling incredibly hopeful that things are, or will be, getting better for young people in and from care and for their helpers/workers.

I recognize that it takes a village to not only help raise a child, but I think it will take a village to help make the findings and recommendations from this research a reality in our communities. That said, I genuinely believe that all of us have the capacity to achieve this together. But I believe now, more than ever before, that does not matter if you are a social worker, or an accountant, or whether you are an employer, or an educator, or a youth mentor, or simply a neighbour in the community, all of us can play a positive role in a young Indigenous person's life as well as to help them with their exciting albeit daunting transition into adulthood.

If nothing else, I believe this research makes it evident that preparing Indigenous youth for leaving foster care needs to begin as early, and as collaboratively, as possible. What we saw in the research was that some Story-Sharers and Circle Members recommended that these preparations begin for young people between the ages of 16-18, whereas others suggested that this begin as early as childhood, including the very first moment the young person enters foster care. But either way, do *something*. Even if you can implement only 1 of 12 supports and services recommended in this research, it is still better to do something rather than to do nothing for our young people.

Finally, I believe words are powerful because they carry meaning and spirit that evoke, provoke, and inform our thoughts, feelings, and actions towards ourselves and others. As such, I propose change the ways in which we label and define 'aging-out of care'. To me, the term '*aging-out*' denotes something that is gone forever when we inevitably turn 19. Similarly, I think of the

term ‘*out of care*’ makes it feel as though young people are leaving and entering into a non-caring place and I think is incredibly misleading. Instead, I think a young person’s 19th birthday should be celebrated as a successful milestone. As such, I am advocating that we change ‘aging-out of care’ terminology into ‘transitioning into adulthood (at the age of 19)’. Some Readers might brush this off as simple semantics, but I think the sentiment behind language that is more positive and strengths-oriented can help elicit a much stronger sense of one’s identity, belongingness, esteem, wellness, competence, agency, and direction as part of the adulthood transitional journey.

My Future Plans

As a result of this research, I would now like to develop a life skills program that is community-led, culturally-inclusive, strengths-oriented, person-centred, solutions-focused, and culturally-informed aimed at support Indigenous youth in and from foster care. I would like this program to nurture young peoples’ physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, cultural, social, material, and relational quadrants and realms as they transition into and throughout the adulthood phases of their sacred life-cycle. Moreover, it is my sincere and genuine hope that you too will join me in these efforts because I truly believe we must all work together, collaboratively, and co-creatively because each one of us has the ability to contribute to the long-standing quality of life for the current, and next seven generations to come. I think young people should be blanketed by many supportive peoples in this life to help support them and nurture them wholistically all along their sacred life-journey. *Chi’miigwetch* and *All my relations*.

References

- Absolon, K. (2010). Indigenous wholistic theory: A knowledge set for practice. *First Peoples Child and Family Review*, 5(2), 74-87.
- Absolon, K., & Willet, C. (2004). Aboriginal research: Berry picking and hunting in the 21st century. *First Peoples Child and Family Review*, 1(1), 5-17.
- Adams, C. (2015). Paige's story: In search of a name. *Globalnews*. Retrieved from <https://globalnews.ca/news/2290502/paiges-story-in-search-of-a-name/>
- Anderson, K. (2011). *Life stages and native women: Memories, teachings, and story medicine*. Manitoba, AB: University of Manitoba Press.
- Barker, B., Kerr, T., Alfred, G., Fortin, M., Nguyen, P., Wood, E., & DeBeck, K. (2014). High prevalence of exposure to the child welfare system among street-involved youth in a Canadian setting: Implications for policy and practice. *Journal of Biomedical Central Public Health*, 14(197), 1-7.
- Baskin, C. (2016). *Strong helpers' teachings: The value of indigenous knowledges in the helping professions*. (2nd Edition). Toronto: Canadian Scholar Press Inc.
- BC Coroners. (2018). *BC Coroners service death review panel: Review of mcfd-involved youth transitioning to independence January 1, 2011–December 31, 2016*. 1-40.
- Blackstock, C. (2009). After the apology: Why are so many first nation children still in foster care? *Children Australia*, 34(1), 22-29.
- Blackstock, C., Trocmé, N., & Bennett, M. (2004). Child maltreatment among aboriginal and non-aboriginal families in canada. *Domestic Violence and Child Welfare*, 10(1), 901-916.
- Canadian Press, (2011). Native children in care surpass residential school era. *CTV News*. Retrieved from <https://www.ctvnews.ca/native-children-in-care-surpass-residential-school-era->

