

**Supporting the wholistic wellness of Métis children, youth, and families through
prevention-based child and family support services**

by

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B.A., University of Northern British Columbia, 2012

M.Sc., Simon Fraser University, 2017

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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Abstract

The mainstream child welfare system is failing to meet the fundamental needs for Métis children, youth, and families. While the impact of the child welfare system has been studied in depth, there remains a lack of attention toward understanding prevention-based services both within the context of Métis child welfare, as well as more broadly for Indigenous children and family services. This dissertation shares findings from a doctoral research study that was conducted in partnership with Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services (LMO), a Métis-specific Indigenous Child and Family Service Agency located on the lands of Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc (Kamloops, British Columbia). Through learning from Métis Elders (n=20), LMO staff (n=27), and youth and families who have accessed services at LMO (n=18), this doctoral research examines the ways that reconnecting Métis children, youth, and families with their culture and identity can contribute to their wholistic wellbeing and safety. From a broader perspective, this research explores the ways in which Métis culture can contribute to a prevention-based Métis child welfare system.

This research presents and utilizes a Métis research framework, grounded in the Visiting Way methodology. The findings of this research are presented in two chapters: the first compiles the stories and teachings from Métis Elders on raising children and supporting families, and the second looks more specifically at wise practices for decolonizing Métis child welfare. The first section of findings present stories from the Métis Elders who generously participated in this research. The stories in this section—which draw from the Elders' experiences from childhood and parenting—reveal teachings for Métis child-rearing. These teachings relate to identity, kinship and support, independence, and traditional values. The second section highlights wise practices for decolonizing Métis child welfare rooted in the perspectives of helpers, Elders,

youth, and families at LMO. Alongside wise practices, the findings also examine what it means to be a helper in a Métis child and family agency; systemic and organizational challenges; and outcomes for Métis children, youth, and families. In bringing the findings together, this dissertation concludes with a discussion of Métis child welfare as an opportunity for cultural resurgence, fostering belonging, and strengthening prevention-based supports.

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Glossary

Âpihtawikosisân: One of the terms that Métis people use to today refer to themselves. Historically, this term was used by the Cree in reference to the Métis. It translates to “half son” (Vowel, 2024). Âpihtawikosisân is used interchangeably with “half-breed” by some of the Elders who participated in this dissertation.

Blood memory: A term that is used by some Elders in this dissertation when referring to the ways in which knowledge is passed on intergenerationally through unspoken means.

Colonialism: Structures of control and dominance over Indigenous peoples, upheld through oppression, exploitation, and racism (Czyzewski, 2011).

Colonization: The systematic process of geographic invasion, social and economic displacement, and political control. These acts are rooted in beliefs of racial and cultural superiority (Kelm, 1998).

Cultural resurgence: The strengthening and revitalization of Indigenous peoples’ cultures, languages, knowledges, and traditions. It may involve taking power back as a form of reclaiming what has been oppressed and marginalized as a result of colonization (Gaudet, 2018).

Decolonization: A long-term process of structural transformation, which involves the restoration and reclamation of Indigenous Knowledges and practices (Clark, 2016; de Finney & di Tomasso, 2015).

Distinctions-based approach: This term is used to recognize and reflect the diverse cultures and languages—as well as differences in right and priorities—of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

Elder: A term for collectively referring to respected people in Indigenous communities who hold knowledge, culture, and other gifts. Métis Elders may also be referred to in other ways, which include the use of relational terms (e.g., Auntie, Kookum).

Eurocentric: Rooted in western (i.e., European) ways of knowing.

Helper: A relational term that is used when speaking about the roles of staff in helping professions (e.g., social work, counsellors, other frontline workers). This term reflects the traditional roles of helping in Indigenous communities, and that social work is intended to be a helping profession (Blackstock, 2009a).

Indigenous: A term used when collectively referring to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies: In British Columbia, Indigenous children, youth, and families, may receive child welfare services through either the Ministry of Children and Family Development or from an Indigenous Child and Family Service Agency (formerly known as Delegated Aboriginal Agencies). These agencies are delegated after a process of

negotiations and agreements made between the province and Indigenous communities (Government of British Columbia, 2024a).

Indigenous Governing Body: An Indigenous Governing Body is a nation or organization that is authorized to act on behalf of Indigenous rights holders, recognized under Section 35 of the 1982 *Constitution Act*.

Kikékyelc—A Place of Belonging: A 31-unit supportive housing development for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth in Kamloops, British Columbia. Built in 2020, Kikékyelc is a home for youth who are transitioning to adulthood, as well as resident Elders who provide support to the youth residents. Kikékyelc is also staffed by youth social workers, life skills workers, and program coordinators.

Kitchen parties: Seasonal Métis gatherings that are full of music and dancing.

Kookum: A relational, Cree word that translates to grandmother. It is used within some Métis families.

Lateral violence: A broad term that is used to reference the practice of excluding or attacking one's own people.

Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services: A Métis-specific Indigenous Child and Family Service Agency, located in Kamloops, British Columbia.

Métis: One of three distinct groups of constitutionally-recognized Aboriginal Peoples. The most widely-accepted definition of the Métis comes from the Métis National Council (2001), who define a Métis person as someone “who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of Historic Métis Nation ancestry, and is accepted by the Métis Nation.”

Michif: This term can refer to both a language of the Métis people, as well as the people.

Michif Practice Model: Developed by Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services, the Michif Practice Model is a Métis-specific framework for supporting children, youth, and families.

Miskâsowin: A Cree term, used by some Métis people, when referring to the process or journey of finding belonging (Clark & Smith, 2021).

Mooshum: A Cree word for grandfather that is used within some Métis families.

Nanâtawihowin Âcimowina Kika-môshahkinikêhk Papiskîci-itascikêwin Astâcikowina: A method for collaborative meaning making, developed by Starblanket and colleagues (2019). This Cree name translates to “Medicine and Healing Stories Picked, Sorted, Stored” (Starblanket et al., 2019, p. 6).

Natural supports: Broadly, natural supports reflect a person or family’s relational networks across their communities. This term is used by various participants in this dissertation to refer to relationships with caring people who are not working in formal support roles.

Opikinawasowin: A Cree term that refers to the process of “growing children” or child-rearing (Dorion, 2010, p. 2; Fast & Boldo, 2021, p. 43).

Otipemisiwak: One of the terms that the Cree used to describe the Métis. It translates to, “the people who own themselves” (Oster & Lizee, 2021, p. 19).

Passing: The act of hiding one’s ancestry or ethnicity due to fear of discrimination. Within the context of colonialism, passing has been used as a “survival strategy” within some Métis families (Richardson, 2016a, p. 33).

Pêyâhtik: A Cree term used by an Elder within this research in reference to traditional forms of meditation.

Piihitikway: A Michif word meaning “welcome.” Within LMO’s Michif Practice Model, the Piihitikway is a gathering that acts as a first welcoming of Métis children, youth, and families.

Prevention services: Services offered to families in an effort to avoid children and youth being removed from their families and placed in government care. At LMO, prevention services aim to assist families to support the safety and wellbeing of their children and youth.

Secwêpemcul’ecw: The unceded lands of the Secwêpemc people.

Signs of Safety: An approach to working with children, youth, and families that is used by some agencies, including some Indigenous Child and Family Agencies. Signs of Safety involves a collaborative approach to assessing and addressing child protection concerns through balancing strengths and concerns through analysis and safety planning (Elia International, 2024a).

Wahkotowin: A Cree word and teaching adopted and upheld throughout many Métis communities. It is a representation of the social and relational obligations of Métis people. In its simplest form, Wahkotowin refers to kinship and relatedness (Macdougall, 2010).

Wholism: The understanding that there are interconnected aspects of a whole, which should not be considering in isolation. Looking at wellness from a wholistic perspective may focus on balance between the mind, body, and spirit (or the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical aspects of health and wellbeing). While often spelled as “holism,” some Indigenous people prefer the alternative spelling of “wholism,” which is used to represent the “whole” (Linklater, 2014). For an example of a wholistic concept, please see: Wahkotowin.

Wise practices: Defined as “locally-appropriate actions, tools, principles, and decisions that contribute significantly development of sustainable and equitable conditions” (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010, p. 19). Wise practices are community-driven and may be rooted in Indigenous Knowledges (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010).

Acronyms

AOPSI: Aboriginal Operational and Practice Standards and Indicators

BC: British Columbia

CCDAP: Collective Consensual Data Analytic Procedure

CFCSA: Child, Family and Community Services Act

CHRT: Canadian Human Rights Tribunal

CYMH: Child and Youth Mental Health

DRIPA: Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act

ECD: Early Childhood Development

ICFS: Indigenous Child and Family Service

IGB: Indigenous Governing Body

LMO: Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services

MCFD: Ministry of Child and Family Development

MNBC: Métis Nations British Columbia

OCPA™: Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession

NAPKA: Nanâtawiho-win Âcimowina Kika-môsahtkinikêhk Papiskîci-itascikêwin Astâcikowina

RCY: Representative for Children and Youth

TCPS2: Tri-Council Policy Statement (2nd edition)

UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNDRIP: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Métis children and youth have continuously been disproportionately apprehended from their families and placed in government care. According to recent census data, the proportion of Métis children (ages 0 through 14) living in foster care in British Columbia (BC) is more than 10 times that of non-Indigenous children (Statistics Canada, 2023a). Unfortunately, Métis children in care are too often disconnected from their cultures, traditions, and communities (Carrière et al., 2021). As an extension of colonialism, the child welfare system has served to sever many of the connections that Métis families held most dearly: to culture, to land, to language, and to each other (Macdougall, 2017). Given that the mainstream child welfare system has long been criticized for perpetuating colonial policies and practices (Gerlach et al., 2017), there is a growing recognition of the need for a prevention-based child welfare system to better support First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children, youth, and families. Indeed, Indigenous leaders, scholars, and advocates have long called for the current crisis-driven system to shift to focus on the provision of prevention supports (Blackstock, 2009a; Tait et al., 2013; West Coast Leaf, 2019). Unfortunately, there is a paucity of research that seeks to understand the nature and function of prevention-based Indigenous child welfare systems broadly, and Métis child welfare specifically.

Métis traditional systems of knowledge and practice ensured that many generations of children were nurtured and protected through community-centred approaches to child-rearing (Dorion, 2010; Graham & Davoren, 2015; Hancock, 2017). Decolonizing child and family services for Métis children, youth, and families will involve an intentional process of remembering and re-centring traditional practices and laws. These teachings, which have helped

to support generations of thriving Métis children and youth, can help to strengthen and re-orient systems of “care” toward prevention.

Research Purpose

This research aims to explore the ways in which Métis culture, values, and strengths may contribute to a prevention-based Métis child welfare system. Through learning from the knowledge of Métis Elders in BC, and wise practices in decolonizing Métis child and family services, this research aims to respond to the following questions: (1) How does reconnecting Métis children, youth, and families with their culture and identity contribute to their wholistic wellbeing and safety? And (2) What wise practices exist within Métis child and family services that can be bolstered to support positive outcomes for Métis children, youth, and families? These questions were created in collaboration with Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services (LMO)—a Métis-specific Indigenous Child and Family (ICFS) Agency and partner in this research.

How this Dissertation is Organized

This dissertation aims to share the story of this research. The introduction (Chapter 1) shares background information about LMO, including the scope of services and supports that they offer, and the Michif Practice Model that grounds their practice. Chapter 2, the literature review, presents information that is helpful in contextualizing the importance of prevention-based supports for Métis children, youth, and families. The following chapter (Chapter 3) outlines the overall approach to this research, including a framework for conducting Métis research. Chapter 4, the methods section, outlines the process for how the research was conducted. The results of this research are shared across the following two chapters. Chapter 5 highlights Elders’ stories related to growing up Métis and raising Métis children, as well as the

values that form the foundation for strong Métis families. Findings related to wise practices and lessons learned in decolonizing Métis child welfare—rooted in the practice and perspectives of LMO Elders, staff, youth, and families—are shared in Chapter 6. The final chapter (Chapter 7) aims to bring together the expansive learnings and share the significance of lifting up Métis children, youth, and families through Métis-specific prevention-based supports.

Throughout some of the chapters in this dissertation, personal reflections and stories are included in italics; this formatting is done intentionally to denote a shift in voice. These segments touch on the formation of the research partnership (Chapters 1 and 7), and self-location (Chapters 2 and 3). The exception to the general use of third person voice is Chapter 4, where the research approach is described in first person to create more space for ongoing reflections related to the research methods.

A Note on Terminology and Names

Distinctions-based language is used whenever possible to recognize and reflect the different interests, rights, and priorities of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples—as well as their diverse cultures, languages, and governance structures of Nations that fall within these groupings of distinct peoples. Indeed, the categories of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples do not adequately reflect the immense diversity within each group. I also recognize that there are different ways of referring to Métis people—with some preferring Metis as an intentional way of being more inclusive of families who do not have French ancestry (Macdougall, 2017; Younging, 2018). I generally use the term Métis, as it is more commonly used within governing bodies and organizations, but I do not wish to privilege certain types of Métis ancestry. In an effort to recognize diversity, the term Métis peoples is used in some contexts. The use of the

plural is less common, and while I also aim to reflect diversity within and throughout Métis communities, I use the more common term Métis people.

Where possible, I refer to specific Nations and communities to more accurately describe where knowledge is situated. At times, I also use the collective term *Indigenous* when I feel it is appropriate or necessary to do so. For example, this may be done to refer to the broad experiences of Indigenous Peoples in Canada with regard to colonialism, including the child welfare system. In some circumstances, I also use the term *Aboriginal*, as the collective term for the First Peoples of Canada, as recognized in the *Constitution Act* (1982); this is primarily done when referring to programs, policies, or laws that use this term, or when quoting literature from different time periods. While umbrella terms can be helpful when collectively referring to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples—as is done, at times, within this dissertation—it is important to recognize that there are hundreds of diverse Nations across Canada. As such, Nation-specific language is used whenever possible (Younging, 2018).

Names. This dissertation includes the names of many people who were influential in supporting this research. Those who contributed directly to this research, including the many youth, staff, youth, and family members who participated, were asked if they wanted to be named in this research (either generally or in connection with their stories and knowledge). Each name included in this research has been done so with consent. Those who preferred to remain anonymous were assigned a pseudonym (denoted with an asterisk). Reflections on ownership over knowledge and related ethical considerations are included in Chapters 3 and 4.

Partnering with Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services

In the Fall of 2017, new to my analyst role at the office for the Representative for Children and Youth (RCY), I attended an informal circle of people working in Métis child

welfare spaces. It was a concurrent session offered during that year's Annual General Meeting for Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC). I sat down beside a Métis woman who later introduced herself as Colleen Lucier who was working at a Métis child and family agency called Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services. In our conversation, I had the pleasure of learning about the work LMO was doing to strengthen safety and wellbeing for Métis children, youth, and families. I also learned that after years of patiently waiting, LMO would finally be receiving their delegation to provide a full range of child safety services to Métis families in Kamloops and the surrounding areas.

Over the next year at the office of the RCY, I worked to advocate for a distinctions-based approach to understanding inequities in child welfare. Part of this movement involved dedicating time and resources toward understanding the specific issues that Métis children and youth face within the broader child welfare system. While conducting a descriptive analysis, we understood how important it was to craft a Métis-specific report collaboratively with the Métis-specific delegated agencies, the Métis Commission for Children and Families, and MNBC. LMO graciously invited my colleagues and I to visit them: we were invited into their space and offered a tour. During a later visit, we had extensive conversations around the importance of Métis-specific services, rooted in culture, as a way of strengthening the safety and wellbeing of children, youth, and families. We also had conversations about my passion for Métis research. In 2018, the leadership team planted a seed: when you decide to pursue your doctorate, let us know and we will create a research project together. Some three years later, I reached out to Colleen and her team, and we co-created a plan for harvesting and sharing the knowledge that is presented within this dissertation. I am grateful to everyone at LMO for their passion, their openness to working with me, and their generosity in sharing their practice with others.

About Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services

Located in Secwépemcul'ecw (Kamloops, BC), LMO is a Métis-specific ICFS Agency. Using a Métis-specific framework called the Michif Practice Model, LMO aims to deliver culturally safe services and support in order to strengthen outcomes for Métis children, youth, and families. With the vision that Métis children, youth, and families “live with love, honour, dignity, and respect knowing they belong to a strong, proud People with a unique heritage and cultural identity” (LMO, 2024a), LMO works alongside families in their healing while contributing to the wellness and safety of Métis children. LMO asserts that Métis people have the inherent right and responsibility to care for their own children, youth, and families. As a Métis child and family services agency, LMO aims to uphold these rights and responsibilities by working collectively to strengthen and advocate for safety and wholistic wellness for Métis children, youth, and families. Their work is rooted in compassion, love, and respect. With services that align with Métis culture, values, and traditions, LMO aspires to nurture each child’s sense of belonging with culture, family, and community.

A Brief History of LMO. In 1998, a group of Métis community members in Kamloops came together to respond to a need for increased culturally safe services for Métis children and families within the child welfare system. To address this gap in services, they created a unique Métis child and family services agency. Under the former name of Interior Métis Child and Family Services, the agency was incorporated in 1999 (LMO, 2023). At this time, the agency offered a variety of Métis supports, including early years, family supports, and cultural programming for Métis children and youth in care. The original offices were located at the Cottonwood Centre in Kamloops—a space complete with offices and a gathering space. While the offices met the operational purposes for the agency, staff noted that the space was not

reflective of Métis culture (LMO, 2023). In 2011, Colleen Lucier joined the agency as the new Executive Director, and she carried forward the original vision for Métis people and community to reclaim the responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of Métis children, youth, and families. In 2012, the agency received its current name under the guidance of Elder Dave Barron. The name was gifted to the agency to reflect the importance of honouring Métis self-determination and the ability to create services by-and-for Métis people (LMO, 2023). Elder Dave Barron has been described as one of the most significant contributors to the vision and development of LMO. In 2012, LMO moved to a new space on Tranquille Road; this new location provided space and security required for a delegated agency (LMO, 2023). At this time, LMO was actively pursuing delegation and requested co-location with the Aboriginal Team at the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) to temporarily lead practice, and potentially offer secondments to support transition once LMO received delegation. Unfortunately, following this move, MCFD put a hold on all delegation planning for all Indigenous agencies. This lack of support under the Liberal Government significantly impacted LMO's ability to practice in a Métis way (LMO, 2023).

In 2017, LMO finally received child protection delegation (C6) from the Province of BC as a Métis child and family services agency. The choice to pursue and receive C6 delegation was the result of the collective work towards a vision of prevention-based Métis child and family services (C. Lucier, personal communication, August 3, 2023). In order to make the impact and transformation to the child welfare, and to wholistically serve Métis children and families, LMO intentionally chose to offer the full range of prevention and intervention services in order to have a wide range of opportunities to support children and families. In the time since receiving delegation, LMO has significantly grown their services and supports; this has included

expanding their teams and offering new programs and services (LMO, 2023). Each team, along with the services and supports that they offer, are described in the next section.

Services and Supports. LMO is unique as one of two Métis-specific ICFS Agencies in BC. Further, they are one of the few agencies that offer an entire circle of services and supports for children, youth, and families to wholistically meet their diverse needs. Some of these services and supports are described below. These descriptions are summarized from LMO's seasonal program brochures (see: LMO, 2024b).

Michif Elder's Council. Métis Elders are the teachers and the guides who oversee the transformation of Métis child welfare at LMO. The Michif Elders Council consists of a team of Métis Elders in Kamloops and the surrounding areas, who support the design and delivery of services in manner consistent with Métis culture, values, and ways of being. Specifically, the Elders are asked to be involved with mentorship of staff and community caregivers, as well as ensure that the services provided to Métis children, youth, and families are consistent with Métis culture, values, and traditional ways of being (LMO, 2021). The Elders are also asked to offer recommendations on child safety cases when guidance and support is required. They provide support and conflict resolution to families, in a manner that is consistent with traditional Métis practices (LMO, 2021). They are cultural advisors and share knowledge and teachings within services and programs at LMO. Elders may attend family meetings and reviews, where they provide guidance and support to the planning process. Elders are scheduled as the "Elder in Residence" at LMO, where they perform a number of support roles to uplift the safety and wellbeing of children, youth, families, and staff (LMO, 2021). Elders can also be found sharing a cup of coffee with families, while visiting in the lobby (Figure 1). Some Elders also live and

work at Kikékyelc: A Place of Belonging. Elders are celebrated and invited to gather during the monthly Elders' Luncheons hosted by LMO; all Elders are welcome (LMO, 2024b).



Figure 1. Images from LMO's lobby.

Michif Early Childhood Development Services. To support Métis children in their early years, LMO offers Michif Early Childhood Development (ECD) Services, including Indigenous Supported Child Development and Indigenous Infant Development. A Home Visiting Team offers one-to-one support to Métis families in Kamloops and Merritt, BC. The Home Visiting team uses culturally sensitive screening tools for child development to co-create child development plans with families. The team can make referrals to specialists, including occupational therapy, speech therapy, school transition planning, physiotherapy, mental health supports, and pediatricians (LMO, n.d.).

The team also offers a variety parenting supports and family gatherings. Alongside Michif Elders, the team hosts Lii Petit Waposowak Early Years, a drop-in program for Métis, First Nations, and Inuit children, aged 0 through 5 with their caregivers. Lii Vii Maykiw (Giver of Life) is a perinatal and mom support group that offers bi-weekly classes on infant massage, Biibii basics, and pre- and post-natal support. As well, Biibii Time is a bi-weekly program for expectant mothers and babies who are not yet walking; the program explores the Michif ways of parenting babies (LMO, 2024b).

Children of different age groups are also offered a number of different programs and activities. For example, Pchi Aen Noor (Little Bear) is a Michif cultural connections program, offering land- and community-based activities for children aged five and six. As well, Shoohkaychiwun Koorboo (Rip Roaring Ravens) is an afterschool program for children aged 7 through 11. Specific to the summer holidays, LMO offers summer camps. For youth aged 13 through 16, the Buffalo Youth Group offers weekly land- and community-based activities. Programming for children and younger youth (up to age 16) also varies by season, and can include: Michif children's jigging, ribbon skirt and vest making, and Michif art and music therapy (LMO, 2024b).

Michif Child and Youth Mental Health (CYMH) and Family Wellness Supports.

Staffed by counsellors and wellness clinicians, these supports aim to support the wholistic wellness for children and youth through life promotion. Counselling supports are offered in-house to address a variety of mental health concerns, addiction, trauma, crises, and behavioural concerns. These supports—which include ceremony, language, medicine harvesting, and healing circles—are delivered in a way that aims to build Métis cultural connectedness. Like other areas of LMO, the CYMH and Family Wellness spaces aim to reflect Métis culture (Figure 2). Elders

are often included in these supports. The Michif CYMH and Family Wellness Team also offers a number of western counselling modalities, including somatic and cognitive therapy modalities, play and art therapy, and narrative counselling (LMO, n.d.).



Figure 2. One of the rooms reserved for children and families accessing CYMH supports.

Michif Prevention Services. LMO offers the Michif Prevention Services program (previously called Michif Family Support Services). Prevention-based supports assist parents and families to achieve goals around supporting the safety and wellbeing of their children and youth. Michif Prevention Services Social Workers and Support Workers aim to promote and honour traditional Michif values to support strength and resiliency among families. Specific programs offered include: the Gathering Our Medicines Program and Michif Food Fundamentals. Weekly groups include the Pchi Aen Brayroo (Little Badger) Group, the Michif Fathers' Group, and the Michif Moms' Group. Additional events can include monthly Michif family dinners, family drum making, and on the land activities (LMO, 2024b).

LMO also offers several programs, events, and celebrations that are open to the Métis community. Weekly community cultural programs include the Flower Beadwork Circle, Michif language classes, and an adult jigging group. LMO hosts honouring ceremonies, including annual Métis Mothers' Traditional Shawl Ceremonies, Father's Day Honourings, honouring ceremonies for new babies in the Métis community, and graduation honouring ceremonies. LMO also offers several annual events including the Louis Riel Day Dinner and Dance, the Christmas Brunch, and the Back-to-School Barbeque and Voyageur Games Day (LMO, 2024b). Additionally, LMO participates in the annual Indigenous Peoples' Day celebrations, and Pride celebrations in Kamloops.

Indigenous Youth Support Services. Working with Indigenous youth, ages 16 to 27, the Youth Support Services team offers a variety of culturally safe skills-based activities (LMO, 2023). Previously, supports for youth were offered through the Youth Centre, but services are now delivered at Kikékyelc: A Place of Belonging. Built in 2020, Kikékyelc is a 31-unit supportive housing development for Indigenous youth who are transitioning to adulthood. Elders live on-site at Kikékyelc and provide support to the youth residents, alongside youth social workers, life skills workers, and program coordinators (LMO, 2023). Operated by LMO, Kikékyelc is home to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth (Community Living BC, n.d.). Figure 3 includes some photos from Kikékyelc, including the exterior and the gathering space—called the c7ístkten̓ or kekuli.¹

¹ The gathering space at Kikékyelc was designed to reflect Secwépemc winter homes. In reflection of this design, the gathering space is referred to as the kekuli (Chinook Jargon) as well as the c7ístkten̓ (Secwepemctsin).



Figure 3. Exterior and interior images of Kikékyelc.

Recent youth programming has included the Ootway Waanishin “Get Lost” Outdoor Adventure Drop-in Program, and the Riding the Rapids to Wellness Program. As well, LMO recently launched Michif Works, an employment readiness program three days weekly for eight weeks. As well, several cultural classes are offered, including jigging classes, drum making and drumming groups, beading classes, fiddle lessons, ribbon skirt and shirt making, and Cree language classes. In the summer, the Youth Services team offers Mino-Pimatisiwan (The Good Life) Program: a weekly land-based wellness program, that shares teachings about food and medicines with the youth. Other classes include a monthly workshop that aims to teach youth how to repair and renew their clothing, and a bi-weekly creative arts group that offers youth-driven activities including yoga and creative writing (LMO, 2024b).

In addition to regular programming, youth are invited on various day trips; for instance, in the summer, the Youth Services Team scheduled day trips to the Cultus Lake Water Slides, and the Cultus Lake Water Adventure Park. Each summer, youth are also invited to travel to Back to Batoche Days; this week-long trip includes a visit to Metis Crossing in Alberta and ends in Batoche for the festival (LMO, 2024b).

Child Safety Team. The Child Safety Team is responsible for assessing child safety and creating immediate and long-term safety plans in collaboration with families and their support networks. The Child Safety Team aims to ensure that children and youth are wholistically supported through natural and culturally safe connections. Their roles include performing intake duties, conducting child safety assessments, and creating collaborative safety plans. The Child Safety team is aptly named as a way of shifting language; LMO recognizes that term child protection is rooted in an individualistic, blaming stance, and chooses instead to recognize the collective and collaborative work in keeping children safe (LMO, n.d.).

Kinship Care Support Team. In collaboration with Child Safety Workers, Kinship Care Support Workers support children and youth who are placed with a relative. Kinship Care Placements are supported emotionally, financially, and culturally by LMO. For example, each family is offered a cultural resource package to share with the child, and the Kinship Care Support Workers work to engage the child in ongoing cultural events (LMO, n.d.).

Métis Community Caregivers Program. The Métis Community Caregivers program aims to find safe and caring homes that wholistically support and nurture each child, promoting their sense of belonging and healthy development. Métis Elders provide home support to community caregivers, as well as opportunities for education related to Métis culture and identity. The Michif Cultural Services Program also provides children and youth with opportunities to connect

to community and culture. This program is aimed toward children and youth who are living in placements outside of their natural parents' home (LMO, n.d.).

Signs of Safety. LMO has adopted the Signs of Safety approach, as the foundation for their Michif Practice Model. The Signs of Safety approach works with each family to work through the child protection concerns in a collaborative and participatory way, looking at worries as well as strengths, and then moving toward safety planning to achieve the safety goals identified by the social worker (Elia International, 2024a). Offering an evidence-based, relational approach to child welfare supports, Signs of Safety has been adopted by child and family agencies internationally (Elia International, 2024a). Research findings from agencies in Alberta have shown that Signs of Safety has contributed to increased satisfaction among staff and families, increased skills among frontline workers, and decreased rates of child apprehension (Government of Alberta, 2023a). In their synthesis of evaluation findings regarding the use of Signs of Safety, Caffrey and colleagues (2021) stress the importance of considering contextual factors for implementing Signs of Safety, noting that the use of the approach alone does not guarantee positive outcomes (Caffrey et al., 2021). For example, they speak about the importance of having quality assurance measures, and appropriate organizational support to facilitate good practice (e.g., leadership, staff autonomy, smaller caseloads; Caffrey et al., 2021).

While Signs of Safety has been implemented across diverse settings, including several ICFS Agencies,² others have offered critiques of the approach. Some researchers have articulated concerns around fidelity (Baginsky et al., 2017; Caffrey & Browne, 2023). Consistent implementation of Signs of Safety requires entire teams to fully embrace the approach, with supportive leadership and effective training (Baginsky et al., 2017). Additionally, given that

² Some examples in BC include Ktunaxa Kinbasket Child and Family Services (Brown et al., 2020) and Secwépemc Child and Family Services (2024).

Signs of Safety is known as a “process rather than a content model” (Munro et al., 2020, p. 63), resources may be required to develop appropriate tools for implementing Signs of Safety. These concerns highlight a need for organizational buy-in and ongoing support, and investment in adapting Signs of Safety to work in different settings.

Others suggest that Signs of Safety does not appropriately consider multiple dimensions of risk, particularly within the context of “chaotic” families (White et al., 2022, p. 291). Though the authors do not speak to structural issues specifically, their critiques highlight the pervasive ways in which colonialism has shaped the child welfare system, including risk assessment and making decision-making methods used throughout mainstream child welfare practice. While Signs of Safety is widely accepted as a solutions-focused approach that looks at safety as a balance of strengths and concerns (rather than measures of risk in isolation), the approach appears limited to individual- and familial-level factors. In this sense, Signs of Safety may not fully consider structural determinants—that is, the systems that shape the personal and social issues that are the focus within Signs of Safety. While these challenges are not addressed directly, Richardson (2006) incorporates the solutions-focused approach of Signs of Safety, within a structural framework for child protection practice with Indigenous children and families. With recognition of the ways in which dominant practice models perpetuate violence through individualizing risk (i.e., victim blaming), Richardson and Wade (2010) developed the Islands of Safety. The Islands of Safety both contextualizes child protection work within the context of colonialism, oppression, and racism, and offers a structure for anti-colonial and anti-oppressive practice (Richardson & Wade, 2010). Importantly, the Islands of Safety approach is also rooted within a wholistic understanding of safety, which includes the physical, cultural, spiritual, intellectual, sexual, and emotional elements of safety (Richardson & Wade, 2010). Richardson

and Wade (2010) also challenge the child welfare system's narrow understanding of child safety; in response, the authors present a feminist and human rights oriented view of safety that looks vulnerability from a systemic lens. For example, responses to family violence may be limited by overarching issues including poverty and housing (Richardson & Wade, 2010).

While there may be opportunities to incorporate discussions around such systemic issues in the Signs of Safety approach, there is little research that specifically examines the ways in which the approach is responsive to the structures that specifically impact Indigenous children and families. A notable exception, a thesis authored by Heidi Hebditch (2015) examines Signs of Safety within the context of Indigenous child welfare. Of note, Hebditch (2015), speaks about her personal interactions within many First Nations communities, recalling that community leaders and frontline workers had positive feedback for Signs of Safety, including its alignment with traditional approaches to problem solving and conflict resolution (p. 45).

Generally speaking, while Signs of Safety is oft described as relational and strengths-based approach, it is not generally described as anti-colonial.³ Due to its international scope, it is also likely that the Signs of Safety approach is not intended to be culturally-responsive. There may, however, be opportunities to address many of these noted limitations through the meaningful and culturally responsive adaptation of Signs of Safety within Indigenous communities. There are examples of successful Indigenous Nation-specific adaptations of Signs of Safety, including the ways in which the Māori people have created culturally responsive assessments, rooted in Māori language and culture (Mann-Johnson, 2016). The Michif Practice Model at LMO represents a Métis-specific adaptation of Signs of Safety.

³ It is worth noting that while Signs of Safety has been taken up by a number of ICFS Agencies, as well as Indigenous communities internationally, it was not developed as an Indigenous approach to helping. In fact, many of the organizations that have implemented the approach are located in Western Europe (Elia International, 2024b).

Michif Practice Model. LMO has been working with specialists in Signs of Safety for more than a decade to facilitate the adaptation and implementation of Signs of Safety in a culturally safe and responsive manner for supporting Métis children, youth, and families. This collaborative work has led to the creation of the Michif Practice Model (Figure 4).⁴

The Michif Practice Model centres the importance of providing services in a culturally safe environment. The Model promotes the full adoption of culture to ensure that Michif culture is fully reflected across all services at LMO. LMO staff collectively aim to ensure that each person feels welcome, safe, and comfortable while at LMO. This feeling should begin as soon as a family enters LMO, and it is fostered during the first meeting—the Piihitikway, where families are welcomed by LMO staff and Elders. Staff also practice from a trauma-informed perspective that specifically considers the ways in which Métis children, youth, and families have been impacted by colonial violence and intergenerational trauma.

As an important element of safety and wellness, Métis culture is embedded into each step of the Michif Practice Model; staff work with families to create a shared understanding of Métis history, as well as traditional practices related to parenting and family roles. The understanding of traditional knowledge and family roles is extended to the recognition of kinship supports. In some cases, these teachings are formalized through kinship placements to support Métis children and youth who are not able to live with immediate parents. Michif culture is also upheld through the involvement of Elders across all elements of Michif Practice (LMO, n.d.). Staff and Elders strive to honour youth and families throughout their time together.

⁴ The Michif Practice Model has been reproduced with permission from LMO. The header and footer of the Michif Practice Model have been formatted to fit in this dissertation.



Figure 4. 10 Steps of Accountability to the LMO Michif Practice Model (Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services ©)

Screening and Assessments. In the initial intake screening, staff are asked to document what the worries are (i.e., past harms, current/future concerns), as well as what is going well (i.e., existing strengths), and what needs to happen (i.e., next steps). Based on the information collected, staff make a balanced analysis using an immediate safety scale, with documented rationale. They also use a scale to contextualize the risk. Using the same scales, a member of the Michif Elders Council and the Team Leader are asked to make their own assessments based on the information collected. Together, the team works through an Intake Screening Map to determine next steps, which can include further assessment, referral to voluntary Métis services (e.g., Michif Prevention Services, ECD, Michif CYMH and Family Wellness; LMO, n.d.).

Following intake, Michif Family/Youth assessments are completed collaboratively with the family or youth receiving services. The assessments bring together worries, strengths, and goals (Appendix A). Strengths include existing actions being taken to address concerns, while worries may include details of harm. The assessments also incorporate forward-looking goals, including small steps in working towards safety, wellbeing, and success. These goals are rooted in the voices of youth and families. As an important part of the planning process, each family or youth is asked to identify people as part of their Wahkotowin—their Métis kinship networks. LMO uses traditional teachings of Wahkotowin to identify the natural supports and community supports that lift the person or family up and help them to work towards their goals. As part of the final assessment, staff are guided to centre the importance of connection to values and culture of Métis people (LMO, n.d.).

Meetings and Visits. A Piihitikway is hosted around the time that a family or youth is first introduced to LMO. The Piihitikway marks the beginning of new relationships, as staff and Elders share their roles and responsibilities. This foundational meeting intends create space for

relationship building throughout the course of each family's journey with LMO. The Michif Team shares aspects of Métis traditional approaches to parenting and caring for children and youth, along with the ways in which colonialism has disrupted Métis families. Each Piihitikway includes Elders (e.g., the Elder in Residence or a member of the Michif Elder's Council), with opportunity for sharing teachings and experiences that may resonate with the family. The Michif team also offers prayer, land acknowledgement, and introductions in Michif as additional ways of creating a respectful and kind Michif-focused environment. As part of the Piihitikway, a basket of cultural resources, language and prayer booklets, and a cultural gift are shared with the youth or family (LMO, n.d.).

The values and cultural practices involved in the Piihitikway are carried forward throughout all follow-up Michif Family/Youth Planning Meetings. In developing the Family/Youth Plan, the youth, family, and all identified supports (collectively referred to as the "Care Team") are invited to collectively shape the plan. The Piihitikway is also an opportunity to share stories of the struggles and resilience of Métis people, while incorporating Michif language and cultural elements. For younger children, the Michif Team completes a "Words and Pictures" process that aims to share an age-appropriate story with the child to help them understand any worries the Elders and social workers may have, as well as their connection to family, culture, and community (Appendix A).

In the planning process, the Care Team is also asked to identify a "Keeper of the Family/Youth Plan" who is responsible for holding all parties accountable upholding their roles and responsibilities within the plan. The Keeper is gifted a sacred object, which is brought to all future meetings as a symbol of relational accountability and the tangible commitments outlined in the Michif Family/Youth Plan. They are also a key contact person who LMO staff may

contact as needed (e.g., if challenges arise). Regular review meetings are held to discuss progress toward the plan, with opportunity to revisit and revise the plan when needed. Eventually, when all goals are met, a closing meeting is held; this is viewed as an opportunity honour the youth, the family, and the whole support network. Formally, LMO staff honour the closure of a file with a formal dinner or gathering. The Honouring Celebrations are unique to each individual and family, with gifts, teachings, and stories from Elders. If a voluntary support services file is closed as a result of a lack of engagement, the Michif Team offers the family a hand-written letter on a Métis art card, with a small gift and an invitation to re-engage at any point (LMO, n.d.).

Honouring Children, Youth, and Families. With a focus on relationship building, the Michif Team integrates unique ways of honouring children, youth, and families, as well as acknowledging accomplishments, and involving Elders throughout support services. LMO staff strive to practice in a culturally safe, trauma-informed, non-judgmental, relational way—reflective of Michif values of kindness, humility, generosity, and compassion (LMO, 2024a). Each year, LMO offers a number of Michif Cultural Celebrations, which are offered to further strengthen children, youth, and families' belonging and cultural identity. Celebrations and events include a Michif Family Day Kitchen Party, Lii Biibii Welcoming Celebration, Women's Traditional Shawl Ceremony, Michif Graduation Celebration, Men's Traditional Sash Ceremony, Youth Cultural Excursion to Back to Batoche Days, the Back-to-School Barbeque, Honouring Kinship and Community Caregiver Celebration, Indigenous Youth Thanksgiving Dinner, Louis Riel Dinner and Celebration, and Christmas events (LMO, 2024b).

A Focus on Wise Practices

As a whole, this research intentionally focuses on wise practices, rather than competing terms such as best or promising practices. Largely rooted within western worldviews, best practices are lessons learned from one particular group, which are shared and passed on to other groups through documented success stories and replicated practices (Clark, 2016; Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010). The underlying notion of this concept implies that experiences from one community (Indigenous or non-Indigenous) can be shared and applied to all other Nations in similar circumstances. Best practice models advocate for a one-size-fits-all approach, assuming that a method that works well in one community or one situation can be adequately applied to other communities regardless of their culture and knowledge systems. Best practices are generally taught throughout social work education, which may not prepare new social workers to practice in a way that is responsive to families' cultures and values (Barker, 2020). Alternatively, wise practices are built through Nation-specific Indigenous ways of knowing and being, which have been tested, developed, collectively accumulated, and transmitted across generations. While best practices primarily live and function within a Eurocentric perspective of uniformity, wise practices are community-specific, based on experiential knowledge and Indigenous Knowledges (Clark, 2016; Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010).

This research aims to highlight wise practices in decolonizing Métis child welfare through sharing: considerations from the literature; highlights from an environmental scan of child welfare legislation, policy, and practice; teachings from Métis Elders on supporting children and families; and perspectives from staff, families, Elders, and youth at LMO on the strengths, challenges, and lessons learned within a Métis-specific ICFS Agency.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review touches on a number of topics related to Métis children, youth, and families, including Métis teachings on child-rearing. Before speaking about teachings, this literature addresses different perspectives on Métis identity, including Métis presence in BC. This chapter then examines the ways in which colonialism has continually impacted Métis families, while also shaping the mainstream child welfare system. The literature review also focuses on child welfare legislation as it relates to Métis children, youth, and families, for each province and territory across the Métis homeland. This section highlights the scope of practice in Métis-specific child and family service agencies. In closing, the literature review highlights opportunities for transforming Métis child welfare, while also speaking to contemporary challenges related to child welfare jurisdiction.

Discourses on Métis Identity

Recognized as Aboriginal People under the *Constitution Act* (1982), Métis people are the descendants of early relationships between First Nations women and European settlers (Chartrand, 2007). The origin of the Métis involved a process of identity emergence throughout the 18th and 19th centuries (Macdougall, 2010, 2012; Raven, 2018; St-Onge & Podruchny, 2012). During this time, Métis people collectively developed distinct languages, cultures, of ways of life (Macdougall, 2017). Beyond a complex process of ethnogenesis, culture and kinship ties have shaped Métis families and communities, whose ways of knowing and being have been strengthened and passed on through intergenerational knowledge transmission (Leclair, 2002; Macdougall, 2017). Métis people have maintained distinct languages, cultures, and kinship relations (Logan, 2015). Métis scholar Rob Hancock (2017) explains the importance of kinship, stating, “to be Métis is to know who our relatives are, and to be known by them too” (p. 27).

Métis people are also known for their love of storytelling, music and dance, beadwork and other artforms, and humour (Oster & Lizee, 2021).

Defining Métis

Terms used to refer to Métis people have largely varied over time and by place. Historical documents and Elders' accounts alike illustrate that Métis is a relatively new term, adding a new layer to the many other ways that the Métis have referred to themselves, including but not limited to: Âpihtawikosisân (half-breed), Otipemisiwak (the People who own themselves), and Bois Brules (burnt wood) (Ell & Coyes, 2023; Oster & Lizee, 2021; Teillet, 2019). Cree author Joseph Dion (1979) describes some of the terms used to refer to Métis people in his book, *My*

Tribe the Crees:

There are in western Canada many thousands of people of mixed blood, white and red, who have been placed under various categories such as Metis, Half-breeds, enfranchised and ex-treaties.... We have adopted the name Metis, a term derived from the French, which comes nearest to designating those people of mixed Indian and white parentage. No one likes to be called a half-breed or a breed, because it doesn't sound very nice, and it is too closely related to the European slang 'half-caste'. (p. 185)

It was not until 1986 that the term Métis was used as an identifier on the Canadian census form—shortly after the Métis received constitutional recognition (Andersen, 2016). The introduction of the term Métis, which has been used to represent diverse communities, was controversial at the time (Macdougall, 2017); in many regards, it still elicits mixed reviews with many reclaiming other terms to describe themselves, like Michif.

There is a complex and ever-evolving rhetoric around the boundaries and limitations of Métis identity, and competing definitions of Métis identity are in existence today. Legally, Métis people have looked to Eurocentric legal decisions in operationalizing boundaries around Métis identity. Métis people are commonly recognized as those who self-identify as Métis, are distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples, come from historic Métis Nation ancestry, and are accepted by a modern Métis community

(Métis National Council, 2001).⁵ These criteria—which are commonly referred to as the Powley Test—have been adopted and used to determine Métis citizenship, through the utilization of centralized registry processes housed within each of the provincial constituents of the Métis Nation. This definition has been criticized by some for its restrictive geographic boundaries, as what constitutes a historic Métis community remains a controversial topic (Standing Senate Committee of Aboriginal Peoples [SSCAP], 2013). By extension, there are disagreements about who is Métis and what constitutes a historic Métis community.

Several Métis scholars, including Andersen (2014), Gaudry (2018), and Teillet (2019) look more specifically at the emergence of the Métis as a collective and political consciousness, which they purport to be the driving factors of Nationhood. Some strongly assert that the emergence of the Métis is tied to one particular place—the Red River Settlement (Andersen, 2014, 2016). Others assert that Métis people may have ties to other communities and have specifically critiqued the narrow view of Red River Métis as the only Métis (Barman & Evans, 2009; Macdougall, 2010; Raven, 2018; Richardson, 2016a). Specifically, St-Onge and Podruchny (2012) argue that colonial court rulings like the Powley Decision (*R. v. Powley*, 2003), with its focus on geographic fixedness, discount the historical and lived realities of Métis people who participated in the fur trade.

In some spaces, multiple definitions of Métis exist. In Alberta, citizens of the Métis Nation of Alberta (2023) are recognized as those who meet the criteria established within the national definition. Living within the only Métis land-based communities in Canada, members of the Metis Settlements include people of Indigenous ancestry who identify with Métis culture and history (Government of Alberta, 2023b). On a national scale, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (2023)—which seeks to

⁵ The Powley Decision was delivered on September 19, 2003, by the Supreme Court of Canada, following charges placed on a Métis father and son who were hunting for food in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario (*R. v. Powley*, 2003).

represent Métis people along with First Nations people living off reserve and Inuit living in the south—also uses broad definitions rooted in mixed Indigenous ancestry. Throughout and beyond his leadership role with the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, Harry Daniels advocated for an inclusive understanding of Métis Nationhood that embraces people from across Canada who self-identify as Métis (SSCAP, 2013). His son, Gabriel Daniels, has continued to advocate on behalf of Métis and non-Status First Nations people in honour of his late father’s vision and legacy. The historic Daniels Decision in 2016, which ruled that Métis and non-status Indians are Indians under the *Constitution Act* (1867), found that there is no need to place a legal definition for the word Métis (*Daniels v. Canada*, 2016). This decision aligns with the broadest understandings of Métis people, as those of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry.

Distinctiveness and Diversity. Métis people are seen as being distinct from other Indigenous Peoples and maintain past and present connections to Métis communities (Graham & Davoren, 2015). Despite this distinctiveness, Métis populations have also been described as a heterogeneous group, with different family histories, kinship networks, and cultural ties (Hodgson-Smith & Kermoal, 2016). In speaking to this diversity, Leclair (2002) notes, “our cultural and linguistic differences divide us as surely as geographic distance” (p. 163). Similarly, St-Onge and Podruchny (2012) emphasize complex factors, including the mobility of Métis people, which further complicate the practice of fixing identity to particular places. As a result of this mobility, and the complex nature of ethnogenesis, some Métis scholars suggest that there are distinct Métis communities with diverse geographic ties (Leclair, 2002; Sloan, 2016).

Within the Northwest specifically, Métis people were highly mobile, travelling across large geographic areas for hunting, and with the fur trade (Bridgeman & Shepherd, 2019; St-Onge & Podruchny, 2012). Through this travel, the Métis formed extensive kinship networks that spanned vast areas; thus, “rather than being tied to particular communities that sprung up

among the fur trade routes, they were instead tied to communities of kin and attracted to the economic and social opportunities that these geographic points offered” (St-Onge & Podruchny, 2012, p. 64). St-Onge and Podruchny (2012) describe a fluid process of Métis ethnogenesis, focusing heavily on their involvement in the fur trade across the Northwest. Their understandings of Métis identity are broad; they recognize that Métis people may come from Indigenous and European nations including French, British, Scottish, Cree, Anishinaabe, Oji-Cree, Assiniboine, Iroquois, and Dene (St-Onge & Podruchny, 2012). Others, including Métis artist Sherry Farrell Racette, note that such diversity in Métis communities is not widely recognized (Ell & Coyes, 2023). The recognition of diverse roots, along with the mobility of the Métis, may serve as a foundation for a more inclusive understanding of Métis community and identity.

Métis Presence in BC

Today, BC is home to a substantial population of self-identified Métis people, numbering 97,865 according to the most recent census data (Statistics Canada, 2023b).⁶ Métis people living in BC include those with extensive kinship networks expanding into the prairie provinces and those who assert local roots, with relationships and kinship ties to First Nations communities, before the Province of BC existed. Using beadwork and quillwork, Bridgeman and Shepherd (2019) illustrate the expansive mobility patterns of the Métis in the Pacific Northwest during the 19th century.

Through their distinct but inter-related programs of research, historian Jean Barman (1999, 2014, 2020) and Sylvia Van Kirk (1980, 2002) have examined the stories of both Métis

⁶ Statistics Canada (2023b) also includes measures of multiple Indigenous identities, which can include some combination of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit ancestry; these numbers are relatively small (n=10,535 or 3.6% of the total Indigenous population in BC). Given that these data are not disaggregated, they are not included in the total population count of self-identified Métis people.

and mixed ancestry families across fur trading posts in the Pacific Northwest. In doing so, their work highlights the complicated and often contentious dynamics around understanding Métis ethnogenesis. Others seem to reject the distinction between mixed ancestry and Métis Pacific Northwest. For example, in their extensive consultations with Métis community members, leaders, and academics, the SSCAP (2013) reported that the Métis of the Pacific Northwest were “culturally similar to Métis elsewhere” (p. 22). The report also speaks to diversity in terms of language, noting that Métis in BC primarily spoke Chinook Jargon, rather than Cree, Michif, or Bungi (SSCAP, 2013).

Métis mobility resulted in considerable movement along the fur trade routes, as people moved west, seeking resources for hunting and the fur trade (St-Onge & Podruchny, 2012). Migrations were seasonal in some families, while others permanently moved further into the West. Similarly, Macdougall (2017) notes that, “Metis communities located along old fur trade networks were connected to one another, and to other communities, because of extensive kinship networks that nurtured and sustained political and economic alliances” (p. 5). Similarly, Sloan (2017a) describes that Métis people in BC historically worked in many roles, including as explorers, fur traders, farmers, fishers, trappers, and fallers. Métis people also married into First Nations families across BC.⁷ Through her doctoral research, Sloan (2017a) found that several Métis people carry the stories of their families who travelled, lived, worked, hunted, and gathered along fur trade routes and posts in southern BC. Specifically, Sloan’s (2016) research shares stories related to kinship relationships between the Okanagan, Secwépemc, and Métis people, dating back to the mid-19th century. While discussing kinship and social connections—

⁷ Bridgeman and Shepherd (2019) note that the fluid relationships established with First Nations people in BC resulted in the Métis people being disregarded, viewed as being fully integrated within their kin networks, rather than understood as a distinct people with a unique culture.

which she views as a vast network spanning beyond the recognized Métis homelands—Sloan (2016) clarifies that her aim is to describe the places that Métis and mixed ancestry people lived, without asserting rights and title to First Nations lands. It is also important to note that the Province of BC has maintained the stance that there are no historic Métis communities in present-day BC that meet the criteria laid out in the Powley Test (Sloan, 2016). These rulings shed light on the complexity of defining Métis identity within the historic context of BC.

Self-in-Relation. *It feels appropriate to position myself within the context of discussing identity. My name is Monique Auger. I live on the Songhees reserve within unceded lək'wəŋən territory. I have mixed heritage, with French, English, Nisga'a, and Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) ancestral roots. My family has lived on Vancouver Island for six generations as uninvited visitors on the unceded lands of the lək'wəŋən and T'Sou-ke Peoples.*

My family's history is interwoven with the fur trade. My ancestors, Jean Baptiste Jolibois (French and Haudenosaunee) and Tse-ka-ost (Nisga'a), were first married à la façon du pays (in the manner of the country). They came to Victoria as a result of the recruitment efforts of then-Governor James Douglas, who selected a small group of men of mixed ancestry to serve as the first police force in BC—the Victoria Voltigeurs. The Voltigeurs largely identified as French-Canadian half-breeds with Iroquois blood (McKelvie & Ireland, 1956).⁸ To Douglas, they were “half-whites” (Goulet & Goulet, 2008, p. 96; McKelvie & Ireland, 1956, p. 228). My ancestors were among the families that lived in a settlement around the Colquitz River (McKelvie & Ireland, 1956). They moved to a small farming community of mixed-ancestry families in Sooke, and later returned to the city (Peers, 1999). My family has remained on the

⁸ The Victoria Voltigeurs have since been identified as Métis (Barkwell, 2008; Goulet, 2008; MNBC, 2020), metis (Minaker, 1996), mixed-blood French Canadians (Lovatt, 1980), Métis of Iroquois and French descent (Goulet & Goulet, 2008; MNBC, n.d.), French Canadian and Métis (Gough, 1984; Métis Provincial Council of British Columbia, 2021), and French Canadian half-breeds (Loo, 1995).

lands of the ləkʷəŋən people since this time. We are part of a vibrant urban Indigenous population, living as guests on ləkʷəŋən territory, and the local Métis community (the Métis Nation of Greater Victoria). I am grateful that the ləkʷəŋən, WSÁNEĆ, and T'Sou-ke peoples have been good hosts to diverse and uninvited visitors for centuries—including me, my family, and my ancestors. I continue to strive to be a good guest, with respect for the inherit rights- and title-holders of these lands.

Métis Presence in Kamloops. The Secwépemc people have lived within Secwepemcúlecw since time immemorial. Specifically, Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc have long stewarded the lands on which Kamloops exists today. In contrast, the history of Métis people in Kamloops is relatively recent. Expedition records note that Métis people have travelled through and lived within unceded First Nations' territories—on the land later claimed by colonial settlers to be the Province of BC—for over 200 years. In 1793, Sir Alexander Mackenzie's expedition group encountered Métis while travelling through the Rockies. During David Thompson's Expedition around 1800, Thompson also came across Métis people. He found 20 Métis families in the Flathead Valley, in the Kootenays (Goulet & Goulet, 2008). In 1816, Anthropologist James Alexander Teit met a group of Iroquois during one of his expeditions in BC, who the Shuswap people knew as "Le matcif or Le matcip ('half-breed;,' from the French métis, pronounced by the French often 'metci'f'" (Teit, 1909, p. 452). They lived in Tête Jaune Cache, spoke French and Cree, and created flower beadwork trade goods (Teit, 1909). Tête Jaune himself—formally known as Pierre Hasting—was a trader and explorer of mixed Iroquois and French ancestry, who was employed by the North West Company and later by the Hudson's Bay Company. He led a group of traders through a pass in the Rocky Mountains, now known as the Yellowhead Pass (Smyth, 1984).

Historical Métis presence and people in Kamloops. In 1811, the fur trader David Stuart of Pacific Fur Company and a small group travelled along trails that were established thousands of years ago by the Shuswap and Okanagan peoples (Westbank Museum, n.d.). They made their way to the Thompson River and set up a winter location called Fort Shewaps (Goulet & Goulet, 2008; Westbank Museum, n.d.). Shortly after, North West Company employee Joseph Laroque built a trading post close by that was named Fort Thompson. In 1812, the North West Company purchased the assets of the Pacific Fur Company, which resulted in the amalgamation of Fort Shewaps and Fort Thompson into Fort Kamloops. Later, in 1821 the North West Company and the Hudson Bay Company merged. As a result of the merger, Fort Kamloops was named Thompson River Post, although people still knew it by its former name (Goulet & Goulet, 2008).

There were a couple of noteworthy Métis people who lived for some time during the 19th century in the unceded territory of Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc—land that is now colonially known as the city of Kamloops. For example, Jane Klyne McDonald, who was born in 1810 in Alberta, was the daughter of a fur trader. When she was young, she and her family would travel with him by horseback, canoe and on foot for his work duties. She had a talent for making items like moccasins and snowshoes (Goulet & Goulet, 2008). In 1825, she married according to country custom to Archibald McDonald, a Scottish fur-trade officer for Hudson Bay Company.

Archibald was placed in charge of Thompson's River District in 1826. Jane had her first son at Fort Okanagan and then moved to Fort Kamloops a few weeks later to join Archibald at his new posting. In 1828, she gave birth to her second son at Fort Kamloops (Goulet & Goulet, 2008). Jane and Archibald went on to have many more children together, and Archibald taught Jane and their children to read and write when he was the Chief Trader at Fort Langley. During two of Archibald's appointments, Jane held the titles of the Mistress of Fort Langley and the Mistress of

Colville. She was well known for her domestic and culinary skills and was often well-accepted into white society and by clergy wives. In contrast, other Métis wives tended to experience racial discrimination in other forts (Goulet & Goulet, 2008).

There are also historical records that highlight Joseph William McKay as a noteworthy Métis in the 19th century. McKay was born in 1829 and had many familial connections to the fur trade and began working for the Hudson Bay Company at 15-years-old (Barkwell, n.d.). He held many prominent positions throughout his career. McKay lived in Fort Kamloops for about six years when he was put in charge of Thompson's River District in the 1860s. When McKay first arrived at Fort Kamloops, he found it in rough condition, so he built an additional fort on the south bank of the Thompson River (Goulet & Goulet, 2008). This new fort location later became a central place in the current city of Kamloops. McKay also worked as an Indian Agent when the Kamloops Industrial School—the predecessor of the Kamloops Indian Residential School—began operating in 1890. Indian Agents like McKay and Indian Residential Schools played an active role in violent colonial attempts to “civilize the Indians” (Hinde, 2021, para. 2).

The Kamloops Indian Residential School has become well known in recent years for the horrific findings of 215 First Nations children's remains buried on its former grounds (The Canadian Press, 2021). In addition to McKay's problematic position as an Indian Agent, he was also known for his advocacy work for First Nations rights and for administering the smallpox vaccine to many First Nations people (Barkwell, n.d.; Hinde, 2021). McKay is among a group of Métis men who illustrate the dynamics of power and privilege through their colonial leadership positions in BC, alongside their efforts toward social action.

The fur trade undoubtedly facilitated mobility of the Métis into Pacific Northwest, followed by Métis involvement in early expeditions throughout what is now BC. Many Métis

families also travelled west to escape their own experiences of colonial violence in the 19th and 20th centuries. These diverse stories reflect the many different stories that are held by Métis families and communities.

Current Demographics. Kamloops is home to a population of nearly 10,000 Indigenous people, comprising 11 percent of the city’s population. Approximately 4000 people in Kamloops identify as Métis (Statistics Canada, 2023c). Métis people in Kamloops are represented by the Two Rivers Métis Society (n.d.), one of the chartered communities of MNBC.

Métis Approaches to Child-rearing

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis families have long carried distinct and effective approaches for caring for children in their communities. For thousands of years, Indigenous traditional systems of knowledge and practice ensured that children were nurtured, safe, and secure. Through maintaining community approaches to child-rearing, children were held at the centre, or heart, of the community (Anderson, 2016; Thomas & Green, 2015). Métis children, like other Indigenous children, were raised by their parents, families, and entire communities through a wholistic approach (Anderson, 2016; Carrière, 2017; Graham & Davoren, 2015; Mann-Johnson, 2017). The adage, “it takes a village to raise a child,” was first used by Indigenous Peoples in Nigeria, but has been widely adopted in Indigenous communities across Turtle Island as a reflection of common values and practices in child rearing, held since time immemorial (Baskin, 2011, p. 272). Similarly, Métis scholar Kim Anderson (2016) has stated, “everyone in the community has a connection to the children, and everyone has an obligation to work for their well-being” (p. 135). This collective role in child-rearing, with responsibilities distributed across extended families, was largely effective. While Indigenous communities

undoubtedly experienced challenges at times, traditional approaches to child-rearing ensured that children were appropriately cared for and that families were supported (Blackstock, 2009a).

Métis culture recognizes that children are sacred (Dorion, 2010, p. 52). Parents were taught how to nurture and gently care for children as new physical beings, as producing new lives and raising children have long been understood as the cornerstone of sustaining communities and nations (Anderson, 2016). Elders have long expressed that learning how to care for children is an important teaching (National Aboriginal Health Organization [NAHO], 2008). Teaching children was often done in unobtrusive ways, relying on intuition, observation, and patience (Fast & Boldo, 2021; McNab, 2007). Children were recognized as each having a unique gift (Edge & McCallum, 2006; Hourie & Carrière-Acco, 2006; NAHO, 2008). Aligning with distinct gifts, traditionally, Métis communities used distinct ways of assigning roles and responsibilities. Each person held a unique role in their community, with responsibilities that often centred ways of supporting and giving back to neighbours and family members (Barker, 2020). Indeed, Métis culture is rooted in relationships and accountabilities—a concept that is best expressed through *Wahkotowin*.⁹

Wahkotowin

Métis culture is rooted in relationships and accountability; this concept is best expressed through *Wahkotowin*. *Wahkotowin*, in the Cree language, refers to kinship and relatedness—spanning beyond human relationships to include all forms of life in the past, present, and future (Bodor et al., 2009; Carrière et al., 2021; Macdougall, 2010). These relationships inform Métis

⁹ Used by Cree and Michif speakers alike, there are different variations in spelling *Wahkotowin*, including “*Wahkotoowin*”, “*Wâhkotowin*”, and “*Wahkohtowin*.” I aim to be consistent, while honouring the different spellings used by Métis and Cree scholars when using direct quotes.

conceptualizations of family—spanning far beyond the Eurocentric notion of nuclear family units—which wholistically encompass both the natural and spirit worlds (Macdougall, 2010).

Wahkotowin represents the social and relational obligations that are foundational throughout many Métis families and communities (Macdougall, 2006).¹⁰ Through the traditional practice of sharing (Teillet, 2019), Métis people practiced economic solidarity (Macdougall, 2010). When speaking about dynamics within Métis communities in the film *Lii Michif Niyanaan*, Lillian Parenteau explains, “it was through that interdependence on one another that everybody was taken care of, and I think that’s how we survived and grew as well” (Ell & Coyes, 2023, 5:12-5:19). Community members were connected through unspoken reciprocal relationships; these relationships created spaces of belonging and mutual support (Macdougall, 2010). Carrying out the teachings of Wahkotowin requires a shared responsibility to be accountable to kinship relations, to behave appropriately, and to take care of one another (Canada, 2017; Macdougall, 2010). In this way, it is also important to understand that colonialism has impacted many Métis families through intergenerational trauma. Colonialism has interrupted the ways in which Métis people honour reciprocal accountability; as Elder Maria Campbell (2007) states, there is “broken Wahkotowin” across communities, evidenced through poverty, neglect, and lateral violence (p. 5). In terms of healing and moving forward, Wahkotowin emphasizes the importance of collectivity as a way of knowing and being. In recalling the teachings of Cree Elder Leona Makokis, Barker (2020) shares that “we are only as healthy as our relationships within that network” (p. 52); this understanding reflects the

¹⁰ I am borrowing Cree-Métis concept of Wahkotowin, which is a foundation for understanding relational accountability and kinship within Cree and Métis worldviews. In borrowing these teachings, with permission, I take a similar approach to Métis scholar Sylvia Roy (2016), who writes, “Although my ancestry is not Cree, I have been exposed to Cree Elders, teachings, practices, and knowledge over the past decade and have found that this Indigenous worldview often aligns with Métis values, principles, and philosophy” (p. 40). I am grateful to have been gifted teachings on Wahkotowin from wonderful Cree-Métis Elders (see: Chapter 4 and 5), and I also want to uphold the ways in which Wahkotowin has grounded the Michif Practice Model at LMO (see: Chapter 1).

responsibility to ensure that each member of the community has the supports and resources they need to live their best life.

Relationships to Land and the Buffalo Hunt. While contemporary understandings of Wahkotowin may focus on relationships with family, traditionally Wahkotowin was inclusive kinship with all aspects of creation (Campbell, 2007). A significant aspect of upholding Wahkotowin can be demonstrated through relationships with the land. As Métis artist Christi Belcourt (2007) asserts:

our existence on this planet is wholly dependent on Mother Earth. Mother Earth provides the plant world with what it needs to survive, the plant world in turn provides the animal world with its sustenance, and we, as human beings, exist only because of the kinship that exists between all of us. (p. 2)

For example, the buffalo hunt was central to Métis ways of life within the prairies—it was foundational with respect to Métis culture, ways of life, subsistence, and trade. Organized hunts, which occurred in the summer, fall, and winter, would involve entire families, with different roles assigned to different people (Teillet, 2019). However, based on his historical review, Colpitts (2016) notes that zoologist and conservationist William Hornaday criticized the Red River Métis hunt as “one of the most destructive in the history of the slaughter of the northern herds” (p. 201). In this sole historical account, Colpitts (2016) suggests that the Métis were partially responsible for the decline in buffalo during the 18th and 19th centuries as a result of overhunting. Despite differing accounts regarding the extent to which Métis communities respected conservation, the Buffalo Hunt undoubtedly formed the foundation for Métis governance, given the democratic election process for Captain of the Hunt, and the rules that would follow, as well as the values of freedom and teamwork that would guide the hunt (Cram, 2020). This unique political tradition and way of life, rooted in many Métis communities’ values, serves as the modern-day foundation for current Métis governance (Ell & Coyes, 2023).

Traditional Roles in Métis Child-Rearing

While there is significant diversity within and across Métis communities, Métis people have generally recognized the importance of traditional roles within families and communities. The following section speaks to some aspects of traditional gender roles (and the limitations of these binary views), as well as the importance of Elders and grandparents in Métis child-rearing.

Traditional Gender Roles. Métis women carried the teachings of Wahkotowin, ensuring that each family’s needs were met, considering the wellness needs of the entire community (Hourie & Carrière-Acco, 2006). Métis artist and scholar, Leah Dorion (2010), locates older Métis women as the “first teachers and as the overseers of issues related to the growing of children” (p. 7). Women held natural leadership roles within community; this included roles in directing the hunt and distributing food within the community (Anderson, 2016; Hourie & Carrière-Acco, 2006, p. 58). Traditionally, men in Métis society were seen as providers and protectors, leading and participating in the hunts (Graham & Davoren, 2015; Oster & Lizee, 2021; Teillet, 2019).¹¹ Anderson (2016) expands on this view, noting that men and other partners to birthing people carry multiple roles both protectors and helpers.

Métis women are described as knowledge and culture holders, carrying specific knowledge of family lineage and oral histories (Hourie & Carrière-Acco, 2006). They nurture and care for children, passing on traditional knowledge and Métis teachings (Oster & Lizee, 2021). These teachings are integral, ensuring that Métis children can “grow into proud individuals—proud of who they are and proud of where they come from” (Oster & Lizee, 2021, p. 1). Métis Elder Leanne Laberge told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015b) that

¹¹ It should also be noted here that each member of the community played a role in hunting, trapping, harvesting, preparing, and distributing food in the community (Teillet, 2019).

women are the keepers of family histories and stories, and they are the teachers who pass on the Métis tradition of having a good work ethic. Men were also involved in the passing on values and culture to younger generations of Métis children through role-modeling and other forms of teaching (Graham & Davoren, 2015). While doing this important work within families, Métis communities ensured that supports and assistance with childcare responsibilities were provided to mothers without judgment (Barker, 2020).

Recent literature has also endeavoured to both highlight and contribute to the revitalization of the roles and gifts carried by gender-diverse Métis community members, including Two-Spirit and non-binary people. *A Place in the Circle: Two-Spirit Métis Awareness Resource* notes that Two-Spirit people traditionally held a multitude of roles in Métis communities. They upheld kinship responsibilities, adopting Métis children and youth in need. They acted as facilitators and mediators in communities, and also acted as truth-tellers, bringing forward perspectives and insights into the needs of male, female, and gender diverse community members (Métis Nation of Ontario, 2022a). Articulations of gender diverse roles in Métis communities are significant, as they also shed light on the limitations of restricting traditional roles into binaries. With recognition that traditional practices have often been articulated in association with specific gendered practices, some Indigenous scholars have importantly articulated that these roles may be overly reductive (Snyder, 2018; Starblanket, 2018). Additionally, Anderson (2016) notes that several Indigenous Nations demonstrated a great deal of flexibility with respect to gendered roles, with opportunities for individuals to contribute in ways that were reflective of their abilities and interests, rather than gender.

Elders and Grandparents. Métis Elders are described as people who carry gifts, experiences, culture, and other forms of specialized knowledge; people who share those gifts

through teaching and storytelling (NAHO, 2008; Richardson & Carrière, 2017a). While teachings may be rooted in the past, these knowledges carry immense significance for navigating contemporary society and its challenges (Richardson & Carrière, 2017a). Elders are people who are known to the community or region, and are well respected (Edge & McCallum, 2006). They are people who have “done good work throughout their lifetime” (Edge & McCallum, 2006, p. 97). Métis Elders have traditionally been called Ahneegay-kaash-igakick (the ones who know), to honour their wisdom and guidance (Hourie & Carrière-Acco, 2006, p. 56). While some Métis also refer to Elders as Lii Viye (the old people; NAHO, 2008, p. 21), others believe that Elders can be any age, including young culture carriers who have earned respect (Edge & McCallum, 2006).

Métis people are sustained by the knowledges and stories shared by Elders, grandparents, and ancestors (Macdougall, 2017). Dorion (2010) acknowledges that Elders are important teachers, able to pass on knowledge of traditional approaches to Métis child-rearing to younger generations of parents. Similarly, grandparents have been integral in Indigenous families and communities; they have helped to raise, socialize, and teach their grandchildren, while also filling supportive roles within families (Barker, 2020). Grandparents have also been vital in teaching children about their family history, kinship systems, and cultural practices (Dorion, 2010). Barker (2020) explains how grandparents, as storytellers and Knowledge Keepers, hold integral roles in communally bringing up children:

It is through storytelling that children are taught and disciplined. Teaching stories carries the culture forward to the next generation, providing guides about how to live miyo pimâtisiwin. Each person who hears a story understands it as it applies to their experience. This means that children are taught a way of understanding the world rather than a set of rules that dictates their behavior. (p. 65)

Storytelling has long been recognized as a “powerful gift” and a “resource for generations of Métis” people (Oster & Lizee, 2021, p. 6). In the video, *Knowledge Keepers: Sharing Stories of a Métis Community*, several Elders and Knowledge Keepers share stories about growing up in a Saskatchewan Métis community (Indian Head Museum, 2020). They speak about identity and colonialism, while also telling stories about celebrations—from Catholic weddings to Métis kitchen parties—as well as being on the land. The Elders and Knowledge Keepers also share traditional stories, called *Kaayaash ka kii tootamihk aen nistwayr*, indicating that Métis stories have always been used as a way of parenting (Indian Head Museum, 2020). Storytelling is a prominent intergenerational tool for strengthening cultural continuity in Métis families: sharing family stories, histories, and lessons. Traditionally, stories were often told in Métis languages, like Michif, where experiences were shared in a manner that is uniquely Métis—reflecting the knowledge, values, laws, relationships, and teachings of the people (Edge & McCallum, 2006). Stories have helped generations of Métis families to survive and thrive (Richardson, 2016a).

Kinship Care and Customary Adoption

Extended family has often been described as the “basic unit of Métis society” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC], 2015b, p. 48). Historically, Métis extended families were sizeable, ranging from 50 to 100 people over three generations (NAHO, 2008). Métis families and communities traditionally had clear steps to ensure that children were taken care of if their natural parents were unable to do so (Burke, 2023; Carrière et al., 2021; Mann-Johnson, 2017). Grandparents, aunts and uncles, adult siblings, and other kin would assume the parenting roles, with support from the entire community. Simply put, orphaned children were never to be cared for by strangers (Hourie & Carrière-Acco, 2006). With fervent loyalty to family, Métis people privileged their kinship commitments above all other responsibilities (Hancock, 2017;

Macdougall, 2010; Teillet, 2019). In particular, grandparents would often adopt their grandchildren, who would in turn care for their grandparents as they grew older and required more help with daily activities (Carrière, 2017; Hourie & Carrière-Acco, 2006). Elder Angie Crerar shared her personal experience with kinship care:

There was no such thing as children being taken away because the next relative looked after the children. Children stayed within the family circle. I have raised a lot of children in my family, my nieces, my nephews, and it was a way of life for us; we just took them into our homes and our hearts and did the best we could. We shared everything that we had. (NAHO, 2008, p. 57)

In addition to the role of extended family, godparents were also prominent in Catholic Métis families, adding another layer of family and fulfilling roles within the church and in the spirit of Wahkotowin (Macdougall, 2010). These strong extended family systems were an integral aspect of effective child-rearing in traditional Métis ways. Additionally, Métis families also practiced customary arrangements, including informal care and adoption (Carrière, 2017; Raven, 2018). Through Ka oopikihtamashook' (adoption), Métis people cared for and embraced their relatives, spanning beyond genetic relations (Macdougall, 2010; Raven, 2018). Métis families used customary adoption practices to signify a shared willingness to accept kinship-based responsibilities in Métis communities (Raven, 2018).

Kinship care is broadly understood as the practice of extended family and/or community members caring for children who are unable to live with their birth parents (Carrière et al., 2021). In addition to the standard kinship practice of extended family coming together to raise children when their birth parents were unable to, Elders would often live with a family to provide wholistic supports (Barker, 2020). These practices were done in the absence of legal proceedings, independent from any formal child welfare system (Carrière, 1997, 2017; Mann-Johnson, 2017). Traditionally, kinship care has also been described as fluid, where children and

youth may stay with family temporarily, or as needed (Burke, 2023). As a relational practice, Métis traditional forms of kinship care were often discussed around the kitchen table.

Understanding the effectiveness of this practice, Mann-Johnson (2017) argues for a return to Métis traditional principles of *Kiikwookew Kwizin* (Kitchen Visits), to cultivate a caring and respectful approach once again to supporting families.

The imposition of colonial policies, resourcing, and assessment tools have created barriers to the Métis practice of kinship care (Mann-Johnson, 2017). Kinship care was only recognized as a formal placement option in BC within the last two decades (Gough, 2006), and it is still viewed as an emerging practice (Carrière et al., 2021; Mann-Johnson, 2017). The integration of kinship care into the child welfare system has meant that standard foster care policies have been applied to kinship placements (Mann-Johnson, 2017). The use of such policies within the context of kinship care is problematic, contributing to further barriers that Indigenous families may face when attempting to care for their kin. For instance, the assessment tools and approval process are based on unrealistic standards—developed by and reflective of White, upper-middle class families (Mann-Johnson, 2017). As such, standardized risk assessment tools tend to disregard the cultural, socio-political, and historical context for Indigenous children and families. Assessment tools also tend to offer judgement based on classist and colonial parenting expectations, that are often not reflective of Métis families' realities (Mann-Johnson, 2017). While families that are not formally vetted and approved MCFD may still provide informal care to children who have not been apprehended by the government, they do so in the absence of funding and other supports. As such, informal kinship homes tend offer less stability (Mann-Johnson, 2017). Kinship homes may also face significant challenges with respect to poverty, housing, and racism (Burke et al., 2023; Mann-Johnson, 2017). These

challenges often mean that Indigenous families are disregarded as kinship homes for Indigenous children in care. It is also important to note that only recently have kinship placements been resourced at an equal rate to basic foster homes (MCFD, n.d.). Despite the recent equitable approach to funding kinship homes, there exists a need for more wholistic (i.e., wraparound), child-specific supports to ensure that kinship care placements are held up for the value that they provide to Indigenous children (Mann-Johnson, 2017). Overall, kinship care is viewed as an important form of natural family supports, a way of strengthening cultural continuity, and a foundation for effective Indigenous child welfare (Carrière, 1997; TRC, 2015b).

Métis Children, Colonialism, and the Child Welfare System

Indigenous practices and ways of being were effective in supporting many generations of vibrant individuals, strong families, and healthy communities. Yet, traditional practices for raising children were viewed as uncivilized and negligent by generations of early missionaries, and later by social workers, who continued to devalue customary care practices held across many Indigenous communities (Barker, 2020; Baskin & Sinclair, 2015). Speaking more broadly to the ways in which Indigenous parenting practices have been misunderstood by social workers, Stemplau (2005) writes:

Most saw little value in Native methods of child rearing, if they acknowledged a system at all, because they believed that tribal customs endangered the physical and moral wellbeing of children and that Native mothers abused their children out of ignorance. They disapproved of how Native parents socialized and educated their children, who were expected to learn appropriate behavior by modeling that of adults. (p. 274)

Generations of Indigenous parents have been deemed unfit or immoral when their practices have not aligned with, or conformed to, Eurocentric parenting norms (Gerlach et al., 2017; Richardson & Carrière, 2017a; Tait et al., 2013). Historically, Métis people were commonly seen and portrayed as irrational, lazy, and indolent (Teillet, 2019); with added layers of sexism driven by

patriarchal colonial views, Métis women have—and continue to—experience discrimination most profoundly (Monchalin et al., 2020). Control over “interbreeding or intermarriage” has been prominent through Canada’s colonial legacy (Logan, 2015, p. 435). Within the context of eugenics through the early 20th century, the mixed-race descendants of Métis families were considered impure, savage, and half-colonized (Logan, 2015). As prominent examples of eugenic policies, Sexual Sterilization Acts existed in both BC (1933 – 1973) and Alberta (1928 – 1972) led to the persistent and disproportionate targeting of First Nations and Métis women (Leason, 2021). Stories of forced sterilization are rooted in historical practices of violent colonization, and they continue to this day (Boyer & Leggett, 2022).

Residential and Church-Run Schools

The forced removal of Métis children dates back to the 19th century, when Métis children were commonly viewed as “destitute Half-breeds” who were “worse off than Indians, living in squatter homes and too ‘lazy and slow’ to be educated by typical provincial schools” (Logan, 2015, p. 444). During a June 1877 visit to a public school in Langley, BC, the superintendent reported: “Half-breed children very unpromising, dull and stupid and apparently incapable of learning” (cited in Barman & Evans, 2009, p. 77). These discriminatory views provided a strong rationale for the placement of Métis children in residential and church-run schools, where they suffered abhorrent abuse (TRC, 2015a). The Residential School System aimed to Christianize Indigenous children, thereby culturally assimilating them into colonial society (TRC, 2015a).

The implementation of residential school policy for the Métis was inconsistent, representing the government’s attempted balance of aiming to assimilate all Indigenous children across Canada, while also limiting Métis enrolment to be cost effective (TRC, 2015a). The churches aimed to convert as many Métis and other Indigenous children as possible—an interest

that never declined despite the more conflicted perspective held by their government partners (TRC, 2015a). Métis children were among the first targeted and enrolled in many of the church-run schools in Western Canada (Chartrand et al., 2006; TRC, 2015a). While the federal government—the funders of the Residential School System—aimed to assimilate Métis people through removing children from their communities, there was a fear that funding Métis “education” would set a precedence for additional fiduciary responsibilities (Chartrand et al., 2006; TRC, 2015a).

Inconsistent policy and practice around Métis children and the Residential School System represents an early example of Métis-specific jurisdictional disputes. While the federal government continually viewed the Métis as “members of the dangerous classes” and in need of being “civilized,” they often felt that the provinces and territories should take responsibility for this work (TRC, 2015a, p. 4). Generally speaking, Métis children were more likely to be taken into residential schools if they presented phenotypically and culturally as “Indian” (Chartrand et al., 2006, p. 50); indeed, those who were perceived as inferior, and in greater need of assimilation were more likely to be apprehended by the state-run system (TRC, 2015b). Conversely, Métis children who presented as White were more often excluded from the federal system, because they were seen as being adequately “civilized” (Chartrand et al., 2006, p. 19). While the federal government intended for the provinces and territories to take responsibility for educating Métis children, public schools were often inaccessible to Métis families due to racist policy and other social reasons (Chartrand et al., 2006). In some cases, families felt the only opportunity they had for giving their children any form of formal education meant enrolling them in church-run schools, where Métis children were paid for through mission funds (TRC, 2015a).

After Métis children were registered in residential schools, their experiences often entailed physical discipline and abuse of all kinds (TRC, 2015b). Educational instruction was generally limited, with a focus on harsh physical labour, which meant that many children who attended the schools did not progress beyond a Grade Two education (TRC, 2015b). Overcrowding and poor ventilation in the dormitories led to a lack of sleep and the transmission of several infectious diseases, which undoubtedly contributed to the high rates of death across institutions (TRC, 2015a). Additionally, spiritual deterioration occurred through the intentional violence and bleak conditions upheld in the schools, as Métis children were conditioned to abandon their cultural and spiritual beliefs (Chartrand et al., 2006; TRC, 2015a).

Métis children's experiences in residential and church-run schools were largely comparable to the more broadly known experiences of First Nations children, including emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual abuse and exploitation (TRC, 2015a). With the understanding that the "precursor to destroying culture is to deny cultural knowledge to children" (Richardson, 2016a, p. 32), Métis children were prohibited from speaking their languages and from practicing their culture. This has led to common experiences with intergenerational trauma, with significant impacts on parenting skills, emotional intelligence (e.g., the ability to express feelings), loss of language, and cultural oppression (TRC, 2015b).

While the stories of Métis survivors have been known within many Métis families, they have "been underemphasized for a long time in the realms of both residential school and Métis history" (Chartrand et al., 2006, p. 1). Relatively recently, the release of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Report* gained national attention, including the stories of

Métis survivors and their families.¹² The unseen and unheard positionality of the Métis remains a prominent theme throughout the continual removal of Métis children from their families and communities vis-à-vis the child welfare system. It is well documented that the violent, colonial essence of the residential school system lives on in the child welfare system, as Indigenous children are persistently over-represented in the child welfare system (Blackstock, 2009a; TRC, 2015b).

The Sixties Scoop and the Continuation of Child Welfare Inequities

Spanning beyond the eventual closure of the Residential School System, aggressive policies of assimilation have continued to result in the removal First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children from their families and communities. In the mid-twentieth century, the Canadian Association of Social Workers and the Canadian Welfare Council advocated for greater involvement in Indigenous communities, including the provision of services to First Nations children on reserve. Child welfare services were not effectively monitored for quality assurance, nor was there seemingly an understanding of trauma resulting from residential school and other aspects of colonialism. Instead of supporting families, the provision of social services on reserve resulted in the mass removals of Indigenous children by the child welfare system (Blackstock, 2009a). First coined by Johnston (1983), the Sixties Scoop refers to a period of time—from the 1960s and into the 1980s—in which approximately 20,000 Indigenous children were apprehended and placed in non-Indigenous adoptive homes, or foster care placements that were funded by the child welfare system. The term Millennial Scoop is used to recognize the

¹² It is important to note that Volume 3: *The Métis Experience* (2015a), is the shortest chapter of *The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* being *Canada's Residential Schools*. This 81-page chapter includes the consolidating findings of Métis and other mixed, non-Status First Nations peoples' testimonies.

persistent over-representation of Indigenous children in government care (Choate et al., 2021; McKay, 2018).

For Métis children and families, the child welfare system has often involved the forced removal of children from their homes and their placement in non-Indigenous foster and adoptive homes (Macdougall, 2017; Tait et al., 2013). While exact numbers remain unknown as a result of inconsistent identification and record-keeping, Métis children were apprehended and adopted out in large numbers as part of the Sixties Scoop (TRC, 2015b). These apprehensions largely occurred without the consent of families or communities.¹³ After his review of a similar provincial system in Manitoba, Judge Kimelman (1985) said of Indigenous Peoples' experience with the child welfare system that "cultural genocide has been taking place in a systematic, routine manner" (p. 51). In this way, the Indigenous child welfare system has commonly been described as a system that continues the work and impacts of the residential school system (TRC, 2015b; Walqwan Metallic et al., 2019).

Historic processes of colonization and ongoing colonial policies and structures serve as the foundation for contemporary child welfare systems across Canada (West Coast Leaf, 2019). While colonialism remains unaddressed, Indigenous families are continually blamed for the circumstances in which they find themselves (Barkwell et al., 1989; Gerlach et al., 2017; Tait et al., 2013). Specifically, Métis historian Brenda Macdougall (2017) writes:

Outsiders have viewed Metis reliance on family and interfamilial relationships as a form of communalism that fostered behaviours that contributed to their collective poverty, lack of education, and poor health. This overwhelmingly negative assessment of Metis family and society reflects the general belief that Indigenous people need to be saved from their cultural deficiencies which, in turn, justified the state's policies of assimilation. (p. 16)

¹³ It was not until the 1996 creation of the *Child, Family, and Community Service Act* in BC that social workers were required to notify Indigenous communities.

Similarly, Barkwell et al. (1989) speak to the economic and cultural factors that primarily shape the ways in which the system frames Métis families as having inherent deficits, rather than reflecting on the structural shortcomings of the child welfare system.

The overwhelming focus on Eurocentric, individualistic models across research, policy, and practice has led to deficit-based models and practice that ignores the structural determinants of Indigenous peoples' wellness (Baskin & Sinclair, 2015; Clark, 2016; Gerlach et al., 2017). The context of colonialism—which creates structural vulnerability for Indigenous children and families—is often not discussed within individual stories of Indigenous children and youth in the child welfare system. Rooted in Eurocentric child protection policy, this positioning places Indigenous parents, families, and communities as the problem when the perceived issues are viewed in isolation from the systemic context (Choate et al., 2021). While colonialism is structurally embedded within the child welfare system, it is also upheld throughout social work practice including assessments and decision-making tools. Cindy Blackstock, a Gitksan scholar and child rights advocate, addresses social workers directly in a recent conversation around equity in child welfare; she asserts, “stop codifying structural inequality and systemic racism as a personal deficit. We do this in all kinds of different ways: in structured decision-making tools, for example, and even in therapeutic interventions” (Blackstock & Fallon, 2021, 12:22). In addition to emphasizing the need for child welfare reform, Blackstock calls frontline workers and helpers to action, speaking to the ways in which practice can shift to support social justice.

Given the child welfare system's focus on responding to crises—rather than funding and delivering prevention-based services—there are resultingly high rates of child apprehension (Tait et al., 2013). These decisions are made under the guise of the “best interests of the child”—language that is enshrined within child welfare legislation in BC (Child, Family, and Community

Services Act, 1996), and elsewhere (Baskin, 2011, p. 272; Tait et al., 2013, p. 50).

Overwhelmingly, the separation of Indigenous children from their families is perceived as being in their best interests, a Eurocentric view that is continually influenced by racism, stereotypes, and assumptions about the inferiority of Indigenous mothers and parenting practices (TRC, 2015b). Out-of-home placements have long been the primary intervention used within the child welfare system (Gerlach et al., 2017; MCFD, 2020), meaning that Indigenous children are placed in the legal care of the child welfare system “with *in loco parentis* granted to strangers of the dominant [colonial] culture” (Richardson & Carrière, 2017a, p. 94). The provincial child welfare legislation guides social workers to consider multiple factors relevant to each child’s best interests, including safety, continuity of care and relationships, and culture (*Child, Family and Community Services Act [CFCSA]*, 1996). However, safety—which is often interpreted within the Eurocentric context of physical safety—tends to be prioritized over all other considerations (West Coast Leaf, 2019). The West Coast Leaf (2019) notes that “there is no hierarchy of children’s rights and that the aim of the best interests of the child principle is to ensure the wholistic development of the child...” (p. 42). If the best interests of the child were truly reflective of Métis values and culture, social workers would exhaust all possible options to ensure that children stayed connected to their families, community, culture, and the land. In fact, dating back to 1985, the *Kimelman Report* includes key recommendations around interpreting the “best interests of the child” to include relational and cultural connections (p. iv).

The propensity to focus on crises spans beyond service provision and funding, as the focus by ministerial oversight bodies and the media has long been on individual investigations featuring critical injuries and deaths to children. As a result, public attention is often directed toward high-profile, individual stories rather than looking to improve prevention support and

funding (Tait et al., 2013). This has resulted in what Clark (2016) has termed as “the ‘shock and awe’ campaign” targeting Indigenous children and youth who have experienced violence (p. 3). Indigenous families are continually working against a dominant rhetoric of deficits, consistent throughout much of the reporting on Indigenous Peoples. These narratives—which often describe Indigenous people as either violent or victimized, as well as mentally ill and/or addicted—individualize and depoliticize structural violence, colonialism, and racism (Chacaby, 2018). Within this context, social workers have moved within a “benevolent culture of care” while being complicit in the ongoing apprehension of children (Tait et al., 2013, p. 43). The colonial positioning of social workers can be seen both historically in their partnership with the Department of Indian Affairs and the Residential School System, and contemporarily within the child welfare system (Blackstock, 2009a; Sinclair, 2009).

Disproportionality continues to exist across multiple points in the child welfare system. Research has shown that First Nations families are more likely to be investigated by the child welfare system and that Indigenous children and youth are more likely to be apprehended from their families and placed in foster care (Sinha et al., 2011).¹⁴ Once in care, Indigenous children and youth are more likely to experience multiple placements, and they are less likely to be reunited with their families (de Finney & di Tomasso, 2015). In further examining the gross over-representation of Indigenous children and families in child welfare investigation files, Sinha et al. (2011) reported grossly disproportionate findings of neglect, meaning that disparities can be at least partially explained by poverty and overcrowded housing. In fact, poverty—and its connection to perceived neglect—continues to be one of the most common reasons that children

¹⁴ While Sinha et al. (2011) note that data for Métis and Inuit children was not included in the report, due to issues around statistical reliability, the disproportionate rates for Métis and Inuit children in terms of investigation and apprehension are said to mirror the First Nations data set in the Canadian Incidence Study.

are removed from their families (Richardson, 2016b; West Coast Leaf, 2019). These factors are pervasive as Barkwell and colleagues (1989) found that economic reasons, including poverty and housing, were at the root of the over-representation of Métis children in care.

Neglect is also used as an umbrella term for manifestations of trauma in Indigenous families and communities, including mental health and substance use (Gerlach et al., 2017; Sinha, 2011; Richardson & Carrière, 2017a). In many cases, perceived neglect is a social construct that is arguably used to inequitably target Indigenous families (TRC, 2015b). This approach is heightened by the lack of culturally responsive assessment tools used in child protection work with Indigenous families (Mann-Johnson, 2017; Tait et al., 2013). Specifically, open data for MCFD (2020) illustrate that 75 percent of all Indigenous children taken into government care were done so for reasons classified as neglect—a rate that is considerably higher than non-Indigenous children during the same reporting period (65%).¹⁵ While the Ministry does not report on various forms of racism within the system, discriminatory bias toward Indigenous families clearly exists throughout child protection, as evidenced in assessments, investigations, and the absence of support services (Baskin & Sinclair, 2015; Carrière & Richardson, 2017a; West Coast Leaf, 2019). In this way, the child welfare system has become an effective tool for surveillance and domination over Indigenous parents and families (Tait et al., 2013).

¹⁵ For Indigenous children, other reasons for substantiating apprehension included physical harm (8.6%), other abuse or neglect concerns (4.5%), emotional harm (3.2%), and sexual abuse or exploitation (0.8%).

The Invisibility of Métis Children and Youth

Despite their disproportionate overrepresentation in the child welfare system, Métis children and youth have largely been overlooked and unrecognized within research, policy, and practice related to the child welfare system (Canada, 2017; Carrière & Richardson, 2017b; Richardson, 2016b; Tait, 2009). In reference to the ways in which Métis children and youth have been marginalized and erased from the “public consciousness,” they have poignantly been called “the hidden child of child welfare” (Carrière & Richardson, 2017a, p. 3). Both in terms of legislation and practice, Métis children are too often “treated as an anomaly in child welfare services” (Carrière & Richardson, 2017a, p. 3). The invisibility of Métis children is largely maintained through the lack of accurate and recognized identification practices and policies (Canada, 2017; Carrière et al., 2021). At the same time, Richardson (2016b) notes that due to risk of being mistreated, stereotyped, or offered culturally irrelevant services, Métis families may choose to hide their identities within the child welfare system (Richardson & Seaborn, 2009); however, this approach is not a viable option for all Métis families. As racist policies and practice have long infiltrated the child welfare system, Métis children, youth, and families who appear to be phenotypically Indigenous often fare worse in their interactions with social services (Canada, 2017; Richardson, 2015; TRC, 2015b).

In the face of racism, oppression, and violence, passing has been a historical practice and a contemporary reality for some Métis people as they attempt to navigate unsafe situations (McNab, 2007; Richardson & Seaborn, 2009). Historically, passing for White was seen as a strategy for survival in the context of anti-Métis discrimination (Richardson, 2016a). In addition to searching for safety, Richardson (2016a) conceptualizes passing as a form of Métis resistance. Métis writers, Oster and Lizee (2021) illustrate two historical Métis responses to assimilation:

“many Métis families and communities practiced endogamy to maintain Métis culture and identity. Others hid in ‘plain sight’ as a coping mechanism to keep their family and their community safe from continued persecution” (p. 6). Each of these family stories is valid and authentically Métis (Oster & Lizee, 2021), and there have been different ways in which these stories have impacted Métis descendants. For those who went “underground”, it was common for Métis stories and identities to be hidden in shame and silence (Richardson & Seaborn, 2009, p. 117). While the assumption of some Métis families, in these cases, was that their children and grandchildren would be “better off passing as whites” (McNab, 2007, p. 29)—be it emotionally, economically, or both—the negative impacts that assimilation has had on wholistic wellness, identity, and cultural continuity has been far-reaching (Richardson & Seaborn, 2009). Families that have for generations asserted themselves as Métis are more likely to have experienced the transgenerational impacts of residential school (TRC, 2015a), as well as direct forms of interpersonal and institutional racism.

Identifying Métis Children, Youth, and Families in Child Welfare. Children served by MCFD are identified as Métis if they or their family self-identifies as Métis, if they are members of a Métis community, or if they are identified as Métis by the Métis Commission for Children and Families (MCFD, 2021). Despite these seemingly inclusive practices, identity politics—including the ongoing dispute around who can claim Métis identity and belonging with the Nation—have added to this cultural mystification for non-Métis service providers. This confusion, rooted in the “politics of exclusion,” has undoubtedly shaped the care that is offered to Métis children, including the degree to which services are culturally relevant and safe (Carrière et al., 2021, p. 182).

From a research and monitoring perspective, a pan-Indigenous approach—which involves grouping all First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people under a unified and unnecessarily broad category—is also problematic. Provincial data sets are too often analyzed in aggregate, where Indigenous children are grouped together thereby masking the unique experiences of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children, youth, and families (e.g., MCFD, 2020). In the first ever Métis report produced by a child welfare oversight body, the RCY (2020) found that misidentification issues were pervasive throughout the case management system within MCFD, revealing “gaps in social worker knowledge and ability to identify Métis children and misconceptions regarding Métis and First Nations identity” (p. 30). These challenges trickle down and impact the services that Métis children, youth, and families receive; as Carrière et al. (2021) observed, Métis children are typically served through mainstream child welfare services and tend to receive little-to-no cultural supports. At times, Métis children, youth, and families may have access to pan-Indigenous supports, but these approaches tend to lack relevance and do not address the specific cultural needs of Métis people (Carrière et al., 2021; RCY, 2020). Blackstock similarly urges social work schools and practitioners to adopt a distinctions-based approach in education, policy, research, and practice; she states, “It is very important to disaggregate that and look at it more closely, otherwise it will mask the problem” (Blackstock & Fallon, 2021, 13:14). The Manitoba Metis Federation and Metis Child and Family Services Authority (2013) came to a similar conclusion in their report, *Métis Children and Families and the Child Welfare System: An Urban Winnipeg Perspective*, recommending that a distinctions-based approach be applied to all services for Métis children and youth, as well as their families.

Impacts of Child Welfare Involvement

The impacts of child welfare involvement for children, families, and communities are well-documented. Research has shown that the removal of children from their families is correlated with higher rates of homelessness and inadequate housing (Nickel et al., 2020). Further, there is evidence that children in care are at greater risk for becoming involved with the criminal justice system (Barkwell et al., 1989; Nickel et al., 2020). Former children in care also experience lower levels of post-secondary education and higher rates of unemployment (Nickel et al., 2020), as well as long-term trauma (Tait et al., 2013). In their Métis-specific youth health report—based on the findings of the 2018 Adolescent Health Survey in BC—the McCreary Centre Society reported that Métis youth who were in care or had previously been in care were far more likely to have experienced mental health concerns, including suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and self-harm (Smith et al., 2019).

There are a number of studies that have illustrated the ways in which the child welfare system has damaged Indigenous people's cultural continuity (Tait et al., 2013). Specifically, child apprehension often causes children to be disconnected from families and communities, experiencing loss of culture, identity, and language (Auger, 2012; Carrière et al., 2021; Tait et al., 2013). Richardson and Seaborn (2009) explain that when Métis children are removed from their families and communities, they often “move through the system without information about their birthright, their entitlements or family traditions that once encircled our people in a blanket of survival” (p. 119). These impacts should be considered within the context of both the negative health outcomes associated with cultural disconnection (Sinha et al., 2011; Tait et al., 2013) and the ways in which cultural continuity has been contextualized as a critical determinant of Indigenous peoples' health (Auger, 2016). Taken as a whole, it is not surprising that the child

welfare system is commonly considered among the determinants of Indigenous peoples' health (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012; Loppie & Wien, 2022; Tait et al., 2013).

The child welfare system is a significant source of structural vulnerability for Métis children, their families, and ultimately their communities. Elder Peal Calahasen poignantly shares that “the apprehension policy of governments is really one of the worst... it breaks down families. It breaks down the identity of children. It breaks down the strengths of kids” (Oster & Lizee, 2021, p. 145). The RCY (2006)—which monitors government services in BC with an eye to the well-being of children and youth in care—provides insight into critical and specific impacts of the child welfare system by way of injury and death reports. Based on nearly 200 reports of critical injury and deaths among Métis children receiving government services, the RCY (2020) indicated that Métis children and youth in care may experience higher rates of sexual assault, suicidality, and caregiver mistreatment.

Child apprehension has also led to far-reaching impacts on families and communities. Specifically, Tait and colleagues (2013) note that child apprehension is connected to increased parental substance use, mental distress, and shame. Families may also experience impacts from intergenerational trauma associated with residential and mission schools (Graham & Davoren, 2015). Additionally, parents may experience a loss of income due to shifts in social assistance, housing subsidies, and benefits associated with parenting. These shifts are overwhelmingly experienced by families who are battling poverty, meaning that they then face further challenges when seeking to have their child(ren) returned to their care (Tait et al., 2013). Indeed, intersecting forces—including colonialism, heteropatriarchy, capitalism, globalization, and neoliberalism—have shaped the environments in which Métis children, youth, and families move within. Métis people's experiences are shaped by the multiple, layered aspects of their

positionality. Métis women—and in particular, those who are impacted by racism and poverty—are more likely to be targeted by colonial institutions like the child welfare system.

Child Welfare Legislation, Policy, and Practice

Child welfare legislation, policy, and practice varies by province and territory, meaning that there are thirteen different jurisdictions that serve children, youth, and families across Canada. Each of these jurisdictions carries distinct legislation, which direct how child welfare procedures must function. This section shares a review of child welfare legislation—as it pertains to Métis children, youth, and families—by province or territory. This section also explores practice and policy related to Métis child and family organizations across Canada, with a focus on the Métis homeland: BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and the Northwest Territories, with a focus on Métis child and family agencies. With acknowledgement of the dynamic federal landscape with respect to Indigenous child welfare jurisdiction, this section presents a snapshot of political environment, and discusses challenges and opportunities for Métis child welfare legislation in BC and beyond.

British Columbia

The *CFCSA* (1996) is the primary piece of legislation for all child protection services in BC. Currently, all child welfare agencies are tied to this piece of legislation. The *CFCSA* (1996) shares principles for guiding both voluntary (non-protection) services that are designed to support the needs of children, youth, and families, and to protect children from safety concerns, which may involve involuntary intervention. The *CFCSA* (1996) was recently revised, having received royal assent on November 24, 2022. Substantial among these revisions are the new Introductory Provisions Relating to Indigenous Laws and Indigenous Children (s 1). These provisions contain principles related to Indigenous peoples' right to self-government, including

jurisdiction and law-making authority related to Indigenous Child and Family Services. The *CFCSA* states that Indigenous law shall take precedence in circumstances where an Indigenous Governing Body (IGB) is providing or intends to provide Indigenous Child and Family Services under Indigenous laws, and there is conflict or inconsistency between the *CFCSA* and the Indigenous law.¹⁶ The *CFCSA* also sets out specific duties for related to the identification of, and communication with, IGBs. As a whole, these provisions reflect that provincial child welfare legislation must be carried out in alignment with *An Act Respecting First Nations Inuit, and Métis Children, Youth and Families* (2019).

The *CFCSA* sets out guiding principles that must be considered in the interpretation and administration of child welfare services. Most of these principles apply to all children: children should be protected from harm; parents hold a responsibility to protect children from harm and families are the preferred caregivers for children; children should have their kinship ties preserved; a child's views should be considered when making decisions about said child; and decisions should be made in a timely manner. In addition to these principles, Indigenous children are also entitled to belong to their communities, to learn about and practice their cultures and languages, and to have their families and communities involved in the upbringing. The current definition in the *CFCSA* of an Indigenous child specifically includes children of Métis ancestry (s 1(1)). This represents significant improvement over the past failures of the *CFCSA* to mention Métis identity under the definition of an Aboriginal child (Carrière & Richardson, 2017b). Métis children were not recognized in the *CFCSA* until 2018.

¹⁶ An IGB is “a council, government or other entity that is authorized to act on behalf of an Indigenous group, community or people that holds rights recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982) (Government of Canada, 2024)

The *Adoption Act* (1996) also plays a significant role in Métis child welfare—both historically and currently. In BC, the *Adoption Act* provides regulations for legal permanency for children and youth through adoption. With language similar to the *CFCSA* regarding the best interests of the child, the *Adoption Act* considers elements of child safety, continuity of care and relationships, development and needs, and the child’s views. The *Adoption Act* also indicates that the child’s best interests should consider timeliness of the decision, and “the child’s cultural, racial, linguistic and religious heritage” (s 3(1)(f)). Like the *CFCSA*, the *Adoption Act* was recently updated to bring it into alignment with *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Children, Youth and Families* (2019). As such, the best interests of an Indigenous child must also be considered with respect to cultural continuity, cultural identity, family and community connections, and customs. The *Adoption Act* must also be carried out in accordance with the right to self-government.

With the enactment of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA, 2019)*, BC was the first province to create a provincial framework for reconciliation based on the implementation of the *United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)*. The resultant five-year action plan contains 89 commitments toward advancing reconciliation between the Province and Indigenous Peoples in BC. As part of their commitment toward *DRIPA*, each ministry is required to work collaboratively with Indigenous Peoples in BC to deliver on their ministry-specific commitments (Province of British Columbia, 2022). In part, *DRIPA* mandates the provincial government to bring provincial laws into alignment with *UNDRIP*. With its explicit recognition of Indigenous Peoples’ inherent right to self-government and self-determination, the Province of BC (2022) states that the first goal of *DRIPA* is for “Indigenous Peoples [to] exercise and have full enjoyment of their rights to self-determination

and self-government, including developing, maintaining and implementing their own institutions, laws, governing bodies, and political, economic and social structures related to Indigenous communities” (p. 10). There are various outcomes linked to this goal, including but not limited to the full support for Indigenous Peoples to design and implement their own institutions of government, and to exercise their own laws and jurisdictions (with recognition of legal pluralism). The Province of BC (2022) is also committed to the collaborative development of a distinctions-based fiscal framework that supports Indigenous governments in their operations.

Section 4 of *DRIPA*—Social, Cultural, and Economic Well-being—indicates that Indigenous peoples in BC have the right to “care for their own children and youth in their community, and exercise jurisdiction over their own child and family services through systems and practices they determine for themselves” (p. 22). This explicit recognition of jurisdiction over Indigenous child welfare is further operationalized through specific commitments from the MCFD. Two of the three commitments related to Indigenous child welfare are inclusive of Métis people in BC: Action 4.16 speaks to the development of a fiscal framework in partnership with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in BC to support progress toward Indigenous jurisdiction of child and family services; and Action 4.17 speaks more generally to strengthening prevention and family support services to prevent and reduce the number of Indigenous children in care. These commitments align with *An Act Respecting First Nations Inuit, and Métis Children, Youth and Families* (2019), and speak to a commitment to supporting IGBs in their legal authority to care for their own children and families.

Métis Child and Family Services in British Columbia. In BC, Métis children, youth, and families may be served by MCFD or through ICFS Agencies. Through agreements made between the province and Indigenous communities, ICFS Agencies have delegated authority to

carry out child protection services for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children, youth, and their families (Government of British Columbia, 2024a). Under this delegation model, ICFS Agencies are mandated to administer all or any relevant parts (depending on their level of delegation) of the *CFCSA*. In addition to adhering to the *CFCSA*, ICFS Agencies follow the *Aboriginal Operational and Practice Standards and Indicators (AOPSI)*, which were collaboratively developed by the Agencies, the Province, and Indigenous Services Canada to articulate the minimum performance expectations for Indigenous child welfare (MCFD, 2005). Following a multi-year community consultation process aimed to redesign the *AOPSI*, MCFD produced the *Aboriginal Policy and Practice Framework*. The *Aboriginal Policy and Practice Framework* is the current framework for policy and practice within ICFS Agencies (MCFD, 2015).

Funding models for the ICFS Agencies have been described as “complex and labyrinthine in nature” (RCY, 2022, p. 3). ICFS Agencies that provide child welfare services to children, youth, and families living on-reserve are funded by the federal government, while off-reserve services are funded by the provincial government. Based on a review of these funding models, the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy found that “First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous children living off-reserve are at the greatest disadvantage because provincial funding for services for them is much less than for their counterparts living on-reserve” (RCY, 2022, p. 4). While urban ICFS agencies may receive less funding, such statements do not fully consider the realities of living on-reserve, including employment opportunities, access to health and social services, and education. Further, funding for child welfare services on-reserve have historically, and up-until-recently, been inequitable. In 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) ruled that the federal government had knowingly perpetuated racial discrimination against First Nations children, youth, and families living on reserve through the

design, management, and funding of child welfare services (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2016). In a 2018 “emergency meeting”, the federal government committed to adhering to the CHRT orders, which required an adjustment to on-reserve child welfare funding—shifting to a needs-based model that includes funding for prevention services (Government of Canada, 2023). This recent adjustment—which is not mirrored in the provincial fiscal landscape—likely accounts for the funding disparity now observed between federal and provincial funding models (RCY, 2022). The reality is that the federal government has historically underfunded Indigenous families living off reserve, and this necessitates a need for increased funding for urban First Nations and Métis child welfare. However, the argument for increased funding should be rooted in a rights-based discourse—linked to the recognition of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people under Section 35 of the 1982 *Constitution Act*. Too often arguments for funding are made on the basis of comparison, which lead to feelings of competition and divisiveness, perpetuated through a colonial scarcity narrative.

As of 2023, there are 24 ICFS Agencies in BC, two of which are Métis-specific and delegated to provide a full spectrum of child welfare services and supports, including child protection: Métis Family Services / La Societe de les Enfants Michif (MFS) in Surrey and Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and LMO in Kamloops (Government of British Columbia, 2024a). There are three additional Métis child and family agencies that are not currently delegated: Métis Community Services Society, located in Kelowna; Niwîkôwin Métis Family Services (formerly Kikino Métis Children and Family Services Society) in Prince George; and Island Métis Family and Community Services Society in Greater Victoria. Métis children, youth, and families can also access services through some additional ICFS Agencies, including the Ktunaxa/Kinbasket Child and Family Services in Cranbrook, Xyólheméylh in the Fraser Valley, and Surrounded by

Cedar Child and Family Services Society in Victoria. The Métis Commission for Children and Families (2021) is the official designated representative for Métis children involved in the BC child welfare system. The Commission does not provide direct services to Métis children, but they do inform the services that children receive with an eye toward cultural safety.

Métis Family Services / La Societe de les Enfants Michif. As one of only two adoption-delegated agencies in BC, MFS (2020) provides child protection, guardianship, and voluntary services to Métis children and families living in Surrey, Delta, White Rock, and Ladner; MFS also provides guardianship, adoption, and resourcing support to Métis children and youth who are living in foster or adoptive homes in Greater Vancouver. The Intake and Family Services teams work to review and investigate potential child safety concerns, and provide supports to support the safety of Métis children (MFS, 2020). The Guardianship team works to support children in care—with a focus on cultural and community connections—and foster families and kinship homes are supported by the Resources team (MFS, 2020). In terms of family supports, MFS offers an Outreach Parenting Program, which focuses on parenting and coping skills, establishing routines, and connecting with other community resources (MFS, 2020). The Rapid Response Program works with families to address issues of child safety with the help of community supports (MFS, 2020). For long-term permanency planning for Métis children, youth and families, MFS offers the Resolutions and Reconnect Program. The Resolutions and Reconnect team is comprised of social workers, facilitators, Elders, and Reconnect workers, who work together to support children and families through Family Finding and Planning Circles (MFS, 2020). The team aims to increase opportunities for children to return to their homes or live with their extended families. Their planning processes focus on promoting child and family safety, celebrating Métis culture and history, and strengthening family and community

connections. MFS (2020) also provides on-site supervised visits for children in care to visit with their parents and other family members and offers trauma-focused group therapy to children and families. There is a weekly drop-in Youth Circle for Métis youth aged 12 – 19. These circles are facilitated by a Youth Worker and focus on life skills, cultural connections, and friendships. Youth aged 16 through 19 can also access the Youth Worker Program by referral, which assists youth to strengthen their life skills before reaching the age of majority (MFS, 2020).

In recognition of the strength and uniqueness of Métis culture, MFS also offers a number of cultural activities to Métis children, youth, and families (MFS, 2020). The Cultural Activities Worker connects Métis children, youth, and families with Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Formally, the Elder Connection program is offered to families on a “case-by-case basis,” and may include ceremony and mentoring (MFS, 2020). Children and families can access drop-in supports and activities with Mooshum and Kookum alongside Early Years workers at MFS; these activities include the Aboriginal Mother Goose program, drumming and singing, storytelling and puppetry. Upon request, families can also work with Infant Development Workers, who offer home visits, developmental assessments, and play group activities. In terms of gatherings, Family Nights are offered bi-weekly at MFS, complete with family activities, food, and Elder-led supports (MFS, 2020).

Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services. LMO (2024a) is delegated to provide the full range of child protection, guardianship, and voluntary services under the *CFCSA*. All of the services delivered through LMO are done so using the Michif Practice Model—a Métis-specific model adapted from the Signs of Safety approach. The Michif Practice Model uses collaborative approaches to assessing of worries and strengths to create balanced safety plans. Using the Michif Practice Model, LMO (2024a) strives to create culturally safe

environments, where children, youth, and families feel welcomed; they strive to ensure that Michif culture and language are reflected in their spaces and across all services. The Michif Practice Model also guides specific steps of practice (LMO, n.d.).

In addition to a child safety team, LMO is home to a prevention social work team that offers a wide scope of supports to assist families in wholistically supporting the safety and wellness of their own children. The prevention team offers a number of parenting programs, support groups, family gatherings, and resources to uplift families and address any particular concerns they may have. Children and youth who are unable to live with their parents are largely placed in kinship placements—with their extended family caring for them. Kinship placements are valued and offered a number of supports, with help from the Michif Kinship and Community Caregiver team (LMO, 2023). For a full description of the services and supports that LMO offers, please see Chapter 1.

Alberta Child Welfare

In Alberta, the current child welfare legislation is the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* (CYFEA, 2000). The CYFEA (2000) defines Indigenous as a term that is inclusive of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit; however, there is very little mention of Métis children, youth, and families beyond this inclusive definition. The CYFEA (2000) does indicate that an Indigenous adoptee, their guardian, or their descendants (if the adoptee is deceased), may request identifying information that is relevant to that person's rights and registration. The CYFEA (2000) specifies that this includes but is not limited to membership with Métis Settlements and provincial Métis citizenship; beyond this, there is no further mention of Métis children, youth, and families. The CYFEA (2000) specifies that Indigenous people should be involved in planning for the services that they receive, as well as decisions made about

Indigenous children and families. In addition, the *CYFEA* (2000) indicates that the best interests of an Indigenous child should include considerations for “the importance of respecting, supporting and preserving the child’s Indigenous identity, culture, heritage, spirituality, language and traditions” (*CYFEA*, 2000, s 58(1)(d)).

Métis Child and Family Services in Alberta. Child protection services are provided through the Ministry of Children’s Services, as well as through 20 Delegated First Nations Agencies (Government of Alberta, 2023c) that have authority to provide child welfare services to First Nations children and families living on reserve. Métis and First Nations children and families living off-reserve are offered services through the Ministry of Children’s Services offices—some of which are designated as “Métis and Indigenous Children’s Services” (Government of Alberta, 2023c). Metis Children’s Services offices are located in Edmonton Metis Settlements, High Prairie Metis Settlements, Paddle Prairie Metis Settlements, and St. Paul Metis Settlements (Government of Alberta, 2023c). It is important to note that these are Children’s Services offices (i.e., mainstream child welfare), rather than delegated or community-based agencies.

Previously, the Alberta Métis Settlements Child and Family Services Authority provided serves to Métis children and families living within the eight Métis settlements in Alberta. In 1999, the Government of Alberta passed the *Child and Family Services Authorities Act*, which led to the establishment of 10 distinct authorities, including the Métis Settlements Child and Family Services Authorities. Before the Authority was established, Métis Settlements had no role in the provision of child and family services provided to their residents (Gauthier & Parenteau, 2007). Child and family services provided through the Métis Settlements Authority were guided by Métis culture, traditions, and family values (Gauthier & Parenteau, 2007). However,

following the establishment of the Métis Settlements Authority, there were challenges related to capacity, infrastructure, and technological support—particularly in the most rural Métis Settlements (Gauthier & Parenteau, 2007). In partnership with Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation, the Authority established family centres in each settlement as a “one-stop-shop where families could receive a variety of integrated services, including at least a health nurse and a social worker” (Gauthier & Parenteau, 2007, p. 120). In 2013, the *Child and Family Services Authorities Act* was repealed, the Métis Settlements Authority closed, and jurisdiction of services was transferred to the ministry.

Today, there are non-delegated support organizations for Métis and other Indigenous families, located in Calgary and Edmonton. The Metis Calgary Family Services Society (n.d.) is an independent non-profit organization that provides supports to the urban Indigenous community in Calgary. Supports include cultural activities, on-site Elders, childcare and early child development, employment assistance, parenting courses, and other early intervention supports for Indigenous families. The Metis Calgary Family Services Society (n.d.) also offers supportive housing to Indigenous families experiencing homelessness through the Rainbow Lodge Supportive Housing Program. Additionally, a team of Elders and support workers provides in-home support to families either voluntarily or through child protection channels (Metis Calgary Family Services Society, n.d.).

In Edmonton, the Métis Child and Family Services Society (2018) aims to provide wholistic and culturally sensitive support services to Métis families and communities. Their Aboriginal Child and Family Support Program offers advocacy, counselling, youth work, referrals, and in-home support for families that have current or past involvement with Alberta Child and Youth Services; these same services are also offered to families who are not involved

with child welfare services through a prevention stream. The Métis Child and Family Services Society offers a Foster Care Program that focuses on providing support groups and training for foster families, as well as a Kinship Care Program, with supports to connect children in care with extended family. Additional programs focus on legal advocacy, harm reduction, school completion, and healthy pregnancies (Métis Child and Family Services Society, 2018).

Saskatchewan

The *Child and Family Services Act (CFSA, 1989-90)* governs child protection services for children in Saskatchewan. These services are provided by the Ministry of Social Services. The purpose of the *CFSA (1989-90)* is to “promote the well-being of children in need of protection by offering, wherever appropriate, services that are designed to maintain, support and preserve the family in the least disruptive manner” (s 3). The *CFSA (1989-90)* mandates that child protection services be offered in a way that provides for the safety and best interests of a child or youth, while supporting families. The *CFSA (1989-90)* defines the factors that should be considered when determining the “best interests of a child” (s 4), including the child’s: continuity of relationships; physical, emotional, mental, and education needs; and culture. Best interests are also balanced by the importance of a timely decision and the plans for custody that are in place. While there is some recognition of culture within the legislation, Saskatchewan’s Act only refers to a child that is a status Indian, which is clearly not inclusive of non-Status First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (*CFSA, 1989-90, s 2*).

Métis Child and Family Services in Saskatchewan. In general, services are provided to children and families through the Ministry of Social Services’ Child Protection offices. The apparent absence of any Métis or urban Indigenous delegated agencies suggests that Métis people must access the ministry to receive services and supports for children and families. First

Nations children and families in Saskatchewan may receive services from a ministry office, or from one of the 19 First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies that are delegated by the Ministry of Social Services to provide child protection services to 65 First Nations (Saskatchewan First Nations Family and Community Institute, 2022). Many of these agencies are supported by the Saskatchewan First Nations Family and Child Institute (2014), which provides training, support, and research to service providers and other stakeholders.

Manitoba

The Child and Family Services Act (1985) indicates that “Indian bands are entitled to the provision of child and family services in a manner which respects their unique status as aboriginal peoples” (s 1(1)) There is no mention of other Aboriginal peoples under section 35 of the *Constitution Act* (1982), despite overall higher recognition of Métis peoples in Manitoba compared to other areas of the Métis homeland. *The Adoption Act* (1999) in Manitoba does not provide any sections specific to Metis people, nor does it define Aboriginal people.

Métis Child and Family Services in Manitoba. *The Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry* called for the expansion of the First Nations Child and Family Service Authority to establish a mandated Métis Child Welfare agency (Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, 1991). More than a decade later, *The Child and Family Services Authority Act* (2002) was developed to establish Authorities to be responsible for the administration and provision of child and family services to different populations in Manitoba. Authorities under this Act include the Metis Child and Family Services Authority (the Metis Authority), the First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority (the Northern Authority), the Southern First Nations Network of Care (Southern Authority), and the General Child and Family Services Authority. Each of these Authorities administers funds, mandates agencies, and

oversees child welfare services, in alignment with *The Child and Family Services Act* (1985) and *The Adoption Act* (1999). Together the authorities manage the Child and Family All Nations Coordinated Response Network, which provides child and family intake services for the city of Winnipeg. Upon intake, families complete an Authority Determination Protocol, which determines the type of service required and which authority would best fit with the family's cultural identity and community location. Families can also indicate which authority they would like to receive services from, and they may request to change authorities as needed (Milne et al., 2023). While child and family services that fall under the Metis Authority primarily serve Metis children and families, any person can request and receive services through the Metis Authority (Metis Child and Family Services Authority, 2021).

An affiliate of the Manitoba Metis Federation, the Metis Authority is responsible for the administration, fiscal management, and monitoring of child and family services by agencies under its jurisdiction. The Authority is also tasked with reviewing and investigating complaints concerning Métis child and family services. The 2020 – 2021 Annual Report for the Metis Child and Family Services Authority notes that their primary focus is to support their Métis agencies' prevention and reunification practices, while continuing to focus on the safety of children and youth. The Board of Directors for the Metis Authority is appointed by the Manitoba Metis Federation. The *Child and Family Services Authority Act* (2002) states that the Metis Authority administers and provides child and family services to both Metis and Inuit people. This authority model has been described as “the largest and most unique Métis governance structure for child welfare in Canada” (Carrière & Richardson, 2017b, p. 64). Two of 28 delegated agencies

operating in Manitoba are Métis child and family agencies, both of which fall under the jurisdiction of the Metis Authority (Government of Manitoba, 2023).¹⁷

Metis Child, Family and Community Services Agency. The first—the Metis Child, Family and Community Services (MCFCS) Agency—has offices located in Winnipeg and Beausejour, delivers services to Métis and Inuit children, youth, and families. Their mission statement focuses on the provision of culturally relevant programming for “building capacity” for families and community care for Métis children (MCFCS, 2021). The agency is governed by a Board of Directors and guided by the Spirit Helpers Committee. Staff work with the Committee to develop programming for children and youth, as well as cultural planning. In 2020, the agency launched a new case management system, Michif Kashkihtaaw, noting that it is the first of its kind for the Metis-specific case management for children and family services (MCFCS, 2021). The Métis Connect team is involved with facilitating family-led conferences, as well as family finding and network building to connect children in care with their families and family friends. The agency also commends their dedicated Kinship and Community Care team, reporting that as of 2021, nearly half (42%) of children in care with Metis Child, Family and Community Services were living in kinship placements (MCFCS, 2021). MCFCS (2021) also reported that some of their General Foster Homes and Specialized Foster Homes have at least one Métis caregiver. As of 2021, MCFCS had 1457 total cases, including: children in care (60%), protection cases (26%), agreements with young adults (6%), family enhancement services (5%), voluntary family services (2%), and expectant parent services (<1%). Most of the agency’s children in care are under a Permanent Order (74%); however, the agency reports a trend of decreasing child apprehensions and temporary orders (MCFCS, 2021).

¹⁷ Additionally, there are 18 First Nations child and family agencies and 8 non-Indigenous, private child welfare agencies (Government of Manitoba, 2023).

A pilot project called the Métis Community Addiction Response Team (Métis CART) was launched in 2019, aiming to provide quick and comprehensive intervention services for parents struggling with substance use. Métis CART uses experiential peer family mentorship, case management, and counselling to help families address child safety concerns (MCFCS, 2021). Families with children in care can also access live-in mentorship supports through the Live In Family Enhance (LIFE) Program. Each of the six LIFE mentors live with families for eight or more months, helping them to improve life and parenting skills. Children who have experienced trauma and loss have access to the Circle of Life Program that provides individualized support, including counselling, ceremony, and cultural activities (MCFCS, 2021). The Skills for Life program offers goal-oriented support to youth to help them strengthen problem-solving and life skills, such as budgeting, job searching, and cooking. The agency also offers a Métis Youth Work program, which focuses on job support for Métis youth in care, and the 1000 Futures Project which contributes to Registered Education Savings Plans or Registered Disability Savings Plans for Métis youth in care (MCFCS, 2021). Youth who are aging out of care can also access the Métis Spirit Program that can assist youth with identifying goals, including education opportunities (MCFCS, 2021).

Michif Child and Family Services. The second mandated Métis agency is Michif Child and Family Services (MCFS, 2023), which has offices in The Pas, Brandon, Dauphin, Swan River, Thompson, and Portage La Prairie. MCFS (2023) offers a variety of services—including some of the same programs as its sister agency—such as family enhancement and the LIFE Program, family mentorship and parent education, the Circle of Life Program, the Metis Spirit Program, and the Skills for Life Program. They also deliver youth outreach through the SASH (So Adolescents Stay Home) Program, which works with high-risk youth with a focus on

relational belonging, safety planning, and prevention (MCFS, 2023). Relationships with children in care are also a central focus of the Life Long Connections Program offered through the agency. Youth who age out of care are celebrated through Honouring Our Youth at the agency (MCFS, 2023). The agency focuses their Kinship Care Program, which supports extended family and community members to care for Métis children and youth in situations where parents may be unable to fully support them. The agency also works with foster care and specialized foster care placements in circumstances where children are not able to stay within their extended families. There are also intake and assessment emergency placement resources in Winnipeg, Swan River, and Dauphin which provide short term care while children and youth are waiting for a longer-term placement (MCFS, 2023). The agency has designated intake teams in each of their offices, including afterhours support. In total, the agency served 499 cases in 2019-2020, including those for children in care (67%), protection cases (28%), voluntary family services (3%), and family enhancement (1%). Most of the children and youth in care are under a Permanent Order (62%). In terms of identity, children in care were reported to be Métis (68%), Treaty Status (16%), Non-Status (8%), non-Indigenous (7%), and Inuit (1%). The agency's resource placements for children in care include general foster homes (41%), kinship care homes (31%), and places of safety (28%); this includes resources across all regions served by MCFS (2020).

Ontario

In Ontario, the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA, 2017)* regulates child welfare services, which are delivered by Children's Aid Societies. The primary purpose of the Act is "to promote the best interests, protection and well-being of children" (*CYFSA, 2017, s 1(1)*). The *CYFSA (2017)* highlights the importance of taking the least disruptive course of action

possible, with a focus on supporting families to care for their children. Among the revisions made in 2017, the *CYFSA* now states that:

First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples should be entitled to provide, wherever possible, their own child and family services, and all services to First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and young persons and their families should be provided in a manner that recognizes their cultures, heritages, traditions, connection to their communities, and the concept of the extended family. (s 1(2)(6))

In 2022, the importance of cultural continuity, community connectedness, and extended family were further emphasized within the *CYFSA* (2017) with revisions stating that Indigenous service providers may be designated as “prevention focused” (s 73(1)). Prevention-focused Indigenous service providers may serve the following roles: providing community-based early intervention services to children and families; facilitating access to Indigenous languages, cultures, and ceremony; strengthening families’ autonomy and supporting reunification; supporting the wholistic needs of Indigenous children and youth; and providing services that “support the establishment of a circle of supportive persons for First Nations, Inuit and Métis children” (*CYFSA*, 2017, s 73(2)). Additionally, the importance of culture, identity, and community connections are maintained as important considerations when determining the “best interests” of the child (*CYFSA*, 2017, s 74(3)).

Métis Child and Family Services in Ontario. Child welfare services are offered by a total of 38 Children’s Aid Societies and 13 Indigenous Child and Family Wellbeing Agencies, which are delegated by the Minister of Children, Community, and Social Services (Petrella & Trocmé, 2022). While none of these agencies are Métis-specific, it appears that Métis children and families may access services through some Indigenous agencies, including Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (2022) and Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child and Family Services (2023). There is a Métis child and family organization in Kenora, called Northwestern

Ontario Métis Child and Family Services (2022), that provides culturally relevant family and youth support work, with a focus on prevention; however, they do not appear to offer any child protection services. The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Services (2022) aims to strengthen understanding of Indigenous culture and history for child welfare staff, and support the re-establishment of jurisdiction of child welfare services to First Nations communities.¹⁸

Northwest Territories

The *Child and Family Services Act (CFSA, 1997)* is the main piece of legislation that guides child welfare services in the Northwest Territories. Current legislation uses language about “aboriginal organizations,” which are not defined within the *CFSA (1997)*. Currently, as indicated in the *CFSA (1997)*, the Director is required to notify the appropriate “aboriginal organization” of child protection investigations and court proceedings “unless it is impracticable to do so within the time limits” (s 12(3)(1)). “Applicable Aboriginal Organizations” include the Fort Providence Métis Council, Fort Simpson Métis Local, Fort Resolution Métis Government, Hay River Métis Government Council, Fort Smith Métis Council, Fort Good Hope Métis Nation Local, and the Yellowknife Métis Council (Government of Northwest Territories, 2021).

Métis Child and Family Services in the Northwest Territories. Child welfare services are delivered through the Department of Health and Social Services. There are no delegated First Nations child and family service agencies in the Northwest Territories (First Nations Caring Society, 2023), though several nations are at different stages of working toward taking over jurisdiction of child welfare services.

¹⁸ While the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (2022) tends to use inclusive language (e.g., Indigenous or First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) discussions around supporting jurisdiction are explicitly limited to First Nations.

Legislation Regarding Métis Children Living Outside the Homeland

Métis children and families may also live and receive services in provinces that fall outside of the historic homelands. There are varying degrees to which child welfare legislation in these provinces addresses Métis children, youth, and families.

Quebec. The *Youth Protection Act (YPA, 1979)* guides child welfare in Quebec. Child welfare services are largely delivered by the Ministry of Health and Social Services. Additionally, 19 First Nations communities in Quebec hold agreements one of 15 delegated First Nations child and family agencies, which are also governed by the *YPA* (Tremblett et al., 2022). First Nations and Inuit communities that do not have an delegated agency may receive some or all of their services through the Ministry (Tremblett et al., 2022). The *YPA (1979)* speaks to the importance of keeping Indigenous children connected to culture, as well as the importance of connection to family and community. The *YPA (1979)* specifically declares that Indigenous people are “best suited to meet the needs of their children,” and that cultural continuity and “cultural safety is essential to the well-being of Indigenous children” (s Preamble). There are specific provisions for Indigenous children in the *YPA (1979)*, which aim to consider “historical, social, and cultural factors” specific to Indigenous children and families, while promoting cultural continuity and community responsibility for children and families, and relational permanency for a child (s 131(1)). The *YPA (1979)* also addresses issues of Indigenous families and neglect through “the priority intervention of providers offering health services and social services to the community to prevent the situation of an Indigenous child from being taken in charge by the director” (s 131(1)(d)). However, the *YPA (1979)* does not define who Indigenous children are, or who this term is inclusive of include, so it is impossible to know if Métis children are included within these broad considerations in the *YPA*.

Nova Scotia. The *Children and Family Services Act (CFSA, 1990)* is the current legislation used for child welfare services in Nova Scotia. Services for children and families are generally provided through the Department of Community Services, while Mi'kmaq Family and Children's Services provides child welfare services to children and families living in Mi'kmaq communities. The *CFSA (1990)* defines an "aboriginal child" as a status First Nations child (registered under the *Indian Act*), which is inclusive but not limited to Mi'kmaq children (s 3(1)(a)). The *CFSA (1990)* broadly indicates the importance of culture for "Mi'kmaq and aboriginal children" (s Preamble).

New Brunswick. As of June 2022, the *Child and Youth Well-Being Act (CYWA)*, was in place to guide child welfare services for children and youth in New Brunswick. Child welfare services are generally delivered through the Ministry of Social Development, but Mi'kmaq children and families may access a full range of services through the Mi'gmaq Child and Family Services of New Brunswick (2023). Among the revisions to the child welfare legislation in New Brunswick, the *CYWA (2022)* notes that the "best interests" of the child or youth should include consideration of their culture, language, and "Indigenous upbringing and heritage" (*CYWA, 2022, s 5(2)(c)*). The *CYWA (2022)* also notes that collaborative approaches for planning may include ways for passing on traditional knowledge and ceremonies, and models for Indigenous decision-making practices. In these cases, Indigenous is defined as being inclusive of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples (*CYWA, 2022, s 1*). Additionally, in the *CYWA (2022)*, "immediate family" is seen as being inclusive of broader notions of belonging within Indigenous communities (s 1).

Previously, the *Family Services Act* (1980) lacked any focus on the rights of Indigenous children and youth.¹⁹ Despite the overall improvements to the new child welfare legislation, First Nations leaders in child welfare have noted its shortcomings, particularly in terms of supports for youth aging out of care (CBC News, 2022). In 2022, Neqotkuk (Tobique) First Nation announced plans for taking back jurisdiction with respect to child welfare (CBC News, 2022).

Prince Edward Island. The *Child Protection Act* (CPA, 1998) is the primary child welfare legislation in Prince Edward Island (PEI). The CPA (1998) recognizes the importance of preserving a child's cultural identity as a component of a child's best interests. While the CPA (1998) uses the term "aboriginal", this only includes children who are status Indians, or a child of a status Indian (s 1). There are no delegated agencies for First Nations children in PEI. However, the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI (2023) provides a number of support and prevention-focused services for Mi'kmaq families.

Newfoundland and Labrador. The *Children, Youth and Families Act* (CYFA, 2018) regulates child welfare and protection services, which are delivered by the Department of Children, Seniors, and Social Development. Services are provided through one of the government's 37 offices throughout the province. There are no Indigenous agencies providing child welfare services in Newfoundland and Labrador. The CYFA (2018) defines an "Indigenous child" as being inclusive of Inuit children; Métis children; Innu, Mi'kmaq, or other First Nations children; any self-identified Indigenous children (from the perspective of a parent of a child 12 through 16 years of age; CYFA, 2018, s 2(1)(n)). Indigenous youth are defined similarly but with different age parameters. The CYFA (2018) states that an Indigenous child has the right to a

¹⁹ The only previous reference to "aboriginal" persons occurs in section 94.4(5), which pertains to requests made by adopted persons and adopted parents for determining if a person should be registered as a status Indian under the Indian Act.

cultural connections plan, and that their cultural identity should be considered when determining an Indigenous child's best interests.

Yukon Territory. The *Child and Family Services Act (CFSA, 2008)* governs the delivery of child protection services in the Yukon. Services are delivered through the Yukon Government's Ministry of Health and Social Services. There will be changes made to the *CFSA*, as the Legislative Assembly of Yukon assented to *Bill 11 – An Act to Amend the Child and Family Services Act (2022)*. Reflective of the population in the Yukon, the *CFSA (2008)* is focused on First Nations children and families, with reference to the *Indian Act (1985)*. The *CFSA (2008)* does not contain any language related to Métis children, youth, and families. Rooted in recommendations from 12 Yukon First Nations and the Council of Yukon First Nations. The proposed amendments to the legislation aim to align with *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families (Yukon, 2022)*.

Nunavut. As the primary legislation for governing the delivery of child protection services in Nunavut, the *Child and Family Services Act (1997)* is appropriately focused on Inuit children and families, and it is grounded in Inuit values and principles. The *Child and Family Services Act (1997)* contains distinct language about Inuit societal values, that guide ways of creating respectful relationship and caring for others (Inuuqatigiitsiarniq); being inclusive, warm, and welcoming (Tunnganarniq); providing for and serving family and/or community (Pijitsirniq); practicing consensus-based decision-making (Aajiiqatigiinniq); working collaborative toward a shared goal (Piliriqatigiinniq or Ikajuqtigiinniq); and being innovative and resourceful (Qanuqtuurniq). The Department of Family Services has the responsibility for the delivery of child and family support services.

Indigenous Child Welfare Legislation

In June 2019, Parliament gave royal assent to Bill C-92: *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families* (the *Act*). The *Act* represents potential for the transformation of Indigenous Child and Family Services, with opportunity for jurisdiction of services—including legislative authority, enforcement, and administration—to shift to Indigenous Nations. This legislation has been described as “ground-breaking”, and the result of long-term advocacy, calling for the transformation of Indigenous child welfare (Wilyman, 2020, para. 2). The *Act* allows for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities to assert jurisdiction over their children and families, recognizing that Métis, among all Indigenous Peoples in Canada, have an inherent right to self-governance including jurisdiction over child and family services. Appropriately, the *Act* also confirms that Canada is committed to fulfilling its obligations to Indigenous children as laid out in both *UNDRIP* and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*. Among these commitments, the *Act* affirms the importance of cultural continuity for Indigenous children and families, which is a focus of the national principles addressed in this legislation.

On the surface, the *Act* recognizes Indigenous people’s self-governance and jurisdiction over child and family services. While capacity building and bridging can be addressed after jurisdiction over child and family services has been regained, Indigenous scholars Blackstock (2009a) and Hart (2009) clearly state that Indigenous communities must be offered equitable supports to develop services and engage in effective acts of resurgence and collective action. This is certainly one area where the *Act* falls short, given the absence of any “binding commitments regarding the proper funding of Indigenous child welfare” (Walqwan Metallic et al., 2019, p. 9). There is no commitment in the *Act* to provide funding for equitable service

provision, capacity building, or related essential services (e.g., health, housing; Walqwan Metallic et al., 2019). In this sense, Canada’s commitment to *UNDRIP* presents a paradox, as Article 4 calls for “means for financing their [Indigenous Peoples’] autonomous functions,” alongside Indigenous Peoples’ right to self-determination (United Nations, 2008).

Under the *Act*, an IGB may request a coordination agreement—for the purpose of exercising jurisdiction over child and family services—with the Government of Canada and the provincial or territorial government in which the IGB resides. Table 1 lists IGBs who have entered a coordination agreement with the federal and the relevant provincial or territorial government (Government of Canada, 2024).²⁰

Table 1. Indigenous Governing Bodies that have entered into a coordination agreement.

Date of Agreement	Indigenous Governing Body	Indigenous Law	Province
July 6, 2021	Cowessess First Nation	<i>Cowessess First Nation Miyo Pimatisowin Act</i>	Saskatchewan
March 10, 2022	Wabaseemoong Independent Nations	<i>Wabaseemoong Independent Nations Customary Care Code</i>	Ontario
January 31, 2023	Peguis First Nation	<i>Honouring Our Children, Families and Nation Act</i>	Manitoba
February 1, 2023 ²¹	Louis Bull First Nation	<i>AMO Law – Asikiw Mostos O’pinkinawasiwin Society</i>	Alberta
March 24, 2023	Splatsin	<i>Spallumcheen Indian Band Care of Our Children By-law</i>	British Columbia
March 31, 2023	Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug	<i>Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug Dibenjikewin Onaakonikewin</i>	Ontario
March 31, 2023	Loon River First Nation; Lubicon Lake Band; Peerless Trout First Nation	<i>Awas’ak Wiyasiwewin</i>	Alberta

²⁰ Table 1 was last updated May 31, 2024. It reflects a growing list and may be incomplete at the time of reading.

²¹ Noted as a bilateral agreement with the Government of Canada (2024).

In addition, several other Nations have formally expressed their intention to exercise legislative authority (Government of Canada, 2024). Table 1 also does not include Nations that have formed bi-lateral agreements with the province or territory. For example, in BC, several Nations have signed agreements with MCFD. Some of these agreements pre-date federal legislation (Government of British Columbia, 2024b), and they are often specific to information sharing, and respect for local protocols (Government of British Columbia, 2024c). Some Nations have also signed Memoranda of Understanding and bilateral coordination agreements with the Province (Government of British Columbia, 2024c). For example, in April 2022, the Simpcw First Nation signed the Tcwsémtem: Walking Together Agreement—coined as the “first co-created child welfare agreement in BC” (Government of British Columbia, 2022; Simpcw, n.d.). In November 2023, the Gwa’sala-’Nakwaxda’xw Nations also signed a child and family services agreement with the Province (Government of British Columbia, 2023). This Community Agreement came into full effect on February 15, 2024 (Government of British Columbia, 2024c). While varied in nature, these agreements are made with the intention of supporting Nations to move towards fully exercising jurisdiction over their own child and family services.