1.677743

- Carrière, J., & Richardson, C. (2013). Relationships is everything: Holistic approaches to aboriginal child and youth mental health. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 7(2), 8-26.
- Carrière, J. (2010). *Aski awasis / Children of the earth: First peoples speaking on adoption*. Halifax, NS. Fernwood Publishing Press.
- Carrière, J. & Strega, S. (2009). *Walking this path together: Anti-racist, anti-oppressive child welfare practice*. Halifax, NS. Fernwood Publishing Press.
- Cashmore, J., & Paxman, M. (2006). Predicting after-care outcomes: The importance of 'felt' security. *Social Policy Research Centre*, 11(1) 232-241.
- Child, Family and Community Service Act. (RSBC, 1996). [ENACTED]. British Columbia Laws Publications. Retrieved February 2017, from http://www.bclaws.ca/EPLibraries/bclaws_new/documents/ID/freeside/00_96046_01
- Clark, Y. (2015). What's in a name? Lateral violence within the aboriginal community in Adelaide, South Australia. In the *Australian Community Psychologist*, 27(2), 19-30.
- Cross, T., Simmons, D. & Chase, J (2000). Development and implementation of tribal foster care standards. *The National Indian Child Welfare Association*, 1-48.
- Culbert, L. (2016). She was known as the girl in the tent: Her family wants you to know the real Santanna. *Vancouver Sun*. Retrieved from <https://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/she-was-known-only-as-the-girl-in-the-tent-but-her-family-wants-you-to-know-the-real-santanna>
- Daley, A. (2010). Reflections on reflexivity and critical reflection as critical research practices. *Affila: Journal of Women and Social Work*, 25(1), 68-82.
- Dumbrill, G., & Green, J. (2008). Indigenous knowledge in the social work academy. *Social*

- Work Education*, 27(5), 489-503.
- Evans, R., White, J., Turley, R., Slater, T., Morgan, H., Strange, H., & Scourfield, J. (2017)., Comparison of suicidal ideation, suicide attempt and suicide in children and young people in care and non-care populations: Systematic review and meta-analysis of prevalence. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 82(1), 122-129.
- Fluke, J., Chabot, M., Fallon, B.,m MacLaurin, B., & Blackstock, C. (2010). Placement decisions and disparities among aboriginal groups: An application of the decision-making ecology through multi-level analysis. *Journal of Child Abuse and Neglect*, 34(1), 57-69.
- Graveline, F. (1998). "Revitalizing a traditional worldview". In F. Graveline, *Circle works: Transforming eurocentric consciousness*. (pp. 49-69). Fernword Publishing.
- Gomez, R., Ryan, T., Norton, C., Jones, C., & Galen-Cisneros, P. (2015). Perceptions of learned helplessness among emerging adults aging out of foster care. *Journal of Child and Adolescence Social Work*, 32(1), 507-516.
- Gough, P. (2013). British columbia's child welfare system. *Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-Being*. #54#, 1-4.
- Hart, M.A. (2010). Indigenous worldviews, knowledge, and research: The development of an Indigenous research paradigm. *Journal of Indigenous Voices in Social Work*, 1(1), 1-16.
- Hirt, I. (2012). Mapping dreams/dreaming maps: Bridging indigenous and western geographical knowledge. *Indigenous Cartographies and Counter-Mapping*, 47(2), 105-120.
- Hulitan Family and Community Services Society. (2015). Codes of Ethics. *Hultian Family and Community Services Society*. Website. Retrieved on May 1, 2017 from http://www.hulitan.ca/codes_of_ethics.html
- Isaak, C., Marchessault, G. (2008). Meaning of health: The perspectives of aboriginal adults and

- youth in a northern Manitoba first nations community. *Canadian Journal of Diabetes*, 32(2), 114-122.
- Jackson, L., O'Brien, K., & Pecora, P. (2011). Posttraumatic stress disorder among foster care alumni: The role of race gender, and foster care context. *Journal of Child Welfare*, 90(5), 71-93.
- Johnson, S. (2014). Knucwente-kuc re stsmemelt.s-kuc trauma-informed education for indigenous children in foster care. *Canadian Social Work Review*, 31(2), 155-174.
- Kirmayer, L., Brass, G., & Tait, C. (2000). The mental health of aboriginal peoples: Transformations of identity and community. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 1(45), 607-616.
- Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Kovach, M., Carrière, J., Barrett, M., Montgomery, H., & Gillies, C. (2013). Stories of diverse identity locations in indigenous research. *International review of qualitative research*, 6(4), 487-509.
- Lavallée, L. (2009). Practical application of an indigenous research framework and two qualitative indigenous research methods: Sharing circles and anishnaabe symbol-based reflection. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1), 21-80.
- Meissener, D. (2017). Alex Gervais, métis teen who took his own life, was 'abandoned' by gov't: Report. *The Huffington Post*, Retrieved on July 23, 2017 from http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2017/02/06/alex-gervais-report_n_14633308.html
- Mendes, P., Baidawi, S., & Snow, P. (2013). Young people transitioning from out-of-home care: A critical analysis of leaving care policy, legislation and housing support in the Australian state of Victoria. *Child Abuse Review*, 23(1), 402-414.