Challenges to Indigenous Jurisdiction Over Child Welfare

In September 2021, the Quebec government challenged *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Children, Youth and Families* (2019), claiming that it allows for Indigenous Nations to exercise a “third level of government, one with territorially unlimited jurisdiction” (*Quebec v. Canada*, 2022a, para. 287), which will “impair the province’s authority over its public service” (*Quebec v. Canada*, 2022a, para. 285). The Assembly of First Nations and the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador intervened on the province’s challenge arguing that First Nations people have maintained a right to self-government, which is rooted in Section 35 of

the *Constitution* (*Quebec v. Canada*, 2022a). The Quebec Court of Appeal issued a decision on February 10, 2022, that largely upheld the Act, with the exception of Section 21 and Subsection 22(3), which provide that Indigenous laws have equal force as federal law and that Indigenous laws would be given priority over provincial laws where they were at odds. Following the Court of Appeal's decision, both Quebec and Canada appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada. Other provincial and territorial governments, including NWT and Manitoba, also expressed their opposition to the Act (*Quebec v. Canada*, 2022b).

Despite the Northwest Territories' original support for *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Children, Youth and Families* (2019), the NWT Attorney General recently appeared in Canada's Supreme Court to support Quebec's appeal of the Act. While affirming Indigenous peoples' inherent right to self-government and jurisdiction over child and family services, the NWT Attorney General is fighting against the potential for Indigenous laws to supersede territorial law (*Quebec v. Canada*, 2022b); in short, the NWT is fighting to retain the highest level of decision-making power over child welfare matters. Nevertheless, the Department of Health and Social Services recognizes the Northwest Territory Métis Nation as having IGB status, alongside the Inuvialuit and the Salt River First Nation (Government of Northwest Territories, n.d.). Federally, the Tłegóhł Got'ine Government/ Norman Wells Land Corporation are listed as having provided notice of intention to exercise legislative authority on behalf of the Sahtu Dene and Métis of Norman Wells. Additionally, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation have made a request to enter into a coordination agreement for assuming jurisdiction of child welfare, under their 2021 law *Inuvialuit Qitunrariit Inuuniarnikkun Maligakat* (Government of Canada, 2024). This leaves some discrepancy between the federal and territorial government in terms of

Northwest Territory Métis Nation, the Sahtu Dene and Métis of Normal Wells, and the Salt River First Nation.

On February 9, 2024, the Supreme Court of Canada rendered a unanimous decision to dismiss the appeal of the Quebec's Attorney General and uphold *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families*. This decision deems that the *Act* is constitutionally valid and affirms that Indigenous Nations have jurisdiction over child and family services (*Quebec v. Canada*, 2024). In speaking about the national standards established in the *Act*, the Supreme Court of Canada stated:

It may reasonably be expected that the standards that are preventive will lessen the historical propensity of child welfare systems to apprehend Indigenous children and thus that they will help such children remain, where possible, in the environment they are from. (*Quebec v. Canada*, 2024, para. 11)

Through upholding the *Act*, the decision also affirms the value of the national standards for Indigenous Child and Family Services. Further, according to Naomi Metallic—a legal representative for the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society and intervenor during the appeal process—this ruling may push the federal government to implement *UNDRIP* (Romer, 2024). This decision has been celebrated by a number of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis political leaders and advocates (Forester, 2024; Romer, 2024)

Jurisdiction of Métis Child Welfare

Section 35 of the *Constitution Act* (1982) recognizes Métis people as a rights-bearing Aboriginal People, which includes the right to self-government (Dubois & Saunders, 2017). However, federal and provincial governments have historically excluded Métis people from the vast majority of legislation, policy, and programs directed toward other Indigenous peoples in Canada (Dubois & Saunders, 2017). While agreements like the 2017 Canada-Métis Nation Accord indicate that the federal government may be committed to strengthening its relationship

with the Métis Nation, Métis scholars and leaders suggest that the movement toward Métis self-determination is contextualized within the “structural marginalization of the Métis by federal government policies that fail to fully recognize Métis identity and rights” (Tait, 2009, p. 32). This history has contributed toward considerable skepticism throughout Métis communities.

It has long been the position of the Métis National Council and its provincial constituents that the federal government has jurisdiction and responsibility for Métis services by way of the *1867 Constitution Act*, section 91(24) (Manitoba Metis Federation & Metis Child and Family Services Authority, 2013, p. 40). This position, to some extent, was affirmed by the 2016 Supreme Court of Canada ruling in *Daniels v. Canada* (2016), which requires the federal government to honour their legislative jurisdiction over Métis issues and to interact with the Métis Nation on a Nation-to-Nation basis. While the extent of jurisdictional and fiduciary responsibilities to the Métis and non-status First Nations populations remains unclear, the Daniels Decision may offer a foundation for continued dialogue around the inherent rights of the Métis to self-govern and determine once again how to best care for Métis children and families.

The evolving federal landscape of Indigenous child welfare may present opportunities for re-imagining what the jurisdiction of Métis services may look like. However, there remains a great deal of uncertainty, as well as skepticism, about the specific opportunities that the new federal legislation may offer to the provincial constituents of the Métis Nation that are seeking jurisdiction. Some Métis provincial bodies have hosted engagement sessions with their citizens to better understand the needs and priorities of Métis people.

In 2019, the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) launched their Métis Child, Youth and Family Services Project to engage with Métis citizens to understand their desired plans for the child welfare system in Ontario. With a focus on prevention, MNO has been hosting discussions

with communities to understand the types of services and programs that they feel would help to keep Métis families together. In a video update, MNO President Margaret Froh reported that they are designing a “Métis approach to child, youth and family services for the future” (MNO, 2022b, 01:05-01:10). Meanwhile, MNO has continued to offer foster care recruitment sessions in an effort to encourage more Métis families to support Métis children in care (MNO, 2023).

In the summer of 2023, the Métis Nation Alberta’s Department of Children and Family Services began a series of engagement sessions throughout the province. These sessions aimed to engage Métis citizens to understand priorities for developing a Métis Child and Family Services model under the *Act*. Continued work and communication regarding the development of this model will undoubtedly be forthcoming. Beginning in the February 2024, MNBC (2024) also began hosting sessions for MNBC citizens to discuss the federal legislation. According to MNBC, feedback from these sessions will be reported back to Indigenous Services Canada with the goal of developing Métis-specific laws related to federal jurisdiction. It is unclear how the develop of such laws, or the direction that MNBC takes with respect to child welfare jurisdiction may incorporate the Province as a third party. There is a history of past agreements and relational accords made between the MNBC and the Province of BC.

MNBC and the Province of BC first signed the Métis Nation Relationship Accord in 2006. The Accord was established to strengthen relationships between Métis people and the provincial government in BC, with set objectives in housing, health, education and economic opportunities, and Métis identification in datasets. A decade later, the relationship was reinstated with the signing of the second Métis Nation Relationship Accord; this renewed commitment also addresses new priorities, including children and families (Government of BC, 2016).

In 2018, MNBC and the Province of BC signed an agreement and joint commitment for MNBC to prepare for taking over the authority of child welfare for Métis children in BC. The agreement was aspirational, with a three year time line ending in 2021 (MNBC & MCFD, 2018). This agreement aims to “significantly reduce the number of Métis children and youth in government care, support family preservation, and work on the legislative and other requirements to support transfer of authority over BC’s Métis children and families to MNBC” (MNBC & MCFD, 2018, para. 4). With this new joint commitment in place, MNBC asserted its right to develop laws, policies, and practices in accordance with Métis ways of knowing and cultural traditions. Using a Nation-driven, collaborative approach, MNBC planned to shift legislation, policy, and programming to ensure that Métis children and families are wholistically supported (RCY, 2020).

From a federal perspective, a significant barrier to gaining jurisdiction lies in the fact that MNBC is not recognized as an IGB with the right to enact child welfare jurisdiction for Métis children and families in BC. Following formal notice to provide to the federal and provincial governments regarding MNBC’s intention to exercise jurisdiction under the *Act*, the Government of Canada indicated that ““There is currently insufficient evidence to demonstrate [MNBC] has been authorized by any communities that hold rights recognized and affirmed by s.35 of the Constitution Act, 1982”” (Forester, 2023). This means that, MNBC does not currently meet the requirements to be considered as an IGB. An appeal of this decision is currently underway, and as on March 24, 2023, MNBC launched a judicial review against the Minister of Indigenous Services Canada. The Métis National Council (2023) has also expressed its support for all Métis Governing Members to work toward jurisdiction over Métis child welfare.

Supporting System Transformation

Prevention in Indigenous child welfare requires the full recognition and realization of Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination (West Coast Leaf, 2019). In their interviews with biological and foster parents, the West Coast Leaf team (2019) found that what gave parents an optimistic outlook for the future of Indigenous child welfare in BC was “the idea that Indigenous peoples could regain full control over child welfare services for their children” (p. 81). When applied at a systems level, resurgence in Indigenous social work is evident through the practice of self-governance in child welfare as jurisdiction over child and family services can be returned to Indigenous Nations. Nations and organizations are doing sacred work as they aim to maintain and strengthen children's connections to their homelands, communities, and cultures. The practice of reconnecting with traditional practices, including food systems, homelands and territories, child-rearing practices and ways of caring for each other inherently challenges colonization. Hart (2009) asserts that Indigenous leaders, knowledge holders, researchers, and frontline workers must work together in partnership to actively engage in dismantling colonialism while subsequently revitalizing Indigenous Knowledge systems. Approaches to decolonizing systems require a deep understanding of the importance of spirituality, community, kinship and wholism (Hart, 2009).

While there is limited research that has sought to understand how to support Nations to resume jurisdiction of child and family services, both Auger (2012) and MacDonald (2008) provide insight into Indigenous child welfare transformation. Based on their work with the Touchstones of Hope reconciliation movement in Northern BC, Auger (2012) illustrates five principles of reconciliation, which should be incorporated into all aspects of Indigenous child welfare: self-determination; cultural continuity; wholistic approaches; non-discrimination; and

structural interventions. MacDonald (2008) conducted an environmental scan of Indigenous child welfare and provided four broad recommendations for transforming Indigenous child welfare in BC: creating a common vision; landing on an appropriate governance model; building in an adequate budget and capacity building measures; and returning to traditional forms of child rearing. Cree legal scholar Matthew Wildcat (2018) sees Wahkotowin as a foundation of the resurgence of Indigenous control over systems, meaning there is potential application here with respect to jurisdiction over Métis child welfare. In recovering from generations of colonial control over Indigenous children and families—by way of Eurocentric politicians, health care providers, social workers, and law enforcement—Indigenous communities undoubtedly will need to spend concerted time and energy reimagining a decolonized and wholistic approach to child welfare. Although state policies and laws may offer opportunities for change, there are often caveats that limit potential for change—that is, where a transfer of jurisdiction does not necessarily support the transformation of the system. It is also important to note that research does not fully capture the depth and breadth of community-driven efforts for transforming child and family services.

Many Nations are leading significant and impact work in child and family services—rooted in ancestral knowledge and cultural teachings. For example, the Słłatsin First Nation have long exercised jurisdiction of child welfare services, rooted in their own laws. While their agreement with the federal government came into effect in 2023, their *Spallumcheen Indian Band Care of Our Children By-law* dates back to 1980.²² Secwépemc law is also the foundation for Stsmémelt (2018), a culturally-responsive model for taking care of children and families. These examples are included to illustrate that while Indigenous laws have only recently received

²² With recognition that their traditional laws far precede the date that written laws were developed.

pathways of recognition through federal legislation, they have long served as a foundation for supporting children and families.

Broadly speaking, the West Coast Leaf (2019) report indicates that each model for enacting self-determination will be unique to the Nation, as the process will be guided by teachings, traditions, kinship, and culture. The late Métis scholar, Deborah Canada (2017), has aptly said, “Métis people are the experts in the care and custody of their children” (p. 240). In this way, Métis children, youth, Elders, families, communities, and helpers must define and interpret what child welfare means and looks like to them, within the context of traditional practices. These teachings will guide Métis communities to transform, create, and implement their own child welfare legislation and practices.

Conclusion to the Literature Review

This literature review is vast, covering topics related to Métis identity, culture, and traditional practices. It also addresses the impacts of colonialism and the ways that it has shaped BC’s child welfare system. By providing an overview of child welfare legislation by province and territory, as well as the findings from a scan of Métis child and family services, this chapter also aims to situate wise practices rooted in the work of LMO (see: Chapter 6) within the broader context of child welfare practice across Canada. Additionally, as demonstrated through the final sections of the literature review, Indigenous child welfare jurisdiction is both dynamic and complex, and Métis jurisdiction remains a largely unresolved issue within a multi-faceted legal landscape that spans both federal and provincial levels of government. As a whole, these topics are addressed at the forefront of this dissertation, as they collectively create a unique foundation for the landscape of Métis child welfare.

Chapter 3: Research Approach

This chapter articulates the knowledge, principles, values, and processes that contribute to the methodological foundation for this research. This chapter begins by sharing reflections on the impact of colonial research and the ways in which Indigenous and ally researchers, community members, and leaders can engage in decolonizing research. Following this discussion, a framework for Métis research is presented, alongside an examination of its interconnected components: relationship to self and community; knowledge sharing; meaning making; and giving back.²³ This framework centres the Visiting Way (Flaminio et al., 2020; Gaudet, 2018; Richardson & Carrière, 2017b), which offers a cultural and practical approach to conducting Métis research. Rather than examining specific methods, this chapter focuses on values, theory, and approaches for conducting Métis research in a good way.²⁴

A Decolonizing Approach

Indigenous peoples have diverse and complex systems of knowledge that have historically been guided by Elders and Knowledge Keepers and used to support and maintain the wholistic health and wellbeing of communities. Indigenous Knowledges—which are unique to each Nation—have developed and evolved over time based on lived experiences, observations, and teaching processes (Wilson, 2008). These knowledges have been collectively accumulated, developed, transmitted from generation to generation within the context of social relationships (Hodgson-Smith & Kermaal, 2016). Rather than being static—which is a common misinterpretation of Traditional Knowledge, rooted in its etymology—Métis Elders have been

²³ Throughout this chapter, the term community is used in its broadest sense, inclusive of land-based, rural, and urban communities—essentially any form of Indigenous collective. While technically defined as an ICFS Agency, LMO is also a community for many Métis children, youth, and families. As such, the use of community is inclusive of Métis and other Indigenous organizations, too.

²⁴ Such steps are described in Chapter 4.

clear that Indigenous Knowledges are “not only rooted in ancestral stories and oral histories, but knowledge that is current, contemporary, [and] sustainable” (NAHO, 2008, p. 83). Broadly speaking, Indigenous Knowledges are also as diverse as the lands with which they are interconnected. These knowledges are meaningfully embedded throughout all aspects of life.

Indigenous research (or re-search) methodologies involve returning to knowledge that has existed in Indigenous communities for millennia.²⁵ Indigenous peoples have always had and used methods for discovering knowledge, as Vine Deloria Jr. (1996) describes:

Indigenous re-search methods and methodologies are as old as our ceremonies and our nations. They are with us and have always been with us. Our Indigenous cultures are rich with ways of gathering, discovering, and uncovering knowledge. They are as near as our dreams and as close as our relationships. (p. 182)

Research has traditionally been employed in various forms of sharing, decision making, and strategizing in Indigenous communities (Nabigon et al., 1999). In this sense, while mainstream research aims to create of “new knowledge” (McIvor, 2010, p. 147), Indigenous research often involves is remembering what has always been known (Absolon, 2022).

Signifying the intentional privileging of ancestral knowledge, values, and ways of being, this section aims to share considerations for decolonizing approaches to Métis research. The use of decolonizing, in this context, is purposeful as it reflects a continual process rather than an end result. In particular, both Hart (2009) and Simpson (2011) have urged Indigenous peoples to focus their energy on remembering and re-building their own knowledge systems and practices, rather than diverting such resources to work within colonial knowledge systems. The articulation of a decolonizing approach aims to recognize the work of Indigenous scholars and leaders who

²⁵ The term re-search is often used within the context of Indigenous Knowledge, to denote the practice of re-examining—or searching once again—for ancestral knowledges (Absolon, 2022). While the term research is more commonly within the context of this chapter, it is done with the intention of maintaining the meaning of searching for and remembering ancestral knowledges and histories.

have generously shared their knowledge; they have done so as a way of resisting colonial narratives, practices, and policies, while reclaiming and centring Indigenous Knowledges, languages, and practices.

A Legacy of Unethical Research

Throughout Canada's colonial history and present reality, researchers using Eurocentric paradigms have too often considered Indigenous Knowledges to be primitive (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021). Working within colonial structures, settler researchers have persistently found ways of excluding, exploiting, and appropriating Indigenous Knowledges; these practices are rooted in intellectual imperialism, where colonial knowledge—along with the processes used for obtaining this knowledge—is seen as being more objective and therefore more valid (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021). Research has also been used as a means of asserting colonial control, upholding perceptions of Indigenous people as inferior and helpless. Colonialism has perpetuated a sense of intellectual imperialism, creating an illusion that colonial science is superior (Absolon, 2022).

Historically, research on Indigenous peoples has involved abhorrent, non-consensual practices. Within the past decade, a historian exposed a series of nutritional experiments that were conducted on Indigenous children in residential schools from 1942 through 1952 (Mosby, 2013). These studies—which involved teams of scientists, physicians, and photographers—exploited researchers' positions of power over children in residential schools. Children were viewed as “experimental materials”, providing means for studying the impacts of prolonged malnutrition, vitamin deficiencies, and starvation (Mosby, 2013, p. 148). Indian hospitals were also sites for experimental treatment including lung removal under local anesthetic, as well as forced sterilization and aggressive electroconvulsive therapy (Geddes, 2017). Unethical medical experiments—unrelated to the treatment of tuberculosis—were also conducted on Indigenous

patients without their consent; these studies included the investigating the impacts of severe malnutrition as well as understanding how broken bones heal if they are not set (Geddes, 2017). There are countless examples of unethical research conducted in Indigenous communities across Turtle Island (Hyett et al., 2018), resulting in a widespread mistrust of research, or at best what Dr. Cindy Blackstock (2009b) calls a “healthy skepticism” toward research. Such skepticism is often rooted in a protective stance.

Research has been harmful and destructive to Indigenous communities in a number of ways, often involving exploitation and violence (Clark et al., 2010; Tuck & Yang, 2014). Rooted in colonial constructions of Indigenous peoples as the ‘Other’ (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021), deficit theorizing is used as a way of assigning deficits or problems to individuals rather than attributing challenges to societal structures (Kovach, 2021; Walter & Andersen, 2013). Deficit-based narratives are rooted in the belief that Indigenous peoples are inferior and damaged, thereby perpetuating pathologies, stereotypes, and the marginalization of Indigenous peoples. Rather than individualizing pain and shame, researchers must intentionally scrutinize and deconstruct the systems that create vulnerability for Indigenous peoples (Chacaby, 2018; Tuck & Yang, 2014).²⁶ Research on Indigenous peoples has supported broader colonial agendas; this has been done through the use of unethical research methods that have directly harmed Indigenous peoples, as well as the ways in which the often skewed findings of such studies have been used support efforts of colonization and assimilation (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021). In response to this legacy of unethical research, Indigenous communities have developed ways of resisting and challenging harmful practices that seek to exploit and appropriate Indigenous peoples’ experiences and knowledges.

²⁶ See also the discussion of pathologizing approaches in child welfare practice (Chapter 1).

Indigenous Research Ethics

In response to colonizing research, and as a reflection of traditional ways of knowing and being, Indigenous research employs relational ethics. Relational ethics reflect obligations to kin and to community (Kovach, 2021). From a Métis standpoint, relational ethics are interwoven with teachings of Wahkotowin, which informs responsibility for intergenerational relationships with Métis relatives and community (Flaminio et al., 2020). Relational ethics grounded in Wahkotowin inform responsibilities that span social, cultural, and spiritual realms (Gaudet et al., 2020).

Aspects of relational ethics are included in Chapter 9 of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Research Involving First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples of Canada* (2nd edition)—hereinafter referred to as the TCPS2. In essence, the TCPS2 was developed to provide guidance for preventing further harm when working with Indigenous communities. The TCPS2 emphasizes the need for conducting research in a respectful, collaborative manner that centres relationships with communities. It also provides some guidance to researchers about how to ensure that their work is attentive to the needs of community and that research protects traditional knowledge. The TCPS2 is broad, and it includes guidance that researchers should not use Chapter 9 to override ethical guidance from Indigenous communities. Indeed, there are several frameworks that offer more specific guidance in working with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. In recognizing this gap, current research led by Syilx/Tlingit scholar, Krista Stelkia, aims to create a distinctions-based approach to understanding ethical protocols across First Nations and Métis communities in BC (Mah, 2023).

An early example of distinctions-based ethical frameworks, the *Principles of Metis Research* is a community-directed document produced by the Métis Centre at the National

Aboriginal Health Organization (2011). The framework defines Métis-specific research projects as those that focus entirely on Métis communities and are “consistent with the needs and unique cultural perspective[s] of the Métis” (NAHO, 2011, p. 1). The framework outlines the importance of understanding Métis culture, history, values, and politics (NAHO, 2011). In addition to speaking to the importance of reciprocity and relational approaches, the principles outlined in this framework also highlight the importance of diversity, including the need to recognize that Métis people have diverse ways of knowing and seeing the world (NAHO, 2011). Lastly, the principles speak to forming safe and inclusive environments, meaning that the research should be safe and inclusive of youth and Elders, of people of all genders and sexualities, and of people with different ideas around Métis identity (NAHO, 2011).

Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession. Indigenous research must include consideration for agency and self-determination. Self-determination in Indigenous research has been operationalized through the principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP™; First Nations Information Governance Centre [FNIGC], 2014; NAHO, 2007). These principles were first coined by the First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey Committee in 1998, which later became the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC, 2014). The OCAP™ principles demand that Indigenous peoples and communities have authority over the path and lifespan of the research from conception to knowledge translation and mobilization. The OCAP™ principles assert that Indigenous peoples should have control over any and all research that concerns them, their wellness, knowledges, cultures, and lands. At the core, the OCAP™ principles require that communities are in positions of power and are able to determine what research should look like within the context of the community. While the Manitoba First Nations use the OCAP™ principles in their research endeavours and partnerships

with the University of Manitoba (2013), the Manitoba Metis Federation substituted stewardship responsibilities for possession, with a framework articulated for OCAS.

Ownership. Ownership reflects the relationship of the Métis community or organization to its cultural knowledge, stories, data, and information. The community has collective ownership over this knowledge (FNIGC, 2014; NAHO, 2007). The University of Manitoba (2013) presents the example of the Metis Population Data-Base, which consists of more than 90,000 anonymized individuals and is legally owned by the Manitoba Metis Federation.

Control. Control refers to the Métis community having power over decisions made in the research, across the entire process (University of Manitoba, 2013). This includes many different aspects of the research—including resources, design, data management, and review (NAHO, 2007)—as well as the eventual destruction of the data, when applicable (FNIGC, 2014). Overall, this principle requires researchers to rethink consent processes, perhaps broadening their perspectives to include collective, community forms of consent (Kovach, 2021).

Access. Access means that the Métis community must have access to any data or collective information about the community, no matter where this data is held (NAHO, 2007). This is particularly important where this information can benefit the community involved. The notion of access also means that the community has the right to make decisions about who can access the data (FNIGC, 2014).

Possession. Possession refers to the mechanisms used to assert ownership and protect knowledge (NAHO, 2007). Building on the principle of ownership—which speaks to the relationship between community and knowledge—both possession and stewardship involve a more literal interpretation (University of Manitoba, 2013).

Stewardship. Rooted in the long-term partnership with the University of Manitoba, the Manitoba Metis Federation identified an alternate principle to possession, where stewardship involves the “responsible planning and management of resources... to ensure that research that is completed is in their best interests, will result in positive changes... and is done in as rigorous and ethical manner as possible” (University of Manitoba, 2013, p. 14).

Resistance through Researching Back

Indigenous peoples have conducted or otherwise been involved in research since time immemorial; this research has been used as a way of finding solutions to promote wellness and sustain life (Absolon, 2022). Given the ways in which research has been weaponized as a tool for assimilation, there is a continued need for Indigenous and allied researchers alike to collectively resist research on Indigenous peoples—that is, research that has been unethical, immoral, and often harmful to Indigenous communities. Kovach (2021) describes Indigenous peoples’ resistance to colonial forms of research as “a long swim against a strong current” (p. 63). The practice of refusal holds significant anti-colonial properties (Hart, 2009); however, in addition to the power of resistance by taking a refusal stance, it is also important to dedicate energy toward decolonizing Indigenous research. Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021) speaks about “researching back”, which involves dedication to advancing agendas for systemic change while privileging the voices of Indigenous communities (p. 8). In this way, Indigenous research can serve as a way to claim space for Indigenous voices and knowledges (Walter & Andersen, 2013), while appropriately identifying problems and their potential solutions.

Métis Approaches to Research. Alongside a generational resurgence of Métis ways of knowing and being, there is a growing body of published Métis research methodologies (Davey, 2023). Miner (2012) presents an analysis of Halfbreed Theory: an epistemology that is rooted

within the lived experience of Métis people. As a reflexive practice, Halfbreed Theory “draws from both Indigenous and colonial systems” (Miner, 2012, p. 160). Halfbreed Theory is not a form of methodological métissage, as it both avoids and rejects hybridity as the Métis experience. Other Métis scholars, including Burke and Robinson (2019), have claimed Métissage as an Indigenous research praxis—one that creates space for both Indigenous and western knowledges to be understood, drawn from, and honoured. Similarly, Richardson and Carrière (2017b) assert that Métis research methodologies are diverse and involve the intertwining of Indigenous and western knowledges within the context of Métis specific methodological spaces. Forsythe (2022) honours this resurgence through the development a research framework that draws from three Métis methodologies: Keeoukaywin (the Visiting Way), Lii Taab di Faam Michif (Métis Kitchen Table Methodology), and Kishkeeyihtamaaniwan Kaa-natohtamihk (Learning from Listening and Paying Attention). Each of these methodologies remembers and reflects the traditional practices of Métis women, bringing them forward into the context of research and informing the ethics and methods necessary for doing research in a good way.

This present research aims to respond to the call for recentring Métis voices through working collaboratively with Métis people. Rooted in teachings from Tuhiwai Smith’s (2011) *Decolonizing Methodologies*—which have been adapted within the context of Métis research—priorities for asserting a decolonizing research agenda may include: (1) Naming Métis research needs and priorities; (2) Determining how research should be done; (3) Strengthening and bridging capacity including training Métis researchers; (4) Building and sharing literature on Métis research; and (5) Educating the broader community and bringing allies on board to assist. Further, with an eye toward “citation politics” (Wemigwase & Tuck, 2019), Métis-specific resources and perspectives are prioritized and highlighted whenever possible.

Values that Guide the Research

Axiologies are the interconnected values and principles, which make up integral components of Indigenous methodologies. As Pidgeon (2019) notes, they are “the ethics or morals that guide our search for knowledge” (p. 432). The sections below describe and contextualize teachings on, and guidance for conducting research in a good way.

Respect. Respect is an integral value in all forms of ethical Indigenous research. It encourages researchers to honour and value the perspectives and knowledge shared across the research process. Indigenous scholars stress that one of the most important ethical considerations in Indigenous research is the need to ensure that Indigenous peoples and their knowledge are honoured, and not exploited (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2021; Tuhiwai Smith, 2021).

Researchers must respect and advocate for the validity of Indigenous Knowledges and ways of knowing; failure to do so may result in ongoing inaccurate portrayals of Indigenous communities and the perpetuation of structural violence and epistemic racism (Castellano, 2008; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Tuhiwai Smith, 2021). Métis scholars LaVallee, Troupe, and Turner (2016) share several tangible actions that they associate with teachings of respect: listening and observing, and communicating with transparency. Indigenous research also requires respect for ownership over knowledge and story, which may contradict or challenge academic institutions and their own forms of ethics (Archibald, 2008).²⁷

Reciprocity. Reciprocity, which is commonly described as the practice of “giving back”, requires researchers to work to the benefit of Indigenous communities (Kovach, 2021, p. 21; Pidgeon, 2019, p. 430). Conducting research with Indigenous communities is a privilege, and

²⁷ Ownership over knowledge—and within the context of the Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (First Nations Regional Governance Committee, 2014)—is discussed later in this chapter. Further, the ways in which I aimed to operationalize ownership over knowledge in the context of this research are described in Chapter 4.

acts of reciprocity are required to ensure that research is beneficial to all who are involved with the work. As Brant Castellano (2008) aptly states, research is not meaningful unless it contributes toward social benefit; this can occur through directly improving the lives of Indigenous peoples, and/or through influencing systemic change. With the understanding that the knowledge shared and given to researchers by participants is a gift, the return of knowledge to community is an act of reciprocity consistent with Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2021).

Reciprocity must be instilled in all aspects of Métis research (NAHO, 2011). The Principles of Métis Research indicate the strength of working with researchers who have knowledge of Métis culture and community, as well as those who are known by the people in the community (NAHO, 2011). Reciprocity asks that research creates space for Métis people to share their experiences, family histories, and stories; in part, the act of honouring Métis stories requires recognition that multiple forms of knowledge offer authentic contributions to research (LaVallee et al., 2016). More broadly, Lavallee (2009) conceptualizes storytelling and story listening within research as a way of affirming Indigenous peoples' experiences, as well as advancing Indigenous Knowledges in academia.

Responsibility and Relational Accountability. It is integral that research is responsive to collective needs, accountable to Indigenous peoples, and protective of the cultural knowledges that are shared. In upholding responsibilities for bringing stories and knowledge forward in authentic ways, researchers are required to accept guidance received from community and to humbly adapt the research when needed (Hart, 2009). Responsibility is interconnected with relational accountability. Relational accountability involves answering to the relationships that are created throughout and beyond the research process and upholding cultural and kinship obligations (Kovach, 2021; Wilson, 2008). These relationships are inclusive of “ourselves, the

community, our environment or cosmos as a whole, and also to the idea or topics that we are researching” (Wilson, 2008, p. 106). In this way, relational accountability requires the highest level of ethical conduct in doing research.

Accountabilities are often multi-faceted within the context of Indigenous research. McIvor (2010) stresses that Indigenous researchers, in particular, carry a “dual responsibility” in answering to both academic and Indigenous communities (p. 141). This complex role involves important responsibilities related to guardianship of knowledge, which require mindfulness around the ways in which knowledge is shared and mobilized (Kovach, 2021; Wemigwase & Tuck, 2019; Wilson, 2008).²⁸

Relational accountability also aligns with the decolonial practice of truth-telling and Witnessing. Indigenous scholars Tłaliłila’ogwa (Hunt, 2014, 2018) and Clark (2016) have shared that Witnessing is a decolonizing research practice, as well as a way of supporting healing journeys within Indigenous communities. Similarly, Nêhiyaw scholar, Margaret Kovach, shares teachings around *tâpwê*—to speak the truth (Kovach, 2021). Indigenous research can contribute to *tâpwê*; in understanding this, researchers must be accountable for the messages conveyed through their work (Kovach, 2021). *Here, it is important to note that I hold myself accountable with respect to the way that stories have been shared within this research; any errors within this dissertation are my own.*

Relevance. Research should only be conducted when it is meaningful and relevant to the communities involved. For research to have value to Indigenous communities, it must be relevant. This means that research should align with the needs and goals of the community and be valuable to individuals involved with the research (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Pidgeon,

²⁸ To uphold this responsibility, I requested and received guidance from Elders on which types of knowledge can be shared publicly and in which ways. This process is further detailed in Chapter 4.

2019). Relevance requires researcher transparency and community leadership at each step of the research process through respectful, meaningful, and relational approaches to partnership. On the ground, adhering to the principle of relevance may mean that the research must shift direction after it is already underway. For instance, the Métis Centre at the former National Aboriginal Health Organization (2008) noted that in their research on traditional healing with Métis Elders, the Elders did not want to answer the questions posed in the interview guide, and instead chose to structure the knowledge sharing process around their collective priorities.

Adaptability. While Indigenous methodologies have been in place long before colonialism, the articulation and recognition of Indigenous research in academia is relatively new. With the increasing uptake of Indigenous methodologies in universities today, Indigenous scholars are careful to draw distinctions between inserting Indigenous perspectives into western research frameworks, and centring methodologies that stem from Indigenous ways of knowing and doing (Absolon, 2022; Walter & Andersen, 2013). Unfortunately, Indigenous scholars have often been asked to justify how Indigenous methodologies are comparable to western methodologies, rather than to articulate the uniqueness and authenticity of Indigenous methodologies. Scholars, including Archibald (2008), have indicated that the adaption of western methodologies for Indigenous Storywork, in particular, can be problematic given that qualitative methodologies are not connected with Indigenous theory. Similarly, Bowler (2020) asserts the integral nature of Indigenous Knowledge and methodologies for decolonizing research noting that western methodologies are incapable of meeting this goal.

Other Indigenous scholars suggest that decolonizing methodologies do not require the complete rejection of western theory and research methods (McIvor, 2010; Wilson, 2008); instead, Indigenous researchers may borrow from western methods, after firmly rooting their

research within Indigenous methodologies. Walter and Andersen (2013) also assert that Indigenous research can use tools—like statistical analysis—while maintaining a strong foundation rooted in Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies. Similarly, through sharing the history of Indigenous beadwork, Blackfoot scholar Dionne Prete (2019) illustrates that Indigenous researchers can use the strengths of western research approaches or tools—if desired—while maintaining the integrity and authenticity of Indigenous research epistemologies and methodologies. As a whole, these scholars demonstrate that Indigenous research can contribute to decolonization through resisting the need to fit Indigenous methodologies into western frameworks.

Wholism. Indigenous ways of knowing commonly reference wholism: the interrelatedness of the mind, body, and spirit—or the intellectual, spiritual, physical, and emotional components of wholeness (Archibald, 2008). Understandings of wholism also apply to wellness and collectivity, meaning that individuals and their well-being are linked with the wellness of families, communities, and Nations, as well as the land and cosmos (Lavalley, 2009; Nabigon et al., 1999). Similarly, Indigenous epistemologies often acknowledge the relational nature of knowledges (Lavalley, 2009).

A belief in wholism influences the ways in which knowledge is understood. Indigenous Knowledges have been passed on through spiritual forms of connection, art, teachings and stories. Knowledge systems have been built and maintained in wholistic ways, as they are inclusive and reflective of empirical knowledge garnered through observation and testing, and revealed knowledge that comes from various spiritual means like dreaming and ceremony (Archibald, 2008; Lavalley, 2009). Indigenous Knowledges may be acquired through wholistic ways, where the focus is not solely on the head, but also on the body, heart, and spirit

(Archibald, 2008; Lavallee, 2009). Approaches to searching for knowledge should honour the many ways in which knowledge can exist; this may include what is known (mental), what is believed (spiritual), what has been experienced (physical), and what is felt about these experiences (emotional; George, 1998). As well, breaking apart knowledge through processes of reduction and compartmentalization, may result in a failure to understand the full meaning of what has been shared.

Reverence. Ceremony involves the way researchers carry themselves and the ways that they treat others—both within and beyond the context of their research. Reverence envelops the ways in which cultural protocols, community engagement, and relational accountability—are upheld within the work (Bear, 2014). The ways in which reverence is realized within research is considered to be both an individual and private matter (Pidgeon, 2019). As such, the presence or absence of reverence as an Indigenous research principle across conceptual frameworks has led to some discussion. Reverence is commonly mentioned as an axiology of Indigenous research, but the degree to which it is explained may vary (see: Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2021). While reverence is not overtly addressed by Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991), subsequent reflection pieces have questioned if this omission is related to the incompatibility of sacred knowledge with the academy (Pidgeon, 2019). Ultimately, teachings from ceremony can offer guidance on how to conduct Indigenous research in a good way (Archibald, 2008; Bear, 2014).

Research Framework

In the second edition of *Indigenous Methodologies*, Kovach (2021) presents a conceptual research framework that flows from Nêhiyaw knowledges. Kovach's (2021) framework for Indigenous research involves six interdependent components: researcher preparation, research preparation, decolonizing and ethics, gathering knowledge, making meaning, and giving back.

This research borrows teachings from Kovach's (2021) work in developing a conceptual framework for Indigenous research methodologies, which are applied within the context of visiting in Métis research (Figure 5). Each of the areas highlighted within this model are explored in more detail within this chapter.

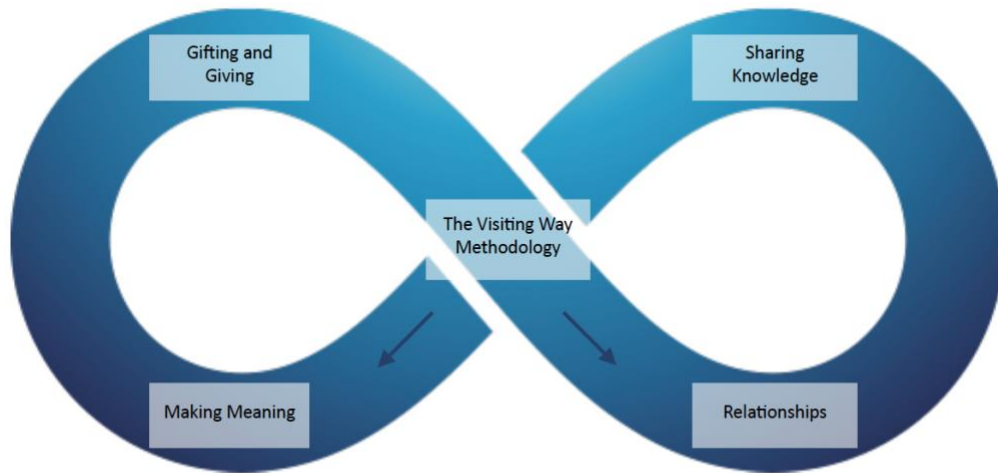


Figure 5. An infinity model for Métis research

The Infinity Model for Métis Research involves a wholistic approach to research, as the infinity symbol suggests that there is no one place to begin, nor end. Additionally, the infinity symbol reflects that the Métis efforts of resistance and resurgence, alongside the resilience of Métis people, will have an everlasting impact for cultural continuity (Edge & McCallum, 2006).

The Visiting Way

Visiting can take place in kitchens or on the land. As a deliberative act, visiting involves being present and participating in active listening. It often involves the sharing of stories, humour, knowledge, and food (Flaminio et al., 2020; Richardson & Carrière, 2017b; Weber-Pillwax, 2004). Flaminio and colleagues (2020) describe visiting as a way of living, decision-making, celebrating, and caring for relatives.

Visiting was once a prominent feature in the everyday lives of the Métis (Flaminio et al., 2020; Gaudet, 2018). Traditionally, it was expected that Métis people would carry out their kinship responsibilities to keep loved ones safe and wholistically cared for. In addition to its practical and social dimensions, Gaudet (2018) notes that *keeoukaywin*—a Cree name gifted to Gaudet in recognition of her research using the Visiting Way—is a “relational obligation, a spiritual responsibility” (p. 48). This name and its meaning is also a reflection of the responsibilities that researchers carry when visiting.

Traditionally, visiting can involve checking on people, asking about “what’s going well and what is not,” as well as helping with practical tasks in the home (Richardson & Seaborn, 2009, p. 126). In these ways, visiting as a way of natural helping has also been described as a traditional social work practice (Richardson & Seaborn, 2009). Traditionally, Métis families looked out for each other and often visited as a practical way of providing help to families in need. Elder Brian Fayant of Fishing Lake Métis Settlement notes that visiting is one of the oldest known Métis interventions (Richardson & Carrière, 2017b).

While visiting is a cultural practice that Métis people have engaged in for many different purposes, it has only recently been formally articulated as an Indigenous research methodology (Flaminio et al., 2020; Gaudet, 2018; Richardson & Carrière, 2017b). Despite this recent uptake, visiting makes sense as a way of conducting Métis research and practising relational accountability. Métis knowledge is best shared in “the context of social relationships”, within families and communities and across generations (Hodgson-Smith & Kermoal, 2016, p. 159), and the practice of sharing knowledge falls at the centre of Métis visiting. While visiting is not solely seen as a Métis way, it is commonly embedded into Métis ways of life (Flaminio et al., 2020; Gaudet, 2018).

Relationships

Relationships are an integral aspect of Indigenous research. This section is two-fold, examining relationship to self and relationship to community as two core areas of relationship within research and in life.

Relationship to Self. Indigenous methodologies require inward reflection and connection to self, in a way that other methodologies do not (Kovach, 2021). In strengthening connection to self and spiritual belonging, researchers may wish to ask for guidance from Elders or from spirit, offer prayer, and participate in ceremony (Kovach, 2021; NAHO, 2008). For McIvor (2010), a maskiko-nehinaw leader in Indigenous language revitalization, research is a “spirit journey” where she works authentically in relationship with the spirit world (p. 140). Preparation, in this way, may involve private ceremony and prayer as a way of connecting to morals and to ancestors (McIvor, 2010).

Indigenous research involves experiential learning for everyone involved with the process; as such, it is important to take steps to prepare for this journey. Absolon (2022) speaks to the importance of preparing to do research in a good way, sharing her process of harvesting berries and the similarities that this process has with research methods: being balanced, offering tobacco, and knowing and sharing your motivations for the work. Similarly, Pidgeon (2019) writes, “I sought guidance from Aboriginal elders and cultural advisors from the traditional territories about the appropriate protocols and processes to follow” (p. 426). Similarly, this research involved preparations through receiving and adhering to guidance from Métis Elders with respect to cultural protocols and researcher accountability (see: Chapter 4).

Self-location is one of the most fundamental principles of Indigenous research (Absolon, 2022). Given that it is unethical to undertake Indigenous research without a connection or

personal stake in the research (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Wilson, 2008), it is also important to reflect on, and share, individual purpose and motivations, relationships to community, and the power and privilege that researchers carry in doing this work. Fast and Kovach (2019) speak about self-awareness as a form of personal preparation in relationship building, noting that, “to know community means that the researcher must not only know the researching self, but also the researching self in relation to community” (p. 22). In this way, sharing stories of self-in-relation helps to offer a sense of integrity, accountability, and transparency (Fast & Kovach, 2019). In sharing and speaking to positionality, researchers also create space for remembering ancestors, acknowledging family, and honouring community (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Kovach, 2021). An integral part of decolonizing and actioning reconciliation, preparations also involve re-centring what it means to be a guest, and a good neighbour, when living within other Nations’ territories.

When I locate myself as an uninvited guest on ləkʷəŋən territory, I acknowledge my family’s history on this land and also hold myself accountable for living and working in solidarity with the people of this land. As visitors, allies, neighbours, and relatives, we must go beyond the basic recognition of acknowledging the ləkʷəŋən people as caretakers of the land, to understand our history and present reality of the territories upon which we reside. As visitor on ləkʷəŋən territory, I am always thinking about how I can be a respectful neighbour and a good relative. Our ties to academia create positions of power that must be acknowledged and addressed. An ongoing process, reflecting on the intersections of self in relation allows for us to step forth into an intuitive, and at times uncomfortable, process as we consider all aspects of our identity in our work with Indigenous communities.

The practice of self-location brings together all aspects of self in relation (Graveline, 2000), including cultural, social, academic and professional, political, familial, and other

personal aspects of life (Kovach, 2021; Walter & Andersen, 2013). Within a research context, self-location contributes to the understanding and acknowledgement that all research is subjective, as researchers each inherently interpret knowledge through their own worldviews (Fast & Kovach, 2019). Similarly, Métis poet and researcher Fyre Jean Graveline (2000) speaks about “First Voice as Methodology,” and the importance of centring the voices of Indigenous peoples when speaking about Indigenous communities, knowledge, and priorities. First Voice methodology—and the practice of self-location—create space for speaking to lived experiences, identities, and perceptions.

Research may involve a search for self, alongside the search for knowledge. At times, research presents invitations to journey home—to reconnect with community and the land. Research may also offer opportunities to strengthen self-awareness, to remember stories, and to understand self in relation to others (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Kovach, 2021).

Relationship to Community. Working in relationship emphasizes the importance of meaningfully engaging with communities and forming connections with the people that are involved in the research. These relationships hold researchers accountable to do good work (Bear, 2014; Hart, 2009). Indigenous research is often aided when researchers work with people that they have long-standing relationships with. Métis artist and researcher, Leah Dorion (2010)—who conducted her graduate research around child-rearing practices in Cree and Métis communities—spoke about how she chose to interview Elders that she had previously formed relationships with, including family members. She hand-selected Elders who carried teachings in the area of her research, and with their consent, had in-depth interviews with them. Similarly, Roy (2016) chose to include the stories of four Métis dancers: three women with whom she had long-standing relationships, as well as herself as the fourth participant.

In the context of new relationships, researchers must hold space for the creation of relationships in research. Throughout the process of building and maintaining trust, researchers must be transparent about motivations and intentions, follow through with commitments, and practice deep listening while people their stories (LaVallee et al., 2016). LaVallee et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of both “storytelling and story listening” (p. 172) throughout the development and maintenance of reciprocal research relationships.

While relationship building—which is especially prominent in community-based research—is important, this practice often comes with temporal restrictions related to research projects. Relational obligations, within the context of Indigenous research, are often lifelong—they cannot be restricted to a project timeline (Flaminio et al., 2020; Lavallee, 2009; LaVallee et al., 2016; Pidgeon, 2019). As a salient example of relational accountability, lived experience, and trust, Canada (2017) shares:

I believe that this trust was based on my Métisness. I am a Métis person who shares culture, language and history with other Métis people. I am familiar with the Métis community and with Métis cultural protocols. I am also familiar with provincial and national governance structures of the Métis people. (p. 244)

Canada (2017) indicates that the strength of the research relationships that she built were rooted in a shared lived experience and knowledge of being Métis. Along with these inherent relational strengths, Indigenous researchers are also often held to an ethical standard that is deeper than any university ethics board. Relational accountability envelops obligations to family, to ancestors, and to community, to ensure that the research is responsive to the needs of Métis people.

Sharing Knowledge through Story

From a Métis perspective, storytelling has contributed to both cultural survival and resurgence (Iseke, 2010). Today, when stories are shared, they help to bring back memories and remind people of who they are (Kovach, 2021; Campbell, 2011). In the Forward to *Life Stages*

and Native Women, Cree-Métis Elder Maria Campbell (2011) illustrates the strength of stories: they help us to rebuild what has been lost, and they help to guide people home. Stories are medicine (Campbell, 2011); this belief is also held by Richardson (2016a), who shares that stories are healing in the way that they strengthen belonging and sense of self.

Stories contribute to decolonization, healing, and rebuilding; Anderson (2011) describes this process as “digging up the medicines,” through “learning about the brilliance of our traditional cultures; the systems that can inspire us today as we reconstruct” (p. 4). In a similar sense, Miner (2012) notes that the ability to share stories is both evidence of Indigenous resilience, as well as an opportunity for healing from colonialism. Stories are a tool for remembering culture and traditions (Richardson, 2016a). Métis scholar, Renée Monchalin (2019) used the approach of “digging up the medicines” when gathering and making meaning of healing stories shared by Métis women (p. 40). In the context of this present research, the sentiment of “digging up the medicines” is applied to the process of reimagining how systems can be transformed to better serve Métis children, youth, and families.

Working with Elders. Within the context of research, Elders have been described as knowledge holders, ethical guides, stewards of local protocols and community information, knowledge translation experts, conflict mediators, and facilitators of ceremony (Flicker et al., 2016). Participants also noted the need to work with Elders from the outset of the research, indicating the value that Elders’ feedback can have in shaping the research design (Flicker et al., 2016). Elders are also seen as people who carry knowledge, including stories (NAHO, 2008). However, it is also important to recognize that not all Elders hold the stories and medicines necessary within specific research areas, nor will those that hold the information necessarily want to share it (Archibald, 2008; Campbell, 2011). Further, as a result of colonialism, Leclair

and Nicholson (2003) explain that Métis stories may come out as “fragments” of history and expressions of identity (p. 64). Regardless of the types of stories and medicines carried by the Elders who participate in the research, their knowledge was treated as valid and worthy of inclusion in the research.²⁹

Ownership of Knowledge and Stories. *In my undergraduate and previous graduate program, my formal course learning almost exclusively focused on western research methods. Throughout colonial research approaches, confidentiality is seen as a core ethical issue and it was expected of me, in my past thesis research, to maintain each participant’s privacy. This made sense because I was looking at mental health and community members shared deeply personal strengths and challenges associated with their journeys around mental health and wellness. They also shared really beautiful stories around being Métis, practicing and understanding our culture, and demonstrating resistance and resilience. I understood confidentiality as an “all or nothing” approach. I asked participants to sign consent forms and these forms did not include options for being named in the research. In reading the perspectives and experiences on Indigenous research from prominent scholars, including Wilson (2008), Pidgeon (2019), Castleden et al. (2010), and Chilisa (2011), I have come to understand that there are other approaches that can both protect and honour knowledge holders and their ownership over their stories.*

Conversations about ownership, authorship, and acknowledgement are important and should occur from the outset of the research (Castleden et al., 2010). The form of acknowledgement—be it individualized or at a community level—depends on the type of knowledge shared, and the desires of the people involved with the research. As Chilisa (2011)

²⁹ This comes with the caveat that sacred stories, including those that are not to be written down, will not be included in the research with adherence to protocol.

notes, “information or stories told by participants lose their power if the storyteller is not known” (p. 207). Ultimately, it is important to acknowledge (with consent) everyone who contributed knowledge to the research, or otherwise provided support.

Making Meaning

Analysis refers to the ways that knowledge is interpreted within the research process. Within the context of qualitative research, Métis scholars Cathy Richardson and Jeannine Carrière (2017b) assert that thematic analysis can be utilized in Indigenous research as a form of “respectful categorization” that can “contribute to a holistic representation, much like threads woven together... contributing to the integrity of one blanket” (p. 35). They note that this method of meaning making is not exclusively owned by colonial scholars (Richardson & Carrière, 2017b). Wilson (2008) describes a similar process of meaning making, which he views as a way of creating a knowledge bundle; meaning making can be done collaboratively as a way of crafting a collective bundle. Collaborative methods of meaning making can be relational and ceremonial (Wilson, 2008).

While there is clearly a shared understanding of the importance of collaborative methods of meaning making within Indigenous methodologies, it remains a topic that is seldom described in detail. For example, Chilisa (2011) speaks about the need for researchers to utilize an “[I]ndigenous analytic framework” but does not explain the components of this framework (p. 289). In fact, data analysis may be the least-developed aspect of Indigenous methodologies.³⁰

³⁰ In addition to the two papers detailed in this section, which address collaborative approaches to meaning making (Bartlett et al., 2007; Starblanket et al., 2019), other resources speak to the intersection of Indigenous epistemologies and quantitative data analysis (Walter & Andersen, 2013) and the detailed process of relational meaning making described in the 2nd edition of *Indigenous Methodologies* (Kovach, 2021).

Starblanket and colleagues (2019) address this gap, outlining their step-by-step process of adapting the Collective Consensual Data Analytic Procedure (CCDAP).

Developed by Métis scholar Dr. Judy Bartlett in 2006 (Bartlett et al., 2007), the CCDAP process involved bringing community members together to read through cardstock with anonymized quotes and paraphrased summaries, and then sorting these cards into groupings—first assigning symbols and then themes to each collection.³¹ While effective, the CCDAP method has also been described as challenging and time-consuming when dealing with large volumes of data. When speaking about their adaptation of the CCDAP, Starblanket and colleagues (2019) note that it was difficult, and in some cases inappropriate, to request Elders and other community members to commit to a collaborative data analysis process that could span several days. As such, they aimed to modernize, digitize, and condense the process (Starblanket et al., 2019). This adapted method was gifted the Cree name: Nanâtawihowin Âcimowina Kikamôshahkinikêhk Papiskîci-itascikêwin Astâcikowina (NAPKA), which means “Medicine and Healing Stories Picked, Sorted, Stored” (Starblanket et al., 2019, p. 6). This name demonstrates that Indigenous ways of knowing and being align with what are oft thought to be exclusively western analytic approaches (C. Loppie, personal communication, November 4, 2020).

With increased efficiency, NAPKA creates space for discussions and shared decision making—the essence of collaborative meaning making. Several scholars have spoken about the importance of using careful and deliberate analytic processes, paired with community engagement (Archibald, 2008; McIvor, 2010). NAPKA aims to create increased engagement and

³¹ Collaborative methods of data analysis are not new (i.e., the Delphi method dates back to the 1950s). However, Bartlett et al. (2007) assert that the CCDAP is an “Indigenized” collective analysis method. While the authors are not clear about the specific ways in which CCDAP is Indigenous or Indigenized, perhaps the involvement of Indigenous participants and their voices in this step, in and of itself, shifts the meaning making process to become more culturally responsive by privileging the voices of Indigenous peoples involved in the research.

influence over the interpretation of peoples' own data (Starblanket et al., 2019). In this sense, the method helps to create opportunities for validity by way of collective thinking, as well as accessibility through a streamlined preparation process.

Conclusion to the Research Approach

Indigenous peoples have always conducted research, including ways of uncovering, sharing, and recording Indigenous Knowledges since time immemorial. Traditionally, research conducted by Indigenous peoples has been strengths-based, solution-driven and survival-focused (Absolon, 2022). In recognizing the work of Indigenous scholars and leaders—past and present—who have generously shared their knowledge in written and oral forms, this chapter aimed to highlight Indigenous brilliance and contribute to the collective acts of reimagining and actioning a return to Indigenous research approaches.

With the understanding that research can create space for processes of remembering and re-centring Métis ways of knowing and being, selecting a methodology that was reflective of Métis culture was important. The Visiting Way informs all other aspects of the research approach, including processes of sharing, gathering, and understanding knowledge. The research framework also speaks to the importance of relationships with self, community, and Elders throughout and beyond the research process. This research is grounded in several values that act as directives for ethical and meaningful research with Métis people, families, and communities. The reflections, values, and methodologies articulated within this chapter have served as a foundation for meaningful and collaborative research with Métis Elders, helpers, and families. By privileging Métis voices, stories, and teachings, research can be an act of decolonization.

Chapter 4: Methods

This research study included three phases of knowledge sharing through storytelling and conversation. These phases, which will be described in detail throughout this chapter, included: (1) storytelling interviews with Métis Elders to learn about traditional Métis approaches to raising children and supporting families; (2) conversational interviews with LMO staff to hear their perspectives on the supports that they deliver and the impact their practice has had; and (3) conversational interviews with youth and family members who have accessed services at LMO to hear their perspectives on the supports that they received. This chapter describes the process of knowledge sharing, meaning making, and sharing back.

The Process of Knowledge Sharing

From July 2022 through July 2023, I travelled to Kamloops five times, for week-long trips to visit with Elders, staff, families, and youth. During some visits, I was accompanied by Raven Fawkes who was an undergraduate student in the Bachelor of Social Work program at the University of Victoria. Raven is Cree-Métis on her father's side and Snuneymuxw, English, Cree, and Icelandic on her mother's side. She is a member of Métis Nation Greater Victoria and an MNBC citizen. As a Research Assistant, Raven provided supported this research from April 2022 through June 2023, and I aim to use language that accurately reflects Raven's contributions throughout this section.³² Raven contributed to the knowledge sharing and meaning making process, including conversations with Elders and helpers, the collaborative meaning-making

³² I use first person (singular and plural) in this chapter as a way of sharing the specific ways that I/we approached this research. At times, Raven and I travelled together to visit with Elders—both at their homes and at LMO—as well as staff. At other points in times, I visited Elders, staff, youth, and family members on my own. I use first person singular and plural to distinguish between these visits.

process, and our team-based approach to thematic analysis. I am grateful that Raven reviewed this dissertation during its final draft stages in November 2023.

Relationships and Recruitment

To begin the process of learning from Métis Elders, I began with reaching out to Elders that I knew personally. I met many of these Elders through Métis gatherings, as well as through social connections in community. For example, I met Elder Francois Morrisette* when I lived in Prince George and attended the University of Northern British Columbia for my undergraduate program in First Nations Studies. I stayed in touch with him and later met his wife, Elder Isabella Matheson*, at a Métis gathering. I first met Elder Stella Erasmus Johnson at a Métis cultural wellness gathering, where she provided emotional support; I saw Elder Stella again when she joined us for a Métis youth event and honoured us by sashing each of the youth present. I also deeply treasure the relationships that I have formed with Elders who came into my life through friendships. I met Elders Phil and Betty Gladue through their daughter, who was my roommate over ten years ago. I continued to see Elders Phil and Betty as a result of their active involvement in the Métis community. Several of these Elders supported my past research on mental health and cultural continuity for Métis people. It was through this research that I first met Elder Marie Bercier. We stayed in close touch after that research concluded, and I am proud to call her my Auntie. I am also grateful that Raven suggested that we ask Elder Jo-Ina Young to participate in this research. Raven has known Elder Jo-Ina for a number of years from community gatherings.

In addition to having the opportunity to visit with and learn from Elders in our relational networks, we also had the privilege of meeting 12 additional Elders—each of whom are connected with LMO through their work on the Michif Elders Council. All of the Elders who currently work with LMO, in their unique roles in supporting Métis children, youth, and

families—as well as the staff at LMO—were asked by staff if they wished to participate in this research. Staff at LMO were also asked to participate through an internal email invitation. Later, staff were asked if they had any recommendations for family members and youth that they had worked with (in the past, or currently). They were asked to contact the youth and family members and provide them with information about the research; they were asked to contact the Michif administration team at LMO to ask questions or express their willingness to participate. Interest and willingness to participate in the research exceeded my expectations, with 65 people participating overall; this total includes 20 Elders, 27 staff, 13 family members, and 5 youth (Table 2).

Many of the participants in this research were Métis, including all of the Elders (n=20). Most of the participating staff were Indigenous, including Métis (n=8) and First Nations (n=9) helpers. While the kinship caregivers interviewed were non-Indigenous family members caring for their Métis grandchildren (n=5), six of the eight parents interviewed were Métis. The five youth interviewed included both First Nations (n=3) and Métis participants (n=2).

Table 2. Elders, family members, youth, and staff who participated in the research.

Team Name	<i>n</i>	Positions
<i>Elders (n=20)</i>		
Members of the Michif Elders Council (LMO)	12	Métis Elders who support Métis children, youth, and families (as well as staff) at LMO through their work with the Michif Elders Council
Métis Elders in our relational networks	8	Métis Elders external to LMO who carry knowledge related to supporting Métis children, youth, and families
<i>Staff (n=27)</i>		
Indigenous Youth Support Services Team and Kikékyelc staff	7	Team Leader, Kikékyelc Manager of Operations, Delegated Youth Social Workers, Michif Works Program Coordinator, Indigenous Community Inclusion Worker, Michif Youth Life Skills Workers
Michif Administration	5	Leadership, Office Managers, Team Assistants, File Clerks, Finance, Cultural Wellness Worker
Michif Early Childhood Development	4	Team Leader, Aboriginal Supported Child Development Consultants, Aboriginal Infant Development Program Consultants, Early Childhood Educators
Michif Prevention Services	4	Team Leader, Michif Prevention Services Social Workers, Michif Father's Support Worker, Housing Support Worker
Michif Child and Youth Mental Health and Family Wellness	3	Team Leader, CYMH Counsellors
Child Safety	3	Team Leader, ³³ Delegated Social Workers, Guardianship Social Worker and Family Circle Coordinator
Michif Kinship and Community Caregivers	1	Team Leader, Community Caregiver Social Worker
<i>Family Members and Youth (n=18)</i>		
Family Members	8	Parents
	5	Kinship caregivers (i.e., grandparents)
Youth	5	Youth residents and Kikékyelc: A place of belonging, youth clients of LMO programs

³³ Note that at the time this research was conducted, the Team Leader position covered Child Protection Services, as well as Michif Kinship and Community Caregivers; therefore, the position is listed twice, but the numbers reflect the true and total numbers of participants.

The Conversations

The conversational method is a qualitative approach found within both Indigenous and western research methods. It involves a flexible approach to gathering knowledge through a guided conversation (Kovach, 2010). Conversations are carried out in an informal, unstructured way, using one or more open-ended questions to broadly guide the knowledge sharing process. Conversational interviews allow for each participant to tailor the conversation based on the stories and knowledge that they feel comfortable sharing (Firmin, 2008). Conversational and unstructured approaches to interviewing are known to facilitate a greater depth of knowledge sharing (Firmin, 2008). Specifically, Burgess-Limerick and Burgess-Limerick (1998) note that they used conversational interviews as a way of collaborative and interactively establishing the agenda for each interview with the participant. Each agenda is unique, as the conversation is responsive to each participant's experiences (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). Copies of all interview guides are included in Appendix B.

Conversations with Elders. For our first trip, Raven and I drove from our homes in Victoria, stopping in to visit with Elders in Vancouver and Chilliwack, before driving to Kamloops for a week's stay. While we had the flexibility to travel around Kamloops and its surrounding area to visit with Elders, they generally chose to sit with us in the beautiful spaces at LMO. Most of our conversations were hosted in the Family Room, or the Elders Gathering Space at the organization.

We took additional trips to visit with Elders who lived in Nanaimo (June 2022) and Prince George (September 2022). We also met with Elders who were local to us, visiting them in Victoria and Sooke (July and August 2022). We asked each of the Elders where they wanted to visit, and most invited us to join them in their homes. Often these visits would involve sitting in

their kitchens or living rooms for the better part of a day. We drank tea and coffee; sometimes the Elders would allow us to take them out for lunch, or they would serve us lunch in their homes. Two Elders preferred to meet at another location, one chose a café and the other asked to meet at their office.

While most of these conversations were held in person (n=18), conversations with two Elders were hosted remotely. One Elder was recovering from an injury and spoke with me over the phone. Another Elder was recovering from an illness and spoke with Raven over Zoom. One Elder who deeply wanted to participate, but he was not well enough to join us in person during our first two visits. After speaking with him several times over the phone in the following months, we decided that it would be best to find a way to meet him in person at his home. Fortunately, Raven was able to schedule a visit with him the following Spring, at a time that naturally coincided with her travels. These conversations occurred with Elders that we only recently met (through connecting with the Michif Elders Council on several occasions leading up to our visit at LMO), but that did not diminish the exceptional quality of information and knowledge that was shared with us. The Elders shared many stories as they reflected on their childhoods, and on their experiences raising their own children. Uniquely, the Elders connected with LMO naturally shared their perceptions of and experiences with LMO, without being directly asked about it.

Our conversations with Elders spanned well beyond what was formally recorded for the research purposes. The recorded portion of the conversations with Elders, ranged from around half an hour to nearly three hours. Two of the conversations were conducted with two Elders in the room together—each of these conversations was longer than two hours, reflecting the more complex dynamic with extra voices. The Elders that Raven and I visited in their homes tended to

have much longer conversations with me, compared to most of the Elders that we met with at LMO or at another outside location. Conversations at LMO were also hosted within a tighter timeframe, with two-hour time blocks scheduled for each Elder—this schedule was built by LMO staff, who worked with each Elder to find out a time that worked for them to meet. Often the Elders chose to meet with us on days that they were already scheduled to work with LMO; the schedule is also a reflection of our respect for the Elders' time, which they also offer to the direct service provision at LMO. One conversation that Raven hosted went well over-time, and she called the Elder to have a follow-up conversation, at the Elder's request.

Conversations with Staff, Youth, and Family Members. In September 2022, I took a solo trip to visit with staff at LMO. Raven joined me for a second week-long visit to LMO in November 2022. Across these two visits, we spoke with 26 staff. Raven conducted one additional interview over Zoom, following our second visit, with a staff who was away on holidays during our time in Kamloops. Aside from this additional interview, all of the staff interviews occurred in person. We sat and chatted with staff in their private offices, or in a gathering space that was reserved for our private use at LMO. These conversations lasted from around a half hour to around two hours. Then, in July 2023, I had the opportunity to meet with family members and youth. These conversational interviews were all held in person—either at LMO or at Kikékyelc.

Conversations with staff, family members, and youth focused on the strengths and challenges related to the services and supports provided by LMO, as well as the difference that these services and supports may have made for Métis children, youth, and families. In order to meaningfully elicit stories about the impact of LMO, I incorporated aspects of the Most Significant Change (MSC) approach, which prompts participants to share stories and their

meaning. These questions were incorporated into all interviews with staff, youth, and family members to understand what success looks like at from multiple perspectives.

Protocols

This section details the ways in which cultural and caregiving protocols were followed within this research. Indigenous scholars frequently speak about the importance of offering tobacco as part of our cultural protocols in research (Kovach, 2010; LaVallee et al., 2016; Lavallee, 2009; Wilson & Restoule, 2010). Similarly, Elders have always instructed me to offer tobacco (li tabaw or li tabaa) when I meet with Elders and Knowledge Keepers in search of knowledge. The offering of tobacco shows that we honour the Elder or Knowledge Keeper's time, knowledge, and wisdom. Speaking from about her research with Métis Elders, Iseke (2010) shared that exchanging tobacco also signifies that we will continue to respect and uphold the Elders' stories, by sharing them with integrity.

In addition to the use of tobacco for ceremonial purposes, there are diverse Métis cultural protocols to consider, depending on the community and place that the research is taking place. Given our incredible diversity as Métis people, cultural protocols may be “adapted to suite the individuals” (NAHO, 2008, p. 9). In working with Métis Elders across areas, the Métis Centre adjusted their protocols and procedures as needed—based on the guidance they received from Elders as teachers (NAHO, 2008). For example, the ways in which offerings were made for the knowledge shared, prayers were made, and sharing circles were conducted all differed across the gatherings (NAHO, 2008).

When we met with the Elders, we also followed our cultural protocol of asking them if they would be comfortable accepting tobacco from us. In many cases, this was an appropriate and well-received protocol to begin the conversation; the gifting of tobacco represented

awareness of the meaning behind the exchange of knowledge. In some cases, I forgot to offer tobacco until after the conversation had begun. In these cases, I waited for a natural moment of pause in the conversation, apologized to the Elder for my forgetful mistake, and asked them if they would now be willing to except the tobacco. Each time the Elder was very gracious with me and did choose to accept the tobacco. One Elder noted that it is not their personal practice to accept tobacco, and this was respected. Another Elder noted that, in my travels to see them, I had not kept the tobacco ties separate from my work products; as a result, they indicated that it would be inappropriate of me to offer the tobacco to them in that form. I humbly accepted the teachings and thanked them for their willingness to correct me. I now will never forget to carry my tobacco in a metal case, protecting the medicine by keeping it separate.

In addition to adhering to cultural protocols for doing this work in a good way, we also tried to take care of the people we were visiting with—particularly the Elders. Our approach to working with Elders began with the ways that we asked them to participate in this research. We invited them well in advance, after explaining the context of this work and its ethical considerations. Our approach to invitation varied based on who knew the Elder best (that person was the one to reach out) and the methods in which the Elder prefers to communicate (i.e., some enjoy phone calls, while others prefer a written invitation). We also made sure that we met with them in places that they were comfortable. As previously described, we often met with Elders in their homes, or in gathering spaces at LMO. We were mindful of being good hosts across different spaces, which meant that we made sure that they had access to coffee, tea, and water, as well as food. Métis community-based researchers, LaVallee et al. (2016) have discussed the importance of sharing food, as it provides nourishment during the process of sharing knowledge and helps to strengthen relationships between people. These teachings also aligned with the

protocols that we followed at LMO; the staff were also attentive hosts and provided snacks and beverages. They ensured that seating arrangements were comfortable and appropriate for each Elder's needs. We also checked in periodically throughout our visits and conversations to check in with the Elders, and we took breaks as needed. The conversations varied in length, and so too did the structure of our visits. In cases where we were invited to visit Elders within their homes, we asked if there were things that we could do to help them in their homes. One of the Elders was recovering from an injury, and we were able to help with housework. During a different visit, I was delighted to take the Elders' dog for a long walk during our visit. These small acts of service and kinship contributed to the diverse ways that we were able to give back to the Elders who took time to share with us. Gifting and providing honoraria are also important steps within these protocol; these topics are described in detail in the following section.

Gifting and Giving Back

The knowledge that we receive from participants and the teachings that are offered to us from our communities are immense gifts. As researchers, we are often learners in the research process (Archibald, 2018). I aimed to recognize these gifts by sharing pieces of my own knowledge and experience, as well as offering tangible gifts in recognition of the teachings, knowledge, time, and experiences shared in the research. Gifting is an important part of reciprocal practice. The late Métis scholar, Deb Canada (2017), notes that "in the Métis culture, gift-giving and feasting are acts of appreciation to those recognized as having a good heart, a clear mind and a strong spirit" (p. 248). Gifting practices are done to show how we honour our relationships. They are a part of ethical research and are reflective of Métis ways of being.

During the time of initial knowledge sharing, we offered each of the Elders, staff, family members, and youth a small gift to thank them. The practice of giving gifts aligns with cultural

protocols in Métis research. There was some variation in gifts, based on what I could procure from local Métis artisans and Indigenous-owned shops, as well as each person's preferences. We prepared gift bags for each of the Elders; the bags included either coffee or tea, soap, and a small, beaded item. Coffee was purchased from Winona LaDuke's Spotted Horse Coffee in the Louis Riel French Roast blend. The loose-leaf teas came from a small Métis company in the Fraser Valley: The Red River Bannock Company. The bags also included soap by Moshkwa, a Métis artisan in Victoria. I added in a handmade beaded lanyard for a personal touch; while I am a novice beader, at best, I believe that the Elders appreciated something that I made myself.

Elders, families, and youth were each offered a small honorarium for their time. The amount aimed to be reflective of the estimated time of their involvement with the research. Elders were offered \$100 based on their estimated involvement lasting between one and two hours.³⁴ Family members and youth, who participated in shorter interviews (estimated to last between 30 minutes and an hour) were offered a \$50 honorarium. When I brought the Elders back together to gather for a three-hour collaborative meaning making gathering in April 2023, I gifted each Elder a \$200 honorarium.

Staff, who all participated in the interviews during working hours—with the permission and encouragement of the leadership at LMO—were not offered an honorarium. They were, however, given a small gift of either Louis Riel coffee (Spotted Horse Coffee), or tea from The Red River Bannock Company in various blends. Family members and youth were also gifted

³⁴ At the time of crafting the research design, the interviews were estimated to last around one hour, plus extra time for the consent process. At the time, \$100 seemed appropriate for around an hour of time. It was also an amount that would work within my research budget. In retrospect, and particularly for the few one-on-one conversations that lasted nearly two hours, this amount was insufficient. I also understand that some Indigenous researchers choose to offer an hourly rate for Elders' participation in research, including interviews. Rather than offering an hourly rate, the standard honorarium was offered as a gift, rather than through a contract with each Elder. I also did not want to have the perception that I would be penalizing Elders who were not as comfortable sharing with me. As I reflect back, I am not sure which method of compensation is more appropriate, but I do wish I had offered a larger honorarium.

either coffee or tea. Due to low stock supplies at Spotted Horse Coffee (I believe I bought out their stock of Louis Riel blend at least three times), I supplemented my collection of gifts with a Spirit Bear Coffee, an Indigenous coffee company located in Greater Vancouver.

Ethics and Consent

Elders, family members, and youth were all offered two options for the consent process: written or verbal. There was a strong preference among the Elders for the verbal consent process, and that may be a result of the ongoing conversations that we had been having when the opportunity to proceed with the consent process arose. The verbal process allowed for the conversation to continue to flow; it also offered a flexible way of explaining the detailed ethical considerations in more of a conversational way. While we—as a general practice—verbally discuss all components of the ethics process regardless of the modality, I could see that those that chose the written process often preferred to focus on reading the form through themselves. For some families and youth, the verbal option offered a better pathway toward understanding ethical considerations, given various literacy levels. As well, some of the Elders noted that they preferred to complete the verbal process for consent, as a result of limited vision.³⁵ Copies of consent forms are included in Appendix C.³⁶

Recording Conversations. As part of the consent process, Elders, staff, family members, and youth were each asked if they would allow us to record the conversation. These recordings, we explained, were only used for the purpose of transcribing the conversations. After transcriptions were complete, and proof-read, the recordings were deleted.

³⁵ Staff were only offered written consent forms, as their participation did not fall within the University of Victoria's guidelines for oral consent (see: Appendix C).

³⁶ For Elders, youth, and family members—where oral and written consent forms were both offered—only one version of the consent form is included to reduce duplication and redundancies (noting that the content is identical across both modalities).

While the conversations with Elders were each recorded with their permission, there were several times where the Elders indicated that the recording should be paused. These instances created space for conversation to continue, but not for the purpose of the research. This allowed for sharing related to ceremony, personal stories, and other aspects of traditional knowledge to be shared with us, as Métis community members speaking to Elders, but not for us as researchers.

In nearly all of the staff interviews, staff gave us permission to record them for transcription purposes. One staff member did not feel comfortable being recorded, so handwritten notes were taken with the understanding that the staff member would not be quoted verbatim. Similarly, while nearly all family members and youth consented to being recorded, one of the youth did not want to be recorded. Their choice was respected and the same procedure regarding notetaking was used. These notes were anonymized and shared back with the youth for their review and revisions.

Sharing Transcripts. During the consent process, each person was asked if they would like to receive a copy of their transcript. Whenever desired, transcripts were shared with the participants for their validation and suggested revisions. In alignment with the OCAP/S Principles (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession/Stewardship), this practice honours the ownership of the words that are shared by each participant while also increasing the transparency of the data collection process and improving the validity of the data. In addition to returning individual transcripts to Elders, we also provided each of them with a summary of what we understood to be the themes and main features of the knowledge shared.

Acknowledgement versus Anonymity. Each participant was given the choice of either being acknowledged in the study or remaining anonymous. The majority of Elders (17 of 20), around half of the staff (15 of 27), and some family members (5 of 13) indicated that they

wanted to be acknowledged by name in the research. Nearly all of the youth asked to remain anonymous; one youth shared that they were indifferent, but ultimately chose to be anonymous given the group trend. Pseudonyms, denoted by an asterisk (*), are used to protect the privacy of those who wished to remain anonymous.

Given that several staff and family members wished to be acknowledged by name in the research, I wanted to add extra steps to ensure that they were comfortable with the ways in which their words were shared. In all cases, names and other identifying information for individuals who did not directly participate in the research were removed. I was also cognizant about ensuring that the decision to be acknowledged was reflective of a fulsome consent process. In addition to sending them their original transcripts—and this was done for anyone who requested a copy, regardless of their acknowledgement—I also followed up with each person later to share with them each of the quotes that could be used, as well as the context in which they would be situated. In short, this involved sharing drafted excerpts in which they are identified, either in summary or contexts where their own words were quoted. This allowed for each person to review the ways in which I represented their knowledge and perspectives. Several staff sent me feedback, which I incorporated to ensure that their perspectives were reflected as accurately as possible. Some also indicated that they were no longer comfortable with being named in the research, and so we switched to using a pseudonym.

We used a similar process for Elders that wished to be acknowledged in the study. At various points, we checked in with the Elders to make sure that they were still comfortable with what they had shared, and the way that their knowledge was included in the research. Reception to their stories being shared back them in written format (both through the transcript and summary), was generally very positive; most of the Elders validated what they had originally

shared and confirmed that it should be used in the research. For some, however, they were not as comfortable with the inclusion of their personal stories. For instance, one Elder who was particularly mindful of protecting their family, chose to withdraw their original transcript from the research, and instead submitted a summary of what they wanted to include in the study. While they originally did not want to be named in the study, they later said they would be happy to be included by name in association with the knowledge shared in their revised transcript. Any changes to the transcript—including significant ones—were adhered to without question.

The Process of Meaning Making

Two methods of meaning making were used within this research. The knowledge shared by Elders during the storytelling interviews were analysed using a method for collaborative analysis. In response to a request for an arms-length approach to analysis from LMO leadership, findings related to wise practices and lessons learned within LMO were analyzed using thematic analysis.³⁷ Each of these processes are described below.

Collaborative Approach to Meaning Making

Using NAPKA as a method of collaborative analysis (Starblanket et al., 2019), we invited all of the Elders that participated in the knowledge sharing process to collectively discuss and analyze the knowledge gathered. On the morning of April 21, 2023, we hosted a gathering in Kamloops in the early years space at LMO. The space, like all of LMO, is a beautiful reflection of Métis culture, complete with a full-size trapper's tent, ornate furniture, and Métis décor (see images in Figure 3). With the invaluable support of the Michif Administration team, the space was equipped to host 14 Elders. Twelve of the Elders were able to join us in person—four of

³⁷ Feedback specific to LMO from the Elders' interviews was also analyzed independently using thematic analysis, rather than the collaborative approach.

whom came from Vancouver Island or Northern BC. While there were some challenges in procuring funding to support the Elders' travel, I ensured that all of their expenses were covered (e.g., mileage, ferry costs, airfare, hotels, and meals).



Figure 6. Images of the early years space at LMO where the Elders gathering was hosted.

During the gathering, Colleen Lucier, LMO's Executive Director, welcomed the Elders and offered an opening prayer. We had a round of introductions and it was wonderful to hear several Elders introduce themselves in Cree or Michif. Many of the Elders knew each other, but the visitors were warmly welcomed into the space. It was clear that the Elders were curious to hear about the collective of Elders' stories and receive an update on the work that Raven and I had conducted. Raven and I had engaged in a process of preparing the knowledge so that it could be shared with the Elders in a short amount of time. While methods for collaborative analysis, like the CCDAP method, can take several days to ensure that a group can go through each story

line-by-line and conduct thematic analysis, this process would have overburdened many of the Elders. It also would have taken time away from visiting during the gathering, which was a highlight for many of the Elders. As such, when I spoke to the Elders about the process that we had used to prepare the knowledge for sharing and discussion, I explained that Raven and I had used a wholistic coding process to create broad categories that we believed represented the knowledge that they shared with us. The categories were: Being Métis, Growing Up and Raising Children, Values, and Reflection of the Child Welfare System. We created a visual representation of each of these broad categories, using the five-petal flower. We placed the broad category at the centre of each flower, with what we saw as the five most prominent themes on each of the petals. Additional themes were listed beside the flower (Figure 7). The flowers were incorporated into a slideshow, that was shared in the room and over Zoom.

For each category, we chose a number of quotes that aimed to represent various themes. The quotes were selected to also be inclusive of the different Elders and their perspectives. In the weeks leading up to the gathering, we contacted each Elder to ask their permission to include their quotes in the presentation. Two of the Elders asked that we not include their quotes in the gathering. While only 14 of the 20 Elders were able to attend the gathering, all of the Elders who approved of their quotes were included in the slides. Each of the Elders was given a print-out of the slides. Elders were also given a handout with prepared tables with each of the themes, with a brief description of two or three sentences for each of the themes. Elders were also given written feedback sheets, in the event that they did not wish to share their feedback in a group setting. Elders all chose to offer feedback verbally and we did not receive any completed feedback sheets. A copy of these handouts can be found in Appendix D.

GROWING UP AND RAISING CHILDREN

Additional areas:

- Education and life skills
- “We never felt poor”
- Discrimination
- Teachings
- Hunting and trapping
- Sewing
- Technology

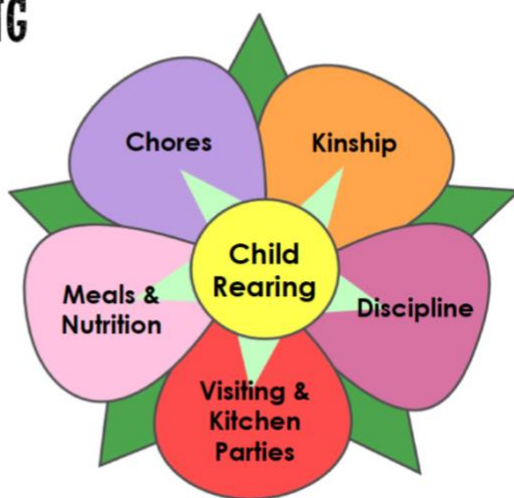


Figure 7. Example flower diagram.

As we went through each of the categories, we paused and gave the floor to the Elders for their discussion. Elders offered their feedback on the visual representation and themes overall for each category. We also discussed the quotes and if aligned with a specific theme. For the most part, the Elders enthusiastically validated the work that we had done in picking and sorting the stories (Starblanket et al., 2019). In other cases, the sections brought about additional conversation. For example, the Values category led to an interesting discussion about tolerance and forgiveness; the Elders collectively indicated that this theme had only come up in one of the original conversations, it should be more prominently featured within the research. As well, a roundtable discussion from the Elders at the closing of the gathering, brought up additional values including the importance of Métis entrepreneurship. The suggested changes and additional thoughts shared by Elders during the gathering are all included in the next chapter which shares the Elders' Stories.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was used as a way of understanding the relationships between the different types of knowledge and perspectives that were shared within and across participant groups. Using a team approach to thematic analysis, Raven and I followed Kovach's (2021) process for thematic analysis to make meaning of the knowledge shared by LMO staff, family members, and youth—as well as the aspects of the Elders' interviews that pertained to LMO. Using NVivo 12 (Mac) as a tool for our manual meaning making process, we began with the process with descriptive analysis. We used open coding techniques as we read each transcript line-by-line, as we co-developed an emergent (i.e., data driven) codebook (Kovach, 2021; Saldaña, 2013). In this sense, the labels that we selected during the descriptive analysis were reflective of and driven by the stories that were shared with us.³⁸ Understanding that coding methods may result in fragmented knowledge (Kovach, 2010), we were mindful to fully capture stories throughout this process. We returned to transcripts for further review following significant shifts in our codebook—a result of our emergent approach to descriptive analysis (Saldaña, 2013).

Following the process of descriptive analysis, we engaged in relational analysis where we examined the relationships and patterns across stories (Kovach, 2021). This process allowed for us to consider how codes may be interconnected, and to reflect on the context in which these codes exist. We then gathered the codes into metaphorical baskets, or themes. While many of these themes became large baskets, holding a number of distinct but related codes, we also followed Kovach's (2021) process of being mindful of “coyote codes” (p. 210). Coyote codes represent unique perspectives, which may be referred to as outliers; we sought to recognize these

³⁸ Sundler et al. (2019) note that thematic analyses of lived experiences should always involve data driven approaches, rather than a priori analyses.

perspectives as important pieces of knowledge. Alongside this process of arriving at themes, we then engaged in a process of intentional interpretation, which involved situating the meaning making process within Métis ways of knowing and Indigenous approaches to helping (Kovach, 2021). For example, our analysis of perspectives on staff attrition was intentionally embedded within wholistic wellness and Métis ways of helping—as well as the structural impacts of colonialism. In preparation for defending this dissertation, I created a Venn diagram to illustrate a relational analysis of themes across the entire scope of this research. This illustration can be found in Appendix E.

The knowledge shared within the context of wise practices and lessons learned at LMO was nuanced and complex. Kovach's (2021) approach to meaning making allowed for a thoughtful, wholistic, and multi-phased approach which was integral for honouring the stories shared. Additionally, using a team approach to meaning making—particularly in the absence of more inclusive, collaborative methods—required us to slow down, and discuss our decision-making process. This thoughtful approach added layers of rigour to our thematic analysis.

The Process of Sharing Knowledge Back

From the beginning of this process, we understood that reciprocity must include processes of “reporting back” to the people and communities that are involved in the research (Pidgeon, 2019, p. 428). Through ongoing conversation with the Elders and staff at LMO, we spoke about opportunities for collectively engaging in knowledge mobilization to ensure that this research is useful and actionable. In addition to the eventual academic articles that may come from this work—with the intention of reaching those in research and policy—there are two key methods in which this research will be shared more directly. In discussions with each of the Elders that participated in this research, they were all clear that this knowledge must be shared.

Understanding that few people will have access to, or choose to, review this dissertation, we decided that the stories from Métis Elders (see: Chapter 5) will be shared with Métis children, families, and communities in the form of a book. The publication of this book is forthcoming. At the request of LMO, findings from this research (see: Chapter 6) have been shared with them in the form of a report that highlights wise practices and lessons learned within their practice. Through the collaborative efforts of several staff, this report was reviewed, and several recommendations were added for internal action.

Chapter 5: Teachings from Métis Elders

This is the first of two chapters that share findings from this research. The Elders' stories include perspectives and stories shared by Elders with respect to Métis identity. They also illustrate Métis child-rearing practices, through sharing both their personal experiences of growing up in Métis families, as well as their own journeys with being parents and grandparents. The last section of this chapter includes some of the values-based teachings that the Elders carry.

Reflections on Being Métis

The Elders told stories about the different journeys that they have taken toward understanding what it means to be Métis. Some Elders grew up with a strong understanding of who they are as Métis people. For example, Elders Denise McCuaig, Melba Sterling, Francois Morrisette*, Larry Ahdemar, Rebecca Dubois*, and Fred Paquette indicated that they have always known that they were Métis. Elder Denise McCuaig explained that this was not true of everyone, as she said, “Not all Métis people have had the opportunity to grow up in the Métis way, but I did.” Similarly, Elder Francois Morrisette* spoke about his gratitude for being raised Métis, noting that a lot of Métis today do not have the same experiences, nor the same connection to the land that he had growing up:

It was just a whole different way of life, right, but I was really thankful for that way of life today... being raised Métis because it's all that I knew, right, and living the way that we did and being connected to the land, a lot of Métis don't have that. – Francois Morrisette*

Connection to land is an integral aspect of being Métis, as Elder Francois*'s sentiments were echoed by many others. Elders spoke about relationships—with land, animals, people, and spirit—as a key aspect of their Métis identity. For Elder Rebecca Dubois*, an important aspect of Métis identity is knowing who your family is, and—by extension—knowing who you are, too. Being raised Métis, Elder Rebecca* shared, means that they did not need to learn about being

Métis because they were always living it. Similarly, Elder Melba Sterling spoke about her experience being raised on a Métis settlement community, with her whole family:

I think it's really important—and I'm talking personally—that we connect back to our childhood and where we're from, learning and understanding our ancestry and our connections, because as Métis we have First Nations blood and we're mixed with European, so I talk about my case where I was born on a Métis settlement in Alberta, which is unique because it's the only place in Canada that has settlements and so I was lucky that I was raised with an intact family. My parents stayed together until my father passed away. And my grandmother lived with us. I was lucky in that way because I was not taken into care. And I talk to the kids a lot about privilege. I talk to them about, you know, having things is not as important as having someone who loves and cares for you.
– Melba Sterling

Being from a Métis settlement, Elder Melba speaks about having a defined land-based that she can connect with. The Elders shared their awareness that a lot of Métis children and youth may not have the same experiences with being connected to land and place.

While many Elders use the term Métis today, they shared the different terms that they have used to describe themselves as Métis, including *âpihtawikosisân* or half-breeds. As Elder Betty Gladue succinctly stated, “We’re half-breeds. They didn’t know what the heck Métis was all about.” Similarly, Elder Stella Erasmus Johnson explained how confusing it was to first hear the word Métis:

you know, not understanding that Métis was a popular word for it. But the way they used it, well those were fighting words for me when I heard Métis, or the way they said it *Métisse*, right, which is a French accent part. – Stella Erasmus Johnson

However, as another example of diversity, it is important to note that some Elders—like Elder Fred Paquette and Elder Larry Ahdemar—have consistently used the term Métis from childhood to present. As Elder Fred succinctly stated, “I always called myself a Métis.”

As a result of various issues, other Elders explained that they were not raised with a strong cultural foundation. Elder Patrick Savard explained that he was raised with the understanding that he was French, and he did not have a strong connection to the Métis

community growing up. Elder Lea Becker shared that her family was disconnected as a result of isolation, and as a result she was not raised with a strong focus on Métis culture. Her reconnection to culture as an adult illustrates the importance of helping other Métis families reconnect with their culture and identity:

That [Métis culture] is something that we weren't brought up in because my father left, I think in search for work at one point in time. A lot of the family units broke down and so they were isolated, and a lot of the traditions broke down, but what I have seen between language and storytelling, and oh, surrounding everybody with Métis teachings through the stories and through the culture, through the honourings, it's like a beautiful gift that the Métis give to each other in such a beautiful way. – Lea Becker

Elder Jo-Ina Young, who did not find out she was Métis until her adulthood, has worked exceptionally hard to learn about who she is and what it means to be Métis. She spoke about how she was raised in the absence of Métis material culture, but looking back, she sees how present Métis values were within her family. She shared, “I grew up not knowing I was Métis, but I was still getting Métis values, and that's, I think, the difference, right? Métis values are there, but you're not knowing that's what they are.” Today she can identify how those values are uniquely Métis.

Regardless of their journey, Elders were clear about the importance of sharing what it is to be Métis, to be proud of who they are, and to share that with others—including Métis who are learning and reconnecting, as well as other folks who may not understand who the Métis are. For instance, Elder Larry Ahdemar spoke about the importance of sharing teachings with other Métis people: “Well, they've got to know where they came from, you know, they've got to. You know, because there is a lot of Métis out there who don't know where they came from.” Additionally, Elder Stella Erasmus Johnson spoke about correcting people's misconceptions about who Métis are and what Métis culture includes:

People say Métis don't smudge. Yes, we do. Métis don't do teepees. Métis don't drum. I said, "Yes, we do that." That's from our mothers, our ancestors, they brought that with us, but their European husbands did not want their children to be taught because that was a savage way and that's why some of them... but secretly they showed you how to bead, they showed you how to make moccasins, they showed you how to prepare meals and cook this stuff. It was there you were being taught the culture but not saying this is Métis way or this is... We all grew up one way or another with some parts of our culture so now we have the opportunity with the media and different things. Be proud of your ancestors. – Stella Erasmus Johnson

In addition to misunderstandings around Métis culture, some Elders also spoke about the challenges around Métis self-identification and the complexities of definitions around who is (and is not) Métis:

What happens today is we've got those particular Métis people who have been identified, sort of in Section 82 of the Constitution, and where that element of definition comes into play, but at the same time, the Government of Canada has not been all that particularly supportive in how they are doing it. So, we have a problem where we've got individuals who self-identify and say, "I'm Métis," but... if you're being a little nosy, they'll say well, "We couldn't get status and we're First Nations, and we're European." That's doesn't make you Métis. – Barb Hulme

Elder Barb Hulme goes on to explain that institutions in education and public health are not doing their due diligence in terms of confirming identity and partnering with recognized Métis governing bodies and chartered communities.

Understanding that there are diverse journeys with respect to understanding Métis identity, many Elders spoke about the importance of embracing adults who are learning about who they are and supporting them in different ways. For example, Stella Erasmus Johnson shared the importance of helping Métis children and adults to learn about and connect with their culture and community:

The more that we can teach our young children... but also our older ones that are 40 and 50 and are just finding out that they're Métis. Invite them. If you find something, that there's going to be a cultural event happening, invite them, let them know, or sign up for something and usually there's a little bit of culture taught at the same time of whatever, making a ribbon shirt... making earrings, there's so much. The Métis community are really working hard to share that knowledge and they have Elders come in, you get to

meet them and talk with them, set up a time and maybe go have tea with them later and learn a little bit more. – Stella Erasmus Johnson

Elder Stella acknowledged that because of racism, many Métis families hid their identity; today, there is an opportunity to proudly be Métis. Through being inclusive and inviting young and older Métis people in Métis spaces to connect with community and culture, the Métis culture will continue to grow. Similarly, other Elders spoke about the need for workshops to the Métis public as a way of bringing people together and strengthening identity. For example, Elder Phil Gladue speaks about the value in bringing together community members for workshops that address topics in Métis history and identity; these gatherings will present opportunities for learning and connecting with community.

Another way of demonstrating pride as Métis people is through wearing sashes, which was specifically requested by Elders Stella Erasmus Johnson and Marie Bercier:

We're living in a great opportunity now to be able to talk about who we are and where we come from, and people will understand.... Wear your sash, even the little lapels... There's so much culture. We all have so many, maybe three or four Nations in our blood running through our veins. It's just like our sash how it's woven in. Be proud of who you are. Our ancestors hid it because they were trying to keep us safe and now, we have the opportunity to spread the word. What is it, like the churches or whatever, spread the word. Spread the Métis word now. It is time we have that opportunity. Some of our ancestors were able to hold that culture and teach their children. – Stella Erasmus Johnson

Please wear your sash. How do I know who you are or that you are part of my community, regardless if you live up in Prince George or Montreal or wherever, how do I know? I have no way of knowing and I'm not going to stop you in the middle of the street and say, "Are you Métis?" – Marie Bercier

In addition to showing pride as Métis people, the Elders note that sashes are an effective way of identifying other Métis people in society. Elder Marie further explained that wearing sashes is a great way of identifying other Métis people, creating connections, and expanding our social circles.

For those that were not raised in the culture, it is a journey of learning, understanding, and becoming Métis. Elder Larry Ahdemar emphasized the importance of sitting with and learning from the older people who can share “the way the true Métis were brought up.” He emphasized the importance of understanding what it means to be Métis by learning about traditional ways of life from those who lived it. As Elder Larry explained, “you got to know where you come from and that and you got to make sure the people who are telling the story lived that life.” And while the Elders were clear that it is important to respect each Métis person’s journey with reconnection, some shared their thoughts around the dangers of “new Métis”—or those who have more recently discovered their identity and were raised as non-Métis peoples. These folks may tend to lead a more “assimilated lifestyle”; when folks who do not fully understand Métis culture and ways of life become the decision-makers within the provincial governing bodies, their decisions may not reflect a true understanding what it means to be Métis.

Several Elders—including Denise McCuaig, Jo-Ina Young, Stella Erasmus Johnson, and Marie Bercier—shared that blood memory is a way of knowing, as well as a strength and a gift for Métis people. They spoke about awakening blood memory, as Elder Marie Bercier recalled, “blood memory goes right back to our ancient mothers.” Elder Jo-Ina Young spoke about the importance of supporting Métis children to connect to their own blood memory; she shared, “Just by learning about more Métis culture, there’s more acceptance... there’s blood memory in people and little Métis kids have blood memory, those things are going to come back to them.” Similarly, Elder Stella Erasmus Johnson spoke about guiding Métis adults to connect with their culture and identity, sharing a personal experience with her granddaughter who felt connected to her ancestors when she heard drumming at a Métis gathering.

Connection to Land and Spirit

Stories about land and place were diverse. This section includes stories that highlight the value of land-based activities and outdoor education, and the ways in which these activities can teach children and youth about Métis traditional values and life skills, which are very relevant today. Elder Lynda Tilley shared about her experience of sharing her connection to land with her children:

I brought my children up on the land. And, I mean, my boys are great hunters, and they know all the traditions with the hunting and everything. But I think a lot of children don't get that opportunity to go out in the wilderness and maybe see a deer, maybe see a bear, which we have up in our area. But just be up in the mountains, the fresh air. It's just a totally different atmosphere, free, totally free. The kids would absolutely go crazy up there and I would love that because that is, they could go now, especially now that the creek is down and as it warms up, they can play in it, they could have a fire, you know? Typical things children should have, is to be able to go out in the country and enjoy life... be free, I mean, to a point where they're safe, mind you. I mean, and then maybe teach them some traditions, like the flowers, go through, and my son's great for this, my oldest boy, he knows the bush so well. – Lynda Tilley

Elder Lynda's story illustrates the multi-dimensional value of land-based activities. Elder

Isabella Matheson* shares a similar perspective, which she illustrates through her thoughts on the danger of being disconnected from the land:

So that scares me actually, more than anything, for our kids. That scares me. That lack of connection to the land, because we talk about that word, Wahkotowin, if you don't have a connection to the land, you don't have an understanding of how things are connected, and what you do to one thing eventually has a spillover effect on another thing. If you don't get that connection in your spirit or in your soul or whatever you want to call it, then how do you make good moral decisions about things in your life, right? And how you treat other living creatures and the land if you're not connected to it. It's about that relationship piece. If you don't have a relationship with something, how are you going to treat it? – Isabella Matheson*

However, relationships with land can be complicated given the positionality of Métis people living in BC. The Elders talked about what it means to be visitors on the territories of First Nations, as Elder Barb Hulme shared:

The biggest problem for our British Columbia Métis community is that we're visitors on other people's lands. We don't have a land base or even a building space that we could call our own to interact and do a youth and seniors' tea, or other kinds of things that could be worthwhile to the community. – Barb Hulme

Elder Barb's statements reflect the complicated dynamic of being Métis in BC, and the challenges that come up when wanting to connect with the land, while respecting the stewards and rights-holders across different territories.

Discussions about connection to land were often intermingled with talk of Métis spirituality. The Elders were clear about the distinction between spirituality and religion, although Métis people may be aligned with either—or sometimes both. Elder Patrick Savard reflects on this topic broadly, as he states:

I think most Indigenous people, including Métis people, are very spiritual, and if it's your thing or not we do that, and it brings a calmness and a difference to the meeting, and it's not officialdom or whatever, it's something that we do and that we have always done. My father believed, my mother was a Christian lady, and my granny was a very devout Catholic, with a rosary and everything. So, we come from, and we've always been spiritual people. – Patrick Savard

Despite these multiple forms of belief, the Elders almost exclusively spoke about forms of spirituality, including the practice of ceremony and prayer. Elder Marie Bercier reflected on the connection between spirituality with connection to land. She spoke about the importance of expressing gratitude to Mother Earth while interacting with nature. Similarly, Elder Lynda shared how prayer connects Métis people to each other, to the land, and to Creator:

I feel that when you sit and pray together, you come together, and also you have to have a belief in the Creator. Creator is one of our powerful teachers. If we don't have that, we don't have nothing. And I think a prayer centres you right away and it's amazing after the prayer is done, how people feel. It connects, it connects to the Creator, it connects to the land, our whole being, and I think that is so important to all our people, is our prayers are so important and that our prayers come from our Elders. So, those are more important because it's Elders that are doing the prayers, like a lot of our prayers are from our Elders from way back. It's so cool and I just, like, I find even myself, when I am, you know, when I'm up on my property, I find being, I'm earthy, I'm a very earthy person, and so, I go by the creek and I sit there and, you know, go in with the water and you just give that,

you say, “Thanks Creator for what we have,” and not what we don’t have. And so, it’s powerful. You know, you hear the creek running and it’s cool, I don’t know, it just really centres you, centres us. And I think that’s what our families need to be centred because once they’re centred, they have a vision and when that vision comes, it comes strong. – Lynda Tilley

Elder Betty Gladue shared that spirituality can also be simple, including the ways that her Métis practiced *pêyâhtik*:

They call it meditation. My grandfather would call it *pêyâhtik*. Just be quiet and careful. He says, listen to the mosquitos. How could you listen to the mosquitos? Listen! And the wind, which direction is it coming from? The weather, he sits there and studies it, the environment. In the morning you would see him outside sitting, with his cup of coffee. That was his meditation. – Betty Gladue

The importance of listening, being mindful, and expressing gratitude are reflected in the conversations with Elders Marie Bercier, Lynda Tilley, and Betty Gladue, when they spoke about spirituality and nature.

Ways of Knowing

During the Elders Gathering, the Elders were clear that discussions around Métis identity should emphasize the importance of balance around the articulation of Métis identity, which can be inclusive of multiple worldviews. This blending of traditions was evident historically through the Métis Buffalo Hunt, where elections for Captain of the Hunt were derived from a western tradition, and the treatment of the buffalo through the hunting process comes from Indigenous worldviews. Elder Denise McCuaig explained this relationship:

When you think about the Métis Nation and the role we played in the fur trade and the buffalo hunt and providing food, we didn’t do that one lone hunter, out on horseback, coming back with some medicine or a moose. We did that in masse, you know, electing a Captain of the Hunt and twelve-hundred people out on the prairies, and it’s the same way when we produced things, like, we often do that as a full family and a collective. And so that sense of belonging and being relational often happened around food and land activity, and I think being able to go back to that in modern child welfare times is extremely important because there is not a lot of space in Canadian society where you and enter into it and feel authentically Métis and accepted for who you are. And so, if we

can create that kind of space around traditional activities and gathering and sharing in food and being relational, I just think that that is really valuable. – Denise McCuaig

The Elders were clear that Métis people should understand and share this balance with a sense of pride, respect, and understanding. Some Elders, like Phil Gladue, noted that they are witnessing an imbalance in terms of privileging western ways of knowing:

We need to get back to looking at both sides of our history... so that there is a balance. There is not a balance right now. We get taken away so easily by the material side of the world and we need to look at where we come from. It is hard for some people who didn't grow up with it. They're up here [in their head], and they don't connect to the feeling part of it. And that's where the true things are, they're in here [the heart], feeling. Especially when we use our senses—the five senses—then we connect. – Phil Gladue

Similarly, Isabella Matheson* explained the importance of understanding the roots of the term, Otipemisiwak, and the harm in interpreting this concept through a western lens:

So, the western view, being the boss of yourself is the difference on worldviews between Indigenous and non-Indigenous. It's just you do everything for yourself. I'm the boss of myself so the money I make is for me, the knowledge I have is for me. Anything I do is about me. Whereas the Indigenous version of that word is again connected to Wahkotowin. What I know, what I receive, whether it's in money form, resources or gifts—that doesn't just belong to me. It belongs to my family, it belongs to my community, it belongs to the world. But people get stuck in it... it just means that I'm super independent, and then that independent self-centred view of Otipemisiwak versus the Indigenous view of it. Because to me, I mean if you look at it from an Indigenous lens, it means that you're strong and independent but that also means you can contribute to your community and your family. You're a warrior. You can keep things safe. Not I'm like this greedy capitalist person... So sometimes it gets taken too far and then that's why you get this lack of communication. I can relate all this back to what's going on with the agencies. That's why you talk about diverse views on that, and that's what happens when you don't have enough Indigenous Knowledge or connection to Wahkotowin to understand the difference. That's when you end up with all we've got going on with all the agencies. – Isabella Matheson*

In addition to balancing multiple ways of knowing, Elders also shared about the importance of balance in terms of wellness. Elders spoke about the impact of experiencing an imbalance – which can manifest itself in mental health challenges, addiction, self-esteem and confidence. It is

important that Métis people take care of all aspects of their wellness, tending to the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical aspects of well-being.

Métis Languages

Many Elders shared their stories about Métis languages (e.g., Cree, Michif, Bungi). They spoke about the importance of learning these languages. Elder Phil Gladue was particularly clear in this sentiment, as he said, “Language is power, and no one can ever take your language away from you.” Some of the Elders were explicitly raised with their traditional languages, while others reflected that Michif, and other languages had been integrated into their lives without knowing it. Elders Jo-Ina Young and Stella Erasmus Johnson both shared memories of their kookums speaking French-Cree and French-Michif to them, while they thought that their grandparents were trying to speak basic French. Elder Stella Erasmus Johnson later spoke about the process of learning Métis languages and passing them on to children and grandchildren from a young age:

It’s important once you know who you are... try to pick up some of the language, the dialect, doesn’t matter which one that you learn, but be proud to say it. Greet yourself, niwihowin Stella Erasmus Johnson, my name is. Nimiweyihten: I like it, I love it. Kisâkihitin: I love you. These are important little things to greet your little grandchild or your child, to start showing them when you have children. I remember these lullabies and the lullaby that they sing is A-E-O, that’s the syllabics, that’s our sound system. Those were our little songs that they sang to us. – Stella Erasmus Johnson

Additionally, both Elders Melba Sterling and Stella Erasmus Johnson spoke about their current and past work in teaching Cree in community settings.

There were many examples, as well as a spirited discussion in the Elders gathering, of ways to honour the diversity of Métis languages, including but not limited to dialects of Cree and Michif. Elder Larry Ahdemar spoke about the value of the Cree language given that there are many Cree speakers, both past and present:

Well, you know, my thing on Michif, the language or the speaking. You know, back where I come from, it was all Métis pretty well, eh. There was probably only two or three who spoke Michif. Everybody spoke Cree, all the Métis spoke Cree back there.... See, we went there and all the Métis and everything in Alberta and Manitoba, we had relatives there. They never spoke Michif. It was all Cree. And this is, I don't know, I wish that more people would learn Cree, because Michif, if you learn Michif, I would learn Michif if you had somebody to talk to, but who are you going to talk to once you learn it? ... but you learn Cree, you've got a whole Nation there you can talk to. You go to any city, I don't care where it is, there will be a Cree you can talk to.... Back home, where I come from, you learn Cree from when you were young, eh. Even our church on the reserve was in Cree and school was in Cree and all that, eh. – Larry Ahdemar

Similarly, some Elders spoke about the importance learning Cree before learning other Métis languages. Elder Stella Erasmus Johnson explains her thought process around learning Cree, which is a root language for Michif:

I think as long as you learn Cree because that's the base—the Cree, and the different dialects. As we moved west, our ancestors went and maybe stayed with a family, maybe a Saulteaux family for a couple of years and they picked up their dialect, their language. And as we moved on, that's why our people, some of them spoke five or six different languages and could understand each other. That's because as we moved on in these experiences of... I'm just saying it my way and you will learn you can pick it up from there. I'm not trying to enforce my grandmother's dialect with you, I'm just trying to help you and as long as you keep practicing, learning whatever dialect, then it will just come easier for you when you go see your aunt or uncle or whatever, somebody who might speak some of the words, and you'll be able to. – Stella Erasmus Johnson

As well, Elder Isabella Matheson* spoke about the ways in which Indigenous languages, like Cree, serve to strengthen a sense of kinship and *Wahkotowin*, including connection to land and spirit.

Elder Barb Hulme illustrates how the diversity of our languages is reflective of the cultural and spiritual diversity of our people:

I would say if we can have Métis looking after each other, the reason being is that as a Métis group as well, we're very diverse, and how those people, let's say, from Alberta, are different from those in Manitoba, or those from the settlements and things like that. That we're all very diverse in our lifetime experiences... I'm Scottish Métis. I don't have a big French Catholic piece to it... the vision of my world is totally different than some of the people who have had sort of a more Catholic upbringing. And so even within our Métis worlds... you know, we've got at least three different dialects, so if we've got three

different dialects of Michif, plus the fact that none of my family even spoke Michif, they spoke Bungi... then I'm coming from a totally different place than some of the others because of that. Sometimes I sort of have a moment of thought saying you know what? No, we're not all that way. But at the same time, it's not worth the exercise to cause any kind of heartburn with anybody else. It's the same as I come from Manitoba. There are people within our community and other communities... well, if we're talking about our community who have been multi-generational Métis, but from here, and they have really, in many ways, no knowledge or experience of the history of Batoche, Duck Lake, Seven Oaks. It's not within their wheelhouse and you can't take that away from them, but it's not the full picture. – Barb Hulme

Métis people have always spoken multiple languages. As a whole, the Elders were clear about the importance of honouring and celebrating the diversity of Métis languages, particularly in spaces that may choose to focus on a homogenous narrative or emphasize one language.

Teachings on Wahkotowin and Kinship Systems

Métis kinship and relatedness to the natural and spirit worlds—including connection to family, community, land, and all beings—was discussed throughout all conversations with the Métis Elders. This understanding of relatedness, and resulting obligations, is encompassed through Wahkotowin. Kinship relations are a key component of Métis identity.

Wholistic understandings of kinship extend beyond western notions of family which primarily consider immediate family members. Elders described how traditionally Métis families were big, strong, and interconnected:

the most predominant thing for me when I think about growing up, is how interconnected we were as a family, as Métis families. When I think about my elementary and primary school experience, for example, a lot of my friends in school, they were having sleep overs and birthday parties and get-togethers, and I did that too, but I did that with cousins. So, it would have been really rare for me to, like, invite my third-grade friend to come for a sleep over at the house because outside of our, you know, school and work obligations, almost all of our time was spent as a family together. So, I'm Métis on my mom's side and she had six siblings and, so I think in terms of us, my generation there was 17 of us and it was not unusual to spend the majority of every weekend together, and I didn't necessarily know that was sort of a Métis way until I was much older and more engaged in the broader Indigenous community. But I was able to look back on that and go, oh, that's an Indigenous way of being. A lot of my friends growing up, they didn't necessarily have Sunday breakfasts with 21 of their family members. [laughter] But we

did. So, I've really sort of come to appreciate that that family connection was really strong, and I think that is the case traditionally. – Denise McCuaig

Families and communities created natural support systems for Métis people. The Elders spoke about the importance of Métis children knowing who their family is. Traditionally, it was important that Métis people fully understood their family trees, as both Elders Stella Erasmus Johnson and Rebecca Dubois* explained, to avoid marrying their cousins. Elder Isabella

Matheson* reflected on the value of living close to family:

I think having that extended family living close by again helped with the childrearing piece of it... even me, I lived next door to my mom and my dad, my aunts and uncles, and in the same community at least, with my kids growing up. I don't know how I would have survived without the support... you didn't have to pay babysitters. You didn't have to have daycare because your family was there and we all shared each other's kids, right? Somebody needed a break, or somebody needed to go out of town to do something, you know, the cousins came and stayed. I remember myself not getting along with my mom when I started to hit my adolescent years. It was okay, I didn't have to go into foster care. I didn't have to run away. I could go to my auntie's house which was just next door, and she was often more reasonable than my mother to talk to, so, you know, and I could stay there until things cooled off. Or I could go to the next house over, which was my grandma's house, and hang out there until my mom and I could get along together again.
– Isabella Matheson*

With her reflections, Elder Isabella* illustrates how the ways of upholding Wahkotowin led to prevention supports for Métis families, by having extended family available to support parents.

Elder Stella Erasmus Johnson shared about how she was surrounded by her family as a child, but witnessed the shift in her family structure over time:

Family was very important... in the smaller community where we lived, my cousins, we were all raised together that way, but as we got older, people moved out because of education or because of work, because there was no work, and that's how sort of the family break up started to happen. There was a lot of people that lost their aunties or uncles or their cousins and the contact sort of just kind of disappeared because life goes on and family reunions were far and between. – Stella Erasmus Johnson

Similar to other small communities, a lack of socio-economic opportunities has meant that young people have had to leave the community for education and employment opportunities. While

family has remained important within Métis communities, the distance between family members has impacted opportunities to gather.

The Elders' stories spoke to the significance of strong connections to family, and in particular, the importance of grandparents. Grandmothers, in particular, were described as strong leaders, as matriarchs of the family. Elder Barb Hulme reflected on her own grandmother, stating, "Grandma was the strength behind all of the kids and that, and, you know, you followed Grandma's rules." Indeed, many of the Elders shared stories about their families, including strong connections with grandparents. These stories emphasize the importance of multi-generational roles in Métis child-rearing. Elder Marie Zwingli spoke lovingly about how her grandmother shaped her into the person she became:

Well, because I was raised mainly by my grandmother, she was an extremely intuitive, strong but quiet and in terms of discipline. It was all about me finding out for myself what would happen if I did a certain thing... – Marie Zwingli

Elder Marie also shared that her family took care of her grandmother as she aged. When she was no longer able to take care of her home, her grandmother stayed with different family members during the winter months, and then would return to her own place during the summer.

In addition to the importance of grandparents, aunts, and uncles, Elder Marie Bercier also spoke about the role of Godparents in some Métis families. While Godparents did not necessarily have a daily presence, Elder Marie explained that they were "there to help if anything happened, they could mediate." The role of Godparents, as Elder Marie explained, is similar to the traditional role of aunts and uncles. Forming circles of support, family members all play unique roles in upholding Métis children. More broadly, Elder Jo-Ina Young spoke about the significance of community support, who can bring so much value to a person's life—particularly for children who may be struggling with self-esteem: "if they are part of the community from

when they are little, they always have that support... that self-assurance, that pride in yourself.”

Elder Jo-Ina went on to explain that community is an extension of family, and that a strong community is an incredible asset for young people.

When speaking about traditional approaches to childrearing, Elders often spoke about helping out other families and supporting each other in the community. Several Elders spoke about how supporting each other has always been a central component of traditional Métis childrearing.

Elder Lynda Tilley spoke about the importance of offering parents support when they need a break, noting, “with our tradition..., [parents] can go and have their children looked after for a weekend or something like, take a weekend, or through the week, if you need a break.” Today, this may be referred to as respite care, but it was an incredibly common form of support across Métis families and communities. For instance, Elder Francois Morrisette* shared how he would stay with an uncle or his grandparents during tough times at home:

If I had trouble at home, one of my uncles would come and get me and go to my grandparents or I would go to my other uncle’s farm and stay there until things cooled down or I had a different attitude, one or the other. – Francois Morrisette*

Elder Francois’s* reflections here share some of the important roles that extended family played in raising children and youth.

Families also cared for other children longer-term through kinship placements and customary adoption. In traditional settings, there was no organized government of agency to direct such placements, Elder Patrick Savard explained, “they had to do that themselves, so, they did.” Several Elders had stories of customary adoption and kinship placements within their families to share. Elder Patrick Savard spoke about the ways that his family would aid relatives, as he recalled that his father would stay at an aunt and uncle’s house to help them with their farm work. Elder Patrick also shared that his father was raised alongside a cousin, who was adopted

and raised as a sibling. Elder Joyce shared that her family also cared for two of her cousins, at different points during her childhood:

If somebody needed help, you went and helped them. If somebody had wanted you to look after one of their children, you took them. My parents took in my cousin, my first cousin, when she was only about three years old and she lived with us then until she grew up, except for a couple of years. Her dad took her down to the island with some of his sisters and she went to a convent there, but then she came back up and lived with us.... Then we had another cousin, a boy; his mother was having a rough time. She just got divorced and had a hard time looking after... I guess there were four little boys... and Butch seemed to like our place, got along well with everybody, and we all loved him, so he stayed with us for a year. I mean you didn't question, you'd just take them in. You were part of the family. – Joyce Munro

This practice of welcoming people into the family also expanded beyond kinship care with extended family. Elder Joyce went on to share that she would often bring home other children in the community who needed help or a place to stay, as she recalled:

I don't know how my parents ever put up with me, but I was always dragging somebody home. I'd meet them and they'd need a place to stay so I'd bring them home. There was nothing ever said, you just moved your chair over and sat them down. I remember this one time I met this girl on the street, and I got talking to her and I asked "Well, where are you from?" because that was just a little village, you knew everybody. She said, "Oh, I come from Manitoba, northern Manitoba. I was travelling with some friends, and we came up here last night, and I don't know, they just left me. They're gone. So, I'm trying to get a hold of them." Well, in those days, how would you get a hold of anyone? So, she had nowhere to go so I took her home and probably had to share my bed with her, and anyway she stayed with us for a couple of weeks and then my mother found her a job babysitting for a neighbour, so she babysat there for a while until she saved up enough money... At the same time, she was still living at our place, and she saved up enough money to go to Prince Albert and get a room and a job there. – Joyce Munro

Elder Isabella Matheson* shared similar memories of kinship care while she was growing up.

While she was an only child—biologically speaking—she noted that her house was always full of people. Her family would care for children when their families were going through tough times. Elder Isabella* recalled that her bedroom was set up to create space for her relatives: "I never had my own bedroom. We always had like two sets of bunkbeds in every room in our house, so sometimes there was like 13 people at the dinner table." Kinship care was practiced

throughout her community. She shared that families and communities were closely connected, and the women in the community generally knew when families needed extra support:

Back when the matriarchs of the family saw what was going on, they would usually intervene before things got to that point where somebody got hurt or the family fell apart. And if the family was totally falling apart... it was like the grandmas and the aunties that took over... and there was adoption without being legally adopted. – Isabella Matheson*

Elder Isabella* shared that this awareness allowed for families to offer informal kinship care as a form of preventing ministry-involvement. Her statements also reflect the prominence of customary adoption, which was traditionally practiced in Métis communities.

In addition to hearing Elders share their recollections about kinship care and customary adoption while they were growing up, Elder Fred Paquette spoke about his traditional childrearing practices as a Métis father:

I raised three girls, besides my two. Their friends, they moved in. We moved here to Merritt, working in the log yard here, and I was so dirty, dusty all day long. So, I came home before supper one day and I want a shower, and the wife said, “You can’t use the shower.” I said, “How come?” She said, “A little girl from across the back alley there,” she said, “She’s in there.” That was okay. I didn’t say nothing. So next night, next time I come home, she was in the shower. I said, “Well, ask her if she could move her showers up a little earlier.” She moved in and she never left. She was 16 when she left... her parents, well they were having a hard time... – Fred Paquette

Elder Fred Paquette goes on to illustrate how this practice was common in his family, as his mother would care for other children, too:

See, my mother, when I was growing up, when I was 16, 17, 18, when I was working, she always had strange kids... she always took kids in. They’d be there a couple months, sometimes a year, and she always had them. Besides her own. See the custom was, if you... they always took somebody else’s kids in, whether one or two, and raise them in the bad times, you know? – Fred Paquette

The practice of taking care of children extended beyond one’s family, as Elder Francois

Morrisette* explained, “one of the things you’ll find with Métis families is that they don’t have

to know the genealogy of that person, right? Not like the western families, like I won't take him because he's not really my relative."

Stories about Growing Up Métis and Raising Children

This section includes a collection of memories from Elders who generously shared stories about growing up, as well as reflections on their own experiences of raising families.

Chores

Chores were a prominent theme in stories about growing up Métis. Elder Verma Kerr explains that chores were a daily part of life because there was always work to be done. Many Elders described the types of chores they were assigned in their families. There was some variation in chores across the stories, accounting mostly for age and in some cases gender. For instance, Elder Stella Erasmus Johnson spoke about washing clothes and cleaning floors, while Elder Fred was tasked with splitting and packing wood. However, many of the Elders described farm labour as a daily task, as Elder Verma Kerr recalled:

I guess it was probably a typical childhood. I mean, we were out on the farm. We didn't have friends to go and play with. We did what we were told to do, whether it was go get a pail of water or carry firewood in, and feed chickens or whatever, you know, whatever it was, we learned early. We learned to milk a cow. I was ten, eleven years old, I could drive the tractor... drive a team of horses on a rig raking hay. You got out there and did it, because it had to be done. And, you know, we weren't a wealthy family, we were a poor family. There was six of us kids and we were dad's helpers, we were mom's helpers. You know, just get out there and do what you were told to do... We worked in the garden, we hoed the garden, we picked those awful potato bugs. Oh, I hated those. You know, there was always something that had to be done. You had to do dishes and you had to sweep floors and as you got older, you know, it got a little heavier. – Verma Kerr

On the farm, chores often included feeding and tending to animals, hauling firewood and water, taking care of the gardens, and housework. Elder Larry Ahdemar spoke about similar tasks,

noting that many of these chores occurred out of necessity as they did not have any running water or electricity:

We had a hard life growing up, Métis life, hey. And we were raised on a farm and had to work, you know. Had chores right after school, sawing wood, hauling water, cleaning the barn... we had animals. We had horses and a few cows, and lots of chickens. Yeah, and a big garden. Ever year was a big garden and that was a chore, eh, because we had to haul water. – Larry Ahdemar

At a younger age, Elder Larry remembers helping his mom mix the dough, while also playing with it. In a similar way, Elder Isabella Matheson* spoke about different chores for children of all ages, as she explained, “Everybody—once they were five or six—everybody had little tasks to do. You helped with the dishes, or you helped weed the garden, you know, just little things that were appropriate for your age.” Chores were also expected at grandparents’ houses, which Marie Zwingli reflected on fondly:

My Grandmother’s house was bursting with grandchildren during the summer school holidays. Sometimes there would be 10 or more children sleeping on sheepskins all around her bed and wherever they could find space. The young boys slept in the hayloft. There were always chores to do before you would be allowed to go in the lake. Watering the vegetables, feeding the animals, chopping, and piling the wood for the winter, washing clothes in a very unique half barrel contraption that we took turns swinging from side to side. The milk separation was a daily occurrence. Every second or third day, Grannie would make 10 to 12 loaves of bread to feed all those hungry little faces. Her sour cream on a slice of bread was everyone’s favourite. Everyone did their part. No fussing. Even the smallest ones would be given pails with chicken feed and would throw this to the free-range chickens. Those were fun times with all the cousins. I do not know how that tiny lady did all that she did with a smile and a peel of laughter when someone did something silly. Sometimes we put on little talent shows for her. Some liked to sing, others liked to watch. There was always a harmonica and guitar available. I do not recall bickering or fighting or any really bad behaviours. The bigger children always watching out for the younger ones, which was an unspoken expectation. – Marie Zwingli

Elder Marie’s reflections, among others, indicate that chores were an important part of everyday life, but were often shared throughout big families and balanced with a lot of fun activities. In addition to entertainment, chores also helped to create character. Many Elders, including Melba

Sterling, shared stories about how they developed a strong work ethic as a result of being raised with chores:

We always, always had gardening. We always had a small farm. So, we would have a cow or two, we would have pigs and chickens, horses, and my dad always gardened, and we always picked berries. In all the years that I lived there in the beginning of my youth, we didn't have any electricity, we had no water, we had to do our cleaning by hand. So, I remember all the work, and my parents were both hard workers, so I learned a work ethic right from when I was young. Us youth, us kids and family had to help out, and mostly us girls did the work in the home and the boys did the outside work, but we could also do that. We would gather wood, we'd get snow, we'd get water, we'd scrub clothing on the washboard... – Melba Sterling

Elder Melba credits her strong work ethic to the strict responsibilities that she had growing up.

However, she also spoke fondly about a sense of freedom she had, when the work was complete for the day, to wander about the land and interact with nature.

Elder Larry Ahdemar indicated that his work ethic has been passed down across generations in his Métis family, as he noted, “My grandpa and granny were very hard-working people. And that's where my mom got her work ethic and that's where we got ours.” Additionally, both Elders Phil Gladue and Fred Paquette shared how they learned how to work from watching their parents. Both of these Elders also shared that they started working at a young age. Elder Fred Paquette recounted his first job, at age eight:

I had my first job when I was eight years old... cutting wood. My younger brother, or my older brother just before he drowned and that, the guy came around, he owned the café, and he had to have somebody cut wood. There was nobody to do it, and I told him I'd take the job, and he said, no you're too young. He said I couldn't hire you anyways. You gotta be 16 or something like that. So, I said, okay, and a couple of days later he was back. He changed his mind. He couldn't get nobody. So, all that summer, I cut wood. Then they got me washing a few dishes, then peeling potatoes... I think it was \$80, but I put that all back into war savings bond.... I always had a job. – Fred Paquette

The value of a strong work ethic—and the way in which chores can foster a spirit of hard work—were often carried over to the Elders' own children. Children were brought up learning about work ethic through chores, as Elder Marie Bercier recalled, “My children all had to work and

whatever money they made, they got to spend on their own, under supervision of course. So, my oldest daughter was working, she decided that she was going to do housework.” In addition to sharing within their own families, the Elders were clear that all Métis families should pass on the lessons learned through working hard and completing chores.

Discipline

Traditional approaches to discipline were described in many of the Elders’ stories. While there was some variation in the types of discipline Elders experienced when growing up, most stories featured examples of teaching lessons through stories and gentle redirection, as well as natural consequences. Elder Lea Becker explains that storytelling and collective guidance have been used to teach children, rather than discipline through forms of punishment. Elder Lea shared that in her family, “there isn’t the punishment per se; it’s life lessons through stories.” She grew up in an environment that broadly reflected Indigenous teachings around childrearing and explained that “parents are in an honoured position, but it takes a village to raise a child, and I still believe that.” Similarly, Elder Francois Morrisette* explained the difference between western and traditional Métis forms of teaching children, with a focus on redirection and explanation in Métis child rearing:

I remember when I was growing up, a lot of my cousins whose parents—both of them—were Métis, they never got the word “no” too often. They were always stopped and explained and redirected. Whereas for ones who were kind of the European and Métis, the word ‘no’ was quite used prevalently. I mean there was lots of times you thought your baby’s name was “No-No.” So, I think when it comes to raising the children, to raise them traditionally and culturally is the best way. Teach them who they are as Métis people and help them to understand why they did things in a certain way because it’s going to be helpful throughout their life. – Francois Morrisette*

Elder Francois* went on to share the ways that he was redirected as a child:

it was strict but yet it was kind, you know. It wasn’t demeaning like some of the western discipline is, and it was not a put down. It’s a teaching. The discipline is more of a teaching than it is a discipline. That’s how the majority of my cousins were raised, and I

had a fair amount of that at home too, especially when my aunt came and lived with us. We had a lot more of the redirection and things like that. – Francois Morrisette*

Interestingly, Elder Stella Erasmus Johnson also spoke about how you did not hear the word “no” too often:

There was no such thing as “No, I’m not going to do that.” Nowadays I think we hear more “no” and I think that’s the important thing is to have rules and regulations for our children, and we should teach them that by the time they’re five years old. They should know what is right and wrong, and given those strong guidelines to be respectful. That was always taught. – Stella Erasmus Johnson

In this way, Elder Stella is speaking about the ways in which teachings around respect and responsibilities have been passed on to children. Traditionally, Métis children understood their obligations to the family, as well as the rules that they were to abide by.

In addition to redirection, Elders spoke about teaching children through natural consequences. Elder Isabella Matheson* recalled that she was never discouraged from physical activity, like getting messy outside, and if there were natural consequences to her actions, she learned from them. While this was likely a mindful choice, Elder Isabella* noted that it was also a necessity as, “families were too busy trying to survive. Whether it was work or farming or food gathering or hunting, there was more energy put into that than into like all the minor irritating stuff.” Elder Isabella* explained that parenting styles have shifted over time, noting that many parents today tend to be excessively restrictive or overprotective. To these parents, Elder Isabella* recommended that they “save their energy for the big things.”

Elders also spoke about parental influence as a form of teaching. For instance, Elder Marie Zwingli recalled her grandmother’s approach to raising her through intentional role-modelling, with a focus on teaching her about common sense:

as I got older, she definitely told me, “It’s your choice, so if you get hurt, that’s the lesson you’ll have to learn.” That’s how she approached any discipline or teaching. She taught by example; she led by example. – Marie Zwingli

She explained that while many of her cousins found their grandmother to be overly strict, Elder Marie appreciated that she was given autonomy over her actions.

Converse to many of the examples of traditional Métis discipline, other Elders shared stories of punishment, like spankings, in response to trouble-making. These Elders, like Elder Larry Ahdemar, note that the punishment was not too serious:

You know, they would threaten and that, but we got a lickin' now and then, nothing really serious. [Laughter] We thought it hurt at the time, but when you think back, it was nothing, eh. Yeah, it was a good life. You know, when you think back, it was a good life, you know. Of course, as kids you're always going to get in trouble now and again. – Larry Ahdemar

Elders also spoke about the ways in which discipline taught them about being accountable. Elder Fred Paquette shared a story about how he learned about the repercussions of stealing candy:

I'll tell you a little story when we were taught not to steal. My mother sent my brother and I to the store with a note for some bread and that, put it on the bill. We went there and the guy was busy and that, and we were standing there and there was this great big McIntosh toffee... It was lying on the counter where he had the candies out, so we got our groceries and we were leaving, and I took one, and next day he was at the house and told my mother that we swiped a chocolate bar, and I guess they put it on our bill, and when Dad came home, Mom said we'll let Granny punish them. So, we got over there and the first thing she did was she marched us over to Granny and she was going to punish us. There was a show once a week and Granny said, "No shows, you'll go to church for six months...." We sure learned that one. I don't like toffee. – Fred Paquette

Elder Fred's story highlights that grounding was, and remains, a well-established form of discipline, and these experiences tend to be preserved in childhood memories.

Elder Verma Kerr also shared that the strict but fair discipline she received from her parents helped to teach her about responsibility. As a child, she knew that she had to follow through with her chores, because there were repercussions if you did not abide by the family rules. In recalling these experiences, she noted that they were never mistreated as children, and that the discipline helped her to grow into a responsible person.

Across these stories, the Elders shared their experiences matter of fact, and did not judge the choices that their parents made. While some societal norms have shifted, the themes of redirecting, role-modeling, offering consequences, and instilling responsibility are all examples that may continue to resonate with Métis families today.

Visiting and Kitchen Parties

Elders shared stories about growing up around lots of their own family and other Métis families. They would visit each other, play games, gather and have kitchen parties. Gatherings and kitchen parties often included music, which was a prominent feature in many stories about happy Métis families, as Elder Lynda Tilley shared:

a happy home is music. I mean, the Métis, the First Nations, all were born with music and if it wasn't the fiddle, it was the drums and it was whatever, and I love, I mean, I play banjo... well sort of. But anyways, it's fun. – Lynda Tilley

Elder Larry Ahdemar spoke about how important music was within his family while he was growing up. Similarly, Elder Marie Zwingli also recalls her experience of growing up in a musical family, noting, “My oldest sister and her husband had a band, and they were always performing. So, on Friday night until Sunday night, they were performing and partying.” Elder Stella Erasmus Johnson shared that there was always music in her home, too:

There was always music around as Métis people. There was always music. If you couldn't play the music, then there was the radio to dance to or sing along to. Those were those special things. Métis love music and having fun and work hard. They work hard, have fun, time out to go and have some fun. – Stella Erasmus Johnson

Kitchen parties, filled with music and dancing, were family and community events. Elder Isabella Matheson* shares that kitchen parties were seasonal in her family: “the winter thing about the dances, my family did the same thing, the kitchen party thing. They would clear the living room out and everybody in the family again musical, so music was very important, right?”

Music was very important.” Additionally, Elder Francois Morrisette* and Rebecca Dubois* each recalled how, they were always included in kitchen parties:

Wintertime was the best season because that’s when you would go around and visit everyone, and you had a lot of the dances. My grandma used to have these get togethers, even during the summer... they call them kitchen parties, but they used just to call them like a gathering, right? And then, you know, all my uncles played an instrument. I remember my Uncle Johnny Gladue used to sit and play the fiddle for hours and hours and hours. And my dad was a Scotsman and he couldn’t jig but he used to call all the square dances so I remember my uncles got him one of these wooden crates that they put in the corner and my dad would stand on and call all these dances. And us kids, I mean all our older aunts and that would grab us and try to get us to dance, teach us to jig and do the waltzes and all the rest of it. And then when you got tired, you just threw a bunch of clothes or coats under a chair and that’s where you went to sleep until it was over... And it was great because the whole family was always together, and we learned to get along that way. So that’s my recollection of all of that. – Francois Morrisette*

Growing up, we were included in everything. Sometimes we’d be sleeping underneath the table or sometimes my dad would play for dances, a lot of them benefit dances, because we had to be there. We all had to learn to play the guitar, if you wanted to be a part of that family, you had to get up there and sing and help and go and get the older people, in those days, to, a lot of them didn’t have partners, so there you were half asleep trying to dance at night time with dad playing the fiddle. – Rebecca Dubois*

Kitchen parties tended to be large family events, where multiple generations would be involved.

Both Elders spoke fondly about fun it was to be included—even when sleeping—in these parties.

While gathering occurred frequently in many Métis families, some Elders—like Jo-Ina Young and Barb Hulme—shared the particular importance of visiting family during the holidays.

Additionally, Elder Jo-Ina noted that visiting in her family always included helping out at the house, or in the yard:

One of the things that I mostly noticed was—and I never even thought about it until I read about how Métis people were—was that whenever you came to our house, you never just sat down and had tea or sat down and visited. We were always working, doing something and you were always doing it with us... We never sat and did nothing. So, if we were in the yard, my mother always had an extra pair of boots out there. – Jo-Ina Young

In sharing this, Elder Jo-Ina illustrates that gatherings were not always about fun and games. These work parties, however, also constitute a form of visiting and show the principles of supporting other families.

Life Skills

Life skills were described as important parts of children and youth development into adulthood. Some of the Elders reflected on their experience of teaching life skills to their own children:

we tried to do our best to stay close to the land and to understand the natural way of life. The basics. And teaching life skills. And what I call life skills is teaching a kid how to fix his bed when they get out of bed, how to clean their room, how to hang their clothes. Those are skills that are going to carry on for the rest of their life, no matter what they do, even if they are in the corporate world. Those are the skills they are going to need. The basic skills. And I see that we are not doing that with the children today because it has not been passed on to the generation, because everything is money. You can buy your way out of everything. Today there is a lot of young people who see their life, they gotta buy their way out of anything. It's based on money. But the good part of life doesn't cost you, really. That is the way we raised our kids is to be not only responsible but to be independent. Otipemisiwak. That's where that word comes from. To look after themselves. – Phil Gladue

Elder Phil demonstrates that life skills create a foundation for independence—for living as Otipemisiwak. Similarly, many Elders also spoke about the value of addressing identity, culture, and healing from trauma in relation to teachings about life skills. For instance, Elder Melba Sterling shared that—in her previous work—she collaboratively designed an eight-week, low barrier program geared toward strengthening life skills. The program addressed history and intergenerational trauma, healthy relationships, substance use, community service, and education goals. Elder Melba also shared that the program was successful with respect to assisting women find employment and regaining custody of their children.

Life skills were noted to be important for all children and youth, but in particular, disparities were noted for children and youth in care. Unfortunately, as many Elders emphasized,

children and youth in care may not have adequate access to these teachings on life skills. Elders Larry Ahdemar and Rebecca Dubois* each noted that the foster care system is generally not setting youth up with practical skills for managing money, cleaning, and cooking, which creates disadvantages when youth become adults and they are expected to be fully independent. Elder Melba Sterling shared some of the work that she has been doing at Kikékyelc with teaching youth different skills in terms of banking and budgeting, housing, and maintenance:

There's a lot of young kids now that are just so good at all sorts of things. It's the basic things they lack. The basic life skills.... I talk about budgeting, I talk about saving, I talk about banking, and so that's the first part of the program, and also, I talk about housing as it evolves. So as a young person, you normally start with a bachelor suite or a basement suite, and then you progress from there. As your family, as your situation changes though, eventually you're going to live in a house with bedrooms because you're going to have a family. As you age and your children leave, you again, you get smaller, so I ended up smaller. I'm now living in one bedroom. So, your housing needs expand and get smaller but always you need to respect the building, not damage it. Understand that everything has a cost, and the maintenance is critical. The other piece of my workshops talks about home repair and maintenance. – Melba Sterling

In addition to teaching about housing and finances, discussions around life skills focused cooking and sewing. These practical skills are what Elder Rebecca Dubois* referred to as “survival skills.” Elder Lynda Tilley explained how cooking, while living on the land, is an exercise in creativity. Several Elders explained the particular relevance of traditional survival skills today. Elder Denise McCuaig spoke about application of traditional skills during climate crises:

when floods cut our entire community off from our supply chain, I was grateful to know that my children can cook food from scratch, that they can grow their own food in a time when food sovereignty is a challenge, and I think that when we're talking about child welfare, it's not always the case but a great majority of the time we are talking about poverty and, so being able to have those traditional values and live more in those traditional ways with that traditional knowledge, it's a way in which we can be rich, even when we're impoverished. – Denise McCuaig

This illustrates one of the many ways in which traditional skills and activities will continue to maintain their relevance throughout contemporary times.

Sewing often arose in the Elders' story as an important life skill. Stories about sewing often included elements of being economical and resourceful, by way of making and repairing clothing. Elder Jo-Ina Young shared that her mother used to create different styles of clothing for her to wear throughout her youth. As Elder Stella Erasmus Johnson and Elder Barb Hulme explain, fiscal necessity required parents to find creative solutions to worn and torn clothing:

[My grandmother] didn't do beading, but she did a lot of sewing and mending... Doing patches on clothes and mending socks, which nobody does anymore—they're thrown away. But we used to have those... I call them work socks, those woolen ones, and they're very expensive so they showed us how to darn socks. – Stella Erasmus Johnson

My mother knew how to sew so she hit the rummage sales and rebuilt clothes, that kind of thing. So, looking at economy of effort and being able to, you know, create something nice out of something that didn't necessarily look nice previously, is the kind of thing that she did. And that's the other thing that she did as well, was take in sewing. – Barb Hulme

In addition to its utility, sewing served as a fun way to pass time. Elder Verma Kerr recounted how her mother taught her to sew at a young age; she was tasked with patching overalls and jeans for her family. Similarly, Elder Melba Sterling shared that she used to make and mend clothing of all kinds. She shared that there remains a need for young people to know how to complete basic sewing tasks, like attaching buttons, changing zippers, and hemming pants. Unfortunately, the Elders explained that they do not see these skills among Métis youth as prevalently as they used to. Elder Melba Sterling recommended that youth programs aim to address this gap.