- Ministry of Children and Family Development [MCFD]. (2018). *Ministry of children and family development: 2018/19–2020/21 Service plan*. 1-16.
- Ministry of Children and Family Development [MCFD]. (2017). *Ministry of children and family development: Performance management report*, 9(1), 1-98.
- Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) (2015). *Adoption Awareness Month Factsheet*. Retrieved from http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/adoption/pdf/adoption_fact_sheet
- Moosa-Mitha, M. (2015). Situating anti-oppressive theories within critical and difference-centered perspectives. In S. Strega & L. Brown (Eds.), *Research as resistance* (2nd ed.) (pp. 65-96). Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press.
- Naccarato, T. & DeLorenzo, E. (2008). Traditional youth services: Practice implications from a systematic review. *Journal of Child and Adolescence in Social Work*, 25(1), 287-308.
- Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth [PACY]. (2012). My real-life book. *A Report from the Youth Leaving Care Hearings*. (pp.3-35). Toronto, ON.
- Rankin, E. & Brend, Y. (2016). Dead teen patricia lee ‘indigo’ evoy lacked support, say friends. *CBC*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/patricia-lee-indigo-evoy-death-mcfd-youth-case-1.3491326>
- Reilly, T. (2003). Transition from care: Status and outcomes of youth who age out of foster care. *Journal of Child Welfare*, 82(6), 727–746.
- Representative for Children and Youth [RCY]. (2016). Annual report 2015/16 and service plan 2016/17 to 2017/18. *10 Years of Advocacy: Representative’s Report Card*. 3-82.
- Richard, K. (2004). A commentary against aboriginal to non-aboriginal adoption. *A Journal on Innovation and Best Practices in Aboriginal Child Welfare Administration, Research, Policy and Practice*, 1(1), 101-109.

- Rodriguez, K., Schwartz, J., Lahman, M., & Geist, M. (2011). Culturally responsive focus groups: Reframing the research experiences to focus on participants. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 10(4), 400-417.
- Rutman, D., Hubberstey, C., & Feduniw, A. (2007). When youth age out of care – Where to from there? *Final Report Based on a Three-Year Longitudinal Study*. (pp.1-53). University of Victoria Press. Victoria, BC.
- Schiewe, K. (2017). BC NDP expands tuition waiver for former youth in care. *Global News*. Retrieved from <https://globalnews.ca/news/3713160/b-c-ndp-expands-tuition-waiver-for-former-youth-in-care/>
- Sherlock, T. (2016). BCTF calls for children's minister to resign after latest teen death. *Vancouver Sun*. Retrieved from: <http://www.vancouversun.com/life/bctf+calls+children+minister+resign+after+latest+teen+death/11789466/story.html>
- Simard, E., & Blight, S. (2011). Developing a culturally restorative approach to aboriginal child and youth development: Transitions to adulthood. *First Peoples Child and Family Review*, 6(1), 28-55.
- Sinclair, R. (2004). Aboriginal social work education in Canada: Decolonizing pedagogy for the seventh generation. *First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada*, 1(1), 49-61.
- Sinha, V. & Kozlowski, A. (2013). The structure of aboriginal child welfare in Canada. *International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 4(2), 1-21.
- Smith, L. T. (1999). "Colonizing knowledge". *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. (pp. 58-77). Landfall, NZ: University of Otago Press.
- Statistics Canada. (2013). *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: First Nations People, Métis and Inuit*. Retrieved from <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-011-x/99-011->

x201101-eng.cfm.

Stewart, S. (2009). One indigenous academic's evolution: A personal narrative of native health research and competing ways of knowing. *First Peoples Child and Family Review*, 4(1), 57-65.

Stock, C., Mares, S., & Robinson, G. (2012). Telling and re-telling stories: The use of narrative and drawing in a group intervention with parents and children in a remote aboriginal community. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 33(2), 157-170.