Education and Sharing Teachings

Education was addressed by many of the Elders. Education was described as the foundation for successful employment and good life. Elder Debora Todd Draney recalled her father's words to her, which she shared during the Elders Gathering: "Get a good education, my girl, and you'll get a good job." Similarly, Rebecca Dubois* recalled her mother saying, "Get out there and learn and just get as much help as you can."

Despite this emphasis on the importance of education, the school system was described as a challenging environment for many Elders who shared stories about their experiences of racism and discrimination growing up. Elder Fred Paquette, who was not able to attend school until his adolescence, shared a story about identifying as Métis within the school system:

I couldn't go to school. They wouldn't let you in school because you were Métis... our house was on this side and there was a fence, and the schoolyard was there, right across our fence. This was in Alberta. This was Fort MacMurray, and we couldn't go across into the schoolyard. They didn't let us. I didn't get no school until I was about 14... I did go to school in Prince George for about two years... We moved to Prince George from Hinton, and then there was Henning, just out of Prince George up to Chief Lake. That's the first time I had to go to school. Mom said you had to go because, well, they were family allowancing, and so we went. First day in school, a little log house school, and there was a male teacher and he said what nationality are you? I said Métis, so then the class had to know about what Métis was.... And after school, we had a fight. Yeah, because I was Métis. They didn't know what the hell a Métis was, but they were fighting anyway, to beat you up. And then before that morning, the next day I went to school and he put some numbers up, arithmetic numbers on the board and that... and so I didn't know what it was, so he grabbed me by the head, by the hair, and banged my head against the blackboard, and he did that for the first week... so I told my mom I'm not going to school... She wanted to know why not, I said, "He's banging my head up against the blackboard when I don't know nothing." I said, "What do I know?" And she said, "Well, you have to go. Just go." So I went, and I guess she told my dad, so he was a bouncer on the weekend at a dance hall. I didn't know for quite a while after, a year or so later, but I went to school on a Monday morning and he didn't bounce my head up against the blackboard, and I thought, oh I must be getting better at it. But then I found out later, mom and dad said, "Well, let's go to the dance." So, mom and dad went to the dance, and I guess my dad bounced him around a little bit. Dad was a heavyweight boxer. Then we moved to Prince George and Central School. First day in school, we were sitting beside each other. My younger brother and I were sitting beside each other, and she [the

teacher] said, “What nationality are you?” Before I could say Métis, my brother kicked me in the knee, kicked me in the leg and said, “French Canadian.” – Fred Paquette

While discrimination was primarily perpetuated by White students toward the Métis, both Elder Larry Ahdemar and Rebecca Dubois* spoke about not fitting in with First Nations and White students:

It was a hard life, a very hard life because you were kind of discriminated against by the White people, you know, at school. And then the Natives kind of discriminated against you. So, you’re stuck in the middle. – Larry Ahdemar

[Our dad] showed us how to try to talk to somebody. But growing up with prejudice, it’s kind of hard to talk something out when you’re being called a half breed in [school]. How do you talk that out? You hardly understand both sides. Cause the white man didn’t want us and the people from around the reserves there, they’d call us bad names: “Halfbreed, and what are you doing here, you shouldn’t have even been born.” Stuff like that, eh? – Rebecca Dubois*

In standing up to bullying, Rebecca Dubois* went on to share that she learned that the best response is to “Always be proud of who you are; you make sure you know who you are, who your family is.” Elder Marie Zwingli also recalled instances of bullying, and shared how she stood up to the bullies. And while there were many difficult experiences with the education system, Elder Barb Hulme noted that she truly enjoyed her education experience, as she noted, “I never had a timeframe where I didn’t enjoy being in school.”

Education was described in both a western sense and through culture and storytelling—both forms of education were described as important. Elder Phil Gladue explains that education can be offered through Métis storytelling:

I like to acknowledge my parents and my grandparents on both sides. My grandfathers on both sides I didn’t know. They were passed on before I was old enough, but I had other grandfathers. Many over the years, because they used to take us in. They would say, you know, I am your grandfather. And I learned a lot from those old people. I used to listen to them, and they used to tell stories. The way education was for the Métis—and maybe First Nations too—was storytelling. That is how we got educated was through storytelling. And I’m still doing that today. That is the only way I can write my history. A lot of the times it is humour too. And you have to be a good listener, because if you didn’t listen the Elders would not say anymore. They would stop because there was

disrespect here. They wouldn't tell you; they would just stop or leave. And that's the way it was in our culture. And lots of the stories had to do with the land and the animals and the environment. Those are the types of stories we had. The stories that we could use and learn from it. Those are the kinds of stories. – Phil Gladue

Elder Phil Gladue goes on to explain that a cultural foundation is the most important form of education: “I always stressed get educated. No matter what culture, no matter who you are, get educated. Culture first. Your identity, your culture, your history, and then the mainstream education.”

The Elders spoke about the ways in which teachings should be openly shared with Métis children, youth, and families. This can be done through role modelling and sharing stories. Teachings can also be shared in the context of cultural activities, like beading and cooking. Across these modalities, Elder Isabella Matheson* emphasized the importance of bringing multiple generations together. For Elder Phil Gladue, one of the most important elements of sharing is to “create safety and honesty,” which is particularly important for children and youth, as he notes, “when we are happy that is when we learn the best.” Similarly, Elder Jo-Ina Young underlined the need for sharing teachings in a gentle way:

And I think that is the way you teach anything. You don't reprimand or go, “You shouldn't have done that.” You teach it in a way where I can do that now, and that is the way of learning, I think because... if you embarrass people, they don't even want to learn about it, you know? You can trigger anger, too... Then you've lost them. – Jo-Ina Young

Here, Elder Jo-Ina illustrates a traditional perspective on why shaming can often be an ineffective form of teaching. With a focus on productive and positive approaches, Elders often spoke about sharing through storytelling, as well as through mentoring and role-modelling. For example, Rebecca Dubois* shared how values can be taught by demonstration:

Just all together and instill values in you and most of the time it was, I'll show you. So, we got taught to do things and then they would show us and then it's stuck in your head. Instead of having to learn it on your own, we always had teachers always around us to show us how to do things. – Rebecca Dubois*

Similarly, Elder Phil Gladue noted that he learned from Elders in his community, who showed observed and guided children throughout their development:

people are watching you all the time, since the time you crawled people are watching you. And that's how you become an Elder. It starts down there when you are crawling. In a community, people are seeing how you grew up, how you carry yourself. Those are all values that you learn when you are younger. And people are seeing that, what you put into the community and how you help out, those are things that really make you a Métis. Not just take from the community but put in. So that's how I understood my Elders and my parents, my grandparents—watching them and not only talking about it but doing the actions. – Phil Gladue

As Elder Phil explained, these teachings begin from a young age, and this is viewed as life-long preparation to become an Elder. In these words, he also emphasizes the importance of reciprocity within the Métis community.

Throughout the stories offered by the Elders, several people shared that every person carries a gift. Elder Lea Becker revealed that all of the Elders that works with are gifted in their own unique ways: “My role as an Elder as I see it is to be a support to everyone... We all try our best and we're gifted in different ways, all of us Elders.” Elder Jo-Ina Young shared a similar sentiment, applying this teaching to all Métis people who each hold their own gift:

everybody has their own gift about what they do. So, just because I do things that way, I mean, other people can go in, and they can do Métis cooking, or they might have knowledge about their own family or a story they'd like to tell. There are all kinds of things, there's not just one way of doing it. It's got to be a community going into these schools, it's got to be a community lifting up these children. It's like the Métis sash, that one string can be broken and it's really not doing any good. But when they're all together, they're a force to be reckoned with. They're strong. This one can be weak, but the rest of them are holding it together. This is what it is. – Jo-Ina Young

As Elder Jo-Ina has shared, it is a community effort to lift people up so that they can each discover the gifts that they carry.

Gardening, Subsistence Living, and Nutrition

Elders spoke about the healthy meals that they would eat growing up. Elder Stella Erasmus Johnson noted that the simplicity of meals contributed to their nourishment; rather than relying on processed foods, “We had good hearty meals and I think that’s why we’re very strong. I think we’re very healthy.”

In addition to hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering the Elders shared how gardening has been significant in many Métis families. Elder Denise McCuaig explained that with the agricultural requirement of Scrip, gardening became foundational in how Métis people define themselves. Many Elders shared stories about the sizable gardens their families maintained. Here, Elders Larry Ahdemar and Francois Morrisette* shared that gardening was a necessity in order to support families:

Oh, we grew everything, everything. Potatoes, corn, a lot of root vegetables for winter, eh. Lots of root vegetables. Potatoes, turnips, carrots, everything like that, beets. You had to in those days because we had no money, no money at all. – Larry Ahdemar

And the gardens were huge, our garden would take up at least two or three city blocks, and we raised everything from corn, potatoes, beets, you name it, the whole vegetable thing. We raised it, we grew it. And corn on the cob was something we had all the time. So, you know, I mean it was based on life, the way we were raised—the way I was raised, you know—it was all based on life. Like you have to do this so that you would be ready for the winter. So, you did things seasonally so that you would be ready to go into the next season. – Francois Morrisette*

Planting, harvesting, and preservation were all seasonal activities. Gardening practices were also long-term, as Elder Fred Paquette remembers, “My mother always had a garden.” In addition to their purpose for subsistence, Elders also spoke about the teachings that gardens can offer young people. Elder Marie Bercier shared the lessons that she learned as a child, as a result of caring for her own garden:

I think one of the primary things that I learned from Auntie Mary and from my dad, was planting the garden and watching it grow. I fell in love with marigolds as a child. I loved

the smell of them, don't ask me why because they don't smell that beautiful, but I did, and I loved the colours, and I planted a whole row of them. And then my dad went and hoed them out and I'm like, "Weeds don't grow in a row, they grow all over the place." His excuse was that he thought they were weeds. So, I was quite upset, and not only quite upset, I was quite demoralized because how could he do this to my garden? And children then, they picked their first carrot, and they don't even bother to wash the dirt off or scrub it clean or anything else. They put it in their mouth, and nothing tastes this good! And so, you now have a child who will eat carrots and they'll eat tomatoes and they'll eat corn, you know? And then take them out in the wild and if they get strawberry that's as big as my little fingernail, they think they're wealthy because it tastes so incredible. And even if you have to take wild plants and plant them in your garden. We can all do this, and we can insist that we have a community garden, that has the water, has the facilities that people can use and make use of it. In doing that, then the child becomes accustomed to having the responsibility, okay, and to having the joy to something that they took hold of and did. And I'm not saying that you have to have them cultivating this land from start to finish. They can weed, they can get down on their hands and knees and do some weeding. It teaches them to have some pride in something too. – Marie Bercier

The teachings embedded within gardening practice have been meaningful both as a metaphor and literal practice within child-rearing. Elder Melba Sterling explained how gardening can teach youth about the full life cycle of their food, and the many steps involved in its preparation:

When I first came [to Kikékyelc], they had a garden outside and so we cultivated and harvested some of the fruit that was still there and so what was left was tomatoes so some of the youth helped me. We harvested and we made sauce from those tomatoes, so we were able to use that into the wintertime.... They were quite anxious to start again this year, but everything was late starting. The season was late this year, like about a month, so we haven't harvested yet but there's some lettuce that's up, so they've been having some lettuce but that's all. So, what I did, and I'm going to do again, is I go to Vancouver, and I picked blueberries. Last year, I had about 40 pounds and I froze them and then I use them in my cooking, so I tell them where the berries came from, how I processed them and what we're going to use them for. They really enjoy... I use them in pancakes and muffins. They understand that the food doesn't just show up at the grocery store. That there is a method. There's the planting and the gardening and all that involved, and then there's the picking of the berries and the cleaning and storing, so they know the steps. – Melba Sterling

Traditionally, Métis people knew where the food came from and how it was prepared. Elder Isabella Matheson* explains that Wahkotowin extends to relationships with the land—including the plants and animals that later become food: "It wasn't distanced by having like migrant workers pick it and then have it processed in a plant, then have it shipped and then have it sold to

you. You saw the face of your food.” In these ways, gardening was an important topic for many of the Elders and arose as a strong theme in this work.

When they were living with the land, the Elders never spoke about a lack of food. In fact, it was not until Elder Francois Morrisette* went to his first grocery store that he recalls seeing empty shelves. Yet, many Elders shared stories about growing up in housing that did not have plumbing or electricity. They spoke about these stories fondly, often noting that they did not think of themselves as being poor:

We never felt poor. We didn't have running water and that but it's just the area we lived in. We lived in my grandmother's log house and then my dad bought a little house, a one-bedroom house, just across the road and it had power... it still had an outdoor bathroom but at least we had power. And he said, "Mum, why don't you move in my little house?" Because he always worked on the railroad and was never around, and so that's what we did, and we moved in there and the first thing my father bought was a TV. Oh, that was so exciting. We could actually watch the hockey games live, you know, and then grandma brought the catalog out and we looked for a washing machine, an electric one. I mean those were just great times. – Stella Erasmus Johnson

Similarly, Elder Barb Hulme highlights that for her, materialism was never correlated with happiness: “For me, all I can look at is did we have a lot of money? No, but was I unhappy? No.”

Sports, Play, and Technology

In telling stories about their childhoods, some of the Elders described their competitive spirit, which was channeled in part through sports. Elder Stella Erasmus Johnson recalled her gift for all kinds of sports: “I was allowed to play all the sports that I could. That was strong in our Métis culture. Sports was... we were all very competitive even amongst each other in the family.” Elder Larry Ahdemar shared that it was perhaps his talent that led to an unpleasant reception in the field: “Well, I was pretty good at sports, and they would boo at me, eh. You know, I was pretty good. And whether they didn't like it because I was good or because I was Native, Métis, I don't know.” In addition to participating in organized sports, both Elder Barb

Hulme and Elder Larry Ahdemar spoke about the fun they would have playing games with neighbourhood children in the streets. These games were described as good fun that required little money.

Reminiscently, the Elders spoke about the first time technology was introduced into their lives; for instance, Elder Melba Sterling declared, “I remember the first time I saw a telephone, the first time I saw a TV. It wasn’t until I was 15.” Technology was described in both favourable and a challenging ways with respect to parenting. Elder Stella Johnson Erasmus spoke about the challenges that come with introducing technology to young children, and how it can be overly relied on:

I love the technology. There’s a lot of great information and great things but there’s too much technology given to these kids at an early age to shut them up. There’s no one on one talk anymore, and sit down at the table as a family... – Stella Erasmus Johnson

She continued by sharing that society is continually learning more about the impact that technology can have on sleep and other important aspects of human development.

And while technology can be helpful, it can also be over-used. The Elders urged for children, youth, and adults to limit their screentime and spend more energy being physical and connecting to the land. Elder Isabella Matheson* identified that connection to land is something that is missing for too many children and youth today. Similarly, Elder Larry Ahdemar advised that children and youth should “get off that little computer thing... get out and go play some ball or go for a walk.” Lastly, Elder Stella Erasmus spoke about the importance of connecting with nature: “go out and experience the world, go smell the roses or the dirt or whatever. And dirt has a very nice smell if you have that nice clean dirt. There’s just so much out there.” Clearly, there was a common theme of encouragement for connecting with nature, being active outside, and

taking a break from technology. As the Elders urged, children, youth, and adults would all benefit from listening to this guidance.

Living and Practicing Métis Values

Throughout the stories, perspectives, and teachings shared, several values arose as prominent themes in the conversations. These values, which were articulated in a distinctly Métis context, are described in this section.

Respect

Respect arose as a notable value in the conversations about what is needed to restore traditional ways of caring for one another. Respect was described as loving and valuing yourself, and your people. In terms of respect for self, Elder Phil Gladue shared: “my mother she taught me how to love myself. That’s what she taught me: love yourself. Know who you are. Be respectful to yourself.” In addition, the Elders shared that in addition to having love and respect for yourself, it is important to show respect for each other. Elder Verma Kerr explained that respect is the foundation for positive relationships. Elder Stella Erasmus Johnson explained the importance of having rules and guidelines for children to teach them ways that they can show respect for themselves, as well as respect for their family:

they [children] should know what is right and wrong, and given those strong guidelines to be respectful. That was always taught... respect everyone. There’s other things out there. You didn’t go breaking things or damaging other people’s property or anything, and you looked after your own clothing because that’s all you had. – Stella Erasmus Johnson

In addition to respect for self and for family, Elder Fred Paquette and Elder Verma Kerr highlighted that they were raised to respect Elders. Elder Verma Kerr explained that these teachings carry forward beyond childhood and into adulthood. Elder Verma would like to see more effort dedicated to teaching children to respect and listen to their Elders.

Elder Melba Sterling shared some of the ways that she has been teaching youth at Kikékyelc about respect and responsibility in terms of self, others, and property:

The other thing I talk to the kids about is the three R's. The three Rs are respect for yourself, respect for others and responsibility for your actions. So that's all they need to know to start with.... I talk to them [the youth] about respecting a house because whether you are renting or owning, you need to respect a house because a house is looking after you. It's a roof over your head and you need to respect it by maintaining it, by looking after it, and cleaning it because a house needs to be maintained. – Melba Sterling

In terms of further application, Elders also spoke about ways of teaching children and youth about respect through land-based activities. The Elders explained that appreciation for land and animals can influence the way you treat them. Specifically, Elder Rebecca Dubois* explained that witnessing her father hunt taught her to value an animal's life and to never waste any parts of the animal. Elder Lynda Tilley explained how land-based teachings influence all other areas of life, noting, “when you have respect for the land, you have respect for yourself, and you have respect for the people you deal with.” She also shared that the values that she instilled in her children, taught through land-based teachings, have been passed on across generations.

Responsibility and Independence

Responsibility and independence, including how to take care of yourself, were important values in the stories that the Elders shared. This included stories about fostering leadership skills and self-sufficiency at a young age; Elder Jo-Ina Young spoke about the strong leadership skills that Métis women have had throughout history:

My mom was a very powerful woman. My dad was very, very kind and very, very nice. But you can see, and I'm called bossy at times... I think that's just an assertive Métis woman and I think that the Métis women through history, you see that they were very strong and very strong-willed and that. So, you could see that coming up through my family too. – Jo-Ina Young

For many Elders, independence and leadership skills are strong, positive qualities for Métis people to have. Some Elders spoke specifically about nurturing healthy independence and autonomy for Métis children:

I think that we need to give the children more autonomy. This hovering we do now, I think it's, again, as I said, I feel like it's almost disrespectful to the kids cause, cause the kids don't learn how to problem solve, how to, they're going to get themselves into something, but they have to learn how to get themselves out of situations, right? As long as you're within, that you're observing what they're doing and that they're learning... – Marie Zwingli

As Elder Marie shared, these teachings will help to build up children's self-esteem, and set them up for a positive future.

Tolerance and Forgiveness

Forgiveness and tolerance were described as important values in supporting other people in the community. During the Elders gathering, the Elders highlighted tolerance and forgiveness as some of the most important values in Métis families and communities; forgiveness and tolerance help to counter the divisiveness that has become pervasive in some Métis families and communities, because of colonialism. In the face of these issues, the Elders were clear in stating that “there is no right or wrong way to be Métis.” This is a particularly important sentiment when supporting community members that are re-connecting with their Métis culture, identity, and community connections. Furthermore, families that have been impacted by the child welfare system—past and present—may be experiencing additional barriers in reclaiming their culture, and compassion and understanding in these circumstances become even more meaningful.

Love and Kindness

Elders shared the power of leading with love in helping professions, and in supporting each other in the community. Elder Lea Becker envisioned working with love as having a ripple

effect, where your impact will be much broader than you originally imagined: “if you share love and continue the good works, it’s not going to fail. I think it will travel and it will get bigger.

That’s how I see it, like an ice cube just melts and spreads all over.” Elder Melba Sterling noted that while there is kindness in the world, there is an ongoing need to increase efforts of supporting one another:

Encouraging kindness and doing kind acts for each other—I try to do that every day. Lots of times, what I’ll do is if I know one of the youth is having a hard time, I’ll take a little bag and I’ll just hang it on their door and I’ll put some little thing on there: a chocolate bar, maybe a candy, it could be a t-shirt that they admired, something... just anything, whatever. So, I hang it there and they know who it’s from, but I don’t say who it’s from, so they always thank me for that. So just little acts of kindness I try to do. Or I phone... I have quite an extensive list of people, friends here and there, and out of the blue I’ll just phone them and say, “I was just thinking about you, how are you doing?” Just touching base. Those are just simple things and I think to try and teach them. – Melba Sterling

Elder Joyce Munro shared a story about how she encourages young people to assist others, noting that helping others is what Métis people do:

Like any young teenager, they don’t want to work. We were at the vegetable gardens in Ashcroft and this woman was putting stuff in her trunk and I told [the girl], you know, “Go over and help her. It doesn’t look like she’s having an easy time,” and [the girl] didn’t want to go. I said, “You’re a Métis. Get over there and help her.” So she did, and she came back all happy because she’d helped her, so things like that I’d teach her, to help out. – Joyce Munro

Elder Rebecca Dubois* has urged for more opportunities to teach young people about the Métis practice of supporting others in the community:

And supporting families, I think our young people should be taught that they should help each other. You know, if there was someone down and out in our community, everyone was out there. They were all helping get the wood in, if the dad broke his leg or something, everybody would be getting that wood in before winter. I think kids should learn that kind of stuff and don’t run away from work. – Rebecca Dubois*

Elder Joyce illustrated a positive way of instilling Métis values and traditional practices while mentoring young people. This is another step towards the revitalization of Métis values and ways of being.

Generosity

Elders shared strong examples of intergenerational generosity. Even when families were living in poverty, they found ways to share what they had in order to help and lift each other up. Elder Joyce Munro spoke about the tradition of helping each other and sharing with others, in need. With a similar perspective, Elder Lea Becker shared her father's practice of sharing what he had, even if he did not have much for his own family:

This was something that I didn't understand growing up because I wasn't raised in a big nucleus of Métis people, but my father would empty our cupboards to give to somebody who was hungry and so that's one thing that I noticed was the sharing and giving of the people to other people who hurt. – Lea Becker

Elder Lea's story illustrates that affluence was not a condition for generosity. With creativity and collective understandings of wellbeing, Métis families often shared the limited resources that they had without question. Additionally, Elder Barb Hulme notes that sharing is a responsibility among Métis people—both in terms of sharing tangible items, as well as knowledge.

Pride

Many of the Elders' stories illustrated that pride is a strength among Métis people. Elder Marie Bercier counters the western notion that pride is related to arrogance:

And, you know, the White man says pride is bad. But no, it's not. It depends how it's put to use. If it's because you've accomplished something good, then yes, but if it's pride because you're a millionaire—but in the meantime you're not a very good person—to me that's being prideful, that's not because you've earned it. – Marie Bercier

Several Elders, including Elder Larry Ahdemar, Rebecca Dubois*, and Elder Verma Kerr shared that all Métis children should be proud of who they are. And more specifically, Elder Joyce Munro spoke about how learning about Métis culture and identity is important in instilling a sense of pride for Métis children, youth, and families:

I think it makes them proud of who they are, in that they have a place of belonging... They get to know who they are... You see, I never had to deal with that [the shame]

because well you knew right from the beginning who you were. And I think we were lucky because we were never ashamed that we were part Indian. That's what they called us in those days, or half-breeds. – Joyce Munro

Through sharing her own experience of having a consistent and strong sense of who she was as a Métis person, Elder Joyce emphasizes the importance of dedicating time and resources to lifting up younger Métis generations to ensure that they too can develop a sense of who they are.

Entrepreneurial Spirit

During the Elders Gathering, the Elders brought forward an additional value for consideration—that of entrepreneurial spirit. Elder Melba Sterling illustrated this value in her family: her grandmother was an entrepreneur who built and ran a Bed and Breakfast. As a result of working with a diverse clientele, her grandmother continued to learn different languages, and became fluent in many. At age 14, Melba herself started her own business at school, marketing different foods to students. In telling this story, Elder Melba Sterling emphasized that every person has a gift—a teaching that other Elders have echoed—and that Métis people can turn those skills into successful work.

This notion of entrepreneurial spirit has always been a part of Métis families, and the Nation as a whole, as Elder Denise McCuaig recalls:

when I think about my great-great-great-grandfather, Cuthbert Grant Jr., I mean, they're whole coming together and existing was about entrepreneurship and commerce... he's working for the Northwest Company and he's building a little trading post along the Pembina River and then down the road, on the other side of the river, maybe four kilometers away, the Hudson's Bay Company is also building their own little trading post, and that goes on and on all the way down the Pembina River and, so it's like the Tim Hortons and Starbucks of the 17th century, right? So, I think we can be honest about that. As Métis people, we are entrepreneurs, it was about our economy, our purpose for forming as a Nation was to protect that economy and resource and, so I think it is very much foundational to who we are. – Denise McCuaig

Elder Denise went on to explain that “Cuthbert Grant Jr was first with the North West Company and, after 1821, with the Hudson's Bay Company. The competitive nature of these two

companies was a significant contributor to the forming of the Métis Nation.” Related to entrepreneurship is the Métis gift of problem-solving. Métis people were traditionally seen as being creative problem solvers, which was explained in historical context using the Red River Cart as an example of Métis ingenuity:

The Métis are such problem-solvers and when they came here and they had to get those furs across rivers and, you know, Métis invented this cart. There’s no metal, it’s all wood. So, we can take the wheels off, we can strap them underneath. Now, we can float our families and our fur across the water, right, and so I tell them [the children], “That’s what Métis do. We solve problems.” – Marie Zwingli

Elder Marie’s example highlights the ways in which the Elders are actively working to ensure that Métis children are inspired by traditional values and are encouraged to see the strengths in their culture.

Humour

Lastly, the Elders spoke about the value of finding humour and joy in life, as they spoke about creating opportunities to laugh and visit with each other. Elder Melba Sterling shared, “That’s one thing that I really enjoy is just talking and laughing and visiting. I really enjoy that. I use humour a lot... Yeah, we laugh a lot. I really enjoy it. It just brings me joy.” And similarly, Elder Phil Gladue stated, “You have to have humour. You can’t be so serious. I never want to be too serious.” Humour is another venue for sharing joy, which has, and continues to be an important aspect of thriving families and communities.

Conclusion to the Elders’ Stories

This chapter presents a collection of stories and teachings about what it means to be Métis, including reflections from both childhood and child-rearing, and the values that guide Métis families—past and present. The Elders’ stories included journeys of understanding what it means to be Métis, opportunities for sharing teachings around Métis culture and identity with

others, and the terms that Métis have used to define themselves. They also spoke about connection to land and spirit, different ways of knowing, and Métis languages. Importantly, the Elders also shared teachings about Wahkotowin and the importance of kinship systems; in many of their families, their culture was embedded in systems of care so that children never grew up without family.

In speaking about their experiences during childhood, as well as their reflections from raising their own children, the Elders provided many interesting stories. The Elders spoke about the provision of chores during their childhood, as well as the connection between childhood chores and the development of a strong work ethic. They described what discipline involved within their families, touching on diverse experiences during their childhoods and later as parents. They also spoke about the fun that was had during visiting and kitchen parties, as well as sports and play. Topics discussed also included life skills and gardening, including traditional skills interwoven with growing, harvesting, and preparing foods—these are survival skills that many Elders believe have fallen by the wayside, but still maintain their relevance in contemporary society. Additionally, experiences with education—both good and bad—as well as broader perspectives on sharing teachings are discussed.

While they did not aim to provide an exhaustive list of Métis values, they covered many including respect, responsibility and independence, tolerance and forgiveness, love and kindness, generosity, pride, entrepreneurial spirit, and humour. Within each of these areas, the Elders speak both to the ways in which they were taught about these traditional values, as well as ways for sharing these teachings with others. With respect to values, it is also important to acknowledge the work of the late Elder Dee Dee Hurd, who illustrated a Red River Wheel model of traditional Métis values (Figure 8).

METIS VALUES

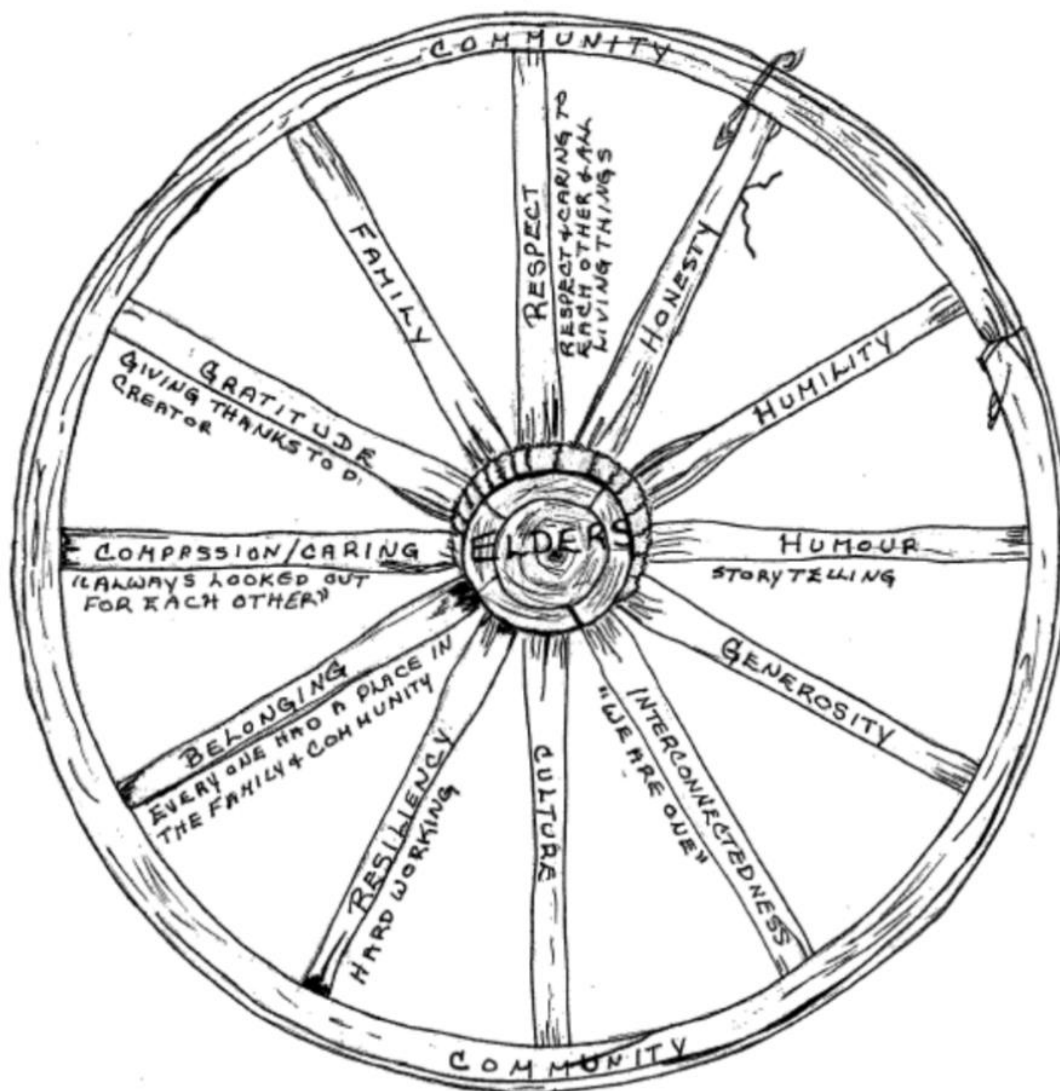


Figure 8. A visual depiction of Michif Values illustrated by Michif Elder Dee Dee Hurd (Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services ©)

Elder Dee Dee Hurd's model highlights some of the values shared by Elders in this chapter, including respect, generosity, love, humour, and gratitude. Her depiction of resilience also aligns with the Elders' stories of work ethic, survival, and ingenuity. The Michif Values Wheel, also highlights the importance of family and community, culture, belonging, and honesty; these are principles that are reflected within the Elders perspectives on Métis identity and kinship, but these values are also explored through a different lens in the next chapter of this dissertation (Chapter 6).

With generosity, the 20 Métis Elders represented in this collection illustrate the richness of Métis teachings for raising children and supporting families. The teachings shared within these stories include lessons, beliefs, lived experience, and morals; each of these messages is rooted in Métis culture. In speaking with each of the Elders after they reviewed a draft of these stories, they were emphatic about the importance of sharing these stories with Métis children, youth, and families widely. Traditionally, teachings were shared intergenerationally; the Elders are eager to find new ways of sharing as families work to strengthen their own ways of returning to culture, language, and teachings. The teachings shared here may contribute to the remembering and reclaiming of family stories, and the ability to share these memories with the future generations.

Chapter 6: Wise Practices for Decolonizing Métis Child Welfare

This chapter presents findings from the research with LMO, with a focus on wise practices and lessons learned. The scope of this stage of the research was two-fold: to assess elements of design and delivery of the services at LMO, as well as to review outcomes for Métis children, youth, and families with attribution to their involvement with LMO.

Being Helpers for Métis Children, Youth, and Families

This section centres the perspectives of staff at LMO, who shared stories about why they choose the work that they do. These stories highlight the strengths of the agency as well as the passion, commitment, and values of the staff. Their stories also underscore the value of working and practicing social work in a Métis-specific agency, as well as the unique opportunities that come with transforming child welfare. Staff also discussed some of the challenges that they face in their work, reflecting on issues like attrition and staffing shortages.

Choosing to be a Helper at LMO

Staff were asked about why they actively choose to work at LMO. In terms of what initially drew them to working at LMO, many staff spoke about the positive reputation that LMO carries in the community.³⁹ For example, Jennifer Friesen shared how she was influenced to work at LMO by word-of-mouth: “I was hearing a lot about LMO and how they’re trying to do the work differently, and I thought ‘Yeah, that’s right up my alley,’ and so that’s why I wanted to work here.” Some staff—including Tia Stanley, Ashley Smith*, and Sam Miller*, first heard about the positive impact that LMO was making in child welfare throughout their social work

³⁹ As described in Chapter 4, participants included staff who are Métis (n = 8), First Nations (n = 9), and non-Indigenous (n = 10).

education programs. Others spoke about hearing about how LMO was a good employer from friends that worked for the agency—supportive of staff and staff development.

In addition to recognizing the strengths of LMO, some staff spoke about how their previous involvement with child welfare and their lived experience guided them to take on professional roles in supporting Métis children, youth, and families. Several staff shared their personal interactions with the child welfare system—with mainstream services and other agencies—which motivated them to be part of an organization that is working to transform the system. In a similar way, Cheyenne Gentles shared that she is an intergenerational survivor of the Residential School System, and how this shapes her lens for working with Métis children, youth, and families – many of whom may carry similar experiences:

being a descendent of a Residential School Survivor and just seeing the results of attending a school like that... There was that connection and then being able to relate that to a lot of similar trauma that Métis people have had.... So, it's like, I think that the entire cause of it, and because I know from my home community a lot of people who have been associated with the child welfare system. When I had my first son, they had to come do a house check on us because I was First Nations and young. So, regardless, they had to come and check out... And there's things that have happened and maybe my distaste for the child welfare system, my sour taste. – Cheyenne Gentles

Cheyenne's story illustrates how work in child welfare—particularly for Indigenous peoples—moves beyond the professional, with strong personal motivations for creating change.

For two staff members, LMO was first a space of support before becoming a place of employment. Philip Shupe shared his story of how LMO welcomed him:

There was this other Indigenous family service agency... and they had a restraining order against me because after fighting for four years for my children and losing access and communication for long periods of time and missing out on multiple school functions like Christmas concerts and not even being able to speak to my children or ask if they're okay, and they're in foster care. As a concerned and loving parent, I was getting upset and losing patience. I didn't do anything violent or anything like that but they managed to get a restraining order against me and so I ended up protesting 100 metres away, which happened to be in front of the LMO building. Prior to this, I walk into the businesses in the area and give them written notice, and when I did this at LMO they asked me to sit

down and share my story with them. The LMO staff who heard my story granted me permission to protest and the next day, after I was protesting, I went through the doors again to thank them and they introduced me to their Elder and Dads' Group Facilitator, who invited me to attend their Dads' Group meeting. It was a great place to share and be heard. There were other dads attending that were going through similar ordeals. After about a year of attending the Dads' Group, I was asked to co-facilitate, and then to facilitate. A couple of years later, in 2015, I won my kids back in court. Years later, in 2019, I was offered a job by LMO to supervise youth during the construction of their Kikékyelc building. Then, LMO offered me maintenance, janitorial, and landscaping work at Kikékyelc, and I was a night watchman after that. In January 2022, I started my present job as the Father's Support Worker and Dads' Group Facilitator. – Philip Shupe

Philip went on to share his critiques of the legal system, and his passion for advocating for parents. While highlighting the shortcomings of the child welfare system, broadly, Philip's story also highlights the importance of inclusion and welcoming, which are values and strengths woven throughout LMO's foundation and practice framework. Montana Butts shared how LMO shaped her life and helped her to reconnect to her Métis culture:

I got involved with LMO through my foster family. My foster siblings, all of them, came from LMO and my sister and I were MCFD kids and I kind of just seen the way that they loved on their kids, and my brother introduced us to LMO and the way that their culture affected them, and he continuously told me and my sister, "You guys are Indigenous, you need to find your Indigenous roots and you need to get back to that." So that's what I did. I found LMO and when my brother passed away in 2018, it became a bigger part of my life and a bigger mission than me just wanting to know my own culture. I'm pursuing the culture for all those other kids that we've lost and I'm beyond grateful that I just ended up here. – Montana Butts

Others, like Pearl Madore, spoke with an empathic understanding that she, too, could have come into contact with the child welfare system:

In a sense, being the youngest of 11 children, I grew up with a big family and I know that we have our fights or spats and like there's peaks and valleys in people's lives when things are going well and not so well, so it's understanding that anyone that comes into the child welfare system. That could be me, in the sense of I left home when I was 16, I created my own family, and my kids didn't grow up with aunts and uncles or cousins, but I had adopted ones here in BC. And that's the way culture works, I think. It doesn't have to be blood or biological. It could be like that one person that loves you and shows you that love and support, and I think everyone has that in their lives. – Pearl Madore

Both Pearl and Montana's stories reflect the ways that lived experiences have guided them to be involved in the work at LMO, while also enriching and strengthening their work.

We also asked staff why they continue to choose to work at LMO. We asked this question with the understanding that child welfare practice is difficult work. Furthermore, working to transform a system that has been founded on colonialism can be extremely challenging. Many staff noted that their drive to transform the child welfare system compels them to work at LMO. Tia Stanley explained that it is this drive, combined with her lived experience, that fuels her work:

I just realized how it needed to be changed. How welfare needed to be changed for the better, and it needed to be given back to the Indigenous communities to do it themselves, and all of that was happening here... So that's why I'm at LMO. Changing child welfare.
– Tia Stanley

Further to this, Lexa Smerdal spoke about the importance of contributing to an approach that helps to lift people up, which is not common within the child welfare system; she spoke about how her understanding of Métis people as Otipemisiwak influences the ways that she contributes to decolonizing social work practice:

So being able to come here and be a part of that and making a change... you're not stagnant in a system which further oppresses people. I think being able to be active in the system where you're giving power back to the people, and it really is doing some healing work at a really pivotal time in history right now... I think really having that firm understanding about Otipemisiwak, right? The people that govern themselves, and so being able to help them navigate the worries in their lives from their skillsets and what they think is most helpful. – Lexa Smerdal

Staff also spoke about how contributing to social work practice that is grounded in Métis culture helps to sustain their professional involvement in child welfare:

I'm definitely really passionate about people first, and I'm passionate about culture and understanding what it is who we are—whoever you are and where you come from. And I think that's one of the biggest strengths I bring to our team is putting culture and family first. – Laura Brown*

Passion for people, culture, family, and community was common across many of the staff interviews. Colleen Lucier shared how her work at LMO has helped her to strengthen her own cultural connections, and carry on her family's legacy:

I feel different being grounded in who I am as a Métis person, and knowing my story, my history—I think of all the Métis women in my family who are not named or identified, and I know how hard their life was—like I'm carrying on their legacy. All of that feels really good and makes me want to do better. I live that every day here, so what keeps me here is just this constant reminder that I'm contributing back to something bigger than myself, I hope. Part of healing my own people—and if I can play some role in that—that feels good and that's rewarding for me. And I just feel like there's so much work to do, like I'm excited every day. I come to work and I'm excited to do the work that we're doing. – Colleen Lucier

Similarly, Melissa Chalmers and Jay Roque, each spoke about how they are personally motivated by helping children, youth, and families connect with their culture and identity. Other staff spoke about how they view their work at LMO as a form of being in service to community. Elder Patrick Savard shared that giving back to community is a big draw of working at LMO for Métis and First Nations staff:

A lot of people, I think, have been motivated to [practice] social work to make a difference with our community, and maybe even when they went to school, you know, some of the ones who have been around for a while, there wasn't even Métis child welfare. But to make a difference in their own community, they want to be involved with us and would prefer to be here, rather than some other place because they're helping their own community. We have some social workers who are First Nations also, but again, their motivation is to help Indigenous People and we're part of the Indigenous family. – Patrick Savard

The staff echoed Elder Patrick Savard's belief. Tia Stanley explained that she does not have a strong connection to her own community and views her work as LMO as another form of having connection and giving back. Métis staff at LMO, including Daylan Kidder, spoke about their work as a way of giving back to the Métis community:

I want to give back to my Métis community. I mean I had opportunities to go elsewhere after I graduated, obviously, because I was still doing youth work and I wanted to be a social worker right after graduation, but I chose to stay because... I believe in what LMO

is doing and the vision it has for the Métis community. – Daylan Kidder

Daylan's words illustrate how service to community is a beautiful motivator for many Métis people.

Other staff also spoke directly about how their love for working with Métis children, youth, and families motivates them. Several staff shared that their personal values align with the way in which the approach to practice at LMO is family-centred and relational. The work they do helps to empower people and keep families together, which serves as a foundational purpose for is their work with LMO. Several staff, including Melissa Chalmers indicated that they would likely be working outside of child welfare, if LMO did not exist. She shared, "I can't see me doing that work in any other agency. Their flexibility in working from a lens to really empower families and help them see their value and worth in parenting is what grounded me in that work." Trisha Cruickshank also shared that her work at LMO aligns with her own values, including the importance of building relationships with families and other service providers, as well as the core believe that "families belong together." These values guide the relational approach to supporting families.

Staff commonly spoke about their love for children and families, and how their compassion drives their work. Additionally, many members of the Youth Services Team shared their love for specifically working with youth:

What keeps me here is the people and the youth mainly... they have taught me so much about myself, and I'm just hoping that I can impart some of that knowledge that I've learned along the way to them as well. So yeah, that's what keeps me going. – Sophia Johnson*

Here, Sophia Johnson* highlights the value of reciprocity in helping professions, as well as a love for continuous learning. From a personal perspective, both Daylan Kidder and Tia Stanley shared how their passion for serving youth is, in part, influenced by their own experiences in

adolescence:

I guess when I had my struggles, it was that age, and I think we see how the system has affected the youth. Like we see them aging out of care and not having any life skills because they've been bounced around from placement to placement, and I think that's why I love Kikékyelc because we can teach them those skills that weren't taught to them when they were younger. – Daylan Kidder

I just remember who I was as a kid and that I just needed someone to hear me, and I felt like nobody was listening to me, and so I'm remembering that the young people especially... not so much the parents, but when the young people are yelling at me, it's because they're not used to being heard, and what they're crying for is connection. They've been traumatized and they don't want to trust me, and what gets me up is that I hope I can at least make a difference for one child, because I have people who made a difference in my life and got me to where I am today, and without those people, even a slight different trajectory in my path, I could be active in my addictions like the rest of my family, or homeless or poor, anything like that... I wake up because I know that I can come here and I can do the work that I want to do, because right from the top down, all of our vision is the same. So that's what gets me out of bed, even on some days when I don't want to. – Tia Stanley

In addition to being driven by their personal motivations, many staff talked about how they are supported by their co-workers. These stories illustrate that the people that work at LMO greatly contribute to the positive and supportive environment, helping each other to get through difficult days. For example, Montana Butts shared her perspective on LMO:

It's more than a workplace... I've always felt out of place and unwanted in quite a few workplaces, but coming here you're allowed to be human, you're allowed to have these moments where you're not okay, because they understand that it's deeper than just a bad day, like it stems from so much of our past that makes us who we are today, and the fact that I'm able to come here and have that positive influence on my future, it's a big thing and it ties me back to it. – Montana Butts

In speaking about the shared passion, support, and alignment of values, many staff shared how LMO has cultivated a sense of belonging for them. For example, Ashley Smith* shared, "It feels like home. It feels like working with people who have the same vision for Indigenous people and how we can support them in the welfare system that they're in." This notion of belonging is further strengthened by acceptance and cultural pride, which is fostered among staff, as well as

the children and families served. Cheyenne Gentles revealed that LMO was the first workplace that made her feel both excited and accepted. She explained that the agency creates a space where staff can feel proud about what they are, and what the unique cultural gifts that they bring to their work:

I've never felt the sense of belonging I feel at LMO. And if I feel like that, I can only imagine how the youth and families we support feel... So, I'm really grateful. Like I've said before, I am able to use my voice and stand up against things I feel are inappropriate or oppressive. – Cheyenne Gentles

Using her own feelings as a baseline, Cheyenne explains that this feeling of acceptance is likely amplified for the children, youth, and families that LMO aims to serve.

Lexa Smerdal also supported the notion that having values in alignment within and across teams is a beautiful strength at LMO:

I think you stay well in the work when everybody is passionate about the work. The folks here really are... we have our days where we're not going to see eye-to-eye on things but at the end of the day, we're all working towards the same purpose, and it really stands out when people's value systems don't align with the work that LMO is doing, and they don't stay long, and that's okay, you know. – Lexa Smerdal

Here, Lexa also explains that when values do not align, it is a sign that someone may not be the right fit in this work. Jennifer Friesen has a similar point of view, as she shared, “Métis people, that's what matters. I don't care what degree you have. If you can't play well with others, and treat our families with respect, we don't want you here.” In saying this, Jennifer emphasized that if a social worker is not working from a Métis person-centred approach, LMO is not the right place for them. In the same way, Tia Stanley indicated that it becomes clear when someone is not the right fit, due to a misalignment of personal purpose:

I think everyone here has the same vision and people get weeded out very easily. If you're not willing to [work] in a good way, you can go and do social work elsewhere. We want those people to go because we want people here doing the same thing. – Tia Stanley

Indeed, the team at LMO has changed over the years, as people who did not align with

decolonizing practice did not stay at the agency long-term. Catlin Durand* recalls a time, many years ago, when staff seconded from MCFD did not believe in LMO's vision:

the workers that were seconded to LMO, and so just shifting people's worldviews in regard to how to best work with Métis peoples, and I think that was one of the biggest challenges. Because they're being trained in a colonial institution in colonial ways. – Catlin Durand*

For those that actively choose to work at LMO, they describe their positions using incredibly positive terms. Philip Shupe described his position noting that he has found his “dream job,” and Daylan Kidder simply said, “I can't imagine working anywhere else.”

Wellness

This section discusses topics related to grief and loss, work-life balance, and self-care.

When speaking about challenges at work, several staff spoke about the toll that support work can have on a helper's wellness. They also shared some of their personal strategies, including compartmentalizing, creating personal boundaries, and centring families' resistance. Jasmit Mahal shared her strategy of trying to end each day with a strength or a completed task:

I've had moments where I've felt really burnt out but what I've found for me is like even if I come the next day, some of the problems will still be there. I can't change that. There's only so much I can do... I mean there's moments when I'm going to have to, but every day, like I can't change everything, but I can do the best I can. – Jasmit Mahal

She also shared that she tries to recognize what is within and beyond her control. In terms of practicing compartmentalizing, Sam Miller* spoke about centring families' resistance and resilience when leaving for a weekend:

The day-to-day challenge that I face personally, on a professional level, is just not taking it home with me sometimes. And then also just knowing that our families are hurting and not being able to do anything about it sometimes, right? But then also knowing how amazing and strong and creative they are to ensure their safety as well. But sometimes you just really have to reassure yourself because you've got to go home on the weekend and turn your phone off. You've got to do it for your own wellness so you can come back on Monday feeling 100 percent, right? And that can be really difficult sometimes. I've gotten better at it, but it's taken me awhile. – Sam Miller*

In addition to these individual strategies, Montana Butts also spoke about the importance of taking care of each other, praising the addition of team days and wellness days:

I think us taking a step back and having more of our team days and more of our wellness days and stuff like that does help us remember the good that's happening around us, and the big ones that we do get, even though it does come with huge losses, it's just going day by day and recognizing where we need to support a little bit more and how we can assist our team in being better, which I think we're doing a great job of. – Montana Butts

Staff shared openly about their experiences of grief and loss. Both Lexa Smerdal and Reagan Laurent* shared that staff have been impacted by heart-breaking losses of youth and Elders:

the disproportionate loss, especially in the last, I would say, 12 to 24 months has been, whether it's an uptick of the opioid crisis, Covid, so many different factors. We know that Indigenous peoples are further racialized in that system as well and so the death toll again is proportionate to that, which is tragic here because they're not just people who receive our services, they're extensions of us, and so it's really hit home to a lot of us in having to do so many goodbyes so close together. – Lexa Smerdal

We've had a lot of deaths recently, like our youth team and Elders, and then we've had families that have had young babies that have died. I think that that's a challenge for the staff because... it's not like we're told to get over it, but some staff really hold onto that, and they get stuck on it. – Reagan Laurent*

Staff shared some of their complex feelings around these deaths, including guilt and questioning “What could I have done differently?” These losses have been particularly hard for the Youth Services Team, who worked closely with the youth who passed. Staff shared some of the ways that they have supported the Youth Team, including hosting healing circles and cooking them breakfast at Kikékyelc, but also noted that more should be done to offer support. Some of their recommendations speak to the need for ongoing support, with understanding that grief and loss can be ongoing and it impacts people differently depending on the relationship and the person's lived experience. In addition to these tragedies, social work and helping for Métis people occurs

within the context of intergenerational trauma and colonialism, which as Montana Butts shared, can be draining for staff at the best of time:

I think because of the past traumas and struggles that Indigenous and Métis people have had to go through, it puts a lot more strain on our employees working through that and tiptoeing through the field, trying not to overstep that line, but be able to come up against it and push. I think that can wear out quite a few people pretty quickly. – Montana Butts

In speaking about self-care, Janet Dickons* offered a critique of the discourse around self-care:

And a lot of times, it's kind of put on the individuals. It's like, "Well, you need self-care, here's your day off, go do what you need to do, and just come back, okay?" I think that is a part of it for sure, but I think sometimes it's like just not being okay at work... there's people that are actively grieving, and they are showing up every day. And so, for me, I don't know what the answer is... and I think LMO does do a lot more than what other places do, but... like I hear staff saying if someone tells me to do self-care one more time, I'm going to get so angry. I feel like that's aloneness. It's almost like telling a kid, "You're crying, now go to your room, I don't want to see you right now. When you're like composed, then come to me." So, there's this condition that I have to be well, to then get wellness. So, for me, that's the barrier, I think. – Janet Dickons*

Janet* makes some poignant points with respect to the kindness of reaching out and supporting each other. Traditionally, Métis people did not have a term for self-care because support generally took place within the context of visiting. In this traditional context, it is clear that the concept of self-care is inherently individualized, as it puts the onus on each person to take care of themselves. And while this can be effective, healing and wellness also occurs as a collective.

In terms of strengthening in-house supports, staff spoke about exploring options for offering clinical counselling to staff, particularly in times of grief. Similarly, staff spoke about building in more supports related to traditional healing. In this regard, some staff spoke about assigning an Elder to staff wellness:

I think if we have a staff Elder, that would be cool, as someone to kind of guide us that way. But I feel like LMO does a lot. We have the wellness benefit. Our team leaders are really like supportive when we need like time for ourselves. Like in the past, like I have had some personal stuff going on and my team leader was like, "Just take the time that you need because you can't support others if you can't support yourself." – Ashley Smith*

Some Elders also recognize how child welfare can weigh on staff of the work. Elder Patrick

Savard shares how he supports the staff organically:

I've have done it for a number of years, and this work is very stressful. And sometimes some of the workers are stressed out and sometimes they just don't know what to do and sometimes they just want to talk. And so, when I'm not in meetings or doing anything with a client, I walk around and often I will end up sitting in somebody's office and we'll have a 15-20-minute visit, and maybe about some of the families we work with and maybe just about things. Sometimes people talk about some issue in their own family or whatever. And so, I feel that is valuable thing. – Patrick Savard

Staff also spoke about how effective support within teams can be, and suggested that the practice of debriefing continues, with recognition that while it is a helpful practice, it may not be enough support.

A couple of conversations with staff also highlighted a need for increased spaces for staff to speak out, in the context of openness and understanding, so that everyone can be heard. One staff member also highlighted the need for positive feedback and staff recognition in public forums. However, there were different opinions around the type of recognition that is needed, suggesting diversity among staff:

I think just knowing that you're making a difference and even though you're like... you don't get thank you's and things like that. That's not important to me. I don't need to be thanked for what I do. It's just that I can see somebody, you know, is happier, and working on what they need to do in their lives to get to that place. – Sophia Johnson*

These perspectives suggest that there is a great deal of diversity around staff needs, and there may be a need to further explore different ways of gathering feedback. Additionally, staff asked for more opportunities to provide feedback in an anonymous format, such as through an annual survey.

Staffing Shortages and Attrition. Like many other organizations across sectors, LMO is currently under-staffed, which has undoubtedly contributed to organizational challenges with

respect to capacity.⁴⁰ Given that social work can be a demanding field, several staff noted that it can be challenging to find the right people for these important helping roles. The Elders often emphasized that more social workers are needed across organizations. However, they also spoke about the importance of particular qualities among social workers—a sentiment that is similar to the many staff that spoke about finding people with the right values and shared goals to take on roles at LMO.

From her perspective working in CYMH Melissa Chalmers explained that turnover in these support roles contributes to trauma for Métis children and youth. From a structural perspective, both Tia Stanley and Lexa Smerdal contextualize staff attrition within the context of colonialism:

I think it's important to know that a lot of the shifting of people moving to different positions, and people leaving, and people taking leaves of absences, I think these are more in response to the inequality in society as a whole. And the pressures in our personal lives away from work, but also the extra pressures that our families are suffering. – Tia Stanley

I think we're still in a system that works to oppress or racialize Métis people and families, and so we may be able to work within our small system and be thinking outside of the box but then to be able to go into our school system and help them to decolonialize their practice, or walk into our judicial system and help them, you know, inform their languaging and their viewpoints of Métis people and families, and I think that that can become a challenge because when there are systems that don't allow us to keep our families safe, it creates a lot of spiritual pain within us as a people, and within us as a staff group, and when that happens, it's hard to continue to want to do this work because you're putting in your best work, your families are putting in their best work and you feel like you're failing, and that can be really hard. – Lexa Smerdal

Lexa was clear that many of the challenges that staff face are not a result of supporting Métis children, youth, and families at LMO—these challenges are rooted in the larger context of colonialism. In this way, trying to transform child welfare and challenge systemic issues can feel

⁴⁰ Capacity reflects the time required to do social work in a good way that is in alignment with the Michif Practice Model, rather than a result of each social worker's caseload.

insurmountable at time—in times of grief, particularly, decolonizing work can become untenable.

Recruitment of Métis Social Workers

In addition to shared values, Elders also spoke to the need for more Métis social workers, who understand Métis identity and culture.⁴¹ This was a central topic of discussion at the Elders Gathering. The Elders discussed the ways in which more Métis people can be hired into helping positions and recommended that LMO and other Métis organizations and governments look at their methods for succession planning, with a focus on mentoring people so that they can grow into positions.

Staff at LMO were clear that they would like to strengthen their recruitment efforts to reach more Métis candidates to fill staff positions. Unfortunately, one of the major challenges that LMO faces in recruitment is the lack of funding to provide a loan forgiveness program. In speaking about this challenge, Colleen Lucier explained:

we don't have the ability to cover a student loan—to offset the student loan costs that new students acquire. They can go work for MCFD, and I think it's like two years and they've got their student loan paid off. They can go and work for Secwépemc Child and Family Services and get their loan paid off. They come work for LMO, we can't offer them that. So, in a community the size of Kamloops, with three distinct child welfare delivery services, there's only a certain pool of social workers. – Colleen Lucier

Colleen went on to explain that some Métis social workers are choosing to pay off their own student loans, to continue working at LMO. This should not be an expectation of them, however, as this funding issue could be corrected by the Province.

⁴¹ During the time when this research was conducted, approximately one third of LMO staff were Indigenous, including 15 percent that were Métis and 20 percent that were First Nations. It is important to note that there is some fluctuation in these numbers as a result of attrition. As discussed in this section, there are ongoing concerns related to continuity; it is important to note that such concerns are common across helping positions, and in child welfare work specifically.

There was agreement that Elders should continue to be involved in hiring panels, as they are at LMO. They also spoke about the need to re-examine credentials for social worker positions, including consideration for openness to other forms of education, including Métis people who carry cultural knowledge, who may not have credentials from formal institutions.

Leadership and Supervision

Supporting Métis children, youth, and families while transforming the child welfare system can be demanding work. Staff across all program areas, as well as Elders, were clear that organizational transformation requires effective leadership. Staff spoke specifically about the dedication and unwavering values, morals, and focus of Executive Director, Colleen Lucier. These qualities, several Elders asserted, align with traditional Métis leadership. The leadership team spans beyond the Executive Director at LMO, as it includes the Team Leaders from each of the service areas, as well as the Elders Council. Elder Debora Todd Draney explains how the different levels of leadership at LMO work together to create effective services within LMO:

LMO leadership sets the direction, scope, and resources to do cultural programming. Team leaders work with their staff to implement it effectively. Métis Elders in residence also play a major teaching and supportive role to staff. Cultural teachers share their expertise to further increase staff knowledge and awareness about who we are as Métis people. – Debora Todd Draney

The vision for Métis children, youth, and families to live with love, respect, and dignity has been consistently upheld by LMO leaders and the Michif Elders Council. Staff noted that the entire leadership team has a cohesive and clear vision, resulting in transparent and practicable expectations for all staff. With support, it is the responsibility of the leadership team, and all staff, to stay true to this vision and uphold their responsibilities for working in a way that serves Métis people.

Staff also spoke about the qualities they have witnessed that help to facilitate effective leadership and organizational success. For Jennifer Friesen, this includes “being willing and open to creativity... the ability to be flexible in how we deal with situations.” Creativity is demonstrated through effective grant-writing skills, which have led to important resourcing for LMO. Staff also indicated that it is refreshing to have an Executive Director that walks with humility and leads by example in terms of transforming Métis child welfare. This leadership style has also contributed to buy-in among staff, who all contribute to transformational practice and the Michif Practice Model. Colleen Lucier shared that the entire leadership team, with their dedication and shared vision, is an important strength of LMO:

in order to do anything good or transformational, you have to have people that share the passion and vision and commitment, and that’s definitely one of our strengths. I think we’ve got a very dedicated leadership team. Now what I’m really trying to focus on is our leadership team, holding their direct team members accountable to our practice of trying to put in resources to help monitor and guide so that we can all stay accountable. So, you really need a team of people that want to do this work and are doing it. I think leaders have to set a vision, but to actually make the work happen, it’s the people delivering the work, so I need the right people and it’s taken awhile to find those people.
– Colleen Lucier

Staff also spoke about the importance of having strong and inclusive communication, where rationales for decision making are shared with openness. Supportive leadership helps to facilitate staff retention. This was raised directly by a number of staff, including Reagan Laurent* who said, “I think that’s why most staff stay is because of [the leadership], because of the vision, and enthusiasm.” And while this model has been effective—with interviews that overwhelmingly highlight the strengths of the leadership team—staff also spoke about need for additional clinical supervision from team leaders.

Collaborative Practice and Dynamics within Teams

Overall, the state of communication and understanding across the entire organization—and particularly within teams—was described as an immense strength and a key reason that LMO is successful. Staff often talked about their co-workers with love, noting a sense of family as Jennifer Friesen notes, “just our team, and the larger team, we’re kind of like a family full of a bunch of sisters. Like we all have our quirks and idiosyncrasies, but at the end of the day, I’d like to think we’re kind of like family.” Several staff spoke about how the solidarity and cooperation among staff has helped with handling the difficult work. Reshie Moss aptly stated, “Strength is a team; when we are strong, we will do strong work. When there is a crack in the wheel, we will be unbalanced.” Indeed, several staff explained that the team dynamics at LMO are key to its overall success. Specifically, Melanie Allard elaborated on the strength within her team, noting that they support and hold each other up:

I work in this office with two other lovely ladies, and we’re all part of a team, and we all want the same thing for the youth, and we want to see them all succeed. It’s never just one person who can make something happen, it takes everyone together, and understanding that we have the same goal and the same dream. And just holding each other up when times get stressful. There’s youth coming in and out of here and sometimes we have to fly by the seat of our pants to make it work. So just being able to have each other here is very helpful. And we all complement each other in our roles. – Melanie Allard

Teams share in the successes, and they hold each other up during challenging times. During these challenging times, Sam Miller* spoke about the importance of being surrounded by people with a shared understanding:

The people that I work with are super supportive, so even on the days where I’m kind of like dragging my butt out of bed, and—it’s not that I don’t want to go to work, it’s just that you’re so exhausted emotionally sometimes. Just knowing that the people here have your back. And just having that shared understanding that some days are harder for you than others, and just to be gentle with yourself, and your coworkers tend to be able to pick you up on that too, which is really cool. – Sam Miller*

Stories like Sam's* also demonstrate that support within teams contributes to staff wellness and retention.

Some staff explained that the teams are not seen as being equal. There is a perception, among some, that teams offering voluntary services are less important. However, as Reagan Laurent* shares from her work with ECD, there are multiple, valuable dimensions to child safety:

I think working alongside the child safety team can be a challenge just because... when you're working with kids day in and day out, you wear your heart on your sleeve because these kids, you're with them and you experience the impact they're having, and it's sometimes a struggle because like why isn't this child protection? – Reagan Laurent*

Stories from staff across service areas demonstrate that all of their supports are important, and that they are all contributing to prevention and the betterment of Métis children, families, and communities. Cheyenne Gentles demonstrates this impact, noting, "I feel like if we do Youth Services properly, there will be no Child Safety. I feel if you change one kid's life, you change a hundred generations, right. Thousands of lives if you help one person."

While staff commonly expressed that all support services and teams within LMO are important, they also recognize that the dynamics across teams—particularly with the child safety team—can be challenging, given the nature of case management and delegation:

I think we have grown a lot as a bigger team. Some of the past challenges I will talk a little bit about. The social worker is the case manager, so some team members feel less valued or less part of the plan. "Do this, do that" feeling. So team leaders had to have those types of conversations, realizing that we are all valuable in the family's life. We have different roles and different authority, and unfortunately the authority does land on us [the child safety social workers] if something does happen to that child. That's the accountability piece. The challenge is around the pressure of our support team in the past when we have competing demands and pressures. Different timelines, planning, external pressures. So that was a challenge for the social work team. So how can we navigate through those external pressures from the work that we need to do? ... So, we created internal care teams. It was bumpy at first, because it took time to bring everyone together.
– Reshie Moss

Here, Reshie touches on the development and implementation of internal care teams. From her perspective working with CYMH, Melissa Chalmers shared similar challenges with the collaborative practice model:

I would say integrated practice is beautiful. Collaborative practice has so many beautiful strengths in ensuring the wholistic wellness of children, youth, and families that we are supporting. It also can get confusing sometimes as to who is doing what, and how we balance that without overwhelming families. It can be tough sometimes... Consistent reflexivity in practice and getting clear about roles and responsibilities is imperative in keeping families at the centre of everything we do when working within an integrated team. – Melissa Chalmers

Despite these challenges, the staff were clear that collaborative practice is important and effective, particularly in terms of minimizing redundancies across teams. For internal care teams to be most effective, there needs to be trust and shared goals, as well as effective communication and accountability.

The Role of Elders

All of the service areas within LMO are delivered in consultation with the Elders. The Elders are involved in the overall design of LMO, including the Michif Practice Model, as well as in direct support roles with children, youth, and families. Reshie Moss shared that Elders are involved in all of the programs that LMO offers, commenting on how fortunate the staff are to have the involvement of Elders in everything they do:

I think all the programs that we have here—the support programs, the preventative programs, and the early intervention programs at LMO—have Elders attached that do the teachings. Like, how lucky are we to have Elders that will offer that? – Reshie Moss

This sentiment of gratitude for having Elders involved in many aspects of the organization was echoed by many staff. Similarly, Elder Denise McCuaig explained that Elders have been intentionally woven into all aspects of services at LMO:

they're embedded in everything that we do, whether we're developing a care plan for child safety concerns, whether we're doing Early Childhood Development assessments

and activities or whether we're doing a home visit to help you with your parenting skills and provide support in your own environment. – Denise McCuaig

Elders are involved in many aspects of LMO, including decisions around staffing. Isla Martin* explained how Elders are involved in staff interviews:

Coming from me growing up, we always leaned on our Elders for things as well, but it was often sort of in a hands-off way, so I really liked that the Elders that they bring in are hands on. So, they were asking interview questions. They were participating in what you were doing versus just being in the room. I really liked the difference of that. – Isla Martin*

Several staff also spoke about how the Elders' presence in their own interviews opened their eyes to opportunities for working in an organization that is actively transforming Métis child welfare.

Program and Service Involvement

In addition to their guiding roles at LMO, the Elders are involved in providing direct support to Métis children, youth, and families through involvement in each of LMO's service areas. Staff from each area of LMO described the important role that Elders play in their programs. For example, Elders are often present in the ECD programs, and the staff spoke about the importance of teaching children about Métis culture, history, and values from an early age. Louise Anderson* noted that, "in our groups, we always have an Elder if we can, and they share traditional knowledge and what the family dynamic was like when they were growing up, and what the traditional ways were." Reagan Laurent* also shared examples of cultural activities that Elders have offered to families through the ECD programs:

we ask the Elders, "What's things that you did back in the day?" And they teach us. For example, moss bags... one year, they made moss bags, and they were able to gift them to another mom, and they learned about, back in the day, why people had a moss bag, and what it was used for, and traditions, and trying to bring back those cultural pieces that are missing. And a lot of these people, clients, and families, they don't understand what that is, or they don't know. They were never taught it, so simple things like that are kind of how we bring the culture in. – Reagan Laurent*

This is one of many examples of the ways in which Elders teach about the culture through material activities—like making moss bags—while also passing on the teachings that are interwoven with practice of making and using moss bags. One Métis mother also shared that she had a positive experience learning to sew with the Elders:

We did ribbon skirts and the Elders helped with that. I'm good at hand sewing but not with like a sewing machine so thank goodness they were there for that. And then we just finished up moss bags a couple of weeks ago. – Kathleen Svedberg

More broadly, families often spoke about the value that the Elders bring to different supports at LMO. In speaking about her experience with the ECD programs, Lisa Adams* spoke about the relationship that she has with Elder Debora Todd Draney:

I have a strong sense of connection with her because she is from close to where I'm from in Northern Alberta... she's awesome. Singing, her guitar, the kids love it, [my daughter] loves it. Jigging, she loves to jig. And Deb's really impactful. She loves working with kids. She's awesome. – Lisa Adams*

In addition, many family members shared about the important role that Elders have played in their lives, including sharing teachings on the land and offering emotional supports during the Michif Mother's group.

The Elders also play important roles within the Michif CYMH and Family Wellness supports at LMO. Melissa Chalmers shared how her team often relies on Elders' guidance: "Elders really guide our practice. If we're feeling stuck, we consult with Elders. We bridge Elders to connect with our youth, within our counselling process." Similarly, Ashley Smith* described how the involvement of Elders has transformed her counselling practice with Métis children. She spoke about connecting with children and youth in a way that feels right to them and supports their wellness. She spoke about a recent appointment with two children that she had over for lunch; she asked Elder Lea Becker to attend the lunch with her, and the purpose was to

just check in with the family. Elder Lea also shared that she sees her role at LMO as a support person; she noted that the Elders provide support to children, youth families, and staff:

My role as an Elder, as I see it, is to be a support person to everyone involved with the agency... All of the Elders try to do our best and individually we're gifted in different ways. We offer honest and kind feedback. We support the individual workers, never picking favourites. The workers and clients are like our children, if you would. As an Elder, everybody involved within the agency is important—staff, families, youth, and children. We love them all for their individuality.... When I think of myself, I think I am defined as being an auntie and offering support everybody involved with the agency. I feel so blessed and honoured to be here. – Lea Becker

The Elders have participated in circles and debriefing sessions with and for families, as well as staff. This process has been particularly helpful in managing feelings around grief and loss.