Stueck, W. (2017). B.C.'s coroner to review deaths of children who 'age out' of government care. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/bcs-coroner-to-review-deaths-of-children-who-age-out-of-government-care/article35784188/>

Thomas, J. (2003). Association of personal distress with burnout, compassion fatigue, and compassion satisfaction among clinical social workers. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 39(3), 365-379.

Thomas, R. (2015). "Honouring the oral traditions of the ta't mustimuxw (ancestors) through storytelling". In S. Strega & L. Brown (Eds.), *Research as resistance* (2nd ed.) (pp. 177-198). Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press.

Thomas, R. (2000). *Storytelling in the spirit of wise woman: Experiences of kuper island residential school*. (Master's thesis). (pp. 1-153). The University of Victoria.

Thomas, R., & Green, J. (2007). A way of life: Indigenous perspectives on anti-oppressive living. *First Peoples Child and Family Review*, 3(1), 91-104.

Trocmé, N., Knoke, D. & Blackstock, C. (2004). Pathways to the overrepresentation of aboriginal children in canada's child welfare system. *Social Service Review*, 577-600.

- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2015) *Calls to action*. Retrieved from http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2
- Tweddle, A. (2007). Youth leaving care: How do they fare? *New Directions for Youth Development*, 1(113), 15-31.
- Twigg, R., & Hengen, T. (2009). Going back to the roots: Using the medicine wheel in the healing process. *First Peoples Child and Family Review*, 4(1), 10-19.
- University of Victoria. (2003). *Protocols and Principles for Conducting Research in an Indigenous Context*. Faculty of Human and Social Development. Retrieved from <http://icwrn.uvic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/igovprotocol.pdf>
- Verniest, L. (2006). Allying with the medicine wheel: Social work practice with aboriginal peoples. *Critical Social Work*, 7(1), retrieved from <http://www1.uwindsor.ca/criticalsocialwork/allying-with-the-medicine-wheel-social-work-practice-with-aboriginal-peoples>
- Wenger-Nabigon, A. (2010). The cree medicine wheel as an organizing paradigm of theories of human development. *Native Social Work Journal*, 7(1), 139-161.
- Wiles, R. Crow, G., Heath, S. & Charles, V. (2008). The management of confidentiality and anonymity in social research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11(5), 417-428.
- Wilson, S. (2013). Using indigenist research to shape our future. In J. Coates & M. Gray (Eds.) *Decolonizing social work* (pp. 311-322). Abingdon, UK/New York, NY: Routledge.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing Press.



**University
of Victoria**

Participant Consent Form (Story-Sharers and Talking Circle Members)

Project Title: The Next Chapter: Utilizing Storytelling to Examine Traditional Supports that help Foster Cultural (Re-)Connectedness Among Indigenous Youth Aging-out of Care.

Research Ethics approved by: The University of Victoria, Vancouver Island University, and the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

Purpose of the Research: To examine ‘*what (if any) transitional supports, services, and/or practices help foster cultural (re-)connection among Indigenous youth aging-out of care?*’. The research in this study is intended be for the Researcher’s graduate thesis project.

Objectives of the Research: [1] to raise awareness of aging-out of care from the perspective of Indigenous peoples; [2] to help find culturally-appropriate solutions to aging-out of care issue; [3] to highlight ways to (re-)build cultural connections among aged-out Indigenous peoples; [4] to help change ageing-out of care practices to become more culturally-appropriate; [5] to help further decolonize child welfare services for Indigenous peoples who aged-out.

Guiding Questions: *What (if any) are the challenges facing Indigenous youth aging-out of care? What (if any) support are needed for Indigenous youth aging-out of care? Is there anything else not yet said that you would like to add?*

Benefits of Participating in this Study: Some of the benefits of participating in this study include the opportunity to [1] share your story and have it heard in a unique and safe way; [2] make positive difference in the lives of current and future Indigenous youth leaving care; and [3] participate in one-of-kind research that is conduct by, with, and for Indigenous peoples utilizing Indigenous methodologies.

Data/Stories, and Information Handling: All digital files associated with you and this study be password-protected (encrypted) and kept under lock and key, along with all papered documents. Moreover, in accordance with the *Tri-Agency Statement of Principles on Digital Data Management*, all documents related to your participation must be preserved for at least two years upon completion of this study. After such time has lapsed, the above will be permanently deleted and/or destroyed.

Privacy and Confidentiality Statement: Everything you share as part of this study is considered confidential and that only the information provided ‘story-summary’ will be included in the final study. All identifying characteristics be removed, altered, replaced, or redacted in from published material. By signing this consent form you also agree to protect the privacy and confidentiality of others participants in the Talking Circle (if applicable).