Relational Support

As part of LMO's relational practice, Elders are paired with specific children, youth, and families who are receiving services through LMO. Elder Denise McCuaig explains how this Elder involvement is a routine aspect of supports through LMO: "when you receive services, you are automatically offered connection to a grandma and a grandpa... those mooshums and kookums are there every step of the way and I just think again that that's really beautiful." Elder Lea Becker shared what this relational practice can involve, as she described some of the ways that she visits with youth, and celebrates them:

With the young people and their families, I believe in building relationships. To do this, we may go out of the land or communicate over coffee or tea, and we text back and forth. As an Elder, we also take clients shopping, or take them to appointments. We may visit with them in their homes, once in a while; for example, one of my girls just graduated high school, which was wonderful. In celebration, we—as an agency—shared a luncheon, sashed her, and congratulated her—all to celebrate her successes. She enrolled herself in university and she wants to be a doctor one day... And so, through our involvement, I have become part of her family... they aren't of my blood, but they are family and friends. I'm their kookum, or their auntie. – Lea Becker

In her reflections, Elder Lea also highlights the meaning of celebrating youth—a theme that is further explored within the findings related to the Michif Practice Model.

From her perspective of access supports with LMO in the past, Montana Butts shared the difference that the Elders made for her:

So when you first get introduced to LMO, there's like our big Piihitikway meetings and you meet all of your staff, and at that point you get introduced to an Elder, and for most kids it happens when they're just a baby, so they grow up with this Elder as their grandparent, and this Elder goes and takes them out on one-on-one's, and teaches them culture, and it's just that way of wrapping that child in that family feeling because around here you call them aunt, uncle, grandma, grandpa, kookum, mooshum, and it's honestly immaculate because a lot of our kids don't have that connection and if they do, they don't have it where they feel like it's blood. I struggle with that immensely and the day that I met Elder Fred and Elder Linda, my heart forever melted, like I cherish them so deeply and if anything was to ever happen to them, it would absolutely break my heart because they are family. They kick my ass when I need it. They support me when I need it. – Montana Butts

The Elders, in their important relational support roles at LMO, have made a significant difference for youth, like Montana.

As part of their practice of giving back, LMO also hosts a monthly Elders' Luncheon, which welcomes a diverse group of Métis and First Nations Elders who are served a lunch, followed by games, music, and door prizes. The LMO teams rotate in their duties for serving the Elders as showing their respect and reciprocity to the older ones in the community. Staff, like Lexa Smerdal, explained that the overall presence of Elders, in these different ways, has helped to create a sense of familiarity and welcoming energy at LMO.

Each weekday, there is an assigned Elder in Residence at LMO. Elder Patrick Savard shared that, often, people will come into LMO just to visit with the Elder in Residence. Many staff spoke about the important role that the Elders in residence play; for example, Isla Martin* described the pro-active role that Elders take in supporting youth:

The Elders that are in residence here, they don't even flinch, and they go right to the youth. Like they don't wait for you to call, or they don't stand by and watch. They go right in there, and that reminds me of like my great aunts that would take care of business, so I really liked that. – Isla Martin*

The Elders often participate in family meetings. In particular, Elder Lynda Tilley explained why she really enjoys visiting with, and supporting families:

I think as we go along with our families, and we also go on home visits to make sure that they're okay. I think that's very important. I do most of the home visits because I love going into homes... maybe for an hour or two hours. Even that makes a difference. It's so cool. That's why I love going into homes 'cause that connection, you know, and a connection with another Elder and with grandma being there, the kids are so cool, they're just so relaxed... that's why I love my job. It's not a job, it's an Elder thing, you know? And actually, I don't classify it as a job. I classify it as, "I'm here," I'm an Elder or grandma or whatever. Use me if you need help 'cause we're Métis people. We're family.
– Lynda Tilley

Elder Lynda explained that her presence provides support to families, and also tends to provide a comforting presence to children in the homes. Elder Joyce Munro explained that she attends meetings with staff and families, where her role is to listen. Elder Patrick Savard also spoke about attending similar visits and meetings; he spoke about how the presence of Elders in these meetings can help to calm the environment: "I know that you can have meetings with people, and you can spend an hour arguing... but when you're coming into the meeting and even having an Elder there, it sort of diffuses the situation." Elder Patrick goes on to explain that he sees his role with LMO as being "the bridge between the community member and the agency." He views this bridging role as being a protector of the community member, as he holds dual roles with LMO and with the Métis community. This positionality resonates with Elder Patrick, from a historical perspective as he explains, "as Métis people, that has been our role. Many times, between the First Nations people and the non-Indigenous community, we've been that bridge, so this is kind of a natural role."

At LMO, the Elders also commonly attend team meetings, where they provide guidance and share teachings related to particular situations:

in each of our team meetings, we have an Elder that sits in and ensures a lesson or a teaching in it... it's stories. It's sharing their life. It's sharing how they would have

handled different situations... we're just constantly learning... we're constantly being connected with a variety of people where we're learning different lessons and stories all the time, and thinking about how we can adapt our practice. – Trisha Cruickshank

In addition to their work in guiding internal practice at LMO, the Elders have also brought balance within challenging meetings with external organizations, as Louise Anderson* shared:

having the Elders involved too, and, you know, I've been to mainstream meetings where I've brought an Elder and I've been to meetings where there is no Elder, and just the difference it makes. Like having an Elder present, it just seems to bring calm and respect to the whole room, and all the individuals there, as opposed to again, you know, parents being afraid to speak up in a mainstream meeting. And staying quiet and just being told what to do, or this is what's happening, and really feeling like they don't have a voice, yeah. – Louise Anderson*

Providing a calm and comforting presence has helped to form bridges between LMO and external organizations, that may have been more difficult to work with in the past.

Supports from Elders at Kikékyelc. Some of the Elders also provide direct support to youth at Kikékyelc. Four Elders each work one day per week at Kikékyelc. Staff explained that the Elders work with the youth in several areas including cultural teachings, land-based activities, and a number of life skills:

We're really community oriented. So, we try to support the youth in building their sense of community, which is what Kikékyelc: a Place of Belonging is, right? We've managed to bring together 26 or 27 youth who live here, incorporate Elders, and just have them support each other. So, we do have some here that say, "I may not have a family, or I may not have somebody out in the community, outside of my Youth Workers who I reach out to, but there is somebody in the house that I connect with and when I am down, I am able to go to them." Having the Elders involved and around brings that grandmotherly, grandfatherly—mooshum and kookum feel, which is nice. – Jay Roque

The Youth Services staff clearly recognize the value that the Elders add to the environment at Kikékyelc. Similarly, the youth told me about the value of living with Elders; for instance, Finn Lewis* said of having Elders on-site: "it kind of keeps a calm, like a balance. It would be nice if we had a couple more Elders in here. They have a lot of experience to share." One of the Elders

that lives full-time at Kikékyelc shared that she enjoys having conversations with the youth—covering a number of topics:

I'll go downstairs and I'll go into the kitchen, and I'll start tidying up and pretty soon they start coming into the kitchen. Usually, I'll have the same ones that come, and we'll talk about everything. As they get more comfortable with me, they'll start telling me things that are personal to them... We'll talk about safety, sexuality. We talk about their past. They'll tell me about where they lived. Many of them have been bounced around from foster homes. And I'll share with them my background of being a single mom, and working as a single mom, being a foster mom, all that stuff. Dating as a young lady. We talk about, clothing. We talk about makeup, cooking... it's open. – Melba Sterling

With her background in employment, Elder Melba often speaks with the youth residents about their own goals in terms of employment and education. She also works on different activities that help the youth to develop skills in budgeting:

I love to go to thrift stores, so I offer to take them with me. I've had a couple who have come and they really enjoy that because there's bargains to be found, deals to be made... so there's lots that they can learn in budgeting, which is an important skill... budgeting is something that should be... well, it should be learned at home but because of their situations, sometimes they didn't have that training. – Melba Sterling

Elder Melba contextualized the importance of these skills within the culture and history of the Métis, as she stated, “I believe that my understanding of being Metis is that we were the original ‘can-do society.’ We foraged and preserved food. We were not a throw-away society. We repurposed, we lived within our means. We fixed-up items and shared what we had. Our young Metis need to learn these same skills.” More broadly, Jasmit Mahal shared how each of the Elder’s skills contributes to activities that they can do with the youth residents:

Each of the Elders has a really cool skill that they'd like to teach the youth. We have one Elder who does tea leaf readings which is so cool. One Elder is good with thrifting, so she takes the youth thrifting. Another Elder is very good cooking, and another one with gardening, and like other skills. It's really cool that we could have that presence... And the Elders are always just so happy to be there, and the youth love them. And it's really cool to have that Grandma and Grandpa figure, you know, because a lot of the youth haven't had that. – Jasmit Mahal

These stories demonstrate that each of the Elders has their own gifts that they bring to the youth.

Staff shared how the youth at Kikékyelc naturally gravitate toward different Elders, forming relationships that are unique. Many of the youth that I spoke to also told me about the Elders that they have the special connections with. One youth, Rowan Water*, shared that they have stronger relationships with the Elders than with the staff, noting: “I don’t trust workers or stuff like that, but I trust Elders, so I always went to stuff with Elders, knowledge keepers, anything to do the culture and nothing else... I like most of the Elders.” The Elders have also shared that everyone has their own gifts. While the youth living at Kikékyelc may not yet be aware of their own gifts, the Elders are helping them to discover these gifts organically through the relationships that are built.

Traditional Significance of Elders

Several staff spoke about the traditional significance of the Elders involvement with families. As Philip Shupe shared, Elders provide stability to meetings to meetings at LMO:

We have Elders at most if not all the meetings with families, and to me that’s culturally significant because back in the old days, Elders were always involved and respected. In past meetings with family services, there would only be parents, their supports, social workers, and lawyers. At LMO meetings now, Elders bring a much-needed balance. – Philip Shupe

Similarly, Trisha Cruickshank explained that Elders also commonly attend home visits to support community and kinship caregivers:

I think about going for a home visit, say. When I’m able to, I bring an Elder, and when I first started, it was interesting because that was something that I was a little bit uncomfortable with... it was very foreign to me, where now, sitting down and talking to an Elder, or inviting them to come along, it’s really just what we do, and there’s comfort in it... We have caregivers who reach out directly to Elders now. – Trisha Cruickshank

The choice to have Elders present and connected with Métis children, youth, and families is intentional. Colleen Lucier described the intention of involving Elders in interactions with families, as she shares, “we involve Elders to remind families of the role that our grandparents

played in our family.”

There is a strong cultural component to all of the work that the Elders do at LMO. Elders can often be found offering teachings to staff, as well as directly to children, youth, and families. Elder Joyce Munro shared how she especially likes to support young children, sharing, “I like being with the young ones and some of the things they do. I can’t get out and hike with them and all that but just here, like their different crafts that they’re learning.” Elders were described as the cornerstone of the ways in which culture is embedded into all aspects of LMO.

The Elders are highly valued throughout the work at LMO. In sharing the reciprocal nature of the value of these roles, Elder Melba Sterling shared her own feelings about working as an Elder at Kikékyelc, and at LMO more broadly:

I feel very honoured, welcomed, treated with respect. I feel like I have a purpose... and that I am contributing. I have a lot of experience working with youth and children, and I’m making use of all of my experiences. – Melba Sterling

The Elders also reported that they are recognized and compensated for their time, their knowledge, and their work. Elder Denise shared what compensation means—how it is tied to honouring knowledge—and why it is so important that LMO recognizes Elders in this way:

the fact that our Knowledge Keepers are community members who have so much lived experience and wisdom, are available and embedded and are part of the processes that we do. I can’t say enough how proud I am of that and that LMO finds a way to honour those Elders for their knowledge as well... I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been asked to come and share or speak as an Elder and treated like a tobacco offering or a blanket is the only way to compensate, or they want me to come back but they are seeking me to do that as though I am a volunteer, and that’s not the LMO way. They honour those Elders just as much as they honour their unionized paid staff. – Denise McCuaig

While recognizing and following protocols for working with Métis Elders is also important, it is integral that Elders are also supported to continue their good work through adequate compensation.

Culture First: The Overall Approach

Elders, families, and staff spoke about the importance of having a child welfare system that supports youth to reconnect with their culture, their identities, their families, and their histories. Culture is at the forefront of everything that LMO does. In this regard, it was not surprising that in conversations at LMO and with Elders, the term “culture first,” often came up organically in conversations. For example, Laura Brown* said:

I think it’s been really impressed upon that it’s culture first, and I firmly believe that... It’s always first, from the moment when you walk in the door to the first moment that we meet families, and it’s actually—I’m hopeful—in everything we do... I know that in the programming that we do, I look first for culture. – Laura Brown*

Similarly, Elder Denise McCuaig shared that culture is a gift that is broadly shared with Métis children, youth, and families—as well as community caregivers:

that’s the gift that LMO provides to our children and our caregivers, whether the caregivers are Métis or not. We provide an environment where they can experience and live culture on a regular basis in their lives, and we’re there when you need to call on it. – Denise McCuaig

Based on the conversations with different family members that interact with LMO, it is clear that they, too, understand the value of culture. Indeed, all of the family members that have actively engaged in services through LMO indicated that receiving family supports from a Métis agency made a difference for their families. While Métis people like Robert Harris* noted that they had access to learning about Secwépemc and Cree culture, they struggled to learn about their own culture. He shared, “I’ve always, ever since I was a kid, wanted to be part of my heritage and the culture... LMO is where I want to go, where my actual heritage is.” In this way, LMO has become an important place to not only receive family supports, but also to reconnect with Métis culture and identity.

For kinship caregivers, like Greg Dawson and Sherry La Chance, LMO has provided them with much-needed opportunities to create stronger cultural connections for their Métis grandchildren. The opportunity to surround Métis children with their own culture was widely appreciated. Cindy Thomas* explained that LMO has created opportunities for her own children that she did not have during her own time in care through MCFD. She explained, “it has made a huge difference in my life and my kids’ lives to have them go through their culture and have that ability to be able to have that involved in all our meetings, compared to what I went through.” In this way, Cindy* highlights the value of being wrapped in Métis culture, as well as the active involvement in planning that is promoted through the Michif Practice Model.

This section considers the many ways in which the gift of culture is shared with everyone who interacts with LMO. It touches on the physical space of LMO, Michif language, land-based learning and wellness, cultural teaching and learning, Métis identity, music and play, traditional Métis roles, and ceremony.

A Welcoming Space

We heard many stories about the welcoming atmosphere and positive environment that has been fostered at LMO. Many staff told us stories about their first impressions of the organization, recounting the first time they walked through the doors. Among them, Cheyenne Gentles noted that she immediately had a sense that something was special about LMO: “As soon as I walked in that door I just knew, you know, it’s different, there’s something different. I’ve never felt more welcome.” Jennifer Friesen spoke about the amazing feeling she had when she first arrived, noting “I wish I could walk into this building again for the first time. I can see people come in and it’s got its own energy, its own comfort.” LMO promotes a sense of belonging that is experienced by people who access services—or who just pop by for a visit—in

addition to the staff. For example, Sherry La Chance—a grandmother and kinship caregiver—shared her experience of coming into the lobby at LMO:

When I walk in the front door, people know my name somehow. Maybe they know I'm expected that morning. Maybe they've had a team meeting in the morning and know that I'm expected to walk through those front doors, but it sure feels nice to walk into a place... and it's not like a waiting room where you feel like you're waiting for the doctor or you're waiting for your labs. It's like you've walked into a living room, and the person at the front counter is friendly and inviting, and not serious, like, "Do you have an appointment?" They go kind of like running into the back, and more people will come running out, and like, "Hi Sherry!" You feel like you're important and you're special, and you're welcome. – Sherry La Chance

Like Sherry, many families spoke about the caring and friendly atmosphere at LMO. Kinship caregiver, Jocelyn Hunt, noted that the welcoming approach at LMO particularly stands out in her world: "They make you feel important in a society that doesn't have that anymore... We walk in here, I get nothing but smiles and they ask how I'm doing, not just my grandson." In a similar way, Cindy Thomas* described that LMO has created a welcoming space that promotes her sense of belonging; she explained that she values her relationships at LMO, particularly in contrast to her past experience with MCFD:

For me, it's knowing that I belong is my biggest thing, and that I'm not just another number in the system. I go in and there's always a smile and a hello, how are you? Where I go into the white ministry and they're like okay, what do you need? It's that welcoming piece that's my biggest thing. – Cindy Thomas*

Many family members shared general comments about the staff as non-judgmental, compassionate, personable, and caring. Bill Sampson* noted that the relationships that he has built with the staff have shaped the increasingly positive experiences he has had at LMO. Lisa Adams*, compared the staff to supportive family members:

I think it works really well with LMO just because they're like family. They really make you feel like family. They're super like just always positive and they're very supportive in the decisions you do or do not make, and they never... You never feel discouraged. I don't know if that's the right word. You never feel like you've made the wrong decision

by being here or there. They're always there and they're always supportive of what we do and don't decide to do. – Lisa Adams*

Similarly, Métis mom, Kathleen Svedberg, shared that she was originally worried that staff would judge her based on the questions that she had, but these concerns were quickly alleviated, as she was met with kind and welcoming responses to her requests.

Lisa Adams* spoke to the value of accessing supports through an agency like LMO, noting that there is “absolutely zero judgment and it's like very refreshing. In other agencies, you can get that sense of judgment.” In fact, several family members noted that their experience at LMO was unique. When speaking to her experience at LMO, Nancy Bernard* said that it was the first time in her life she ever felt heard: “I was able to come into LMO and sit down with the worker and just tell my story and then actually like hear my voice, and then provide support to help me reach my needs.” Nancy later shared that this experience was the first time she has ever felt heard.

Staff also spoke about the impact that their non-judgmental approach can have on families accessing services at LMO, echoing several themes that the families brought up. In particular, Cary Davis* shared that Métis culture is reflected at LMO from “the minute you walk through the door.” LMO is designed to feel warm and welcoming, unlike typical child welfare offices:

You're not buzzed in. It's not sterile. You walk in and every aspect of your culture is reflected in everything around you. Absolutely everything we do is rooted in the culture, in the values, and I think that makes a huge difference for the families. – Cary Davis*

Like Cary*, many staff offered comparisons between the environment for Métis child welfare, and common environments fostered at other agency offices. Louise Anderson* spoke about this contrast clearly:

I see a difference in families I've worked with who were involved with mainstream...

just how stressful it is, they want nothing to do with MCFD. Whereas here, people that we walk alongside, they consider us family, and even just simple things, like the way the office is set up. It's not a stone-cold brick building where you walk in the front door and there's somebody behind a piece of glass. And, you know, cold furniture. Whereas here it's welcoming and, you know, yes, we have families get angry with us, but they keep coming back, and they know they can come back. They won't be judged. And just like in a regular family unit, we don't always get along, but we still love each other and that's, I think, made a big difference in our practice. – Louise Anderson*

For Louise*, the combination of having a welcoming physical space, filled with staff that practice from a non-judgmental and compassionate approach, has contributed to the ongoing engagement of families in the programs despite the challenges that they may face in their journeys.

Staff often described how culture is a part of all aspects of practice and physical space at LMO. Among them, Montana Butts shared that LMO offers the feeling of “come into our home, come have a cup of coffee with us, have some tea and cookies, have a little smudge, have a circle. It's grounding them and bringing them back to their culture.” Similarly, Elder Patrick Savard shared some of the feedback that he has received from clients:

You walk in the door here and I've had the comment from lots of people, ... they've said, “Coming into your agency is just like coming into somebody's home.” And it makes such a difference for the people and some of the staff here, they bring their dog to work, their little pup, and people walk into our place and there's lots of Métis stuff here. We've got a small replica cart in the lobby and there is a picture of Louis Riel and there's sashes hanging and there's pictures of families hanging on the wall and, so it is, there's a rocking chair and there might be an older person there holding a baby and people come in and you can just sort of see them relax. – Patrick Savard

Alongside the common themes shared by staff and families, Elder Patrick's experience further reflects the ways that LMO promotes belonging for children and families. A Métis mother from Alberta, Lisa Adams*, agreed as she described LMO as feeling like home:

I was like these are my people... I feel like there's a lack of that definitely in other agencies, which is very unfortunate because I feel like everyone should have that sense of security when they go through agencies like LMO or whatever other programs there are, or agencies out there. – Lisa Adams*

Several families echoed the sentiment and belonging, as an outcome, is explored later in this chapter.

Culture is represented throughout multiple senses at LMO, from the visual aspects of the building to the scent of sage burning, to the fiddle music playing. Melissa Chalmers shared how she came to understand how important it is to have a space that fully encapsulates Métis culture:

As a non-Indigenous person, I learned very clearly from Colleen that culture is not something you do, it just is. It took me awhile to understand what that meant, whereas now I see it. It is from the second they walk in the door, they're seeing Leah Dorion's art, they're seeing the beadwork, they are hearing the fiddle, they are seeing the leaders that empowered Metis people posted along the walls, they're seeing the massive buffalo. It is community the second you walk in, and it provides opportunity to ask questions, to learn more about your cultural identity, who you are and where you come from. Culture is woven within everything that we do. – Melissa Chalmers

In Melissa's view, the environment acts as a physical representation of Métis culture as well as a warm invitation for Métis children, youth, and families to learn more about who they are.

Many Elders discussed the power of being surrounded by Métis people and being in spaces that are reflective of who Métis people are. These stories, which are further highlighted the concept of belonging, were often discussed association with promoting safety for children, youth, and families. Several Elders, including Elder Rebecca Dubois*, shared that when you are surrounded by your own people, in your own spaces that are reflective of who you are, it promotes a sense of safety. She shared that young people should have opportunities to be around other Métis people, in Métis spaces. In her view, LMO offers this type of space, where people can come in and feel safe, with “reminders of who you are” and “good stories about accomplishments of Métis people.”

Michif Language

Language is a central aspect of Métis life and is a significant component of all aspects of life at LMO. As Melanie Allard shared, language is a key part of the cultural environment at LMO: “We practice culture all day every day. We are working on our language, we are wearing our sashes, and just by inviting people in for coffee and tea. Our culture is shown throughout LMO through everything we do.” Family members often agreed; among them, Robert Harris* noted that culture is “woven in a bit” throughout LMO, and his whole family enjoys it.

Families hear their language from the moment they enter LMO. Michif language is used by staff at the front desk, who answer the phone and greet everyone walking into the office in Michif. In discussing the ways that culture is a part of their everyday work, Reshie Moss shared that being greeted in Michif, with “Taanishi” or “Boon matayn” is one important element of bringing culture into LMO. In speaking about Michif language revitalization, she shared, “we have to bring that back—we’re learning the language and speaking it as best as we can.” Her comments reflect that the use of Michif language is an intentional choice at LMO. And while the integration of Michif is an incredible strength of LMO, Isla Martin* also shared that the learning process can be overwhelming:

it was very intimidating at first, the language.... I see everywhere. It’s all over the office and spaces. People use it for greeting. There’s often sort of some chatter about it in the lobby, which is nice, and people really are understanding about it. I think with some of the knowledge keepers that are fluent, they can be a little judgmental on people learning. I don’t find that here so that’s really nice, like people are very supportive of people learning Michif, so I think that’s been really nice. – Isla Martin*

With her words, Isla* notes how learning languages can be intimidating, and that LMO takes an inclusive and gentle approach to (re)introducing families to the Michif language.

LMO has worked with Norman Fleury—a renowned Michif language specialist—to offer several Michif Language sessions. These sessions, Elder Debora Todd Draney explained, have

introduced staff to “the language and cultural teachings, Métis worldview, our values and ways of knowing.” These sessions have acted as a catalyst for ongoing language learning at LMO.

Similarly, the Elders also shared the importance of their own work in (re)learning Michif, as well as Cree:

My parents were both Cree speakers, but I didn't learn Cree growing up. I was somewhat hesitant in learning a language other than Cree. Once I realized that our people historically could speak many languages including Michif, then I opened my mind and became more engaged. I understood the worldview and ways of being as we were raised in a traditional Métis Cree way. I was somewhat hesitant in learning a language other than Cree. Once I realized that our people historically could speak any languages, including Michif, I opened my mind and became more engaged. I wanted to learn both languages. – Debora Todd Draney

Staff practice speaking Michif so that they are able to promote the language with the Métis children, youth, and families that they work with. Learning Michif is seen as a collective movement, central to the work at LMO. Language learning is a priority, as Tia Stanley explained:

It's part of the work. If you're going to be servicing Métis children and families, you need to speak their language. It's as simple as that. So, I think that's one of the strongest things we're doing. It doesn't really have anything to do with one area of practice, and so everyone can do it. – Tia Stanley

Learning language is a collective movement at LMO, spanning all service areas. Many staff shared that they recognize that learning and sharing the language is a priority in their work, and that they are happy to be contributing to language revitalization alongside children, youth, and families. In recognizing the difficulty in language learning, Elder Debora (Deb) Todd Draney shared some of her early thoughts about staff learning Michif:

Many at LMO are non-Indigenous or non-Métis. I wondered how they would receive language and cultural programming. What was the motivation to learn? How would we impart the program and how would the teachings transfer to our families and children? How would those who were not raised with our Métis cultural worldview move this forward? It was a high expectation. Our children and families need strong cultural anchors to heal and to become resilient. The staff took on the challenge and they continue

to utilize and hone their cultural knowledge and language skills in their day-to-day practice. – Debora Todd Draney

Elder Deb highlights the dedication and passion required among staff to adopt a worldview that may be different from their own. The commitment of non-Métis staff to continually take steps in learning Michif is as an expression of their ally-ship, and their support for Métis children, youth, and families. They are learning Michif as a means to support the language, as well as the families that they work with—not out of an individualist desire but as a commitment to supporting the collective.

Staff have also worked to incorporate Michif into their programs. Michif language is a central aspect of part programming with Métis children at LMO. Two Métis moms spoke highly of the ways that Michif language is intentionally woven into the ECD programming. Lisa Adams* shared that they incorporate the language all aspects of programming: “everyday things, when we eat, when we talk, when we play, like it’s always there and they’re always incorporating it.” As well, Kathleen Svedberg shared the joy of learning Michif through Songs with Kookum and other aspects of ECD programming:

I remember distinctly the Taanishi Kiya Song... and [my son] was singing it loud and proud at home, and that was a really big turning point for me.... little things that I’m noticing... that give me hope that it’s not going to be something that’s lost. I try to incorporate in a way too, like when my oldest had kindergarten last year, you know, taking the sash for show and tell, or like taking the spoons. He took the spoons the next time he was up for show and tell. So, we have spoons at home. We have lots of sashes at home. I just want to put the stuff in front of them and, you know, it’s up to them if they take it and run with it or not but I can gently encourage it to the best that I can. – Kathleen Svedberg

As Kathleen shared, the exposure to language and culture for children at a young age is already having a far-reaching impact for her and her family. Similarly, Tia Stanley shared one of many charming results of incorporating language into programs at LMO: “everyone knows how to introduce themselves, and when I say goodbye to some of the young kids... when I say,

‘Kawapamatin mina,’ they’re yelling it back at me.’⁴² Tia’s comments illustrate the significant impact that language learning can have for young Métis children—an area that is further examined in the outcomes section of this chapter (See: Cultural Resurgence).

Land-Based Learning and Wellness

Staff across all program areas shared the ways in which they work to incorporate land-based learning and wellness strategies for the children, youth, and families that they work with. Recognizing that healing can come from being on the land, staff shared some of the ways that they bring children and youth outside to connect with nature. Laura Brown* illustrated that connection to land does not have to be elaborate, noting, “Even you can go to the river and pick up rocks, there’s so many lessons on self-regulation that is really just quite a natural way of being and doing.” With similar sentiments, Ashley Smith* spoke about offering land-based counselling:

I like to do counselling out on the land, so the river is really grounding for some kiddos that I have that don’t get to do that stuff. Lots of times, we just go to the water, and they just stick their little feet in. – Ashley Smith*

Using a child- and youth-driven approach to wellness, Melissa Chalmers shared that weaving in culture into healing often includes connecting with the land:

We want to hear what’s important to them in their wellness and then work with that. Cultural teachings are woven throughout their healing journey. For example, going out on the land and connecting to nature.... We value just stepping our feet into the river and cooling our body. Nature provides the care and wisdom in supporting their nervous system to come to rest so they can move forward. Managing big emotions like anger or anxiety can calm by just being out on the land listening to the gentle breeze through the forest trees. Words are not always needed in healing, sometimes silence and allowing for the land to provide care, is exactly what the youth need. It is not uncommon for us to hear from the youth that they feel the best when they’re in the forest or they feel at peace when they’re out away from Kamloops surrounded by nature and animals... I think we do a really good job of validating what they’re going through, who they are and how they can heal in a way that makes sense to their spirit, through this unique counselling process. –

⁴² “Kawapamatin mina” is Michif for “see you later.”

Melissa Chalmers

In addition to the protective factors that culture can have for mental health, stories like Melissa's also illustrate how connecting with the land has multi-faceted benefits for wholistic healing—including the physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental elements of wellness.

Children and families are also offered opportunities to connect with the land. Philip Shupe noted that activities with the Dads' Group can include barbeques, hikes, ice and rod fishing, and target practice with bows and arrows. As well, ECD staff spoke about incorporating land-based activities into their work with young children:

When I'm with kids, one to one, I take them fishing or out on the land. You can just see, like physically, the calm in the kids when they're out on the land. It's different than sitting one to one in a playroom because when we're putting a worm on a hook and casting out the line and they just naturally speak about the things they want to speak about when they're ready, and there's no pushing or interrogating. So, I mean, just being present—I think that's a good cultural way to be. – Louise Anderson*

In sharing this, Louise* illustrates the significance of connecting with the land as a natural way of facilitating conversations with children. Additionally, other staff and family members shared that connecting with the land has been helpful in passing on teachings to children. Specifically, kinship caregiver, Jocelyn Hunt, shared that she has been using Métis teachings around mindfulness and land-based connection to help to ground her grandson:

I do that with [my grandson] now too. If he starts getting really mad, I say let's go sit outside. Let's just sit and have our quiet time. Not with an iPad... let's just have some quiet time. Let's go play outside. We go for a lot of walks. We go for a lot of bike rides... we do need to appreciate what we do have, and I think that's one of the biggest things that they've taught me here. – Jocelyn Hunt

These stories are reminiscent of the teachings from Elder Betty Gladue, who emphasized that meditation and *pêyâhtik* is a cultural practice for connecting with the land.

Throughout their programs, LMO offers children, youth, and families different opportunities to connect with the land. Staff and families shared the value of these opportunities,

which have included snowshoeing, harvesting medicines, and visiting with Elders on the land. In particular, two Métis mothers spoke about how much they enjoyed harvesting sage with the Elders. Among them, Kathleen Svedberg shared her experience:

I love that the little kids can just run in the field, and the Elders come too, and they teach us to do the offering and that there's meaning behind picking medicines. I love that activity. I wait for it every year. I'm trying to think what else we've done out on the land. Oh well, during Covid, I was a part of the Gathering our Medicines program, which is essentially like a parenting program. And so that was over Zoom and then at the end of it, we met again out in Batch at McQueen Lake, and it was like at this clearing and it was really picturesque and like Elder Patrick, he started a fire and there was like a dozen of us, and the kids just ran and played and there was a nice little pond there... that kind of stuff is really exciting for me. – Kathleen Svedberg

Teachings around traditional medicines and relationship with the land are also offered to the youth at Kikékyelc. Finn Lewis*, one of the youth residents, shared that they particularly appreciate opportunities to connect with the land and harvest medicines: “the staff here help build programs to get us going out on the land. There's been a few times this year that we've gone out to pick medicine. A bit of it is in that jar there.” From her perspective working at Kikékyelc, Jane Williams* shared that she aims to bridge teachings about medicines to the ways that youth can uphold traditional values: “Teachings around tobacco as medicine, cleaning up after yourself – treating the land with respect.” The connection between cultural practices and values has also been shared with Métis children and families. Through the ECD programs, kinship caregiver, Patti Lefrancois, shared that her grandchildren have been learning about how to share their gratitude and respect for the land.

In recognizing the value of opportunities to bring children and youth out onto the land, family members like Robert Harris* shared that this is a programming area that could be further bolstered at LMO:

I do know that they are trying to get out more and more out into the bush, and I think everybody should be out in the bush more... [we need] more traditional stuff. The

traditional stuff that we used to go through was in the bush: hunting, fishing, gathering. I think everybody needs to go back into that though. – Robert Harris*

Here, Robert* highlights not just a need for more access to land-based and traditional practices within LMO, but also within Métis communities more broadly.

While staff widely recognized the value of land-based activities, Elder Lea Becker also highlighted the relationship with Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, the peoples of the land on which LMO sits:

In all ways the agency honours the Secwépemc people and land... verbal respect is expressed before all meetings and gatherings because this is historically their land, since time immemorial. We are so thankful to live, work, raise our families here, and enjoy this land... – Lea Becker

Elder Lea went on to share that LMO works in consultation with the Secwépemc people, particularly in regard to their housing developments. Her points around respect and relationship are critical and require ongoing maintenance. Conversations around land inherently elicit important conversations around Métis-First Nations relationships. In this way, this under-examined area within the context of Métis child welfare on Secwépemc territory.

Teaching and Learning

Elders, alongside staff with dedicated positions for cultural teaching, work to ensure that LMO staff continually work to increase their knowledge and understanding of Métis culture and history, enabling them to best support Métis children, youth, and families. Elder Denise McCuaig described an organizational responsibility for facilitating staff learning about Métis people, culture, and history— “understanding who we are as people.” For many staff, their learning has contributed to a passion for instilling Métis culture and history among the families that they serve. Non-Métis staff also spoke passionately about how excited they are about Métis culture, and how meaningful it can be to connect Métis people with their history, culture, and

language. For example, Jennifer Friesen shared that she often encourages families that she works with to learn about who they are. Lexa Smerdal also explained that learning about Métis culture can involve a shared journey of gathering knowledge and connecting families to Elders who may have more to share about a particular topic:

Our staff are learning and trying to be involved in culture as much as possible... and so this is just as much of a journey for us as it is for our families, and so being able to learn alongside them, and sometimes it's about like looking things up together and being really excited together, or like hey, let's go talk to this person. Let's go find someone who holds this knowledge, who would know that. Hearing the stories of our Elders is so rewarding because oral story telling is how information was passed down and how knowledge was passed down. We didn't have the luxury of having researched and written knowledge and so being able to really help inform it for future generations. – Lexa Smerdal

Lexa shared that this learning is not only valuable to families, but also to staff. While some staff described a steep learning curve involved in their work with LMO, they spoke fondly about the opportunities for ongoing learning and growth across their careers at LMO. Staff shared the value in the complete immersive learning that takes place in their work at LMO. Janet Dickons* noted how important it is for learning to be continuous to promote the authentic sharing of Métis culture with children, youth, and families. Similarly, from her perspective as a Métis summer student at LMO, Montana Butts shared that there is a shared commitment toward contributing to the resurgence of Métis culture:

Looking at the other employees we have that are not Métis or Indigenous, the way that they instill our culture, and the way that they take on our culture and pass it along to our families, because they understand how important it is, I believe that is one of the biggest things that anybody can ever do when working or being in an Indigenous or Métis place, so I love that they embrace it as their own, just as much as we do. – Montana Butts

Several staff shared that they are well supported in their learning about Métis culture. For example, Louise Anderson* shared, “we are immersed in the culture every day, as staff, with our families, and then we're just continually being provided opportunities to learn, and again, that's where the Elders come in.” Indeed, some Elders shared that they view their role at LMO as being

a cultural mentor, where they have the privilege of sharing teachings with LMO staff in an effort to guide them in their work with Métis children, youth, and families.

Métis Identity and Connectedness

Staff and Elders were clear about the importance of supporting Métis children, youth, and families to understand who their people are. In addition to providing opportunities to engage with cultural activities, Daylan Kidder spoke about the work in building up a sense of identity and confidence for Métis youth:

I mean it's easy to say, "Okay, we provide cultural opportunities like drumming and beading and all of that." Yes, we do but I think it's just like the overall environment that we provide, making sure that they know their ancestors and their background. As Métis, we're very resilient people. For a lot of Métis people, they've had to hide who they were because it wasn't safe to identify who they were. So just teaching the youth that they come from like strong people is huge. And letting them explore their culture is also huge because a lot of them don't know anything about it, or they are scared to identify as Métis because, I mean, Métis people, we all come in different colours. – Daylan Kidder

Supports for strengthening identity are also offered through Michif Works, a new eight-week career readiness program offered at Kikékyelc, also brings in culture. The foundation teachings offered in the first week of the program are about identity. The youth enrolled in Michif Works learn about elements of culture and identity, with activities in beading, ribbon shirt and ribbon skirt making, and teachings related to identity. Melanie Allard explained that the program is designed in a way that cultural elements can be tailored to the backgrounds and needs of the cohort.

Community connectedness is at the core of LMO's approach to supporting children, youth, and families in ways that mirror traditional approaches. As Reshie Moss said, "That is the Metis way: to create community. We get to know them and learn how to support them. We are here for you, and we show that. Community building and trust." Reshie went on to share that many of the cultural activities that are offered through LMO have elements of belonging and

connectedness interwoven into them. For example, when LMO hosts a beading group, it involves bringing Métis people together, sharing culture, and creating connections. These groups also create space for people to speak their truths, which can help with feelings of frustration and isolation. Family and community connections are foundational to Métis culture, as Colleen Lucier explained:

To me, family is culture, and if a family has been disconnected from their Métis culture, what are you doing to reconnect them to their community? Because they're naturally already doing things that they don't even recognize as part of their culture, but by bringing them back to their charter community here, connecting them to their Nation, making sure they know how to do citizenship applications—all of that—they'll naturally get reconnected to their culture. – Colleen Lucier

As a result of colonialism and dispossession, many Métis families that access supports at LMO have been systematically disconnected from their culture. With these words, Colleen explains aspects of the philosophy that guides the Michif Practice Model, where multiple layers of connection are re-established to support the identities and connections for Métis children, youth, and families.

Culture, Music, and Play

As a focus of the ECD programming, Métis culture and music are brought together with play as a way of learning. Several family members described the different ways that their children have become more involved with Métis culture through opportunities to play and learn at LMO. They spoke about the fun that their children have attending summer camps, taking jigging lessons, and making crafts. These opportunities are distinctly Métis, and they naturally promote conversation and questions with children:

just being in the playroom where we have the picture of Louis Riel, and like all of the trapper's tent and all that stuff, they just naturally sort of like ask questions... lots of times when they are interested, even just having them there when we are in the playroom has been super cool. – Ashley Smith*

Music and storytelling are also important elements in programming for children and families, as

Elder Lynda Tilley shared:

they're drumming and singing and jigging, you know, and we get up and jig with the kids, and, you know, that's the tradition. That's our tradition coming back and what makes a happy home is music.... I notice the difference with our girls in the daycare, how awesome they are. How they are bringing all the traditions back, with the singing, the storytelling, I love the storytelling. – Lynda Tilley

Music has also acted as a bridge to Michif language learning for children and families within the

ECD programs:

it's beautiful because the workers start teaching the babies and parents language through singing children's songs. By singing these little songs, and including Michif words, the parent or caregiver is learning the words also and can continue singing at home. This is truly the first step in revising a disappearing language. – Lea Becker

Like Elder Lea, many families also spoke about the value of the ECD programming. One Métis

mom, Cindy Thomas*, shared that the Michif Waposak Hot Breakfast Program is a particular

highlight for her children:

It's during the week, every morning. The kids go in, they go play and interact with each other and just have a really good time. There's usually all sorts of different projects going on and like we go out on little field trips and stuff. And then usually we'll gather up into groups and we'll sing different songs, using some of the Michif language that the kids can understand, and then from there we go, and we sit down, say a prayer, and we eat. And so that sense of community in that alone is absolutely amazing. Like my kids have thrived through that program, to be able to make friends, because they're currently not in daycare, so that was our way of trying to get them to start interacting with other kids at a young age, and learning... yeah, I know that both of my kids absolutely love it. That is definitely like their home during the school year. – Cindy Thomas*

Cindy's example is one of many that highlights the value of bringing Métis children and families

together for ECD that is steeped in culture, music, and play.

Revitalization of Traditional Roles

The programs at LMO work to revitalize traditional roles within Métis families and communities. Elder Debora Todd Draney shared the thoughtful positioning of Métis children at the centre of everything at LMO: “Traditionally, children were always the middle of the circle. All of our thoughts, planning, and programming at LMO are about meeting the children and their families where they are at and to create opportunities for success.” In sharing this, Elder Debora highlights the traditional role of community and collective support, as well as the ways in which LMO is working to re-orient child welfare back to these traditional practices. In a similar way, Jay Roque spoke to the Métis tradition of working hard, and how staff harness the value of determination, along with community support, to help youth reach their goals. Additionally, in his work with the Dads’ Group, Philip Shupe also reflected on traditional gender roles and their associated responsibilities:

And you would think that with our traditions and cultures, as a warrior is that the dad of the family, like you got these little ones looking up to you, that it would be an easy job but for some it’s not, like we’re all raised differently, and you just have to understand that. In past generations, especially in courts and family services, people seemed to have undermined or didn’t realize the importance of a father’s—or dad’s—role. – Philip Shupe

Here, Philip shares how his work is contributing to the revitalization of positive masculinity and traditional roles within Métis families.

Elders and helpers alike shared the poignant example of revitalizing traditional Métis roles throughout LMO’s programs. Most prominently, staff spoke about the Captains Program at Kikékyelc. Captains each take shifts at the front area of Kikékyelc and are tasked with greeting and registering any visitors who enter the building. Melissa Chalmers explained, “They are in charge of who comes in and who comes out. It kind of gives you that sense of ownership.” The Captains are also tasked with keeping the front area clean, smudging the c7ístkten / kekuli and

the rest of Kikékyelc, and assisting the Elders as needed. The Captains take on leadership roles in their community, and staff shared that many of the youth residents have flourished in these roles.

Ceremony and Protocols

As part of working in a Métis way, several staff shared that they appreciate the way that meetings are conducted in a way that aligns with Métis protocols. This includes beginning meetings with a prayer in Michif and offering a land acknowledgement, which staff widely recognized as a valuable way of opening meetings. Elder Lynda Tilley spoke about the revitalization of prayers at LMO, and by extension, in Métis families:

with our traditions, and our prayers are coming back, and I think our prayers are very important to our families and, you know, you do a prayer, and it connects and. You know, we always start with a prayer in our meetings, that's the first thing we do is a prayer.... And, of course, everybody's doing different prayers now. A lot of them are learning the Cree... and so, it's not always about the perfection, it's always about the heart. – Lynda Tilley

This process of learning language and practicing prayer comes with a spirit of embracing the learning process along with imperfections. Additionally, several staff shared that the prayer helps to ground staff and remind them of the work they are doing and who they are doing it for:

when I do bring Elders to a school meeting, or a meeting with another agency... we start off with prayer, and we also do a land acknowledgement... it sounds so simple, but it grounds everybody, and it starts us off in a good space. – Louise Anderson*

Additionally, Tia Stanley spoke about the way that meetings are conducted in circle, noting that this practice is a “very gentle shift in decolonizing [social work].”

Staff also shared some of the tangible ways that they are bringing ceremony into their programs. As part of the Michif CYMH team, Ashley Smith* shared aspects of her practice, noting, “It depends on the kiddo, but lots of them like to start with a Métis prayer before we start our session. Some of them like to smudge.” Philip Shupe spoke about the collective process of building a sweat lodge to create more access to ceremony for Métis and First Nations youth.

The Michif Practice Model

The Michif Practice Model represents the coming together of Métis values and practices, with Signs of Safety as a practice framework. The practice model has been modified to make it Métis-specific, using culture as the foundation for supporting Métis children, youth, and families.

Piihitikway

Across the conversations, Elders and staff shared that engaging Métis children, youth, and families begins with the Piihitikway, which was intentionally named to represent a warm welcoming, as Elder Patrick Savard explained: “Piihitikway in our language is a ‘welcome,’ it means ‘come on in.’ It doesn’t mean ‘get on over here!’ You’d say, ‘aashtum.’ But it’s Piihitikway. Come in, come on in, we welcome you in.” All initial visits involve a Piihitikway, which acts as a way of embracing children, youth, and families into their culture and community. Each Piihitikway is opened with a Michif prayer and a land acknowledgement. During the welcoming, the family is offered food, as well as a gift basket with Métis books and cultural items. This practice of gifting aligns with Métis cultural protocols. Elder Denise McCuaig explained that families can be engaging with LMO for any number of reasons, ranging from Child Safety to ECD supports:

when someone comes to our agency, it doesn’t matter why they are there, it could be a child protection issue, it could be to use support for mental health, ... maybe they want the child assessed or supported with Early Childhood Development, it doesn’t matter, but they’re brought in with Piihitikway. – Elder Denise McCuaig

The Piihitikway is a relational practice that allows for an introduction to the people and the supports available. Staff across support areas—along with Elders—are present at the Piihitikway. Several staff shared how important it has been for them to be present during the Piihitikway, to provide opportunities for introducing themselves and sharing the supports that they can provide. As Executive Director and a member of the Métis community, Colleen Lucier endeavours to

attend every Piihitikway:

I'm working for my Métis people, and I really mean it when I say I try to go to all of the welcoming meetings, all of the Piihitikway meetings, because I'm really excited to actually meet other Métis people and hear their story, because it's such a shared story. – Colleen Lucier

Colleen's commitment, as she shares, stems from a place of community, culture, and shared history. Her position highlights the importance of involving Métis people in helping roles throughout Métis child welfare. Similarly, Elder Patrick Savard shared his own view on his position as an Elder supporting LMO and a member of the Métis community:

I'm not a social worker, I'm not part of the staff, but I work here because I believe in what we are doing. But these people are my community and I'm not going to sit there and have them abused and made fearful. And so, my role, I'm with the agency but I'm also with the community. So, I try to speak to the people, sometimes I know them from the community... And we talk to them, "Who's your family? Where are you from?" And I was in one meeting and the young man that was in the meeting, I was sort of asking him where he was from and all that kind of thing, and he said, "Oh yeah, well I've got a cousin that's name was Savard," and I said, "Well, we would be related because there was just one Savard who came originally." And we were doing fist bumps and everything and everyone was laughing and happy as they left. Well, that was their introduction to child welfare and that's different than what people are used to and that's what we're striving for here. – Patrick Savard

Like Elder Patrick, many staff also revealed that the Elders play a significant role in shaping the Piihitikway and setting the overall tone for LMO:

I think it's really important to have an Elder there at the Piihitikway meetings because it's their initial contact with us. I've been in meetings where they started off really heavy and the kiddos were emotional and Elder Lynda was there. And this one youth, she was crying really heavily because she really just needed someone to talk to and Lynda just held her, and it was the most organic, comforting thing. So, I think Elders really play a huge role in welcoming everybody here. – Ashley Smith*

As Ashley* explained, the Elders provide a form of support that would not be possible in their absence.

During the Piihitikway, staff also speak with the family about the Michif Practice Model.

Reshie Moss shared what this conversation can involve:

We explain that the system is broken, and this is our response: working along with you and hearing your voice... the Metis way is about working together, so what can we do together to make a difference for your child? The Piihitikway meeting sets a beautiful tone. – Reshie Moss

Elder Denise McCuaig explained that while the practice of the Piihitikway makes perfect sense within the context of Métis culture and community, it is a unique way of practicing social work within the larger context of child welfare:

You cannot go down the street to mainstream child welfare agencies, walk in the door and have tea and cookies, and an opportunity to meet a whole bunch of staff, and then be given choice about how you're wanting to interact. That is a very Métis way. – Denise McCuaig

In addition to the ways in which the Piihitikway contributes to cultural resurgence for Métis families, it is also a fundamental practice for building relationships. Relationships contribute to the foundation for effective prevention and child safety services; in this way, Colleen Lucier shared why the Piihitikway is an important aspect of the Michif Practice Model:

it's such an important step of our practice that doesn't get missed, because that's when, ideally, you're starting to build that relationship to show that we understand that child welfare is a scary place. It's a scary thing to be part of. We understand that you're not going to trust us... we understand, and we share our commitment to them. We really hope that you're going to feel comfortable with us by the way that we talk to you, the way we treat you... And through that first welcoming, usually my experience is that it always ends well and then when we want to invite them back to start talking about some of the things that we're worried about and that they might be worried about, they're just more comfortable to do that. – Colleen Lucier

In building trusting relationships, staff, and families—together—are able to create a space for having more difficult conversations related to child safety as the support work progresses.

Assessment and Analysis

The Michif Practice Model incorporates a balanced assessment and analysis that looks at the concerns for a family, as well as the strengths and safety measures that already exist. The model incorporates the shared understanding that removing children and youth from their

families creates trauma and should be a last resort. Elder Larry Ahdemar explained this view, and contextualized the meaning of safety:

The last thing we want to do is remove children, the last thing, and it seems that many people [in other places] are more eager to do that earlier on than we are. But we've seen the results of that. You talk to anybody who's been in foster care and going into stranger foster care is really not safe. There's an inherent danger in that too, historically... And many people you talk to, just in our community, that have had the foster experience, it's not been helpful for their life. So, you think of some of the chaos and maybe alcoholism or whatever that's in a family and poverty. Well, you can help those things and keep the children there, and to me, that's way safer than removing them into a care system that can scar them for life. And it's not to say that those hard situations and chaos in the home can't be scarring, but you can work on that and repair that and then down the road, years down the road, in my own experience people have been happier. – Larry Ahdemar

In speaking about safety, Elder Larry explained that LMO aims to wholistically support families to create safety, and by working together they have been able to overcome challenges. Staff carry a shared sentiment around promoting child safety through supporting families. In discussing the dangers of removing Métis children from their homes, Tia Stanley noted that “we no longer need to know if that's true or not. We know. We see the numbers. We see the outcomes... it's not safe for them to be removed.” Knowing this, staff do everything they can to support parents. Tia goes on to explain what these supports can include, noting, “sometimes all the parents need is just like a leg up, a respite weekend once a month. Maybe they just need a little bit of extra money to make rent that month, so that they're not stressed.”

Several staff spoke about the hard work that staff and families undertake to ensure that children are safe at home; staff facilitate the process while families are tasked with the implementing measures, as Sam Miller* shared:

We will reduce the barriers and help them through it, but in reality, they're the ones doing all the work to ensure their children's safety and wellness... we take a fine-toothed comb and really comb through every single possibility, and also providing our family with patience to have the opportunity to be able to parent safely as well. – Sam Miller*

This belief in the ability of parents and families to centre their children's safety and wellness was echoed throughout several interviews. Among them, Janet Dickons*—a member of the Michif ECD team—explained how traditional teachings direct their involvement with families, noting that staff work from a place of knowing that traditionally Métis families kept their children safe. Staff work to give power back to families and support them to regain their positions of facilitating plans to ensure that families are safe.

In speaking about the importance of conducting a balanced assessment, both staff and Elders indicated that there are times when children are not safe in their homes. As described later, LMO staff also work to bring family together through working within Wahkotowin to ensure that these children retain their family, culture, and community connections. Overall, Elder Larry noted that “the children must be safe and that's our bottom line, but we're challenging what is safe and what's unsafe, and we err on the side of keeping the family intact.” The Elders spoke about the impacts of being disconnected from family and community and indicated that cultural connections contribute to the safety and wellness of Métis children and youth.

Visiting

Visiting was described as a core aspect of relational practice, upheld within the Michif Practice Model. Visiting can occur at LMO, with coffee and cakes, or during visits in family homes and out in the community. Visiting is also part of the staff culture at LMO, as Louise Anderson* explained, “we sit at the table with everyone, and we eat together, and we laugh together, and we share... I don't see any other agencies where they would do that.” Visiting is embedded within the staff and Elders' practice as well as their ways of being in relationship with one another. Elder Lea Becker explained that visiting is a form of mentorship, which she uses in her support work with youth:

I like to build relationships. That's a part of my working life too is that you don't go anywhere until you get a relationship going and so my first things are building a relationship, whether it's by having tea or visiting or texting or any which way the young people like it. So, I come down or come up to their level, whatever's comfortable. – Lea Becker

Métis people used, and continue to use, visiting as a way of being in relationship, and of supporting each other in Métis communities. Elements of traditional visiting practices are carried forward by staff as helpers in their work today. In her support role with community caregivers, Trisha Cruickshank notes that she learned from Métis stories that you should always bring a gift to offer. Colleen Lucier explained the teachings behind offering gifts: “that’s a value that I heard our Elders speak of, that they never went to someone’s home empty-handed. There was always bread and jam. So that’s a way that we show up.” As a result, it is a common practice for staff to bring gifts, like tea and cookies, with them during visits.

Voice of the Child

Staff and Elders shared their passion for supporting Métis children, youth, and families, often sharing that the Michif Practice Model reflects Métis practices of placing children at the centre of the community—the figurative circle of care. Several Elders emphasized that LMO staff share a common passion for supporting Métis children; among them, Elder Lynda Tilley stated, “We’re here for who we work for, with our children, with our families, our grandparents, or, you know, it’s just everybody, it’s the whole family that needs help, and so, we’re here for that.” Through centring Métis family, community, and cultural connections, staff also detailed the ways in which the Michif Practice Model aims to support the wholistic wellbeing of children, and their families.

While staff were clear that the Michif Practice Model honours the voice of families, there was less evidence that the voice of the child is directly embedded into the work. Some staff, like

Reagan Laurent*, acknowledge that this may be a current limitation of the Michif Practice Model—particularly in its implementation in Child Safety work:

Sometimes I feel like the voice of the child isn't interbedded into the safety work that we do, that we focus on the parents and support, that we sometimes miss the kids, I find. That can be a challenge. But to be honest, that's really the only challenge I ever think, is our files that are child safety, and the miscommunication and the not understanding of getting stuck, basically in the complicating factors and the worries. And it's easy to do that when you're working with kids because you see all the hurt and the stuff that is happening, right? You also don't want them to leave their family, but you want more support, but how does the family get support if they aren't willing to come to the table? So, I would say that's the hugest challenge. – Reagan Laurent*

While some work can be done to ensure that there are measures for fulsomely incorporating each child's voice into planning in an age-appropriate way, it was also clear that the importance of the child's voice was front of mind for many staff. Sam Miller*, for example, shared her understanding of family preservation from a 'child's best interest' perspective:

we know if we were able to ask the kids what they truly want, their best wishes is for mom and dad not to do that thing anymore, but they still want to stay with them. So, if we really are including the voices of the children in our plan, that has to be part of the equation at all times. – Sam Miller*

Wahkotowin

Wahkotowin is an important practice embedded within the Michif Practice Model, as well as a guiding principle for LMO as a whole. In understanding Wahkotowin within Métis communities, Lexa Smerdal explained that “Métis families never parented on their own. They were never without family or community.” This sense of collectivity is being brought forward, once again, through the work of LMO. Naturally, Wahkotowin was explained as a fundamental practice that directs staff in how to take care of Métis families based on traditional practices.

While not speaking about Wahkotowin directly, Jennifer Friesen shared the importance of community connection as a part of healing:

I believe that people don't get well in isolation. People get well in community. People get

well in relationship and connection. And so, I think in western society for the most part, a meth addict for example, a mom said, “Oh don’t talk to me, figure your life out,” but people don’t get well in isolation. People get sick in isolation. People get well with connection. If I treat my families that way, they’re not going to get well. If I treat people with connection and bonding and belonging and purpose and community, then people are going to feel that. – Jennifer Friesen

Staff and Elders hold an intimate understanding of the ways in which colonialism has damaged Wahkotowin for many Métis people. In addition to explaining how colonialism has impacted Métis families, staff embark on a process of rebuilding Wahkotowin for Métis families. Part of this work involves inviting families to come to LMO, to gather, and to remember what it means to be a family and a community. Lexa Smerdal shared that this process helps families to create relationships and become comfortable asking for help:

we get so used to isolating ourselves when things go wrong, it’s really being able to empower them to be able to lean into their Wahkotowin, to know that it’s okay to make mistakes and to be able to ask for help—and that’s actually a sign of success, where I think our families have often been told that that’s a sign of safety risk. – Lexa Smerdal

Staff identified that they play important support roles for the Métis children, youth, and families that they serve. They recognize that a significant aspect of Wahkotowin is how Métis people hold each other accountable, with kindness as well as a firm sense of responsibility. Colleen Lucier shared her understanding of accountability embedded within Wahkotowin, and how these values are brought to life within the work at LMO:

We cared deeply about the wellbeing of our children and families. We showed kindness and generosity, but still held one another accountable. We had rules, but they were done for the wellbeing of our people, so everything was done to support the children and families, and we worked together as a community... we actually do really care about you, we’re going to hold you accountable the way your auntie would, or a grandparent would, not because we are trying to judge you or hurt you, or make you feel little or unimportant, or that you’re a bad parent. We’re going to hold you accountable because we do want the best for you and your family. We need you to be a strong family to help rebuild our Nation... It’s constantly reminding families and youth of who they are and why it’s important that they are strong, that they belong because they belong. It’s part of who they are, and they do belong to a community, that traditionally we all held one another accountable. – Colleen Lucier

Other staff shared this sentiment, including Isla Martin* who acknowledged that LMO staff are well positioned to hold families accountable, in the context of Métis culture and values. She explained, “if a teacher or a principal tried to tell a parent something about their child, they might not be receptive, whereas here, their family support worker will probably say the same thing, but they’ll do it in an auntie kind of way, and it’ll reach them and hold them accountable.” In fact, several social workers explained that they are often called “auntie” within their work with Métis children, youth, and families. As one example, Louise Anderson* shared, “we’re their aunties, we’re their kookums, and you can just see how comfortable they are with anybody here... they think of us as family.” Similarly, Sam Miller* also spoke about assuming the “strong auntie” role when offering advice to the mothers that she works with in her prevention support role. Elders often shared that both staff and children use relational terms, like Kookum, when referring to Elders at LMO; these examples demonstrate how everyone is connected and has a sense of belonging at LMO.

In addition to their own support roles, staff emphasized that Wahkotowin relies on the traditional roles of helpers in families and communities. In recognizing the meaning and traditional functioning of Wahkotowin, staff aim to support families in (re)building their own networks of natural supports. Families are asked to identify support people in their lives, as well as to name a ‘captain’ to lead their planning throughout the Michif Practice Model. Pearl Madore shared that this process of “families planning for themselves” uniquely contributes to empowerment and responsibility.

As a critical part of strengthening Wahkotowin, staff are dedicated to their work in family finding. Pearl Madore, who has a passion for connecting Métis children and youth with their families, explained aspects of her process:

Initially, I just gather family. I search and I try to find all the family members to find out if the child could stay with family, and I bring families together, sometimes both sides of the family, because they haven't seen each other for years, and we create a circle—a secure safe circle. I talk with everyone individually to make sure that we have the goal of the child in mind, you know, that it's for the child and not for anything else. Basically, what's in the best interest of that child, and to find permanency within the family, and if not permanency, how can the family plan for the children and be part of their lives and to maintain their contact and have roots with their family.... We have the freedom to practice the way we want to practice in the sense of bringing family together. Whether or not mom is addicted, or dad is addicted, the children still have the right to know who their family is. To create a safe space and a place of belonging is the most important thing because that's their family. We all have skeletons in our closet, you know, and to build a community of safety, I know even when I was growing up, I knew what neighbour's house I could go to for help, or not allowed to that neighbour's house, you know. You build that sort of community so that kids know who's who, because we don't have that today and that's the way it was. Neighbours took care of neighbours' kids. You knew where everyone was. – Pearl Madore

With her words, Pearl emphasizes the importance of family and community connections. While important across the lifespan, strengthening natural connections can become more challenging for older youth—particularly, as Ashley Smith* explained, among youth who have had longer-term involvement with child welfare, and for families who have survived intergenerational trauma. Rebuilding Wahkotowin undoubtedly aligns with traditional prevention practices for supporting Métis children and families.

Wraparound Supports

The topic of wraparound, wholistic supports came up organically as a theme throughout the discussion of strengths at LMO. When speaking to the overall strengths of LMO's approach, some family members highlighted that it is helpful to have an array of different child and family supports under one roof. They noted that the staff help to connect them to different programs based on the needs of each family. From a staff perspective, Louise Anderson* spoke about the unconditional love that is provided to families throughout wholistic supports, as she said, “we actually do wrap around and support the families and walk beside them. We don't walk behind

them with a big stick.” As a result, she notes that families know they can always come “home” and access services anytime they need them.

The value of wraparound supports includes having a full range of support services available under one roof. Many staff described the provision of wholistic support services—from prenatal, to early years, to youth services—as a key element of prevention-based child welfare. Reshie Moss shared that LMO is continuously looking to fill important gaps in their services across the life-course:

The services we have here are beautiful. It starts with prenatal and then the pathways of Early Years, and Child and Youth Mental Health. Now, Child and Youth Mental Health goes up to age 27, and this was changed just a couple of years ago. We are adding where we see the gaps. We are doing reconcile-action through a wholistic approach. – Reshie Moss

Elder Lea Becker shared a similar position, as she shared that LMO has purposefully “brought in all levels of helping hands,” including social workers, infant development workers, and Elders who work with all ages. For Elder Lea, this model is important and helps to surround Métis families with emotional support.

Lexa Smerdal explained that this model of service delivery alleviates emotional burden for Métis families—when they access supports through LMO, they don’t have to repeatedly tell their story or explain their trauma. Additionally, wraparound services alleviate geographic barriers to services:

I think again just makes it a lot easier for families to want to access services. They don’t have to go from like one building to get on a bus to go downtown to push their baby in a stroller through the snow, to go to another, to tell the same thing, to get told to go try this place, maybe they can help. We’ve got it all right here... it’s a team, collaborative approach. It’s wholistic, it’s cultural, and it’s rooted in Métis healing, and so I think that just creates a better outcome for all of our families. Literally, they’re in three buildings on one strip, and they know every single person here. – Lexa Smerdal

In addition to the physical accessibility of having services co-located under one organization's leadership, Lexa is clear in sharing that the team approach also creates stronger relationships with children and families who work with multiple programs. Pearl Madore shared that the wraparound approach to service provision is helpful from a staff perspective—creating opportunities for teamwork and collaborative planning:

I have a little guy right now who's got Early Childhood Development, the after-school program, a consultant, and the school and, you know, so everyone's involved in the planning. It's not isolated, I can say, and I think that is wonderful because sometimes it's really hard to do everything yourself. It's definitely really hard, whereas, you know, we can delegate things to other people and then come together and talk about what our next steps are in supporting that child, and what they need, so I think that's the beauty of having everything under one roof. It makes sense. – Pearl Madore

Pearl's perspective demonstrates the power of wraparound supports internal to LMO, as well as strong partnerships with external organizations. Similarly, from his perspective working with Youth Services at Kikékyelc, Jay Roque shared how a diverse support team can collaboratively work to meet the needs of each youth:

The youth—the people on our case load—generally don't just have one person helping them or supporting them. There's a whole wraparound support system. There are Elders involved... there's a social worker, there's Youth Support Workers—like me, people in the community, their friends that we try to help bring in maybe a little bit, too. And being able to lean on and brainstorm the best ideas to support a youth to progress is probably one of the best things that I believe we have at LMO. – Jay Roque

Jay went on to share that teams are encouraged to work together as a community to support the needs of each of the youth that they work with. Similarly, Isla Martin* described LMO's wraparound approach as “a blanket of service.” She spoke about the family meetings as a perfect example of wholistic supports, noting that the meetings involve “the social worker, the family support worker, possibly an early years worker, with an Elder, and then the family and then the family's natural supports... I don't know that I really have witnessed that [elsewhere].” These

examples highlight the uniqueness of LMO's Michif Practice Model and overall approach.⁴³ The process of bringing together a team with the family and their natural supports aligns with teachings of Wahkotowin; this practices provides a clear illustration of how culture contributes to safety.

Honouring

Staff and Elders often described the ways that they work to honour children, youth, and families. Families, too, shared their experiences with being honoured at LMO. Staff commonly explained that the practice of honouring significant events for Métis children, youth, and families is a way of following Métis practices and acknowledging steps toward Métis wellness. As an example of lifting up Métis youth and honouring their achievements, Elder Lea Becker spoke about celebrating Métis youth when they graduate from high school:

Some youth find it easy to go through schoolings and others not so much. However, they're all so proud, so very proud when they complete it. Before they go out into the world, LMO celebrates them and their successes. For example, through a gathering, food, celebration of sashing, and a card and sometimes a gift. And it's really, really in front of their peers and family—holding that individual up and celebrating their success. This is Métis culture, and it is beautiful... it doesn't matter if you're the top mark or not. You are who matters. You made it through. You were successful. And you are honoured. – Lea Becker

As Elder Lea mentions, sashing ceremonies are conducted as a way of celebrating success. ECD staff, like Reagan Laurent*, shared that sashing the children at the end of a program is a way that the staff show how proud they are. Parents and grandparents echoed the value of this practice through sharing their own experiences of witnessing their children and grandchildren being honoured at LMO. Jocelyn Hunt shared how honouring her grandson made him feel “so

⁴³ The difference in practice between LMO and MCFD becomes particularly evident at points of file transfer. During these interactions, LMO staff are often dismayed by the practice issues that they witness. Staff particularly highlighted issues around a lack of prevention and financial supports offered to families.

important.” She went on to share the value of this traditional practice, noting that “every little kid needs to have that [feeling].” In the same way, Nancy Bernard* shared that honouring all of her children and welcoming them into the Métis community helped to promote their sense of belonging:

My son got his first sash at like four months old, and then my daughter was only like maybe two and a half months old, and their Breakfast Program... we've done that a couple of times. They've done a couple of dinners, and then there was a graduation thing they did for the grads that they had under their files and stuff. I got to take part in that... it was very special to be able to see [my oldest son] in his own culture, being honoured as a Métis child. And then my daughter as well, even though she's not Métis, you know, they just recognized her, right? And it just made me feel really cool inside because I never really got an experience like that as a child and to be accepted into a whole other culture that you're not actually a part of, but they love you like you are, is a pretty amazing feeling. – Nancy Bernard*

This spirit of inclusion, which is clearly promoted throughout LMO, was often described as a significant strength in promoting the wellbeing of children and families. Similarly, Catlin Durand* spoke about her work in bringing a shawl ceremony to LMO as a way of honouring mothers. This practice was later expanded to honour fathers, as well. Additionally, Trisha Cruickshank spoke about the importance of honouring kinship caregivers as well as community caregivers:

It's the desire to want to sash, like at an honouring. Wanting to be able to provide a gift of appreciation, but really just a genuine honouring of what caregivers do, and—maybe MCFD does this now—like our honouring is of our families that have cared for the children, you know, under an extended family program, or permanently under 54.01. It's not just honouring our community caregivers.... I think of another situation where grandma and grandpa got the transfer of guardianship to them, but we were able to again, we honoured the family, and the child's mom, even she struggled with her mom and stepdad having her son, they were able to all come together and we sashed the entire family. You know, I think those celebrations and those honourings are so important. And in my role, I get to be a part of a lot of that. – Trisha Cruickshank

Several kinship caregivers shared their own experience of being honoured at LMO. Among them, Greg Dawson spoke about how meaningful it was to be welcomed into the Métis culture

and community, as a grandfather and kinship caregiver for his Métis grandson. As well, Patti Lefrancois spoke about how being sashed made her feel honoured and included: “last year they had a luncheon honouring caregivers and I was gifted a sash, and it was really special... When the Elder adorned me with the sash, she said, ‘Wear this with pride.’” She later shared that the way that LMO staff recognized her helped to further build up her sense of belonging with the organization, and within the Métis community as a grandparent of a Métis child. Another kinship caregiver shared her own emotional response to being honoured at a Mother’s Tea:

they put me on stage, and they gave me a shawl and told me I was doing good, and I cried. It feels like family as to how they treat you. They invited you to things and treat you well, like you’re important and you’ve got worth, you know? – Sherry La Chance

Sherry went on to share that this spirit of celebration is an important aspect of the values shared at LMO as a whole, as it helps to foster a sense of belonging and inclusion:

I think they acted a bit more like family than just an institution, especially when they do the ceremonies for like giving you a blanket, and they’re having everybody who wants to be included, included in that, and being part of something, and then taking pictures, and it really... you don’t see that in MCFD. You don’t see where there’s any celebration for things that are going well and helping to support families working together. – Sherry La Chance

Across these stories, the impact of honouring family members in all of their roles clearly contributes to their sense of self-worth and identity, as well as a collective feeling of inclusion and belonging.

Characteristics of the Michif Practice Model

This section shares the themes that arose across staff interviews related to the qualities, characteristics and values that were associated with the Michif Practice Model. Staff spoke about the value in practicing with creativity, compassion, and transparency. Stories from staff also illustrate their dedication to transforming Métis child welfare, and the value in using strengths-

based approaches to supporting children and families. Lastly, the Michif Practice Model was described as a dynamic framework that is adaptive to emerging wise practice.

Creativity

Creativity arose as a prominent theme across interviews with staff. The Michif Practice Model creates space for finding creative ways to support Métis children, youth, and families.

Colleen Lucier explained:

I really try to give staff permission to never say “no” if something comes up... Take the request, consult with your team leader, then come to me with what the need is and how we can make it work, because sometimes we put up barriers that can derail someone’s journey to wellness, and there’s lots we can do in a creative way, but we don’t know until the ideas are presented... We will do our best to meet a need, and if we absolutely can’t, then we can say, “Look, we’ve tried absolutely everything,” and that will still mean something to the family or youth. But I really try hard to give our staff lots of opportunities to think outside the box, justify your requests. They’ve got to be well planned out ... it’s got to be attached to your critical thinking. – Colleen Lucier

Many staff agreed that collaboration and creativity are central strengths at LMO. Philip Shupe shared that creativity has come together with the spirit of continuous improvement as he reflected, “Ever since I’ve been involved with this agency... they are always brainstorming and thinking up new ideas and better ways to do things.” Creativity is central to practicing prevention-based social work. Cary Davis* shared the value of “thinking outside the box” when planning with families to keep children safe:

I remember once, a family was really struggling so it wasn’t: “let’s remove the children and put them over here.” It was: “let’s hire people to go into the house and work with the family in the house, 12 hours a day or 24 hours a day if it’s needed.” I mean, what a blessing for those kids to be able to remain at home and just have people come in and help, as opposed to putting them into stranger care or something. The damage that we’re doing to the youth, or to the children... I work directly with those youth that have had that, and the trauma that it’s created, and the struggles that they face now... it’s really sad. It really is. So... we’re going to do everything we can to be the least intrusive that we can, and I think that’s how we transform child welfare for our people, and I don’t think it’s just a model for the Métis community, it’s the model for other Indigenous organizations, and it should be the model for MCFD as well. – Cary Davis*

Similarly, Jennifer Friesen explained that staff at LMO have the opportunity to direct resources in order to make prevention-based decisions:

I think we are very gracious and generous with money... I mean if they're going to lose their house because they don't have rent, we have a way to do that. Or it's a medical bill. That flexibility, I think, everyday makes a difference for families because we're no longer putting it where we think it needs to go. – Jennifer Friesen

This practice of supporting families and using the least intrusive measures, was described as an effective way of centring child safety and their wholistic wellness.

In reflecting about the growth of LMO over the course of her career, Pearl Madore shared how much their practice has strengthened as a result of having independence as a delegated agency. She shared that, “before delegation, and our practice now is totally different. We have the freedom to practice the way we want to practice in the sense of bringing family together.” With this independence comes the responsibility and the opportunity to revitalize social work practice in a Métis way. Sam Miller* explained that creativity is part of being Métis: “we were raised and created in really tough times, and we always had to be really creative with our problem solving for our collective history.” Sam* explained that LMO honours this resilience in carrying forward with a spirit of Métis creativity and collaboration. Indeed, many staff shared a similar sentiment in terms of the strength of LMO’s approach of creating space for creative problem solving. While they admit that their approach is not perfect—or as Sam* said, “I’m not saying the wheel is always oiled completely”—the overall practice of working together and being innovative has led to some important outcomes. These outcomes are described later in this chapter.

Compassion

Compassion was described as a distinguishing quality of the Michif Practice Model. Many staff spoke about how their practice is non-judgmental and heartfelt, as well as patient and

understanding. Sam Miller* shared that these qualities create a sense of safety for families, where they know that “they can come as they are and that we’ll still wrap around them no matter what.” Sam* went on to explain that helping people with compassion and kindness does not mean that you always agree with an individual’s actions, but that you hold people accountable with love, which is a fundamental practice at LMO. Elder Lynda Tilley described the staff as “caring, beautiful people.” She went on to share that compassion is central to the agency’s overall success:

I think that our values [at LMO] are very strong and the reason they’re strong is because we love, we care, and we’re sincere, because we’re here for a reason, we’re not here for us, we’re here for our people. – Lynda Tilley

Several Elders explained that the values held at LMO—and in particular, the love for Métis families—is a reason for the agency’s success. Love, kindness, and compassion were also articulated as values centered within Métis traditional childrearing approaches. The bridge between traditional practice and decolonizing social work was strongly articulated by many staff. Among them, Reshie Moss shared that a compassionate approach to social work mirrors a traditional approach to helping that was customary within Métis families and communities:

I feel like it really aligns with how things were once upon a time for Métis people. It really aligns from that first phone call—being a kind and compassionate person and not using our power and authority in a way that is controlling. The “do as I say” kind of attitude. So, this practice helps us to remember what we should be doing and why. Because we are reviving and bringing back what they deserve. If they have harmed their children, it is about understanding the brokenness underneath and how do we help and repair that? We have the richness of the research that exists, so our practice model makes sense. Our practice allows for us to understand the parents as well as the child. It allows for us to share our practice and role, with compassion and kindness. The practice guides us to create trust and relationship so we can then talk about the hard stuff. It makes it easier to navigate through that in a genuine way. – Reshie Moss

Elder Lynda Tilley agreed, sharing that calmness is a part of Métis childrearing, as well as an important part of supporting other families. However, being loving, kind, and calm is not necessarily part of social work practice within non-Métis child and family agencies.

Reflecting on her experience practicing social work across sectors, Pearl Madore explained how working from the heart requires a shift away from the ‘toughness’ that many social workers were raised to practice with:

[Our] practice within itself is non-judgmental, and it’s sincere and it’s with care and that’s what I love about it. You can practice with your heart. I used to think I had to be really tough to be in this business, because there’s some tough people out there, but it’s the opposite. The more you work with your heart, and the more you show compassion and care for others, and understand where they’re coming from, you can relate in a sense.
– Pearl Madore

The staff are given permission to show families that they care—this is an intention choice, and it represents a shift in policy and practice away from mainstream approaches rooted in western epistemologies. Philip Shupe shared that in his practice, compassion is particularly important as many of the fathers of that he works with never experienced compassion in their lives.

Elders spoke about the fear that some families carry with respect to the child welfare system, referencing both historical and current harms caused. Fear and apprehension are still pervasive among Métis families who are interacting with the child welfare system. Reflecting on his past experience with MCFD, Robert Harris* shared that feeling safe at LMO has involved overcoming a sense of apprehension: “with my experiences with the other social worker offices in town, I always had a wall up and I was always kind of cautious.” Broadly, Ashley Smith* explained that this sense of fear is common across families because “even if they’re not coming in for a child safety concern, it’s still an affiliated child safety agency—so I think that can be scary if you don’t know what LMO is about.” Knowing this, LMO is actively working to remove the fear from the child welfare system.

Aligning with compassionate practice, the Michif Practice Model was consistently described as a strengths-based approach to child welfare. For LMO staff, taking a strengths-based approach involves working to empower families to recognize their own gifts and strengths:

we set them up for success and it doesn't become about us and what we think is best for them. And I think it's really important to point out those successes to them and help them to point them out for themselves, and to be proud of how far they've come. – Lexa Smerdal

Similarly, Catlin Durand* indicated that the supports that are provided to families help them to strengthen their voices and to recognize their own strengths, as well as the areas that they would like to improve. From his perspective as a father, Bill Sampson* noted that the best way to support children is to “to recognize their strengths and abilities and build to that—build to their strengths.” In sharing this, Bill* spoke about the ways that LMO can continue support children by providing resources to help children to further develop their skills and passions.

Transparency

Staff spoke about being transparent in their social work practice, which helps to strengthen trust and relationships with the families that they work with. Staff also shared that through being transparent, families know that their social workers will be forthcoming with any concerns that they have. In this respect, Jennifer Friesen shared, “I’m not holding any cards to my chest. That’s not how this work is supposed to be. And I’m going to treat them with dignity no matter what.” Jennifer also shared that she alleviates fears within families by fully explaining the steps of the Michif Practice Model, and the reason for using each of the steps: “I explain the purpose to them and then I think they have a lot more information and control, where it’s not just like a totally blind road.” Tia Stanley shared similar sentiments, as she explained that social workers have frank conversations with families about their concerns and work collaboratively with families in order to prevent the removal of children:

We are, as an agency, very upfront with frontloading [families] and saying look, these are the concerns. This is the worst-case scenario. Help us to prevent that from happening. And then empowering them and asking like what do you need to keep these kids at home? – Tia Stanley

Here, Tia shares how transparency can contribute to prevention-based social work practice.

Several family members spoke highly about the extent to which staff at LMO are kind and honest. One mother, Nancy Bernard* shared that the staff are always “real”—this approach has helped her to come forward with her own needs, so that staff know how to best support her. While some family members highlighted that they would like to see more transparency from LMO staff, one parent indicated that they were already pleased with the improvements that they have seen in this area.

Staff also spoke about the importance of transparency in their documentation. As Pearl Madore shared, each file includes “whether or not there has been family connections made, whether or not an Elder was involved, whether or not there has been planning meetings,” among other indicators of safety. She went on to state that the scaling questions developed at LMO as part of the Michif Practice Model have been helpful in holding staff accountable to their practice. As a whole, quality assurance was described as a strength at LMO. Colleen Lucier described how creativity and critical analysis come together, as they are woven into the decision-making processes at LMO. Coupled with detailed documentation related to these processes, there is a clear path describing rationale for every decision made. As Colleen shared, critical analysis aligns with traditional practice: “I always say who best can keep Métis children safe other than Métis people, but we have to do it in a good way. We have to do it in a critical, thought-out way—just as their ancestors did.”

Several staff spoke about being genuine in their helping roles. In their interviews, it was clear that authenticity and transparency are interconnected—these qualities strengthen their

practice within the Michif Practice Model. In particular, Jennifer Friesen shared how her authenticity has contributed to strong relationships with the families that she works with:

working in this field and being genuine is not always looked well upon, I've learned, and people know when I'm genuinely worried or proud or excited about something. People can pick up on that right away, and so for me to come on all staunch into probably the worst time in this family's life, how does that help? And we're removing the secrecy, and I think people feel really relieved not to have to hide things. – Jennifer Friesen

Staff noted that when they take the mystery out of their practice, they are better able to bring families on board with collaborative action for creating safety for Métis children and youth.

Transparent work helps to give power and control back to families, realigning with traditional practices around responsibility and accountability.

Dedication

The Michif Practice Model both represents and acts as an opportunity for transforming Métis child welfare. From her leadership perspective, Colleen Lucier shared that LMO has the ability to make decisions quickly that benefit Métis children, youth, and families. Often, these decisions centre the value of prevention. Family members often indicated that they have experienced child welfare practice in a different way through LMO. When I asked about the most valuable strengths of the agency, Bill Sampson* noted that since they received delegation, LMO has been transforming the way that they practice Child Safety; he noted that he has been encouraged by the ways in which they are supporting families—including his own—to work toward reunification. Bill also spoke about LMO's efforts for prevention: “a positive benefit of the changeover is that now they look for ways that they can assist before it gets to the point where they have to reach out and remove the children from the home.”

Staff shared that their practice is anti-oppressive; among them, Lexa Smerdal described the Michif Practice Model as modality for “giving power back to the people.” This

transformational practice has required a leadership team of passionate, visionary, and dedicated individuals, which have been developed over time. With a strong leadership team in place, each team will work towards contributing to the shared accountability of continuing to hold up the Michif Practice Model.

Given that the Michif Practice Model is a different approach to social work, staff noted that requires significant learning and practice in order to do it right. Staff recognize both the dedication for intentionally maintaining Métis ways of knowing as the foundation for the practice model, even during times when it would have been easier to maintain the status quo. Additionally, the practice model requires dedication from staff during their learning process:

It takes time and work and dedication, and I'll be the first to say, if you're not following the practice model then you don't belong at LMO or Kikékyelc. Because everyone feel that it is for the safety for the children, the families, and the youth. And we're here to share what we can share and be part of their family. – Melanie Allard

As the practice model represents a departure from mainstream child protection work, it requires significant unlearning for staff that were trained under western pedagogies. Similarly, some families noted that while they have positive relationships with LMO staff, they have experienced frustrating interactions with some staff that are new to LMO. One of these family members indicated that when staff are new to LMO—and particularly for staff that may have been trained at MCFD—they may carry a propensity to apprehend children.⁴⁴ Understanding that there may be a significant need to unlearn previous practice approaches, Laura Brown* spoke to the importance of having patience, “especially if you’ve already had experience in this field... because you have to unlearn stuff.” During this process of unlearning and shifting to the Michif

⁴⁴ Theory and practice rooted in colonial models are not only rooted in MCFD practice, but also throughout many Social Work programs as well as the subsequent training required to become delegated as a social worker.

Practice Model, staff spoke about the importance of supporting one another and taking the transformation one step at a time.

Dynamism

The Michif Practice Model was described as a dynamic framework, one that is always evolving and shifting to address needs and encompass wise practices. This sentiment was illustrated by Trisha Cruickshank, who shared, “we’ve learned, and grown, and adjusted that practice model. It’s a continuous growth.” While staff were clear that the fundamentals have been consistent, elements have shifted and strengthened as a result of feedback from staff. From his perspective working with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth at Kikékyelc, Jay Roque shared that youth workers should strive to adapt the Michif Practice Model as needed, so that all youth can see themselves reflected in their supports:

I think it’s interesting because all the other teams at LMO, they serve just Métis, but the youth team, we serve First Nations and Inuit too. So, we have... we use our Michif practice model throughout everywhere, so here at Kikékyelc, and we have two support workers that work with youth that are in community. And so, we serve all Indigenous youth, and so we have to adapt the Michif model to being... incorporating their First Nations traditions too. I think that’s where being a youth worker, you have to be very adaptive, because you have to think, “Okay, like the majority we’re serving are Métis, but we’re also serving First Nations.” – Jay Roque

In this sense, Jay, alongside other staff, have shared that the adaptive nature of the Michif Practice Model is a significant strength.

Challenges and Support Needs

This section presents the findings related to challenges experienced in the work at LMO, as well as suggested supports that would help to alleviate these barriers. This section touches on systemic issues related to funding, intergenerational trauma, and identifying Métis children and families. This section also examines organizational challenges around communication,

documentation, and reporting. There is also a nuanced discussion around the strengths and limitations of training, availability of staff, and gaps in services.

Funding

Funding was identified as the most consistent and significant challenge that LMO, as an organization, faces. Funding is not a challenge unique to LMO, as inequities around funding tend to be systemic challenges common to many Métis child welfare agencies. However, due to the unique nature of the prevention supports offered by LMO, this section describes some of the added layers of difficulty that LMO faces with respect to sustaining their unique programming.

Métis child welfare has been persistently underfunded. For Tia Stanley, inadequate funding has been tied to a lack of recognition for Métis people; she noted, “Métis people suffer even more for that because Métis people are still fighting to be seen as a distinct people and culture.” Similarly, Cary Davis* shared:

You know, they talk about Métis people being the forgotten people, and it still feels like that sometimes... you're fighting for dollars but you don't want to take away from First Nations, and I think that sometimes there may be that perception that if Métis get a little piece, then they're losing something, and then they pit us against each other, and that's not reconciliation. That's not the way it should be. – Cary Davis*

Indeed, Colleen Lucier—who has worked in a variety of child welfare settings, including MCFD—indicated that she has never faced the level of inequity for funding child welfare services that she has experienced at LMO as a Métis agency:

funding is our biggest challenge as a Métis child and family service agency... when I came into work for a Métis agency, I felt more oppressed than I've ever felt anywhere. And how that showed up was just how MCFD contracts were awarded to us versus what mainstream agencies were receiving for the same service. There just does not seem to be equity at all and yet trying to have that conversation is very frustrating with MCFD. There's never an answer. There's never new money, yet it doesn't make sense when Indigenous children are so overrepresented in care, and all the different poor outcomes, that we are the least funded. It's just really frustrating. – Colleen Lucier

Lexa Smerdal shared that precarious funding creates injustices, as program-related funding has to be shifted around to address needs that arise:

I think there's more than enough money to go around and the fact that Métis service agencies are not being given an opportunity to provide for their families is just not right... and it leaves us to have to pull from other things and prioritize the needs of our families when we shouldn't have to prioritize certain groups. We should be able to give equitable care and sometimes, without proper funding, we're not even able to do that. – Lexa Smerdal

Cheyenne Gentles explained how there is a lack of core funding for prevention-based services, noting, “We never have enough funding for support services. Only child protective services are funded through the government and everything else is grant-based.” Several staff spoke about the lack of core funding for the agency’s programming. As Cary Davis* noted, “The amount of money that is required to do what we do, it doesn’t come from the government. There’s a very little portion of our budget that actually comes from the government.” Staff often speculated that the need for proposal-driven funding is a unique situation. For example, Colleen Lucier explained:

I don’t think MCFD workers are writing proposals, and I don’t think other Indigenous Child and Family Agencies are writing proposals. It just is shocking to me that that’s allowed, and we’re a distinct people, recognized in the Constitution, and yet unless I write a proposal, we get zero federal dollars directed to us. I believe MNBC as a Nation gets some federal dollars, but they don’t necessarily get directed to me as a Métis service provider, whereas other agencies are getting federal dollars directly given to them to develop, design, and operate their services. And I don’t begrudge that at all because I know First Nations on-reserve need that, but our Métis people need that too. The depth of healing we have to do for our people is so deep, to the fact that people don’t even know what it means to be Métis, just shows us how much work we have to do to strengthen our families and deliver services in a way that they will receive them. – Colleen Lucier

Beyond the initial grant-writing process, LMO is further burdened by the reporting requirements for the grants received. This process is neither acceptable nor sustainable. Colleen Lucier shared some of her most significant worries when it comes to their system of grant-writing:

I feel like the funding is the biggest one because what I struggle with is when you write a lot of proposals, (a) that's a lot of work, but (b) if you're successful, you've got to get a whole program off the ground, which is a lot of work, and then there's all the reporting. And then it's figuring out how to sustain it. If I didn't have to write proposals, I think of all that other work, the layers of work that would come off my plate to allow me to really grow and develop what we're doing, but even today, I've got two reports I have to get done because there's deadlines.... So, if I was to add up all the time I personally, as an Executive Director of a Métis service provider, spend writing proposals, managing all the reporting, I mean, from a business sense, I just can't even think of what that would actually equate in dollars. And my other worry is... if I were to leave, that's a lot to expect someone else to come in and do for the amount of remuneration that is allowed. When we talk about wanting sustainability, I just don't know how sustainable this is. We're doing it and I think we've been successful, but I don't actually know if it's sustainable. We need a huge infusion of funding to make this realistic. – Colleen Lucier

Further, many positions at LMO are grant-funded, which creates issues around sustainable programming, as well as staff stability. As Cary Davis noted, this model “puts staff in precarious situations.” In addition, staff shared that it would be incredibly helpful to have additional funding to support more staff to deliver their core services.

Reflecting on her work at Kikékyelc, Melanie Allard illustrated her vision for an equitable funding model where dollars for Métis services are awarded directly to the agencies providing such services:

The federal government does not give enough money for this work. This work that they have done through LMO and Kikékyelc has all been proposal-driven. There's a little bit of support through BC Housing, CLBC, and a few other ones, but I think that the federal government—not that they have a need to pay—but the opportunity to access the dollars, rather than giving it to certain parts of the Nation, and the Nation having to hand it down, I think that the opportunity would be better for the actual service providers to step up and request what they need. Because the Nation can do other things, the Nation does not need to duplicate what the service providers are doing, and the service providers don't have to duplicate what the Nation is doing. – Melanie Allard

There are some significant systemic challenges that impact funding for prevention-based services for Métis children, youth, and families. These gaps have challenged LMO leaders to work creatively, finding grants to continue to offer important services to the Métis community.

Describing the labour required in funding and implementing social work in support of Métis

children, youth, and families, Elder Denise McCuaig simply stated, “I’m always telling everyone, they need to fund us at the same level as they do the rest of the system because we’re working twice as hard.”

As a whole, staff understand the value of the support services they deliver. Additionally, Colleen Lucier emphasized the pecuniary importance of investing in prevention services, as a cost-effective approach to child welfare:

the cost for any child to be in care, the cost for any child to age out homeless and on the street, the cost of any child to end up in jail—all those expenses are so high that it makes sense to help agencies like LMO now to prevent all that. Like I keep saying, we’re trying to prevent our children from needing... all those other services. We don’t want our people needing those services. They shouldn’t ever be in a situation where they need those services. But those are the agencies that get all the money in town and agencies like ours that are trying to prevent it from even happening are so underfunded. – Colleen Lucier

Echoing the importance of funding prevention-based supports, a father who accesses supports through LMO shared similar perspectives around the need for prevention broadly within child welfare:

instead of spending all the money in the legal process seizing children and getting them into the system, if we spent a fraction of that money on aid, like sending in home workers. Sometimes life at home can be overwhelming. I mean the dishes pile up, the laundry piles up, the kids are screaming, the vacuuming needs to be done, the bills need paying, things are going crazy at home. The fridge is empty, the cat box needs cleaning, the lawn needs to be mowed. Sometimes life can be overwhelming and if the Ministry spent a fraction of the money, they were spending on post seizing children, helping families is what they need to keep it together, you know, before things explode, you know what I mean? A food hamper can go a long way to relieving stress in a household. Things like transportation to important appointments and things like that, that now this is the way that they’re reaching out to help families, and I know that resources are limited, and they have to be careful how they’re spent currently, but as we spend less and less in the courts and on the battlefield, and more and more on the healing and the helping.... it’s a small thing, but people look past it because they can’t see the forest for the trees when it’s right in front of them, but the homecare thing, you have a worker in that house once or twice a week, a couple of afternoons a week, you know, doing whatever needs to be done. Let me just put it out there. Whatever needs to be done. Whatever stress needs to be relieved. And also, they’ve got eyes on, in-house, on the children and their environment, and they’re there to make suggestions. – Bill Sampson*

In this sense, prevention-based programming is not only an effective and trauma-informed approach to supporting Métis children, youth, and families—it also offers a socially responsive and economic approach to funding the child welfare system.

The Impacts of Colonialism for Métis Children, Youth, and Families

The children, youth, and families served by LMO were described as strong, resilient, and vivacious. Staff were mindful of the trauma that many of their children, youth, and families have experienced—both as a result of direct experiences, as well as through the manifestation of colonial violence and intergenerational harm. Rooted in her perspective as a helper who supports children and youth’s mental wellness, Melissa Chalmers, shared her reflections on trauma:

the significant trauma that some of our children and youth have experienced, especially when working in mental health, can seem—and often is—lifelong. It is important that we are mindful of how we are helping support them in their healing to ensure they feel confident enough to continue their journey without feeling it necessary to bring us with them. This can sometimes be challenging especially when they have a limited Wahkotowin, which is why building, strengthening, and maintaining Wahkotowin through the entire healing process is a mandatory commitment from each of the counsellors. We know that colonialism, the impact of residential school system and intergenerational trauma plays a significant role into why families are so disconnected. Restoring and repairing damaged or severed Wahkotowin relationships is a vital role in decolonizing practice and committing to the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action. – Melissa Chalmers

Often, families explained that their previous experiences with the Ministry added to their trauma. From her perspective, Sherry La Chance explained that LMO is helping to take control over child welfare processes that have too commonly served to further traumatize families. Sherry has experienced the services from LMO in a trauma-informed way, as she explained:

When families are met with the attitude, I've been met with from MCFD, I think it is a form of continued trauma for those it hurts. The issues involved can be so complex and when a social worker treats people poorly it just adds to the experienced trauma. It then contributes to the generational trauma that gets passed down. We all acknowledge that this is even more important in the Native community because of the trauma with residential schools plus much, much more. Taking back that control from the MCFD and

placing it into the hands of organizations like LMO is how we slowdown that continued generational trauma. Get the racist attitudes out of the governmental agencies. Have those who love and better understand and live the culture in there helping ground level. That's my thoughts. When I was treated with love and respect, I was better able to focus my energy on taking care of [my granddaughter] instead of having to deal with more trauma and hurt. – Sherry La Chance

Importantly, Sherry highlighted that through the absence of traumatizing services, she was able to focus her efforts into her role as a grandparent and a kinship caregiver.

Often, the families that are accessing supports at LMO are the most impacted by colonialism, and therefore the most disconnected from their culture and identity. Catlin Durrand* shared her reflections on the ways that colonialism intersects with child welfare involvement:

I think because we are dealing with many families—not all families, but many families—that have their own history of trauma, and they haven't been connected to their communities through, you know, the losses due to that trauma... what I found was that the majority of people didn't know about their Métis identity and then further to that, there's this whole discourse on, you know, if you don't know about your Métis roots or who your family is, and you've never belonged to your community, that you shouldn't identify as a Métis person, you know? And then there's the other discourse that says that... I think it's the more tricky one, especially for children, school age children, because they see the racism that First Nation people might experience, then it further moves them away from wanting to self-identify as Métis, and so what happens, I think, is that they're just not comfortable with connecting to the Two Rivers Métis Society, for whatever their reasons are... – Catlin Durrand*

In the same way, several staff shared that the parents that they often work with are survivors of the child welfare system. In many families, this cycle dates back several generations.

Elder Denise McCuaig reflected on her past work as a Mental Wellness Counsellor at LMO, working with youth aging out of the child welfare system. In this work, Elder Denise consistently heard stories about the impact that the system can have on disconnecting youth from their Métis identity, culture, and family.

I had one young person say to me that they were pretty new to being exposed to Métis culture or any Indigenous culture because of their child welfare experience and their foster placement experiences, and they said, "I'm not sure I deserve to be here. I'm told I'm Métis, but I feel like I'm an imposter because I have red hair and blue eyes. I'm

thinking maybe I don't belong." And, so I think about that and how painful that must be, to be in your mid-twenties and to feel like you're an imposter in your own skin because a system has kept you disconnected from your family of origin and because some very well-meaning and, hopefully, caring foster parents have not been able to help you understand or know what it is to be of the culture from which your family comes from. And, so as that Mental Health Counsellor, I saw a lot of suicide ideation and extreme addiction and victims of violence and domestic abuse, and I really, really believe that so much of that is founded in the denying of them having had the opportunity to know who they are and where they come from. And all the systems that have been at play at our history have been to dismantle, right? So, Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop, the prison system, the purchasing of scrip from Métis families, the denying of scrip to Métis families, the outlawing of Native spirituality and practice, like, all of those things have played against the Métis Nation, out of a desire to keep us disconnected from who we are and our land so that the rest of the country can have. And, so, you know, our young people in child welfare, they're a continuation of that history. – Denise McCuaig

Unfortunately, Elder Denise's reflections represent a common experience for Métis children and youth who are not afforded opportunities to connect with their culture. To strengthen wellness and ensure that children and families grow up with a strong sense of identity and connection, LMO endeavours to bring culture into everything that they do.

Identifying Métis Children, Youth, and Families

Staff indicated that they have indirectly seen improvement in the way that MCFD has been identifying Métis children, youth, and parents, based on the sharp increase in new Métis families that have been introduced to LMO. Elders spoke to the need for identifying Métis children, youth, and families more broadly, as they emphasized the importance of children and youth knowing who their family is, understanding their histories, and being exposed to their unique culture. Elder Stella Erasmus Johnson shared, "It's important that Social Services needs to start acknowledging these children, who their parents are, who they come from... they all have to know where their genealogy comes from and who they are, so they won't be mixed up." Along these lines, some staff spoke about how LMO should continue to dedicate time and resources toward building family trees—both for a child's own understanding, as well as for

MNBC citizenship requirements, where relevant. Staff acknowledged that genealogy requires a unique skillset, a curious mindset, and dedicated time. At different points in time, LMO has had positions dedicated to this work, but this requires funding for a position as well as the right person for the work.

While they are not able to currently offer genealogy support in-house, LMO has been actively connecting children and families to external supports to assist with genealogy. Several kinship caregivers spoke about how valuable the support that they have received for their grandchildren's family trees has been. Other families spoke about doing their own family research and deciding to apply for Métis citizenship. And while Métis citizenship can be incredibly meaningful to many families, LMO staff also acknowledged that many of the children, youth, and families that they work with are unable to complete the application process, given the types of family documentation required. Unfortunately, staff also shared that Métis identity politics and lateral violence can have devastating impacts for Métis people—particularly those that are working to reconnect with their culture and community. Taking a strengths-based view, Catlin Durrand* discussed how there is great opportunity to move from identification to connection. She shared that there is a need for LMO to continue, and hopefully increase, its work in helping to connect Métis families to community.

Communication

Communication arose as a nuanced theme within several interviews with family members who are accessing services at LMO. Many family members described communication with LMO staff to be accessible and responsive. In particular, kinship caregiver, Jocelyn Hunt, shared that the staff have worked with her to find the best ways of communicating with her. Understanding that she is not able to navigate the website, the staff send her information by text so that she is

informed about new programs. Similarly, kinship caregiver, Greg Dawson, praised the staff for consistently getting back to him quickly whenever he has questions. He also shared that he appreciates that staff reach out to him to encourage his participation in programs.

While family members consistently described their personal communication with staff to be effective and helpful, some also noted general areas for improving knowledge sharing more broadly. In particular, family members noted that they would like to receive program schedules with some advance notice. Some parents and kinship caregivers indicated that they have experienced challenges in coordinating their family's schedules to attend programming; for some, this resulted in missing out on exciting opportunities at LMO. In addition to providing more notice around program schedules, one parent suggested that LMO increase the visibility of pamphlets and brochures in the office—perhaps adding a bulletin board with the week's schedule.

Documentation

Staff spoke about the need to refine and streamline documentation processes to ensure that they align with the Michif Practice Model. Along with this process, teams can support each other to ensure that everyone is organized and accountable in their reporting and how they document their work across the ten steps of the practice model. As Reshie Moss explained, streamlining all processes related to documentation will help achieve wonderful results in practice audits, as well as for each staff member to be efficient with their time. Some staff explained that the Internal Case Management System (ICM) can present challenges in improving reporting and aligning documentation with the Michif Practice Model:

it's the fact that we're trying to do this work in a different way, yet I'm still dealing with the traditional beast of the ICM program we use, it's like a double duty. We're also general practice and while that's all I've ever known; it makes it difficult. – Jennifer Friesen

When asked if ICM supports the Michif Practice Model, Jennifer replied, “Well, no. It’s always going to be deficit based. And this work has always been deficit based.”

In speaking to specific documentation, several staff shared their thoughts about cultural planning and cultural safety agreements. As a whole, these forms were described as redundant and ineffective, in that they do not accurately capture all of the wholistic and culturally specific supports that are offered to the children, youth, and families working with LMO. Staff acknowledged that these documents are likely geared toward staff at MCFD, or other agencies, where a Métis specific agency is not available. For LMO, the standard forms for cultural planning do not reflect their way of practice. Colleen Lucier explained the difficulty of taking their approach that is completely driven by, and reflective of Métis culture, and distilling out indicators of cultural planning for the rigid standardized forms:

cultural plans are never going to be successful if the spirit isn’t there, if the intent isn’t there. They’re just a document to get through, an exceptions review. If we haven’t built relationships with extended family, the chartered community, siblings, nothing else matters, because at the end of the day, that’s what children need is to know who they are through their family. Know their story. Know they belong to the Métis community. That’s culture and without that, you end up with children still knowing they’re Métis but not knowing, not feeling comfortable in their skin. – Colleen Lucier

Put simply, the plans do not reflect their wholistic approach. When speaking about LMO’s approach to working with Métis families, several staff and Elders specifically noted that Métis culture does not align with “a ticky-box” approach. Elder Denise McCuaig explained:

That’s what’s different about LMO, is that our Métis culture is not a ticky-box of to do activities, it’s a way of life and that way of life permeates into the environment, from how you experience it when you walk into our physical space, from the way that you hear our Michif language, from all of our employees, whether they are Indigenous or not, from our strengths-based approach to care-planning. Those are all Michif ways of being, knowing and doing and it’s the fabric of who we are... so every time we Honour Song a young mom, we sash one of our young men, we sash our babies, we welcome them with Piihitikway, we provide mooshums and kookums in their lives, we take them out on the land for mental wellness activities—all of those things. It is giving them an opportunity

to learn who they are and to learn it not through the head but through the heart. – Denise McCuaig

Fortunately, there is opportunity to modify how culture is documented within their work. Staff spoke about the success that they have had in re-configuring how caregivers report back to LMO. In her support role with caregivers, Trisha Cruickshank explained that one of her biggest challenges was getting caregivers to write a report each month. While this challenge was not specific to LMO, as MCFD and other ICFS Agencies reported similar challenges, LMO treated this challenge as an opportunity reimagine what reporting could look like. Staff considered what was important to capture with caregiver reports, as well as where redundancies existed. They also considered what a child or youth would want to see in the future if they chose to review their own file. LMO chose to transform caregiver reports into “Seasonal Stories,” which include a compilation of photos and narratives to explain what is happening in each of the pictures. Trisha Cruickshank explained that the Seasonal Stories—completed every three months—were designed to also provide meaningful information for the child, who may request their files in the future, while also aligning with policy. The Seasonal Stories are a key example of transforming practice and documentation at LMO; Colleen Lucier reported that LMO is working through all aspects of documentation “to rewrite them in a way that reflect what we actually want to see.”

Training

Staff often spoke about the value of the training that is currently offered at LMO. Similarly, the Elders also spoke about how they truly appreciate the training that has been offered to them in order to support children, youth, and families. In particular, staff spoke about the training for Signs of Safety and the Michif Practice Model, as well as trauma-informed practice, as incredible learning opportunities. Specifically, Laura Brown* indicated that the

Michif Practice Model was intimidating when they were first hired at LMO, but the training has helped them to develop the skills and confidence to work through the 10 steps effectively:

I appreciate the ongoing, every month we're meeting as a whole team and talking about our Michif practice and learning new things about culture, because not all of the staff get to play like I do. And what a better way to learn? So, I really appreciate the time and the dollars, and the energy invested in helping us, because I firmly believe these 10 steps, if we can do them and do them well, that's why I'm here. – Laura Brown*

Staff also noted that the ongoing training has been helpful in refining their processes around documentation. Some staff highlighted a need for further training on the Michif Practice Model, which could be further tailored to the work of specific teams. They also spoke about challenges that they have experienced in trying to transfer the practice model to their work with youth at Kikékyelc:

I work mainly with the youth who live at Kikékyelc, so it's a bit harder. I would love maybe a demo on implementing this with the youth who have been living there for two years. How we can we bring this approach in, in a way, because the youth have been there for a while. This is different to them. How we can start implementing it right away, and efficiently? – Jasmit Mahal

Jasmit went on to share that staff turnover at Kikékyelc has created additional barriers to using the practice model effectively. At times, it can be hard to tell which steps were completed with youth, and staff were apprehensive to start the process over.

Partnerships

Relationship dynamics with different governments and organizations were touched on in some of the interviews with staff. As a Métis child and family service agency, it was no surprise that the relationship between LMO and the local Métis chartered community, Two Rivers Métis Society, was described as important. From her unique perspective as a former community president and current employee of LMO, Melanie Allard spoke about the special connection between the community and LMO:

I was community president here at Two Rivers in 2011, and so LMO at that time was really small. I think they only had about six staff and they were just starting to get involved with our community. And everyone was evolving and growing together, so as a Métis community we were all coming together and trying to work in partnership, and really getting to know one another. So, I knew about LMO then, but I didn't exactly know all of the things that they did. I stayed community president until 2017, so different staff would come and attend our community meetings, and we would have potlucks together, and then we would have the women's circle, and we would all get together and do a lot of fun things. And community-wise, we got some funding from ISPARC, so we got together for walks, and just really trying to stay connected. And then finding out all of the good work that LMO is doing for children and families, I've actually recommended family members to go to LMO. – Melanie Allard

Melanie went on to highlight how the relationship has been an important aspect in terms of the development of LMO, as well as for promoting community awareness of local Métis supports.

Colleen Lucier spoke about the connection between LMO and Two Rivers from a personal and relational standpoint:

I feel very much a part of my local chartered community. I go to all the meetings. I know what's happening, and I'm the Executive Director here so there's no separation. I need my staff to be as enmeshed in it, and get their families in there... I think that it's important that Executive Directors of service providers are very connected to their community. That's why I think it's helpful when leadership is part of the community, too... I think that is a strength, the fact that I am Métis, and I am part of our Nation, our community—I think that's a strength. – Colleen Lucier

She illustrated the connection between local community and support agencies as being key to supporting Métis children, youth, and families. It is clear that prioritizing this relationship among leadership and staff is an important focus for LMO moving forward.

In terms of partnerships with other Indigenous organizations, one youth spoke more broadly about increasing access and awareness to youth programming at Kikékyelc to the larger population of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth in Kamloops:

We have a beautiful space that we should be running more programming out of. And I think it would be really beneficial for the youth who do live at Kikékyelc to have that access to a wider community. I don't know why it doesn't get used enough. I think it comes down to communication with other agencies and whatnot. I think we need to be okay with hey, we're having these events and these programmings. – Avery Jones*

Specifically, Avery* spoke about working with other organizations—like the Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Society and Secwèpemc Children and Family Services—to share programs with the youth that they work with.

In terms of more challenging relationships, staff commonly spoke about some of the barriers that they experience in working with non-Indigenous external organizations, like schools and health agencies. Staff often spoke about the clash in worldviews that they experience, as Pearl Madore described:

I think the challenge is sometimes with mainstream. They don't see things in Indigenous culture ways so I think just by being brave enough to voice a different way of doing things has been my learning curve, and to have strong members on your team that will support different ways of planning... they have a different plan and an idea in place, and then, for us advocating for Metis cultural integration within that is easier but it's still a challenge, because a lot of people don't think outside the box and think differently and... I find it is changing. – Pearl Madore

On a positive note, Elder Lea Becker shared that she has witnessed some shifts in the school system towards promoting cultural pride for Métis students:

the schools also have done a wonderful job in representing Native backgrounds and Métis backgrounds, that all the kids want to be that too... the schools really have been promoting a lot of whether it be Aboriginal or Métis background there that it's not a hidden... it's not hidden anymore, it's more celebrated. – Lea Becker

These shifts help to support the work with cultural resurgence that LMO is undergoing across all of its service areas.

With an eye toward supporting wholistic wellness and prevention-based family supports, Reshie Moss highlighted some of the issues that exist in the ways that the health system tries to support youth with mental health and addictions issues. She spoke about the need for education and awareness building across the education and health sectors, in order to better support Métis youth and families who are seeking support for mental health and addictions:

We need education as prevention with our medical people. And this is not about blaming, but this is a broken piece. How can we help them to wake up? We have a system in place that works with a lot of our high-risk people who are struggling both with mental health and their misuse of drugs. They are going to this place with a psychiatrist, social worker, and clinician, and their answer is to take them to a special home where they can get the help that they need. And right there, the family is going, “Yes, you are the expert.” Now they are feeling defeated, worthless, hopeless. And now it is about getting a hold of child welfare to find a home for them. So, we need to repair that and help them educate how is that going to help that child create connections to their people? Being in stranger care or group care with different workers coming and leaving? How will that strengthen their connections and their mental health and wellness? That is the question we need to get in front of us. We have people coming to us already defeated. We need to find the supports to wraparound them. So that’s the prevention that I want to do here. – Reshie Moss

Colleen Lucier shared a similar sentiment, noting the amount of extra work that is required to educate outside bodies about who the Métis are:

And just the lack of understanding of who we are as Métis people, I feel the amount of education that we have to do, the amount of just awareness that we have to do, it’s just another layer of the work that isn’t expected of others, and we’re not supported to do that.
– Colleen Lucier

In this sense, strengthening relationships and building awareness is viewed as a building block to strengthening systems of prevention.

Additional Programs and Services Needed

Many family members, youth, staff, and Elders provided specific recommendations to strengthen the array of programs provided by LMO. These suggestions—which included programs and supports for children and families, youth, and adults—are described below.

Programming and Supports for Children and Families. In general, the services and supports provided to children and youth at LMO were described as being very comprehensive. However, some of the family members and Elders provided creative suggestions for bolstering programming for children and families.

Childcare. Family members often shared that they would love to have access to childcare through LMO. These families often noted that LMO has helped them to access childcare in the

community, but they shared that it would be beneficial to have access to childcare that is delivered by a Métis agency. From a different lens, Nancy Bernard* shared that it may also be cost effective for LMO to offer these supports in-house:

it would be really cool to see some sort of like childcare program through LMO. Like specific through LMO, because I know that they can do referrals... because LMO helps me with like child support and paying my parent portion, but I feel like for parents who are using that benefit, it would almost be best to just have their own care facility which would be cool, because then they could be more specific to teaching like the cultural things to the kids in daycare as well. – Nancy Bernard*

Weekend and Holiday Programs. Several families, as well as Elders, highlighted a need for more weekend programming for children and youth. Some families also noted that they struggle during the holidays when LMO is closed. In reflecting on the fun that was had during National Indigenous Peoples' Day each June and Louis Riel Day each November, Colin Atkinson* shared his dream of attending more family and community gatherings that showcase Métis culture. He spoke about the value of attending “huge Métis dinners” in the community, touching on the traditional significance of sharing food in the community and strengthening social connections.

Family Camps. A number of family members noted that they would like to see LMO host a family camp. Among these shared suggestions, Colin Atkinson*, spoke at length about the ways that family camps could help to promote cultural continuity among Métis families:

I think they should have camps for families to do during the summertime.... They should offer a camping thing with kids, where they go camping with an Elder and parents come along, too. And we go away for a weekend... bring them together and introduce children to Elders... they could help you and talk to you about things. And they can do all this stuff that you don't know. And they could teach people how to fish and... like they should teach people how to fish like in the olden days... they should teach people how to hunt like they did hundreds of years ago. And then they could go out and get a bear or a moose, and then bring it back here, learn how to skin it and everything. And then give it to families that need meat during the wintertime. – Colin Atkinson*

In speaking with Colin*, I noted that his suggestion of sharing and giving food to the Métis community aligned beautifully with traditional teachings around visiting and supporting one another. As with many programs throughout LMO, these land-based teachings offer opportunities for revitalizing practices promoting family and community well-being.

Family Housing. Family housing was identified as a critical need in Kamloops, and an area that LMO should consider exploring. Métis parent, Cindy Thomas*, spoke passionately about the need for more family-centred, affordable housing:

There is not enough family housing out there for low-income families... we're leaving young single moms and dads to struggle on their own. Especially ones who have animals. That makes it even worse. So, I feel like that's something that they need to look into, until they can get that family housing built, and possibly more units available, because I know that right now, they have one currently. So, yeah, that's definitely something that's coming from a parenting aspect that I wish they had more of. – Cindy Thomas*

Additionally, Elders also discussed the potential value Elders could bring to families through a supportive housing model for Elders and families:

I think that if you had even just an apartment for them to live in for that time, there should be somebody there all the time, and it doesn't mean they can't have their home and go back to it but commit to that time to do for the benefit of the Métis community. And so, you don't just allocate it to children in care or parents who have children in care or whatever, don't just allocate it to them. It should be for the community as well, because you can't just dissociate from the community. For instance, in Abbotsford we have a big community. I could probably name you six or eight Elders that if I had a place for them, that they were not responsible to pay for, that I could house them and have the community be able to come in and talk and feel and think. To me it's cost effective... There would be a lot of community areas where Elders could come and spend a month, for instance, or two months or whatever time they have, and fulfill the role of culture and teaching, and the parents come in and learn. – Marie Bercier

Elder Marie's words confirm that Kikékyelc is a valuable model for housing that could be replicated in other regions of the province.

Programming for Youth. The youth provided clear recommendations for enhancing programming at Kikékyelc. They noted that they would like to have access to Secwepemctsin (Secwépemc language) classes, as well as traditional arts classes. Partnerships between LMO and the Secwépemc community could aid in bridging these program gaps. For instance, the Wuméc r Cqweqwelútn-kt Community Society (2024) offers Secwepemctsin classes to community members at no charge.

The youth also spoke about the importance of outdoor activities and asked for more opportunities to connect with the land. In terms of increasing awareness and accessibility for youth programs, young parents spoke about the need for youth gatherings that either offer childcare or are safe and inclusive of young children. Several youth, as well as some staff, indicated that there remains a need for a youth centre, with staff who provide youth outreach supports to unhoused youth.

Supports for Parents and Grandparents. Some Elders spoke about a need for supports for parents and grandparents, with a focus on communication and conflict resolution. Elder Melba Sterling highlighted the need for education for parents around different stages of child development, to prepare parents for changes that they can expect as their children age. She also spoke about the value of creating programs for grandparents that focus on skills-based programming (e.g., technology). There is opportunity here to also involve youth in teaching skills to Elders as a way of giving back and creating relationships. Elder Melba Sterling also spoke about focusing on programming for grandparents that focuses on empowerment and reciprocity. She shared that while LMO offers elements of these supports in their work with Elders, she suggests that an “adopt a grandparent program” could offer young families some extra support, while also providing older people with opportunities to be valued and respected.

Adult Mental Health Supports. Staff highlighted that adult mental health supports are among the most significant gaps in services at LMO. In particular, Sam Miller* highlighted some of the limitations of mental health support for children, in isolation from family healing and supports:

We have really beautiful wraparound for Child and Youth Mental Health. I think a lot of the time we focus on fixing the kid, and like maybe not specifically this agency, but a lot of our families react like that... their first instinct is why is my kid behaving this way. I can't control it... so here, you take him, and you do your professional thing, versus we try to re-empower parenting, like you're the professional of your child, right? But they're scared of that, especially when their inner children aren't healed. When their child is reacting, they're reacting almost at the same level as them in some ways, so I think, honestly, adult mental health, just so they can work through their big hurts as well, alongside their families.... we have an amazing mental health team. They're really good but just in the sense that especially the moms and the dads that I work with, when they talk about their children, and their struggles with their children, I just see them talking in a way that like they're just so dysregulated themselves from their trauma, right? And they've just never had a chance actually to take care of their heart, and their spirit, and they've been taking care of these little ones and not understanding why they're reacting the way they are to their child being dysregulated. – Sam Miller*

In order to effectively support the wholistic wellness of children and youth, families require adequate supports in order to heal alongside and with their children—addressing trauma and other issues that may act as barriers to bringing out their best parenting skills. Staff, like Isla Martin*, shared that parents and family members are often actively seeking these types of supports. It can be heartbreaking to let families know that LMO is not currently able to offer supports to adults for mental wellness:

unfortunately we don't have any adult services... when people are calling for help, it's so hard to say we can't service you, sorry. You have to really try and connect them with the Friendship Centre, the Crisis Lines, and Interior Health. And it's hard because that's not what they want. They know that they could go to the other institutions but they they're comfortable here.... A huge wish list would be adult counselling—mental health counselling and addictions counselling, specifically. – Isla Martin

Stories like this highlight the value of connection and relationships in terms of accessing services. In order to further build on the wraparound approach that LMO has been praised of, it

would be beneficial for LMO to be resourced to support families in this way. In addition to mental health supports being offered to adults through LMO, some staff also noted that culturally safe, Métis-specific treatment centres are also a glaring gap in the province. In general, treatment centres are not accessible for Métis people in BC, and, as staff indicated, the ones that may be available are not viewed as culturally safe.

Outcomes: The Difference Made

This section presents some of the outcomes associated with the variety of supports and services offered through LMO. The first area is related to family engagement in LMO's services and supports, which touches on perceptions around safety, trusting relationships, and willingness to return to LMO in the future. Some family members also identified that the support they have received from LMO has helped them to navigate complex systems—a practical outcome that has had a significant impact on their family's wellbeing. Several staff, as well as some youth and families, spoke about outcomes related to independence, which are highlighted later in this section. Strikingly, families often spoke about their direct experiences with family reunification, as well as the impact that LMO's prevention-based services have had in keeping families together. For families that may not be currently able to work towards reunification, kinship care was described as a valuable alternative—one that was shared in the context of strengthening family and cultural connections for Métis children. Many families, as well as staff and Elders, noted that the children are bringing Métis culture back to their families, which is facilitated through opportunities for learning, language, and play at LMO. A sense of belonging, acceptance, and community connectedness arose as important outcomes that families have experienced directly, and also witnessed for their children. Many of these outcomes were described as having the potential to create intergenerational sharing, healing, and wellbeing.

Engagement in Services and Supports

When discussing their vision for signs of success at LMO, several Elders explained that an important indicator of success is when families feel safe engaging with LMO. They also explained that it is important for families to feel comfortable to come back to LMO when they need support. As engagement in different services and supports has increased, staff noted that waitlists for programs have grown overtime. Waitlists were identified as one indicator of success for child, youth, and family engagement. Staff and family members alike shared that trusting relationships between families and support staff help to facilitate active and meaningful engagement across program areas. Staff often provided examples of relationships that that have been created with families. They spoke about the ways in which families have grown to trust the LMO staff. They also indicated that having families return to services, when they need them, is a sign of success and an indicator of trusting relationships with staff. Cary Davis* explained that engagement involves families who continue to be involved with programs, as well as families who return when they need support:

I think what we find here is that once the family is involved here, even if their file is closed, generally they're still involved in the community aspect. And if they aren't, if something starts to happen in their family where they know that they need help, they're the ones who come back to us. We're not getting the phone calls and after-hours calls saying there's something happening in the family. They're the ones coming back and saying, "Hey, I'm struggling, and I need help with this." ... There isn't that fear for them, and there isn't that stigma that because I'm asking for help it makes me a bad parent or a bad person... It's really neat to see that families feel comfortable... – Cary Davis*

The trust and openness that is fostered between staff and families is important not only when families are actively accessing services and supports, but also in the way that it carries over. As Cary* shared, the relationships built are long-lasting and families generally feel able and comfortable to return to LMO if they need support in the future.

Safety is also an important indicator of positive relationships and engagement in services. The vast majority of families said that they feel safe accessing services at LMO (92%). Some parents, like Lisa Adams*, were clear that their families have always felt safe and comfortable at LMO, as she shared, “we have always felt a really strong sense of security being with LMO and being connected with LMO.” Some families also shared that their children and grandchildren feel safe at LMO. Kinship caregiver, Jocelyn Hunt, shared that her grandson “loves his Early Childhood Development. He loves the ladies—they’re so great. They’re so personable, and they care about the kids.”

For other families, this feeling of safety has grown over time; parents like Bill Sampson* qualified, “Now, I feel a lot more confident, a lot more secure.” Many families indicated that their sense of safety and comfort has grown as they have developed relationships with staff at LMO. Some staff similarly spoke about how relationship-building takes time. As an example, Sam* shared a story about how her relationship with one of the mothers that she works with was strengthened over time:

I had a mom reach out to me that never reaches out. I always have to reach out to her for asking for a ride. I have this one mom that I’ve been working with since last August, and she’s just so cool, but sometimes—I don’t know how to say it—like picking her up is like pulling teeth trying to get her out of the house. And so, when she actually comes out all the time, that’s a win, and I know she’s not coming out late on purpose. There’s a lot of other underlying things... or sometimes when she shows up at all, and I’m like great! And she’s very consistent now, but before it was a little tough. It’s just like that build of relationship is a huge success, even though it looks really small to other people. – Sam Miller*

As Sam* shared, their shared commitment to ongoing engagement in supports led to increased consistency, which was viewed as a significant outcome in terms of engaging in services.

Staff, like Janet Dickons*, spoke about the importance of celebrating the strength of the relationships between families and frontline workers, knowing the value of families feeling safe

to return to the agency:

I think one thing that really surprises me is like once we get a relationship going, the families will actually phone their social worker and say like, “Hey, I’m having a really bad time,” and it’s almost like they feel they need to tell you or someone else is going to tell on them, so they’ll just bring it forward, and it’s kind of like, we just celebrate that. “Hey, thank you, this is great.” We use it as a positive, like the fact that you’re telling us is huge, because we know that you want to keep your kids safe, right, so it’s celebrated. So those kinds of things are really exciting. – Janet Dickons*

Several staff indicated that they have families who have experienced trauma as a result of the child welfare system—including the removal of their children—and these families continue to participate in support services. Lexa Smerdal reflected on their engagement:

the amount of participation that they’ve had is extraordinary, and I think that although they’re still going to be angry—which is their right as parents—the fact that they’re participating and planning for their children and planning for their children to be in the arms of their family and their kin, that’s been super cool. – Lexa Smerdal

In addition to recognizing that families often come into child welfare services with fear and anger, staff also shared that they know there is still a stigma attached to their work in child welfare—regardless of how much work has gone into transforming practice. They noted how happy they are that the relationships with families have strengthened to the point where there is trust in the staff and that families can overcome their inherent fear in the system. Isla Martin* shared that she has observed families return with a strong sense of self-advocacy:

I feel like it really helps, judging by those families that still come back every time and they talk. They’re not shut down. They’re not silent. They’re very vocal, and sometimes it’s positive and sometimes it’s not, but they’re vocal. At least they’re not just shut down in a waiting room... So, I think that’s probably one of the biggest strengths that I’ve seen. – Isla Martin*

Elder Lynda Tilley also noted that she has witnessed increased family engagement during meetings, where families are passionate about being involved with planning for their loved ones. Similarly, Colleen Lucier shared a story about a family that has been supported through different challenges to create safety as they raise their child:

We have two parents that are both cognitively delayed... And they had a baby, and I know that under any other condition, their child would have been removed because they would have been defined as not having capacity, and they're very, very fearful of the system, and being judged. But we built a very loving relationship with them and wrapped supports around them, and I know they feel loved by us. I know they don't feel judged by us. I know they trust us. They are raising their son. Their son is getting older... and I don't think they have an open file with us. They come to our Elders luncheons all the time. They participate in all of our special events. And I just think if we had not have been there, their life would be very different. Their son's life, like who knows where he would have ended up, but he knows his family, and his children will know their grandparents. Like I feel like the impact we have, it's not just on the child today but it's their children, and their children's children. Like we really have the ability to impact future generations by the decisions we make today, and that's really exciting, but I am 100 percent confident that if they had been served by MCFD, their life would look very different. – Colleen Lucier

In addition to knowing that they can return when they need to, several staff indicated that families often do not want to close their files. In speaking about the youth that LMO serves, Daylan Kidder noted, “for the majority of the youth that we serve, they never want to let go of us.” Youth Support Worker, Jay Roque, agreed as he shared about the ongoing engagement that youth have in programming and supports, even after their file has closed:

I think one of the biggest things is that even after we've closed a file for a youth because we've hit all the goals, we've hit what they've wanted to achieve... they still come around to programming. They still come and are involved with LMO because they like the feeling that is here. So, even though they are not directly supported by us, they still come to programming, they still come to events, they still come to gatherings and that kind of thing, and same with the families. – Jay Roque

These sentiments were echoed by many of the staff who indicated that the many families who ask LMO to keep their files active is a sign of success for their programming.

Navigating Systems

Many family members highlighted the supports that they received from LMO in terms of navigating complex systems. Specifically, they spoke about finding childcare options and learning to navigate systems (e.g., the courts, child assessments). These were all direct outcomes that families attribute to LMO. Some family members, like Greg Dawson and Colin Atkinson*,

expressed general gratitude for the support that they received in finding appropriate childcare. Métis mother, Lisa Adams*, shared that LMO staff walked alongside her during an autism assessment for her daughter. Lisa* shared that LMO staff supported her through the diagnosis process, and then helped her to tailor supports so that her daughter could meaningfully participate in different programs. When her daughter was getting ready for kindergarten, LMO staff supported Lisa* to develop a family plan, which she explained in detail:

From the beginning, we had a family plan in how to support my daughter and help her through her milestones, and what behaviours I struggled with. But coming into getting [my daughter] ready for school was a long battle—a long battle and I couldn't have done it without LMO. Like they were really my rock. When I felt like I didn't have anyone, they helped me. [My daughter] would probably not be in her program that she's in without LMO. Basically, what it comes down to, LMO was there with me through the meetings with the autism program. They were with me and my daughter through all the steps, until she finally got accepted into her Chris Rose program, and it was like a huge relief off of our shoulders, like the biggest like boulder fell off. And that was amazing. I really, truly couldn't have done it without LMO. During all that, [my daughter] and I were attending the Breakfast Program that they have at LMO, which is amazing. I love it. I love that she got to socialize with other kids and the Métis culture was incorporated in that through their language. We learned the language, and through play, we learned how to eat a meal together. It was very awesome... She has a way better chance of being successful in life now because we did those crucial points and she is at that age where it's crucial she gets these therapies and help that she needs, and yeah... I definitely couldn't have done that without LMO. They were our team, and I definitely could not have done that without them honestly... It was all brand new. I had no idea how to navigate through any of the information they were throwing at me, the funding and all that stuff. Just like there was a lot of information that I wasn't processing, but LMO helped me process it, and why this is like that, or that is like this... I recognized that I can't do this by myself. I need help and LMO has just been like, 'We'll help you through that and support you in that,' and they have been. They 100 percent have been. And now [my daughter's] a wild child but she's getting the support and I'm very excited. She's just finished her first year. We've got a few more years and I can't wait to see her growth. She's had amazing growth just in her first year, so I just can't wait to see how far it goes. – Lisa Adams*

Through their collaborative efforts of navigating the assessment process and building a network of supports for the family, Lisa* said that they have set her daughter up for success.

Independence

When asked what they would identify as signs of success for LMO, some Elders spoke about specific outcomes related to education and employment; overall, they hope that LMO supports Métis youth and families to become confident in supporting themselves. Coinciding with this vision, staff shared examples of steps that Métis youth and adults have taken towards independence. Many of these stories focus on outcomes related to life skills, housing, education, and employment.

Housing has been a central focus for LMO, as the agency recognizes that people need housing before they can work toward supporting other needs. Many stories were shared about the important work occurring at Kikékyelc, which fosters independent living for youth who have aged out of care. Staff shared that there are many youth who have aged out of the child welfare system who are not prepared for independent living. In reflecting on this, Daylan Kidder shared:

I think we see how the system has affected the youth. We see them aging out of care and not having any life skills because they've been bounced around from placement to placement, and I think that's why I love Kikékyelc because we can teach them those skills that weren't taught to them when they were younger. – Daylan Kidder

Similarly, Cary Davis* reflected, “we have youth who come with all kinds of trauma, who don't know how to cook for themselves, don't know how to clean for themselves, those types of things.” Staff also identified financial literacy as a significant challenge for youth who have aged out of care. Kikékyelc works to support youth to gain these important life skills. Elder Melba Sterling, an Elder in Residence at Kikékyelc shared some of her reflections related to outcomes for the youth:

There's some of the youth there are getting better and better at saving their money. One of the youth... he started off just with part-time work and now he's full-time, and he bought himself a car and he's taken his driver's test... even in the few months that I've been there, I've seen huge improvements. – Melba Sterling

These outcomes, related to financial planning, employment, and other skills are significant in terms of long-term impact for youth independence and well-being.

Staff also shared that the programming at Kikékyelc—which includes residents and other youth in the community—has created important outcomes related to independence. From her work with the Youth Services Team, Sophia Johnson* shared how the programs have created a sense of belonging and inclusion that has inspired youth to work towards goals related to housing and independence. She explained that she has seen youth “be on the brink of homelessness and be able to thrive just by being included” in programs at Kikékyelc. Some of these youth later shared that their goals are to live at Kikékyelc, and they are supported to work towards these goals. One of the programs that specifically helps Indigenous youth to gain new skills for employment is Michif Works. After the completion of one program cycle, Melanie Allard shared some of the outcomes she has observed among the youth graduates of Michif Works:

we have one individual who was struggling to even get up and get going. They don't have a sense of time, no sense of commitment, no family. They were basically out on the street, couch-surfing and homeless. And it's giving them the opportunity to come forward and learn about themselves, and to learn about others with them, and to get into the culture and the identity, and actually have a place of belonging. And knowing at the end that they have an opportunity for employment. So, they were couch-surfing and so badly wanted a job, and then unfortunately in the course of the program they go sick and had to take a week off and missed the biggest part, the certificate part, but we're making that up and they're still getting it. And they're not behind, they're just making up the time. And they're so excited. They got their boots today and realized that they can still make it even though they were off during the week of certificates. We can make those up, you're still going to graduate. The trade show is not until the 8th so you're going to be right on par with the others and you're going to get that job. And they're just feeling so excited for that because they didn't have that opportunity and so they're excited to do this. – Melanie Allard

One youth, Finn Lewis*, shared that they really enjoyed participating in the Michif Works program. After completing the program and figuring out what type of employment would be a good fit, they have been applying for different positions. When speaking about the impact of the

program, Finn* shared, “it’s helped me focus my goals into more of paths, rather than a bunch of forks in the roads.”

In addition to the positive impact that Michif Works has had for Indigenous youth, several staff shared stories about youth at Kikékyelc who have gained employment. For example, Cary Davis* spoke about the growth she has witnessed for one resident of Kikékyelc, in particular:

he was heading down a path that would have gotten him into trouble. There was, I think, a lot of drinking and stuff that was going on, and then we got him working as a casual and so that kind of started the ball rolling. Then he took over I think when somebody was sick for an extended period of time, and then a position became available and then he applied for it. I think it changed his outlook. He’s now gotten himself a driver’s license or working towards his driver’s license. He’s bought himself a car. He’s saving. He has dreams. We were talking about it at one point where he was like I have all this money now that I’m managing to be able to save and put away, and maybe I can buy myself a house. Maybe I can buy myself a trailer, something that’s my own. So, I think that for me, that was one of the biggest things was that he was planning for a future instead of just planning to get through the next day. And that’s kind of a hope that we want for our youth, is to think, “Okay, now I’m stable, I have a house, I have a roof over my head, I’m warm and my belly’s full. Okay, what are the next steps going to be for me?” – Cary Davis*

Cary* went on to share that with their new jobs and goals, the youth have a newly realized sense of pride and long-term dreams. Several youth also shared their goals, noting that that they are working on building up their education and skills, finding employment, and moving out to their own apartments.

Staff, too, highlighted significant stories about youth becoming more independent. For example, Daylan Kidder shared the progress that one youth has been making toward his financial goals:

I had a youth, and he really wasn’t doing anything. He was just sitting at home, not going to school, not doing anything. He was on a youth agreement. And so, after having a planning meeting with him and being very clear that we need to see something—him doing something—I told him like I don’t care if school is for you, but we need to see something. After the planning meeting, he really thought about what he wanted to do, and

he is very hands on, and so school... he just decided it was just not for him because he's more hands on, so he actually ended up getting a part-time construction job and now he's full-time and learning to run all of the equipment, making his own money. He can basically support himself. And it happened in like such a short amount of time and that was because of the planning meetings and the review meetings that we had, and just coming from that non-judgmental place.... Now, it's crazy to see him flourish, and now he's learning how to drive and everything, so he went from, you know, not doing anything, and to be honest, he was just staying at home and smoking weed... but now he's working full-time and driving, all those kinds of things. So, to see that is great, and now he'll be 19 next year and so, you know, he's really set up to do whatever he wants. – Daylan Kidder

This is one example illustrates of how using a compassionate and non-judgmental approach to collaborative planning with a youth resident at Kikékyelc led to a wonderful result.

For other youth at Kikékyelc, education was identified as a significant outcome and achievement. Staff spoke about one youth resident of Kikékyelc who became the first in her entire family to graduate with a high school diploma. Staff believe that this youth's progress through school was not only supported by the staff, but also encouraged by her community of residents at Kikékyelc. Staff also spoke about the youth outcomes related to postsecondary education; among these examples, Jay Roque shared that the story of a youth who has continued to excel in school: “She's now progressed to the School of Nursing, which is incredibly hard to get into at TRU, and she's thriving because she has that support here at LMO and Kikékyelc.”

Youth-driven education goals are supported at Kikékyelc as well as throughout LMO. Elder Lynda Tilley also spoke with pride about a youth who was recently accepted into university:

Oh my gosh, I've got to tell you, I've got a young lady who has just been accepted to university... She came to see us last Thursday and she came to tell me herself. Oh my gosh. Of course, both of us start crying. I was so proud of her... If you'd seen her when we first got her, she was a little turkey. But you know what, we were persistent, and she's done this on her own. All of the sudden she did that, she knew we loved her, we cared where she was going and, oh my gosh, it is a totally different young lady. – Lynda Tilley

Elder Lynda's example not only highlights the determination and growth among many youth involved with LMO, but also the pride that the Elders, as well as staff, hold for the youth as they

work towards their dreams.

Helpers from the prevention social work team also spoke about honouring small steps toward independence. Among them, Sam Miller* shared that, for her, important outcomes can include moving from going to the food bank with her to being confident to access the food bank independently. Sam* reflected on this shift, noting:

It took me a while to get her to go to the food bank with me, but once she went there, she was like, ‘That’s awesome.’ Then she did it a few more times... those kinds of things are wins, right? – Sam Miller*

These “small steps” are important and build into big changes. In terms of big changes, Montana Butts shared the impact that LMO has had for supporting her family members throughout their parenting journey, noting that LMO has embraced and supported them to flourish as parents.

Another significant story was shared by Melissa Chalmers, who spoke about a youth who was struggling with mental health and substance use challenges in her adolescence. Over the course of five years, this youth completed high school, graduate from university, and acquired fulltime employment. This incredible growth is, in part, attributed toward Wahkotowin and other Métis teachings shared throughout supports and services at LMO:

The family that was built here helped guide her through tough times as we worked diligently in strengthening her Wahkotowin. We supported her in knowing how her chosen Wahkotowin were there to support her when we started to back away which allowed her the space she needed to feel secure enough to access the vulnerability required for transformative healing to take place. We were also consistently identifying her strengths all the time because it’s easy to harp on yourself when the world feels like it’s crumbling. It took a lot of reminding her of how strong she is as a Métis woman, how she is transforming how people see Métis people, how she continues to be an advocate even when things are hard, and the role model she was and is for all those that are following her, for her to accept her growth and step into the courage to live a life she and her ancestors would be and are proud of. – Melissa Chalmers

Melissa went on to share that the staff wanted to honour the youth’s journey, strength, and resilience. In an emotional ceremony, the youth was honoured with a Woman’s Warrior Sash,

which she wears proudly.

Family Preservation and Reunification

Throughout the early conversations with Elders at LMO, many were clear in defining success as supporting families to stay together. Staff shared beautiful examples of families who they have supported to remain together, as well as stories of children returning to their families. In these stories, staff were clear that these outcomes are attributable to the collaborative efforts of families and supports at LMO. Staff and families often explained that family preservation or reunification would likely not be the result if families were served through the mainstream system. Indeed, some families shared stories about their past involvement with the Ministry and noted that it was not until their files were transferred to LMO, that staff worked with them to have their children returned to their care. Robert Harris* noted that a grueling 18-month advocacy process eventually paid off, when a judge understood the importance of a Métis family receiving services from a Métis agency. After Robert's* family started working with LMO, he started to see positive changes: "I started going to the fathers' group and getting some more supports here, and then eventually we got the file transferred over here then and everything started like slowing down, settling down, and then the kids came home." Later, Robert* summarized his experience, noting, "The biggest impact that I had at LMO was once my file got transferred over here, my children came home, rather than fighting and fighting and fighting." Another father, Bill Sampson*, similarly described the way that LMO has supported healing in his own family as they collaboratively take steps to work toward bringing their children home:

I'm grateful for my children and how well adjusted they have become in the face of all the things that we have been through, and it's because in part to the support we have received. There's been a lot of healing needed for our family. – Bill Sampson*

Bill*, in part, credits the support that his children have received from LMO in supporting their resilience in the face of trauma.