Withdrawing Your Participation Early: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and so you may withdraw your participation at any time. If you withdraw early, you will still receive an honorarium either in part or full reflecting the degree of your participation in the study. At which time, all of your documents including digital files will be deleted and destroyed and removed from the study.

Research Results: The results of this research (which include the story-summaries will become available on both the *National Theses Portal* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/services/theses/Pages/theses-canada.aspx>) as well as the “UVicSpace” (<https://www.uvic.ca/library/featured/uvicspace/index.php>) for members of the public to legally download, review, or use at their discretion.

Future Use of your Approved Story Summary: the future use of your story-summary may include (but not limited to) for the purpose of: [1] further research into the same or similar topics; [2] proposal writing such as those aimed at developing transitional supports for Indigenous youth or adults; and/or [3] formal or informal public or private presentations. However, please note that only the information already approved in the story-summary would be used in the future, which at that time, would be the same information already available in the final study to the public.

Risks and Management Strategies:

You may experience a level of emotional, physical, mental, and/or spiritual discomfort while discussing your experiences with aging-out of care. To help reduce this risk: [1] *you are encouraged to only share information you feel comfortable with sharing*; [2] *it is recommended that you have a safety and wellness plan in place prior to sharing your story*; and [3] *smudging will available to you either before, during, and/or after your story-sharing or talking circle session as well as several referral/resource information*.

If in the extremely unlikely event that your personal information becomes available to the public without your awareness or permission, you may be at risk of experiencing (but not limited to) social stigmatization, loss of privacy, and/or loss of reputation. However, to help significantly reduce this risk: [1] *only share the information which you feel comfortable sharing publicly*; [2] *all identifying characters will be removed from the transcript*; [3] *all digital files will be password protected / encrypted*; [4] *all documents and digital files will be held under lock and key*.

Additional Support Person(s): If you wish to have any additional person(s) join you at any stage in this study, this person simply needs to complete the *Additional Support Person(s) Form* in advance.

Vancouver Island University Students: If you are a past, present, or future Vancouver Island University [VIU] student or community partner, please note that I currently work as an Indigenous Education Navigator at VIU; however, this study is completely separate from the services I provide at VIU, and your participation in this study will have no impact on these supports and services. Nevertheless, all VIU Indigenous Education Navigators are available to you are your discretion.

Participation Concludes: upon receiving your honoraria.

Agreement: Your signature below or your verbal consent indicates that you understand the above conditions and that you have had an opportunity to have all of your questions answered in advance.

**Participant opted for verbal consent []

<hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> <i>Name of Participant</i> <i>(optional)</i>	<hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> <i>Signature</i> <i>(unless consenting verbally)</i>	<hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> <i>Date</i>
---	---	---



**University
of Victoria**

Confidentiality Agreement for Additional Person(s) Forms

Project Title: The Next Chapter: Utilizing Storytelling to Examine Traditional Supports that help Foster Cultural (Re-)Connectedness Among Indigenous Youth Aging-out of Care

Research Ethics approved by: The University of Victoria, Vancouver Island University, and the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

Additional Person:

_____ (Name)	_____ (Profession/Community Title)
-----------------	---------------------------------------

(A brief description of the supports you intent to provide to the participants during the study)

Purpose of the Research: To examine ‘*what (if any) transitional supports, services, and/or practices help foster cultural (re-)connection among Indigenous youth aging-out of care?*’. The research in this study is intended be for the Researcher’s graduate thesis project.

Confidentiality: A Participant has requested you to be their support person throughout the project. If you accept this request, you must agree to uphold the Participant’s right to confidentiality and privacy. If however you or the Participant discloses that they or someone else is at risk of being harmed (including self-harm), and especially with respects to vulnerable populations (i.e. children, youth, Elders, or peoples with a disability), all parties above in this study have the legal, moral, and ethical obligation to inform the appropriate authorities such as police, child protective service, mental health workers, etc).

Participation Concludes: when your respective Participation to whom you are supporting has concluded their participation in the study.

Agreement: Your signature below (or your verbal consent) indicates that you understand the above conditions and that you have had an opportunity to have all of your questions answered in advance.

**Additional Person opted for verbal consent [☐] **Participant opted for verbal consent [☐]

_____ <i>Name of Additional Person</i>	_____ <i>Signature</i> <i>(unless consenting verbally)**</i>	_____ <i>Date</i>
_____ <i>Name of Participant</i> <i>(optional)</i>	_____ <i>Signature</i> <i>(unless verbally consenting)</i>	_____ <i>Date</i>