Strengthened Family Supports. In speaking about the power of family supports, Pearl Madore shared how connection to extended family has strengthened support networks for children and youth, as well as for their parents:

I had this youth one time and he called me, and he was like, “I’m running away, I’m outta town, I’m getting out of this place.” And I said, “Oh, wait a second, you know, your grandmother lives down the road. Give her a call. Stay there for the night and we’ll get it together.” And he did! But a few years before that, he didn’t have any connection with his grandmother. He didn’t even know where she lived. And so, I brought them together, and so now the conversation with grandma was that if he wanted to run away from home, where would he run? Like could he come to your house? And she said absolutely. So, you know, it just happened that that plan worked out so great. And she was able to attend his internal care team meetings and planning for him and things like that... It’s really important that he knows who his people are. So, I think it’s about knowing who your people are, and a sense of belonging and identity. Knowing who you are. – Pearl Madore

As Pearl shared, stories like these highlight how connection to family not only enhances safety directly, but also contributes to strengthening identity and belonging for children and youth.

In recognizing the importance of family connection, staff also shared the ways in which they have ensured that siblings are able to live together:

I think we’ve been working with a family now... there’s four children involved that were in separate foster homes. Three were in one home and one was in another. And we were able to put all the four children together in the same home to help mend those sibling relationships, ... it’s been a year and a half, almost two years, I think, in progress, where we’ve been working with this family for their children to go back to them. – Trisha Cruickshank

Trisha’s example highlights both the importance of sibling groups living together, as well as the ways in which staff take on concurrent planning, looking at the short-term goal of ensuring siblings are together, as well as the longer-term goal of full family reunification.

Staff shared that they use collaborative forms of planning with families to ensure that children are safe and that families have natural supports that they can garner support from,

including extended family. In planning for an upcoming birth, Métis mom, Cindy Thomas* shared the progress that she had made in safety planning with her team:

I recently had a meeting with my whole team, and as far as I was concerned, I wasn't going to be able to bring my daughter home, never mind eventually bringing my boys home. Like the way they were making it sound, that wasn't even a thought. And the way it was brought up that I'd be able to bring my daughter home from the hospital with me brought me to tears because, like I said, I was pretty sure that this was not going to happen. I was never going to hear the words out of my social worker's mouth that if I could get all this done, she was coming home with me. And when she said that, it hit a good spot in my heart and gave me faith back in the system, that they can still do some good. And so, yeah, just like there is some good still left in the system. – Cindy Thomas*

Additionally, staff member, Reagan Laurent*, shared a beautiful example of how collaborative efforts between family and supports led to a child returning home to his family:

I used to work with a young boy; he was probably five at the time, maybe six, and his parents were both cognitively delayed. He himself is also cognitively delayed. And we kept having issue after issue with them... silly things like leaving him in a full airport to go to the bathroom... they just didn't realize. And a social work call got put in and the child was removed. This was when we weren't delegated. And the impact of the child, like, yes, he left his home, but the parents... these are parents who didn't have any supports, nothing. Their whole family, we got them at the table, and we wrapped around them. We built a really great plan: he would go to the parents, and we would do a bit of supervision. The grandparents were involved, the aunt, everyone. We made a really great plan that this child... We returned him home and then had so much support from us and the family, that he thrived. Now he's 10, and there haven't been any other protection reports. – Reagan Laurent*

Beyond the absence of reports, Reagan went on to explain that the relationships fostered between the family and the support staff has ensured that the family feels comfortable to reach out for help when needed. She explained that previously, the family was terrified of accessing basic health care, given the connection between health and child welfare systems. She spoke about the transformation that the family has gone through regarding their view of LMO:

now, they call us if they were to cross the road and he was to let go of their hand, like, and it was through the relationship building and the sense of like pride when they came in here and they realized, "Oh you're not so mean people. You guys worked with us to keep our family." – Reagan Laurent*

As a result of the sustained relationship and concerted efforts from the family and the staff, the team has supported the child to become connected with appropriate supports in school, including art and music therapy, and occupational therapy. The staff believe that the child's success is also attributed to his connection to family and support to live at home.

Prevention is Cost Effective. Several staff shared that they have an intimate understanding the ways in which the system can harm children, youth, and families. While sharing the ways in which LMO supports the reunification of families, Laura Brown* noted that it is much more effective, and less harmful, to support families to stay together:

I'm seeing families come to the table and then they're able to take away their own plan eventually, and very naturally create reunification, but I think it's like cutting off your leg. If you cut off your leg and you send it overseas, just that when things get too far, it's hard to get it back, and so I think that that's beautiful... what we're looking at, keeping families together first. And I haven't actually had any experience, since I've been here, where the first choice is to seek outside, and it keeps a lot of dignity, it keeps a lot of hope and vision if it's just for a couple of days, if that's what it needs to be until we can come together and find enough safety. – Laura Brown*

Much of the support work that LMO carries out has prevented Métis children and youth from being apprehended and coming into care. In addition to preventing trauma—which is well-documented in association with the foster care system—Colleen Lucier shared that LMO's prevention work has had systemic cost savings as well:

I know we have prevented so many Métis children from coming into care. We are rarely in court, so all the cost savings attached to that. Court is like usually because we are doing a transfer of custody to a family member. That's usually why we're going to court. I don't know the last time there was ever a trial here—a contested situation. That's so rare here that when it happens, it's devastating, because it's like what happened? And usually, if you knew the whole story, it would all make sense, but it's just so rare here for us to go to court or have a trial. – Colleen Lucier

It is clear that these cost-savings are put to good use, as staff and families shared the ways that they can use funding to support prevention and family preservation. In particular, one mother shared her experience receiving resources to support her family:

We were in a really terrible position. Christmas was coming up and things were not good for us. We were on the verge of becoming homeless. They were able to help us with those grocery cards. And gas cards. And getting clothing, and diapers, and wipes. All the stuff we needed for when the babies first arrived with us. And it literally kept us from being homeless and losing all of our children collectively. So that was major. That was a huge thing for us. And they didn't make it hard to obtain. It was just, "Oh my god, you guys are in this position. We have this, we have this, we have this. Do you need this? What about this?" It was supportive, and it was offered. And it was not something we had to pry for. We didn't have to beg for it. It was definitely a make-or-break situation for our family. – Leslie Morris*

This is a significant story for Leslie* and her family, who reflected on the supports that they received at a critical moment—these resources allowed for her family to maintain their housing and care for their children during a difficult time. For families like Leslie's, a fraction of funding that would otherwise be spent on the foster care system is redirected toward the family's needs, and these resources diverted any potential involvement from the child safety team.

In addition to the ways that staff can use funding to support families and prevent disruptive child protection measures, creative support measures can also include bringing in respite caregivers, including one situation that Trisha Cruickshank shared about night-time caregiver:

there was a mom who was a really good mom, she just struggled at night, and she struggled with leaving her kids unattended. So we were able to get a caregiver in place where the kids were with the caregiver at night, because mom was a really good mom during the day... traditionally, you'd have those kids out of the home and you'd be like setting up a supported visit or whatever, where, yeah, I just appreciate and I believe in that sort of the creativity that we do here to keep families together. – Trisha Cruickshank

With this story, Trisha explained that staff have permission to be resourceful and imaginative to support families. This ability offer support in ways that meet their unique needs undoubtedly contributes to positive outcomes for family unity.

Kinship Care and Other Forms of Relational Permanency

In cases where family reunification with natural parents is unlikely, staff work on permanency planning alongside families. They were clear that permanency planning can occur in conversation with parents; in cases where there are worries about safety, social workers are tasked with asking important questions about where a child can live where they can be safe. A question they often ask is: “Who else can support these little ones alongside you?” These questions indicate that kinship placements help to honour and preserve relationships between parents and children. In response to these prompts, the vast majority of parents are able to identify a family member—often grandparents—that they would like to care for their children.

In speaking about outcomes related to kinship care, Lexa Smerdal shared, “the numbers are extraordinary in terms of how many kids are in stranger care versus how many kids are in kin care... that never happens in these systems.” Administrative data from LMO align with these staff perspectives; Table 3 shows data for children by placement type at LMO from 2018 through 2023, illustrating a trend toward a larger proportion of children being placed with kin through out of care placements like the Extended Family Program.⁴⁵ The “in care” category includes children under continuing custody orders, temporary or interim orders, and removals, as well as voluntary care agreements and special needs agreements. Children may remain under these orders while staff and families are collaboratively pursuing reunification planning. Further, data demonstrate that LMO have prevented Continuing Custody Orders for 21 children through legal transfers of custody to family and extended kin from 2017 – 2023.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Please note that numbers are reported monthly and may fluctuate throughout the year; the data shown in the table below come from June of each year. Data are available back to November of 2017, directly following LMO’s C6 Delegation.

⁴⁶ These transfers of guardianship fall under Section 54.01 and 54.1 of the *CFCSA*.

Table 3. Number of children by legal category at LMO, 2019 – 2023.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
In Care	20	19	18	22	24	17
Out of Care	6	7	20	18	25	32

Jennifer Friesen also spoke about the impact that family finding has had for children and youth in care. She shared that LMO has had multiple situations where children have been in continuing custody, and staff have managed to find them supportive kinship placements—homes with their extended family. She shared her passion for creating extended family plans:

We do extended family plans, and I really, really love them. And the reason I love them is because families will find a way to support each other. So, we have lots of situations where the grandmother is taking care of the child for the most part, but finances can be a barrier, and so by me sort of joining alongside them—which it’s a three-way agreement between me, the parent, and the caregiver—we’re able to support the whole process of that. We’re able to keep that family connection. – Jennifer Friesen

LMO supports family members to offer kinship care in a way that is similar to how things were done traditionally. In Métis families, when parents needed extra support to care for their children, it was common for the grandparents would step in. This practice provides added support for raising children while also preserving family relationships—an important benefit that is also seen today. For example, one Métis mom shared with me that while her children are in care, she is grateful that they are placed with their grandparents, with support of LMO.

Staff also shared that they have witnessed families who were once apprehensive about caring for children in their family change their minds after being connected with LMO. Karen White* believes that this shift is a result of families feeling supported by LMO, with a shared understanding that they will not be alone in raising the children. In speaking with several kinship caregivers, it was clear that they also are grateful for the supports that they received from LMO. Several grandparents explained that initially they were not sure that they would be able to raise their grandchildren. As Greg Dawson said, “I wouldn’t have been able to do it [be a kinship

caregiver] if it wasn't for the ladies at LMO... I mean what they did was invaluable. I don't know how I would have done it." Similarly, kinship caregiver Jocelyn Hunt said, "I wouldn't be the grandparent that I am right now without LMO." Several grandparents expressed that LMO has supported them to provide the best care possible to their grandchildren. This care has come in the form of support programs, as well as funding. In her role as a support person for caregivers, Trisha Cruickshank shared a story that exemplified the nature of supports that are offered to family as kinship caregivers:

we have a grandfather who has got permanent guardianship of his grandson but initially when baby was born, he had to work and he wasn't able to take a leave, and you couldn't get baby into daycare because he was a newborn baby, and so we were able to have a caregiver, a safe baby home, look after the little guy during the day, grandpa would have baby at night, and then you have your early years program, who is also working at helping support baby getting into a daycare and so, we have all of our teams working with this family. Well, now this grandfather has got permanent guardianship of his grandson, and our community caregiver, who did look after him during the day, is the emergency contact at the daycare, right? We created this family. I've got a photo of them... they say of his little village. So, he has a number of caregivers, grandpa, auntie, everybody kind of came together in order to support this grandpa. – Trisha Cruickshank

In sharing this story, Trisha illustrates how family connections can be fostered through kinship care to create loving environments for children to flourish.

Staff shared stories about parents and families who continue to engage in planning for their children, even in situations where parents do not currently live with their children. In one particular case, the staff held a family circle that brought together family members from across two provinces. In reflecting on this process, Lexa Smerdal described the circle as a success: "not only did it facilitate a plan for this little human so that he could remain with kin... but it also brought healing to the family. Even connected them, where they had gotten lost within that connection." In this story—among others—staff noted that while parents may not be in a place to care for their children directly, it is important to find family for kinship placements to support

connection.

Adoption. The topic of adoption arose throughout conversations with several staff. Many of the staff indicated that they understand that adoption is often not an effective solution for children and youth. They told us about the harms of adoption breakdowns. They also shared that through adoption practices at MCFD, children and youth are often not given the opportunity to retain their connections to their biological families. Severing these connections further contributes to trauma and isolation, particularly in situations where adoptions fall through. In speaking about adoptions, Laura Brown* frankly stated, “we’ve seen that that doesn’t work. I’d be the first to tell you, it is not better. Or very rarely.” Reshie Moss agreed that adoption is usually not the best option. However, she also noted that while controversial, LMO does support adoption if it is reached through a deliberate and supportive process. They use *family circles* to work with families in a collaborative way. This process was developed and fine-tuned over a five-year period. Family circles allow for a Métis-specific, relational approach to adoption, as Reshie explained:

The family met the adoptive family and was able to build a connection, and it was done in a beautiful way. We know that it can break down at any point so how do we strengthen this. Big brother knows where the siblings are, grandma knows where they are. They felt like their family was saying, “This is good,” so that will give [the children] some security. We are trying to prevent young people from aging out of the system where we have missed something. – Reshie Moss

Additionally, Tia Stanley shared a story, which she contextualized as a rare case where adoption was a preferred permanency option after all other options were explored. The story involved a young Métis mother in her early twenties, with a toddler who was under a continuing custody order and a baby on the way. The family was transferred to LMO from mainstream services in another city in the interior of BC. The staff had highlighted worries about the mother, in terms of being unhoused and active in addiction, as well as intergenerational trauma. The mother was also

incredibly intelligent, loving, and kind. Together, the mother and the staff worked to create a plan that centred attachment connection from the moment the baby was born. While everyone agreed that the baby would be going into foster care, there would be daily visitation with the mother. Tia shared how the visits would go:

foster mom would bring in the baby and would sit with the mom and tell her about how baby is doing. And mom would be able to feed her, and you could tell the baby knew that that was mom, and it was just really beautiful. We had an Elder involved who had a background in pediatric nursing. And so, we had these weekly meetings and mom started talking about wanting to go to treatment, and so... we got her into this family treatment where she was going to be able to bring baby with her, to get healthy, so that they could work on the attachment. – Tia Stanley

Before beginning treatment, the mother was required to attend detox. Unfortunately, Tia shared that on the first day of detox, the mother was not able to follow through with her plan, and lost touch with them briefly but later reconnected. Meanwhile, MCFD was pursuing adoption for the older sibling, and staff at LMO advocated for the process to be delayed. Tia explained this process:

I was able to slow them down, and I said, “Let’s give mom a little bit more time.” Rather than adopt this little girl out, we have a mom who’s trying, and I know, timelines be damned, but that’s all MCFD was about... I get that, but we have a mom, we have a new sibling, we have an opportunity to at the very least get these girls together, so they grow up as sisters. Slow down. And they did, which was great. It was wonderful, but the foster parents over there were really angry and I just said, “We’re slowing down.” And the Commission made them slow down. And so, I started working with mom and she got to the point where she said, “You know what? I just don’t think I can do this. I just want my girls to grow up together.” And then mom led the permanency planning, where she was saying, “I know I can’t take care of my girls. I want them to grow up in a home together. How can I help you guys do that?” Mom consented to this little baby going CCO. Usually, we don’t do CCO until after two years. It needs to be time in care. Mom consented, and the reason why we were able to consent and talk to the court about it was, we basically said we want these kids to grow up together, and so they consented. They granted the CCO and then we shifted towards finding like an adoptive family. And in the background, we also had a family finder researching all the family. She had already done it for the older sister, and she gave it another kick at the can, but there was still nobody healthy to come to the table. But we had mom at the table who was saying I just want to help you find a forever family for my girls, and so that’s what we did. With mom, with MCFD, with our office, the Métis Commission, and an adoptions team, we were able to

come together to find these girls their forever home. Mom consented to them being adopted, and they've been adopted into their forever home. – Tia Stanley

Tia shared that while the adoptive family is not Métis, they are First Nations from Northern BC. And while the outcome would not be considered perfect, Tia highlighted the importance of having the mother's genuine consent and having a supportive Indigenous home for the two siblings to grow up together. As with other examples, staff highlight how different the approach would be if MCFD had acted independently; however, Tia also commended the ministry for being responsive to her guidance, as she reiterated, "I had to tell them to slow down, and they did, and by them slowing down and us speeding up, these girls are now going to grow up sisters in a loving family." Overall, her story illustrates that when non-family placements are necessary, it is important to slow down the process and be very thoughtful about it. She credits practicing social work at LMO for achieving this outcome, noting that this work would not be possible in a more restrictive environment.

Restoring Relational Permanency. Unfortunately, several of the children and youth that were transferred to LMO were already legally under a continuing custody order. Staff reflected that there were decisions made for these children and families that do not reflect the practice at LMO. Staff shared that they have a young child who experienced an alarming number of placements in their short lives. As a result of trauma, this child has been placed in a staffed resource, which has further contributed to trauma and impacts on their sense of self and belonging. Today, staff are working to find family to support children, youth, and families—and possibly offer future kinship placements where children and youth can be better connected to their family and identity. Among their caseload, there are three older youth who will be aging out of care. Two of these youth have connections and belonging—they know who their family are—but another, who is a previous adoptee, is being actively supported by staff to find family and

create reconnections.

Staff often spoke about the incredible work of the family circle coordinator, Pearl Madore, which includes finding family, helping people to reconnect, and healing relationships. As one of many examples, Pearl shared about the outcome of reconnecting a child in care with her family in Manitoba:

I had a little girl who her people came from Manitoba, and her father, brother, grandmother, and auntie lived there. I searched both sides of the family, the maternal and the paternal side, and the paternal side wanted the little girl to live with them. There was already some conflict going on with the Ministry and grandma. They had a history when she was caring for the little girl's brother, and so it was really challenging, but we never gave up and I flew to grandma's place a few times with the little girl and she would spend weekends there and get to know her family, her brother, her aunties, her cousins, and so we'd fly back here and then we'd fly back again. And there was even some conflict with where the foster parent wanted to be the person to bring her and bring her back, whereas from my experience years ago, the foster parent was also the expert because they took care of the child and whatever, however I did create a relationship with that child, we talked about going for visits, we talked about going on the plane, so I did a lot of preparation work with her, and so each time I brought her to meet her family, and then summertime came and she got to stay with her grandmother for the summer, and her brother, and she got to know her cousins and aunties more and things like that. Unfortunately, grandma wasn't in a place to be able to care for her permanently because she was caring for her brother, and her auntie stepped forward—I still get goosebumps—her auntie stepped forward and said that she wanted to adopt her, and so she did. She did adopt her, and like my heart is just full. – Pearl Madore

Pearl's story illustrates the importance of investing time, energy, and resources into the process of finding family and facilitating reconnections. There are many examples of the success stories that have come from creating belonging for children and youth in care. Unfortunately, Elder Lynda Tilley explained that a lot of the children and youth interacting with LMO do not know who their family members are:

Our Métis children, they need that, they need to know who they are, where they're from, and, most of all, their people. I think a lot of our children don't get that. They don't know their grandparents, they don't know some of their aunties, and that's so sad because they don't have that. So, you know, to come in and work with the families and say, "Who's your aunt, your support? You need support. You need support from your family and your

family is so important, and if we can bring your family, we can bring your family together.” – Lynda Tilley

Elder Lynda Tilley went on to share that when children and youth are reconnected to their extended family members, the support has been beneficial: “it’s amazing how many aunties or uncles have come forward and stepped in, and then we notice the support in the family, and this is a start, a good start. Because if we don’t have that, we lose our families.”

Staff also spoke about the work that they are doing to ensure that infants, children, and youth have connection to family regardless of what their legal permanency situation may be. Janet Dickons* spoke about the importance of centring belonging and attachment for infants. She spoke about finding ways of ensuring that mothers and babies are supported in their connection, and that parents are not isolated: “we’ll move mountains to make sure that family is connected right from the beginning, right, so their heart is not closing off. And that is a huge impact.” When relationships are not prioritized early on, the work for reconnecting families can be challenging. However, LMO staff shared that they have had many successes in working to reconnect children and youth with their families. One example comes from Trisha Cruickshank, who spoke about a youth who had was introduced to LMO following an adoption breakdown:

there’s one young fellow in particular, he had come into care as a young child, and... he was going to be adopted and then things broke down prior. So then he came back into the care system, and he’s a young man now and he’s still in care, and so [Pearl Madore] doing what she can do to foster a relationship with his grandmother, with his mom... even though as a young child, he was permanently taken from his mom, you know, the work done to try to mend that relationship, and it’s not about them living together, but at least mending that relationship. You know, and I think just in that is giving families second chances. You know, if we really, truly believe that people can change, then let’s act on that. And we know that the stats are there, that this young man is going to seek out his mom anyway, so let’s work at supporting that and supporting him through that. So, I look at those situations that I think are really positive outcomes. – Trisha Cruickshank

Pearl Madore also shared a story about a youth in care that had not seen her paternal family since she was four years old. The staff at LMO worked to bring the youth together with her father and

grandmother; Pearl described their gathering:

They hugged each other, and could not stop hugging each other, and wouldn't let each other go, and it was just, you know, the beauty in bringing them together. I don't care how many years a child has been away from their family, it's instant connection no matter what... and it's healing right away for the family, and to see how much she looked like her grandmother was unbelievable. – Pearl Madore

Pearl's story shows that belonging and connection span beyond permanency goals. While it was unclear if the youth was able to move in with her family, the value of her rekindled family connection is significant in strengthening relational permanency and belonging.

Cultural Resurgence

When we asked the Elders what they view as signs of success for LMO, they often spoke about the importance of families learning about their Métis culture and heritage. Staff commonly shared that they have noticed that Métis children are becoming increasingly curious and excited about their culture, history, and identity; in particular, Lexa Smerdal noted, “as our kids grow, they are more excited about where they come from, and they're showing off their Métis roots. I think you're going to see a resurgence of culture.” The stories shared in this section demonstrate some of the building blocks toward cultural resurgence for Métis people, with outcomes related to Métis identity, pride, and connection.

Bringing Youth Back to Batoche. Elder Patrick Savard shared how bringing children, youth, and families to Batoche helps to promote a sense of pride and belonging that they otherwise don't normally experience: “For a lot of us, especially from BC, we're not used to being in a larger Métis community. It's really mind-expanding... it creates a sense of pride.” Elder Patrick explained that there is a lack of understanding about Métis people in BC, and while this may be slowly changing, visiting a place that is distinctly a part of Métis history promotes a strong sense of belonging for Métis youth. Elder Patrick explained the feeling of visiting

Batoche: “when you’re there and you realize Métis are a thing, we are a people, we are a Nation... it lifts them, the experience. It gives them a sense of belonging... It carries on.”

Opportunities for visiting different areas of the homeland are important for the cultural development and overall sense of self for Métis youth. One Métis youth, Avery Jones*, shared that they had an amazing time at Batoche—it reminded them of a family reunion. Finn Lewis*—a First Nations resident of Kikékyelc—attended the Back to Batoche celebrations and had a positive experience. They shared, “I didn’t feel out of place when I went. Everyone there like made you feel connected.” They went on to share that while he does not know much about his own culture right now, he has learned a lot about Secwépemc and Métis culture through living in Kamloops and being at Kikékyelc. Additionally, Métis mom and youth, Cindy Thomas*, shared her experience of going Back to Batoche:

Being able to go out to Batoche and do the Back to Batoche festival. That was probably the best. That was my highlight as a youth... For me, it was a lot of keeping my brother alive, because that’s where he found himself. As a Métis youth, and like as a Métis man, and we had actually just lost him right before. Like the year I went, we lost him days before we were supposed to go. And so, for me, it was just keeping his memory alive, and it also allowed me to find myself as a Métis woman and get to know the culture a little bit more, and just expand on my travelling and everything. Like Batoche was probably the best thing that could have happened for me in that moment, and it allowed me to keep my memory of my brother alive and how he found himself. – Cindy Thomas*

The trips to Batoche that LMO facilitates for the youth—along with the Elders and staff that accompany them—have had a significant impact on their sense of belonging, and overall pride in being Métis.

Cultural Identity and Pride among Métis Children. Staff and Elders were clear in sharing that there has been a positive shift evident at LMO, as more children, youth, and families are becoming proud of who they are. Elder Fred Paquette was clear that he has witnessed the ways in which children are becoming excited and proud of being Métis. He shared, “Well, I’ve

seen at LMO, the little kids and that, they just like the idea that they're Métis." In following up with this observation, Elder Fred noted that when children know they are Métis, "it is something they will never forget." Elder Lynda Tilley also shared the experience of working with Métis children and families at LMO, and the ways in which reconnecting with culture can help to build confidence:

our families come here and learning the traditions that are way back, they go, "Oh my gosh, it's so unbelievable how we feel," and I said, "You know what it is? It's your roots. Your roots are coming back and you're actually feeling who you are and be proud of who you are, and that is your strength. You want to be a good, strong Métis woman, believe in yourself. If you believe in yourself, you can do anything in this world that you want." – Lynda Tilley

Several staff also shared stories about the impact that reconnecting with Métis culture has had for the children, youth, and families that they work with. Among them, Ashley Smith* spoke about a young Métis mother that she had supported for several months, before she moved back to her home community:

We sashed her with an Elder, and we sashed her little girl, and we were doing an exit interview and she got really emotional, and she just said, "This was the first time that I've felt like I belonged somewhere. I felt like I belonged to a community." And she said, "I'm really proud to be Métis." And her little daughter was like, "Yeah, I love being Métis." So it was like one of those feel-good kind of cases where you think what I'm doing is actually helpful. It validates that we were practicing in a good way.... She said, "I had nobody else to connect with and now I connected here, and now I feel confident enough that like I can carry on with these teachings and talk to my mom about what it was like for her being Métis." – Ashley Smith*

After sharing this memory, Ashley* noted that she is particularly excited by the work of the Michif ECD team, as she often witnesses how young children are not experiencing any shame associated with their culture.

Many staff shared how special it is to witness young children become excited about their Métis culture and identity. For example, Pearl Madore noted that her practice includes introducing herself in Michif and talking about the meaning of the sash and the fiddle. She

explained that even through this introduction, she can see that the cultural recognition creates pride in the Métis families that she works with; she noted, “it’s like their face—their face changes, you know? They exude some pride and curiosity, and they want to know more about their culture, which is the beauty.” Thinking about generational growth, many staff shared that she has noticed a growing sense of Métis pride across generations.

The Elders shared that by using an inclusive approach to teaching, entire families are learning and (re)connecting with Métis culture. Families are embraced at LMO and taught about the many strengths of Métis culture; this approach promotes ongoing learning and conversation that extends into family homes. Family members, like Robert Harris*, specifically spoke about how his children are speaking Michif at the dinner table, as they have incorporated prayer during their mealtimes: “they just sit around the dinner table, every night they say, ‘Maarsii for li soupi.’ They know more words than I do now.” Several families spoke about the important role that LMO has played in strengthening their children’s sense of Métis identity. Nancy Bernard* shared, “if he wasn’t a part of LMO, it would be really hard for me to keep him in touch with his culture because I don’t know very much about the culture.” Additionally, Reshie Moss shared culture is also a form of prevention in the ECD programming:

And when children come in the doors, we’re getting them curious about being Métis when they are younger. So, we’re not getting them when they are older going, “I don’t know what Métis is. I don’t want to be Métis; I don’t know what that means.” So we’re doing that in Early Years. And the Early Years team has gone from 4 to 12 staff. Talk about prevention and bringing back the Métis way early in their lives: from songs to the books, to the Elders’ teachings. To be proud of being Métis. And for families to be proud. That’s your identity! We want children to be able to say, “I am Métis and I’m proud of it, and this is what it means to me…” as they’re growing up. And that’s why the early years programs that they have developed with the Elders are just wow. – Reshie Moss

These stories of demonstrate that Métis children are learning about who they are from a young age, and becoming rooted in who they are. They are bringing back teachings to their families,

which contributing to family-based outcomes related to revitalization and cultural identity.

Later, when these become adults, these children are going to raise the next generation, which will have ongoing ripple-like effects of strengthened pride and wholistic wellness.

Belonging

When asked about signs of success at LMO, the Elders asked if this research could look at the ways that LMO has helped to provide Métis children, youth, and families with a sense of hope, belonging, meaning and purpose. Many Elders noted that they have witnessed the ways in which LMO promotes belonging for Métis children, youth, and families, but they also wanted to hear about this from the families themselves. Belonging was described as an important impact of LMO's work, and staff and Elders described how a sense of belonging is interrelated to wholistic wellness. Elder Denise McCuaig shared that the honouring of Métis families, through providing services that reflect who they are as Métis people, creates hope and belonging. As well, Trisha Cruickshank, acknowledged that many of the families that come to LMO have “struggles that are from not having that place of belonging, or that feeling of belonging,” and a strength of their practice lies in reconnecting families to their culture and community.

Community Connectedness. Creating connections to community and building a sense of belonging in urban spaces are seen as important parts of LMO's work. Melissa Chalmers shared that she often reflects about promoting a sense of belonging in her work with LMO:

how are we gathering the Metis community so that they know that they have a sense of belonging, that they matter, and they have a purpose. I think LMO does a fantastic job of encompassing those important pieces of belonging that contribute to transformative child welfare, and truth and reconciliation moving forward from the impact of intergenerational childhood trauma. – Melissa Chalmers

Melissa went on to share that it has been beautiful to witness Métis children, youth, and families find a sense of home while living away from their homelands. Several families, alongside Elders

and staff, shared that LMO fosters connection and belonging so that families can feel like they are at home. One Métis mother, Lisa Adams*, shared that LMO has become a home for her and her family, in the context of living away from her home community in Alberta. She shared that her connection to LMO has been fostered by the ways that culture and language are woven into all aspects of the agency; for her, culture creates belonging.

Staff and families also spoke about the ways in which their programs have created community connections. For instance, Philip Shupe spoke about the strengthened connections he has witnessed between dads and their children—as well as a sense of community across parents—as a result of their engagement in programming:

The most immediate rewards that I see are I think we've had about four or five dads, and their kids barbecues this summer... and the immediate reward for that would be seeing the dads and their children communicating and swimming... the dads are chatting with each other, and we're all keeping an eye on our children. That's an immediate reward. And long-term is just that support system, where we've got so many things to look forward to. – Philip Shupe

Philip's reflections align with the experiences of the dads that he interacts with. One of these fathers shared why he enjoys attending the dad's group:

there is other dads around that you can talk to, good networking. Say if you just moved to a town and you don't know anyone, it's another place where you can meet people... I come here and volunteer my time with the facilitator of the dad's group... and help the Elders stuff. – Colin Atkinson*

Colin* went on to share that he enjoys helping out with the Dad's Group as a way of giving back to LMO. Like Colin*, Kathleen Svedberg shared that her involvement with the Mom's Group has been beneficial in her life:

We meet every Tuesday. It's awesome because I have four little kids, and only one is in school currently, so it's a place I can take my kids. There's child minding during it, and it's almost like a form of therapy, honestly. There are so many different moms who come and it's just an open space to talk about our struggles, what we're working on this week, what we hope to improve on, where we are in terms of the life balance—the kid balance and the home balance. It's just so many different facets. – Kathleen Svedberg

She spoke about how much she appreciates the emotional support, and the opportunity to be heard in an accepting space. Kathleen also explained how her understanding of Wahkotowin aligns with her experience of community and support at LMO:

it just goes back to then that idea of Wahkotowin. When I entered LMO, I think I was more stand-offish and leery, let's say, like why do these people want to help me? And I think it's kind of gone full circle now... they've really become a big part of me and my family's life... I think LMO has really helped me personally just see who is there at the end of the day, and at the end of the day it's my Métis family is there to help and support and follow me. – Kathleen Svedberg

For many Métis parents, including Kathleen, the supports at LMO have contributed to strengthened relational networks of support.

Staff indicated that community connectedness is a sustainable outcome for the Métis families that they work with. Catlin Durand* explained that when families engaged in programming and cultural events at LMO, it not only supports their sense of identity, but also their belonging as they connect more to community and understand that they belong to a Nation. As a result of her own community involvement, she also shared that she has noticed that families who were formerly connected to LMO have maintained their connections to the Métis community Kamloops, long after their involvement with LMO has ended.

Belonging for Métis Children. Many parents and grandparents also shared the impact that LMO has had for their children and grandchildren's sense of community and belonging within Métis spaces. Métis mom, Cindy Thomas* spoke about the value of having access to ECD programs that are rooted in Métis culture: “for my kids, it's having the Breakfast Program and having them be able to interact with other kids in an environment where they can learn their culture and just really feel like they know where they belong.” Similarly, Patti Lefrancois—a

grandmother and kinship caregiver—shared that LMO has created a space where her grandchildren can connect with other Métis people and their shared culture:

prior to becoming connected with this community, they were isolated. The fact that their family—both the Métis part of it and the non-Métis part of it—have been brought into the fold as part of it, I think it has given them a sense of being. You can't put a price on it. Like when they come in to LMO now... they know it's a safe place. So, it's being a part of. That is the greatest gift that this place does... I'm honoured that I'm being gifted the opportunity to be a part of it. – Patti Lefrancois

Within her reflections, Patti touched on LMO's practice of inclusion. Through including all family members who can engage with LMO's supports, LMO is honouring the diverse kinship networks of each Métis child and promoting a collective sense of security and belonging.

Related to the broader area of belonging, parents and grandparents often shared that their children have developed a sense of acceptance at LMO, as well as a love for the programs. Lisa Adams* shared that through attending ECD programs, like the Michif Wapososak Hot Breakfast Program, has helped her daughter to develop new interpersonal skills:

she's not a very social kid but she has improved her social skills just being around other children, I think, and it was nice seeing other kids interact with [her] and just like being curious about her because they could recognize that like she's not talking. 'Why doesn't she talk?' And yeah, she definitely loves the drums in Breakfast Group. – Lisa Adams*

As well, kinship caregiver Jocelyn Hunt shared that interacting with children who have diverse abilities has had a positive impact on her grandson: "it has showed him compassion. It taught him that others have different abilities. It's made him more well-rounded, I believe, because of the experience... it's made him just an overall well-rounded child as well." These perspectives emphasize the importance of connection and belonging for young children, who are both feeling a sense of belonging while also learning to be inclusive of others.

The value of building community for Métis children was echoed by Jocelyn Hunt, who said, "The sense of community here and what [my grandson] learns about where he comes from

is a very big thing for little children.” Family members also shared that they believe the positive impacts that LMO has had for their children and grandchildren will be long-lasting. When Patti Lefrancois was asked what her children think about LMO, she said:

I think as they get older—if what I’m future-casting is that we are going connected for a long time—I think they’re going to say it was an extension of home. I think they’re going to see it as their community. – Patti Lefrancois

Similarly, as staff reflected on their hopes for the future, many indicated that they believe that their work in creating cultural connections and finding community will have lasting, long-term impacts for the children.

Conclusion to Wise Practices for Decolonizing Métis Child Welfare

This chapter spotlights elements of service design and practice that contribute to LMO’s holistic approach of supporting Métis children, youth, and families. It also contextualizes the work required for system transformation within some of the challenges that the agency faces. In particular, the findings focus on elements of the Michif Team, including their collective passion and dedication to supporting Métis children, youth, and families, as well as the qualities and features of LMO that foster success. The findings also detail the strengths and challenges that helpers at LMO experience while working to support children, youth, and families. From a structural standpoint, funding remains an overwhelming obstacle, but the agency has successfully navigated financial constraints through the innovative and resourceful efforts of its dedicated staff and leaders. Organizationally, challenges reflect a need for continued efforts towards improving communication and documentation, strengthening partnerships, and providing ongoing training to staff. Within the child welfare system, there are also ongoing issues with respect to the (mis)identification of Métis children; LMO has noticed improvements in this area, but staff acknowledged that further efforts are necessary to address full systemic

change. Further, as a system, child welfare continues to exist within a complex web of interconnected systems of oppression; while pockets of good work exist—and LMO is one exemplar—Métis families are continually being harmed by a system that perpetuates colonial violence.

The Elders provide invaluable support throughout LMO. They provide guidance and mentorship directly to children, youth, families, and staff at LMO, while also influencing the ways that services are designed. Staff and families alike were clear that the Elders' roles in bringing culture to the forefront of services that support Métis children, youth, and families is invaluable. The findings also bring forward the many ways in which culture is embedded into the design and delivery of LMO's services. Elders, staff, and families spoke about the importance of having a child welfare system that supports youth to reconnect with their culture, their identities, their families, and their histories. Culture is a part of every aspect of LMO—from the intentional characteristics of the agency's space to the ways in which services are fully enriched with Michif language, music, play, stories, land-based practices, and ceremony. A significant aspect of bringing Métis culture and ways of knowing into their work is facilitated through the thoughtful design and effective implementation of LMO's Michif Practice Model.

This chapter specifically speaks about the unique elements of the Michif Practice Model, as well as the overarching values and characteristics that shape the Model. The Michif Practice Model brings together traditional practices, including the Piihitikway, visiting, and elements of Wahkotowin, with evidence-based elements from Signs of Safety that shape the balanced assessments, analysis, and the child's voice. Together, both culture and strengths-based social work practice create space for honouring and celebrating success for children, youth, and families—an important aspect of the Michif Practice Model.

With a collective passion and dedication for supporting Métis children, youth, and families, the LMO staff and Elders frequently shared that they do this work to make a difference. Early into this research, it was clear that there was a shared interest in understanding what difference was being made through their work. The outcomes for children, youth, and families who have accessed services and supports at LMO are noteworthy. At an individual-level, staff and families identified improved relationships and engagement in services, as well as strengthened skills and independence. For families, LMO has contributed to important outcomes with respect to family reunification, preservation (i.e., prevention), and kinship care. Their work has also contributed to cultural resurgence for Métis families, and a sense of belonging for those who may otherwise feel disconnected. Collectively, those who participated in this research expressed a hope and a belief that the difference that LMO is making for Métis children, youth, and families will have long-lasting effects for generations to come.

Chapter 7: Bringing the Bundle Together

During a meeting early in the research planning process, I sat with Colleen Lucier (LMO Executive Director), Caara Goddard (LMO Practice Consultant), and Michael Caslor (Director of Research for the International Signs of Safety community). There was keen interest in this research for understanding the outcomes associated with LMO—or the difference that LMO makes for Métis children, youth, and families—as well as what these outcomes can be attributed to. In bringing the knowledge shared throughout this dissertation together to form a bundle, I aim to respond to this early query: What is the difference that makes a difference?

Upholding the Meaning of Otipemisiwak

In the context of mainstream child welfare practice, Métis children, youth, and families are frequently perceived as an anomaly (Carrière & Richardson, 2017a). Throughout policy, Métis children are treated as “the other,” or simply rendered as invisible (Canada, 2017; Carrière et al., 2021). At LMO, Métis families reported that they feel seen, and that their culture is reflected throughout all of the services that they receive. Staff are intimately aware that the system can perpetuate harm within Métis families, which is compounded by the damage of being or becoming invisible. LMO’s contribution to healing, is also based on their efforts to ensure that families feel safe to access services, and to actively choose to be openly identifying as Métis people. This is particularly significant given the context of “passing” as a tactical approach within some Métis families (Canada, 2017; Richardson & Seaborn, 2009). Much of LMO’s practice—including the Piihitikway, collaborative planning, and other ways of visiting with families—is rooted in a relational approach. Staff were clear that relationships with families contribute to effective prevention-based services. The impact of positive relationships is seen across many indicators of engagement in services, including the growth of program waitlists,

increased trust among families for LMO, openness to returning to LMO when support is needed, and feelings of safety among families accessing services at LMO. These findings are significant, as relational approaches are critical to countering colonial violence within the child welfare system (Gerlach et al., 2017). More broadly, as Hart (2009) suggests, decolonizing helping within Indigenous communities requires a return to centring relationships. While historical and ongoing practices of assimilation have contributed to resentment and mistrust for the system, relational approaches can help to mend these harms.

LMO's overall approach, and the Michif Practice Model specifically, also align with what Richardson (2016b) calls a "Métis-astute social work practice," which involves acknowledging Métis experiences with colonialism, ratifying issues with the identification of Métis children in the system, and fostering opportunities for Métis children to strengthen their identities (p. 84). Similarly, The Manitoba Metis Federation and the Metis Child and Family Services Authority (2013) assert the need for delivering culturally responsive services specific to Métis children and families. Within mainstream child welfare spaces, Carrière et al. (2021) speak to the need for Métis cultural consultants to work alongside social workers to co-create practice that is both ethical and culturally responsive, highlighting wholistic perspectives on strengths and family safety. LMO's Michif Practice Model brings forward each child, youth, and family's strengths and worries, within a balanced, Métis cultural context. This Model serves as a foundation for reminding families of who they are. While it is possible that other Métis practice models exist, the review of Métis child and family agencies across Canada did not reveal any models of this kind. Similarly, Elder Denise McCuaig shared that while there are other agencies that are doing good work, practice is often rooted within Eurocentric social work theory:

this is something I believe Lii Michif Otipemisiwak does really well and I've also, because of the work I do regionally and provincially, nationally, have come to appreciate

that they may be the only ones in the country doing it... I'm pretty confident that you might find some components of what LMO does if you walked into the Métis Family Services in Surrey, you might find some of it in the Métis family services in Winnipeg, but for the most part, child welfare agencies that I have interacted with are still incorporating the mainstream Ministry of Children and Family Development model. – Denise McCuaig

With awareness of the uniqueness of their model, Elders and staff alike demonstrated generosity and a great openness to sharing their work with others, for the betterment of Métis children, youth, and families across the homeland.

The Importance of Métis-Specific Spaces

Too often, Indigenous social work promotes pan-Indigenous culture, including through the ways in which spaces are decorated (Richardson & Seaborn, 2009). Richardson (2016a) asserts the importance of creating Métis-centred spaces—both physically and emotionally—through the provision of safe spaces that promote the continuity of Métis culture and identity. Richardson's (2016a) theory of the Métis “Third Space” should be applied to Métis-specific child welfare services. Similarly, Richardson and Seaborn (2009) assert that social work services must reflect Métis culture and promote cultural safety to families that interact with these supports. Monchalin and colleagues (2019, 2022) call for similar types of recognition and reflection of Métis culture within services within healthcare spaces. The findings from the research with LMO indicate the importance of receiving child and family supports within a warm and welcoming environment. Families and staff alike also described LMO as being distinctly Métis. The value of the of LMO's physical space cannot be overstated. As Elder Denise McCuaig shared, there are few places across Turtle Island, and in BC in particular, that present Métis culture so intentionally from the moment that you walk through the doors: “To walk into an environment that is uniquely Métis is very, very rare.” Elder Denise highlighted this gap as a call to action for governments to invest in more Métis spaces and cultural centres, emphasizing

the immense value and benefit that these places have for Métis children, families, and communities. As she states, there are significant and wholistic health and wellness benefits “to having a space that is uniquely ours and when we walk in those doors, we can be our authentic selves.”

Helping in Métis Spaces. Children, youth, and families are supported by a number of helpers and Métis Elders at LMO. Helpers—including Métis, First Nations, and non-Indigenous staff, who work across service areas—acknowledged the value of working in a space that is reflective of Métis culture. They also spoke about the importance of the Michif Practice Model, which grounds their work in Métis culture and values. Some staff acknowledged that their learning is ongoing; alongside learning to help in a Métis way, they spoke about the need to unlearn colonial pedagogies that inform mainstream social work. These sentiments highlight the importance of onboarding, ongoing training, and cultural guidance—all of which support staff to transform their practice at LMO. These challenges also point to the current limitations in social work education and credentialing. While there is a great deal of variation in terms of the extent to which social work programs focus on Indigenous content, there remains a general lack of Métis-specific undergraduate-level social work courses in BC post-secondary institutions.⁴⁷

In recounting their motivations for choosing to be helpers at LMO, staff spotlighted the agency’s strengths, as well as their personal motivations and values. They emphasized the significance of supporting children, youth, and families within a Métis organization. For some,

⁴⁷ However, this is not to say that programs have not made strides with respect to shifting to decolonial approaches (see: University of Northern British Columbia [UNBC], 2024; University of Victoria [UVic], 2024). Others have expressed a plan for indigenizing and decolonizing their social work programs (see: Thompson Rivers University [TRU], 2024; Vancouver Island University, 2024). There are also many social work programs that have Métis and First Nations faculty members (see: Nicola Valley Institute of Technology [NVIT], 2024; TRU, 2024; University of British Columbia, 2024; UNBC, 2024; UVic, 2024). Some programs also offer Indigenous specialization streams within the social work program (see: NVIT, 2024; UNBC, 2020; UVic, 2024). However, across all of these programs, there was no evidence of Métis-specific courses.

personal experiences within, and interactions with the mainstream child welfare system have fueled their desire to reimagine how social work can be done. These staff spoke about the importance of being supported to transform their practice. With leadership at LMO that promotes the revitalization of Métis culture in social work, staff also highlighted the importance of having a clear vision for decolonizing Métis social work. These strengths are mirrored within the work of Métis scholar, Susan Burke (2018), who highlights the importance of flexibility and autonomy in social work practice, under effective leadership models. With access to Elders, teachings, and culturally responsive tools, staff noted that they have felt supported to practice social work in decolonizing and anti-colonial ways. Indeed, the meaningful involvement of Elders—which is described in more detail throughout this chapter—has been discussed by others, including leaders of the Northwest Inter-nation Family and Community Services Society, an ICFS agency located in Terrace, BC (Bennett, 2015). When speaking about the value that Elders bring to social work practice, Bennett (2015) states, “Elders are a valuable source of strength and cultural knowledge who can assist with centring culture at the heart of practice... [they] assist in conflict resolution by applying customary ways of restoring harmony and balance” (p. 111). While wellness supports remain a topic of conversation within LMO and elsewhere (Burke, 2018), Elders at LMO were identified as an important support for wellness among staff, as well as children, youth, and families. Staff were also clear that LMO promotes a feeling of belonging for the families that they serve, as well as the staff. In addition to these supports, a passion for helping Métis people, was a common theme for staff who shared the reasons that they continually choose to engage in helping work.

Otipemisiwak and Independence

While speaking about the history of LMO, staff shared that the name was gifted to them by the late Elder Dave Barron, who wished to widely recognize the Métis people as Otipemisiwak—the people that govern themselves. Otipemisiwak reflects Métis independence, but it does so from a collective worldview rather than an individual mindset. In thinking about the importance of independence from a Métis perspective, the Elders shared the ways in which life skills can contribute to the growth of children and youth as Otipemisiwak. They cautioned that the mainstream child welfare system is failing Métis youth, as they are aging out of the system without practical skills for independence and survival. The Elders asserted the importance of survival skills—including gardening, sewing, financial literacy, cooking, and cleaning—which promote resourcefulness. At LMO, the Elders are working to demonstrate the relevance of these skills through teaching younger generations of Métis youth. Through the work at Kikékyelc: A Place of Belonging, staff, youth, and Elders shared many examples of importance outcomes rooted in independence, including areas of housing, education, life skills, and employment.

In the spirit of Otipemisiwak, there are also opportunities for LMO to invest in increasing their autonomy as a Métis-specific child and family services agency. The Michif Practice Model represents an example of meaningfully adapting Signs of Safety for, and under the leadership of, Métis people. Leaders and staff at LMO also uphold the spirit of continuous improvement, knowing that new learnings will come alongside their transformation work. The model and the example assessments shared in this research (Appendix A) represent a snapshot of practice at LMO, reflective of their growth from 2017 to 2023. As their practice continues to evolve, the tools that assist their practice, will also grow and shift.

Leaders in Indigenous child welfare have called for social workers to retire the use of structured risk assessment and decision-making tools that individualize structural inequities (e.g., systemic racism, poverty, colonial violence; Blackstock & Fallon, 2021). The current assessment tools at LMO guide helpers to contextualize risk and balance these concerns with each family's strengths.⁴⁸ Balanced assessments are used within a collaborative planning process that is rooted in relationships. Signs of Safety is recognized as a valuable alternative to structured decision-making tools (Mickelson et al., 2017). In considering guidance on anti-oppressive and anti-colonial practice (see: Hart, 2009; Richardson & Wade, 2010), future iterations of the Michif Practice Model may consider a full departure from assessments that centre individual-level measures of risk.

During the interviews, LMO staff also indicated that they experience challenges in documenting their practice within the restrictive of the mainstream Integrated Case Management System—a data system that is used throughout the province to manage child welfare cases. In the future, there may be opportunities to learn from the ground-breaking work that the Metis Child, Family and Community Services Agency (2021) accomplished through launching the first Metis-specific case management system for child welfare in Canada. As a whole, shifts in assessments, tools, and information management will help to further decolonize LMO's practice, shifting away from a risk-based, colonial child welfare system.

Elders' Involvement

Research has demonstrated the important role of role models and mentors within Métis communities—including Elders and grandparents, family members, and other trusted adults

⁴⁸ This practice is both a reflection of Signs of Safety, as well as the elements of cultural adaptation that have informed the Michif Practice Model, specifically.

(Auger, 2012; Edge & McCallum, 2006). Elders are invaluable members of Métis communities. Edge and McCallum (2006) note the importance of Métis Elders' gatherings as events that can help to "facilitate and foster the exchange and practice of traditional knowledge in a respectful and reciprocal manner" (p. 84). These gatherings are increasingly being recognized for their importance in facilitating knowledge transmission from Elders to youth. In recognizing the value of Elders' guidance, many Indigenous child welfare agencies have sought to incorporate Elders in their offices; while roles may vary, Bennett (2015) notes that Elders have been helpful in "applying customary ways of restoring harmony and balance" (p. 111) in the midst of conflict, as well as sharing stories, cultural teachings, history, and values with children.

Through the Michif Elders Council, Métis Elders are involved in all aspects of LMO's service design and delivery, including the implementation and refinement of the Michif Practice Model, providing direct support to Métis children and families, mentoring staff and caregivers, consulting on cases, and guiding other aspects of the agency's operations. With a rotating schedule, there is always an Elder present and willing to provide support at LMO. Importantly, the Elders are also compensated for their time. At other agencies, Elders may hold a more consistent role that is specific in scope; at Metis Calgary Family Services Society (n.d.), Elders provide in-home assistance to families who may benefit from these supports. Alternatively, while Elders may be available at other Métis agencies in Canada, their involvement is available upon request (Métis Family Services, 2020). With involvement that often feels organic, Elders offer teachings to staff, as well as directly to Métis children, youth, and families. Elders were described as facilitators of culture—an important reason that culture is embedded into all aspects of LMO.

The roles of Elders at LMO reflect the broader teachings that Indigenous helpers have shared. Among them, Raven Sinclair (2009) notes, “Elders remind us that in order to know where we are going, we have to know where we have been” (p. 19). Elders are the “ones who know” (Hourie & Carrière-Acco, 2006, p. 56) and the ones who are known (Edge & McCallum, 2006). They are bridges in community, and conflict mediators (Flicker et al., 2016). Elders are people who carry and share gifts through teaching and storytelling (NAHO, 2008); through sharing aspects of traditional approaches to child-rearing, they help parents to strengthen knowledge and skills for culturally responsive approaches to caring for their children. At LMO, the Elders also have an expanded role in supporting children and youth, as they work with youth throughout and beyond their transitions to adulthood.

The Importance of Stories

Stories are medicine (Richardson, 2016a, p. 37); they are the essence of who the Métis people are (Oster & Lizee, 2021). Stories carry culture, language, and traditions (Macdougall, 2017). Stories are life promoting—nurturing identity and belonging—as they “remind us of how to be well” (Richardson & Seaborn, 2009, p. 127). Storytelling has always been a highly trusted and effective method for sharing knowledge (Kovach, 2010). And stories contain important knowledge—teaching children and adults alike to carry themselves in a good way (Richardson, 2016a). Specifically, stories also offer reminders of teachings, like Wahkotowin, that guide Métis people to be good relatives and take care of all of their relations.

Fostering Belonging

It is well documented that children need a sense of belonging in order to thrive (Bennett, 2015; Carrière et al., 2021; Richardson & Carrière, 2017a). The significance of belonging was emphasized in discussions about LMO's impact, with both staff and Elders highlighting the

interconnectedness between a sense of belonging and wholistic well-being. Their efforts are also coming to fruition for Indigenous youth who have aged out of care. Through Kikékyelc—and more broadly, the wellness supports that have been expanded to serve youth until they are at least 27 years old—have contributed to the positive outcomes shared in this research. Belonging is fostered through strengthening cultural continuity—inclusive of connections to land, language, community, and culture. This is particularly valuable for families who may not otherwise feel connected in their urban environment. For many families, these connections have lasted beyond their involvement with LMO; the Elders hope and believe that these connections will strengthen generations of Métis people to come.

Connection to Land and Community

In their applied research project, *Bringing Home the Kids*, Bodor and colleagues (2009) share the process of bringing 60 children who were “in care”—along with their case workers and foster parents—to reconnect with their families and home communities. Through sharing this process, the authors “explore concepts of attachment and kinship and then describe how the ‘Bringing Home the Kids’ project contributed to mediating previous experiences of anxious and disrupted attachment in a First Nations context” (p. 12). Similarly, Bennett (2015) described the ways in which her staff collaborated with Haisla and Tsimshian communities to bring their children home for visits with extended family and involvement in their culture. On an annual basis, LMO takes a similar approach of bringing children, youth, and families Back to Batoche. These visits have contributed to increased cultural (self) awareness, pride, and belonging. In addition to visits and celebrations, LMO also works to foster connection between families and with the broader Métis community. As a whole, this work responds to the call from Carrière &

Richardson (2017a) who state, “it is time to help Métis family members find each other, their sense of community and inclusion” (p. 4).

Honouring Children, Youth, and Families

Wise practices from the literature indicate that the importance of using strengths-based and relational approaches when working with Indigenous children and families (Gerlach et al., 2017). Relational approaches should meaningfully involve Elders and families across all aspects of planning (Gerlach et al., 2017). From a Métis social work practice standpoint, staff at LMO are deeply aware that approaches to supporting the wholistic wellbeing and safety of Métis children, youth, and their families, must centre the strength of Métis families, culture, and traditional ways. This is demonstrated, in part, through sashing families in ceremony or during a Piihitikway, or hosting a celebration dinner to honour achievements. Other agencies have also adopted ways celebrating children and youth, including Honouring Ceremonies for youth who have aged out of care (Michif Child and Family Services in Manitoba, 2023). In addition to celebrating significant life events, LMO also honours growth in relationships, as well as achievements. Several family members shared that being honoured helped to promote their sense of belonging, and also made them feel important.

Kinship Care is Traditional

Métis communities have long held distinct and effective approaches for caring for children in their communities. While stories indicate that some families faced occasional challenges, traditional approaches to child-rearing ensured that children were nurtured and kept safe, while families were supported. These collective practices, grounded in community and culture, ensured that children were cherished and protected within their families and extended kinship networks (Burke, 2023; Carrière, 2017; Dorion, 2010; Mann-Johnson, 2017). Kinship

care is relational, with the intention of blanketing children with love and acceptance, through the re-centring “the responsibilities of extended family and community across generations to support and claim youth, and retrace the circle of ancestral, spiritual, and territorial belonging” (de Finney & di Tomasso, 2015, p. 79).

It is not surprising that research indicates that when children are not able to remain in their family homes, placing them with extended family leads to the best possible outcomes (Auger, 2012; Kimmelman, 1985). Indigenous and ally scholars have asserted that a focus on cultural identity and belonging may be more appropriate than the western notion of attachment and permanency (Bennett, 2015; Carrière de Finney & di Tomasso, 2015; Richardson, 2016b). With their overwhelming focus on dyad relationships, Eurocentric theories on attachment also tend to overlook traditional kinship ties and community connections (Mann-Johnson 2017; Richardson, 2016b). Kinship care provides children opportunities for increased stability, while they are able to maintain their family and community connections; as such, research has demonstrated that children experience better outcomes when compared to experiences in foster care (Bodor et al., 2009; de Finney & di Tomasso, 2015). Interestingly, de Finney and di Tomasso found that the youth they interviewed repeatedly asked about kinship care, “even when they knew little about their backgrounds and even when they felt conflicted about reconnecting with their family, community, and culture” (p. 78).

The findings on kinship care, both in terms of stories and administrative data, demonstrate the ways in which children are supported to remain within their extended family and kinship networks. LMO has assisted many family members to provide kinship care in ways that align with traditional Métis practices. Traditionally, grandparents played supportive roles that assisted parents with child-rearing; this approach continues to offer valuable supports to families

while maintaining important family relationships and strengthening cultural connections. LMO's practice of supporting kinship care was recognized by parents, grandparents, Elders, and staff. The strengths of kinship care for children who are not able to live with their natural parents is recognized at LMO as well as other Métis agencies, including Métis Child and Family Services Society (2018) in Edmonton and Michif Child and Family Services in Manitoba (2023).

This research included the voices of four kinship caregivers—each of whom were caring for their grandchildren. These grandparents spoke, with gratitude, about the supports that they received from LMO. Some stated that without LMO they would not be in the position of being able to care for their kin. Grandparents have always been integral in Métis families and communities; they provide support with raising, socializing, and teaching grandchildren, while also supporting families as a whole (Barker, 2020). Grandparents are important teachers, as they are in positions to pass on knowledge related to Métis child-rearing. The Elders within this research, too, convey the importance of teaching children through unobtrusive ways, including storytelling, observation, redirection, and natural consequences. Similarly, Vicky Boldo shares that for her, *sipeyihitamowin* (patience) was passed on through teachings across generations, as part of Cree-Métis practice of *opikinawasowin* (child-rearing; Fast & Boldo, 2021, p. 43).

Teaching has been used in place of discipline, in some Métis families. Knowing that each child carries their own unique gift, Métis Elders seek to support children, youth, and adults to find out what gifts they carry and discover how they can best be nurtured. These sentiments are echoed by other Métis Elders; among them, Elder Tom McCallum shares everyone is on a journey to realize their own gifts: “Emikosiyin iyawimikawiyin is to be blessed by the Creator, to be born with a certain gift given to you by the Creator, a gift that you have to realize during your lifetime” (NAHO, 2008, p. 18). These gifts are connected to each person's sense of identity,

belonging, and purpose. And while some Elders shared that they are still on their personal journey of learning what their own talents and gifts are, each child's gift can be nurtured by parents and families through allowing them opportunities to explore and discover their purpose (NAHO, 2008).

The benefits of kinship care, within the continuity of supports for Indigenous children and families, is well documented. Kinship care fosters cultural identity, sense of self, belonging, self-esteem, and connectedness to family and community (Bodor et al., 2009; Carrière, 1997; Carrière et al., 2021; Mann-Johnson, 2017). Though they are not always permanent, nor are they always intended to be, kinship care placements are considered as safe and valuable options for Métis children, offering stability and fostering a sense of belonging (Carrière et al., 2021; Mann-Johnson, 2017; Richardson & Carrière, 2017a). In fact, de Finney and di Tomasso (2015) note that kinship relations and placements are often fluid in Indigenous communities, and that movement between family members' homes for children may not be as disruptive as western social work education has portrayed, as long as there are positive kinship connections that foster a sense of belonging and place.

As a people who have always emphasized the importance of family (Carrière, 2017; Teillet, 2019), Métis Elders often emphasize how important it is for Métis people to know who their relatives are (NAHO, 2008; Oster & Lizee, 2021). The Elders who participated in this present study spoke about the ways in which extended families and communities created natural systems of support for Métis children and their parents. Several Elders spoke about how supporting each other has always been a central component of traditional Métis childrearing. In particular, Wahkotowin informed a foundation for prevention supports for Métis families. They also highlighted that respite care, kinship care, and customary adoption were all used before the

implementation of the colonial government. These practices were all described as relatively common and effective. When children remained within their families, they grew up knowing who they were and where they belonged. Other Elders, including Métis-Cree Elder Elsie Paul, have spoken about importance of kinship teachings in creating places of belonging for children in community (Circle Teachings, 2019). Belonging is fostered when Métis children grow up knowing who they are, where they come from, and who their relatives are (Hancock, 2017). These teachings are integral, ensuring that Métis children can grow into proud people (Oster & Lizee, 2021). As a result of its inherent nature, kinship care honours each child's familial and cultural connections, contributing to a stronger sense of self and belonging within the collective (Mann-Johnson, 2017).

Strengthening Wellness through Prevention-Based Supports

Advocates and Elders alike have long asserted prevention-based child and family services lead to better outcomes for children, youth, and families (Burke et al., 2023; Tait et al., 2013; West Coast Leaf, 2019). The child welfare system, as a whole, has failed to protect children in a holistic sense. Survivors of government care often attribute their experiences with significant trauma (Carrière et al., 2021; Tait et al., 2013) and mental health concerns (Smith et al., 2019). The mainstream child welfare system is also known to sever connections with culture, family, and community.⁴⁹ Contributing to higher rates of homelessness, unemployment, and involvement with the criminal justice system (Nickel et al., 2020). Richardson and Carrière (2017b) speak to the need for addressing Métis child and family poverty through the provision of prevention-focused supports. This current research highlights ways in which holistic support services—

⁴⁹ This continues to occur despite international frameworks that cement the rights of children with respect to their culture and heritage (e.g., *UNCRC*, *UNDRIP*), and provincial legislation that indicates that the best interests of the child are inclusive of the child's cultural identity (e.g., *CFCSA*, 1996).

that are grounded in Métis culture—can contribute to important outcomes for children and families. Through a culturally responsive practice model that centres a relational approach, LMO is working to re-orient child welfare back to these traditional practices which held children in the centre of fulsome supportive systems. Staff shared several outcomes of family preservation, and they attribute these outcomes to the collective efforts of families and supports at LMO.

Returning to Wahkotowin

Wahkotowin comes with the responsibility of upholding relational and reciprocal obligations with generosity, kindness, and good intentions (Macdougall, 2017). In this way, Wahkotowin is seen as the foundation of Métis communities (Macdougall, 2006). To uphold these responsibilities, Wahkotowin requires Métis people to support and take care of their relatives and their communities (Canada, 2017; Flaminio et al., 2020; Gaudet, 2018; Macdougall, 2010). Part of these responsibilities involved supporting families and helping them with childcare, without passing judgment (Barker, 2020). Colonialism has impacted Métis families, and it has caused a disconnect in the way that Wahkotowin is upheld, and relational accountabilities are honoured (Campbell, 2007). LMO also practices in a way that aims to restore Wahkotowin through working with Métis families. This work—which involves creating relationships with rooted in kindness and accountability—contributes to families rebuilding their own internal relationships.

Aligning with Wahkotowin, traditionally, Métis people recognized that each person had a role in community with distinct responsibilities for contributing to the collective well-being of the group. These responsibilities often included ways that each person was expected to support their family and their neighbours (Barker, 2020). Elders speak about this—taking care of one

another—as a key to returning to balanced and whole families and communities. In these ways, Wahkotowin is a part of decolonizing the Métis child welfare system.

Culture is Prevention

It has long been recognized that Indigenous children have the right to know who they are and where they come from, as well as the right to maintain memories, to have culture respected, and to access opportunities to strengthen and promote their ancestral ways of knowing (Kimelman, 1985). When children are apprehended and placed in cities that are geographically distant from their home communities, it becomes increasingly difficult for that child to stay connected to their family, community, and culture. Research has also demonstrated the value of cultural practices and teachings, including connection to community, land, and language, as powerful protective factors that promote resilience and positive mental health for Indigenous youth (Edge & McCallum, 2006). Within the context of contemporary child welfare, Bodor and colleagues (2009) recognize that through “connecting individuals as part of the community through the experience of ‘wahkohtowin’ [we] may help to heal experiences of disrupted attachment” (p. 15). This active process of bringing children back to visit their families, their homelands, and their communities can help to repair and strengthen their Wahkotowin relationships that have been severed by way of being in government care (Bodor et al., 2009). However, as Bennett (2015) notes, “connection to culture is not a simple matter of exposing the child or youth in care to First Nations ceremonies or cultural activities. Children need to connect in meaningful ways to their own specific culture(s) and relations” (p. 106). For First Nations and Métis people alike, children thrive when they are able to grow up in their community, receiving teachings and guidance from Elders and opportunities to learn and connect with their culture (Bennett, 2015; Oster & Lizee, 2021; Quinn & Saini, 2012).

While research in Indigenous social work has long recognized the importance of cultural and community connections (Bennett, 2015), a report by the RCY (2020) found that Métis children in care in BC often experience inadequate cultural planning. This can include a lack of access to Elders, insufficient knowledge about their genealogy and family, disconnection from community and culture, and barriers to learning their language (RCY, 2020). Cultural practices and land-based ceremonies serve to reinforce places of belonging, cultural heritage, and oral histories; these are essential protective factors for the wellness of all Indigenous children and youth, and particularly important for children that are made vulnerable by way of the child welfare system (de Finney & di Tomasso, 2015).

LMO views their role as embedding culture throughout their practice as a way of repairing and healing the harms of colonialism. Staff were clear in stating that “culture is trauma informed,” and that “culture creates safety.” Culture also creates the conditions for healing—for Métis children, youth, and families to feel worthy. Daylan Kidder shared her vision for the future, where the impacts of work with younger Métis children will re-shape the future for Métis youth and families:

I think we'll see a huge difference within the next 10 years because our prevention team for early years is so strong... we're doing such good prevention work early on, right now, and we're instilling the importance of identifying as Métis, and the importance of culture in those young ones, that like when they are [older], they're going to know who they are and who their family is. – Daylan Kidder

In considering the ways in which colonial violence is perpetuated through the child welfare system (Gerlach et al., 2017) and the trauma that many Métis families have survived, it was inspiring to witness and hear about the ways in which LMO is fighting for Métis people. As a result of this dedicated work toward healing, there is a collective understanding that culture will contribute to prevention.

Summary of Wise Practices

This research illustrates the ways in which Métis culture has created a foundation for helping Métis children, youth, and families at LMO. Through offering supports grounded in culture, Métis child welfare provide opportunities for cultural revitalization and resurgence. Culture is at the forefront of everything that LMO does. This is supported by a wide range of literature that suggests that Métis culture should serve as a foundation for child, youth and family supports (Edge & McCallum, 2006; Gerlach et al., 2017; Quinn & Saini, 2012; Richardson, 2016b).⁵⁰ When delivered in culturally responsive and safe ways (i.e., the provision of Métis-specific services), supports can create opportunities to engage Métis children, youth, and families in learning about their traditions and ways of knowing. As part of LMO's overall approach to supporting Métis children, youth, and families, Michif language revitalization is a collective movement and priority that is central to the work at LMO. Language is recognized as a central aspect of Métis life and is appropriately woven into all services and programs at LMO. For many families, language contributes to the welcoming environment that is fostered at LMO—a place that feels like home. Using music and stories to share language with children and families, Michif is a central component of LMO's Early Years programming. LMO has cultivated play opportunities that are distinctively Métis, which naturally encourage children to ask questions about their culture.

With recognition that healing can come from the land, LMO staff shared the ways in which they work to incorporate land-based learning and wellness strategies for children, youth, and families. Families, too, spoke about the ways that they have incorporated Métis teachings around mindfulness and connection to help ground their children and grandchildren. Some of the

⁵⁰ The importance of culturally responsive support services is not only asserted within the literature but also affirmed within Bill C-92: An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth, and families.

programs also contribute towards the revitalization of traditional roles within Métis families and communities. Specific programs, like the Dads' Group, help to promote positive masculinity and traditional roles within Métis families. Much of the literature speaks to the value in understanding traditional roles of mothers and fathers, as well as the strengths that they bring to child-rearing practice (Graham & Davoren, 2015; Oster & Lizee, 2021; Teillet, 2019). Within their prevention-based programming, LMO creates space for parents to connect and to explore how they can bring Métis culture and traditions into their lives and their parenting practices.

Through opportunities to learn about, practice, and share Métis culture, LMO staff have watched children become increasingly curious and enthusiastic about their cultural heritage and identity. More broadly, staff and Elders have witnessed positive changes taking place, with increasing numbers of Métis children and families embracing and taking pride in their culture. As Métis children are actively learning about and embracing their cultural identity, they are fostering a strong sense of self (Carrière, 2007; Hancock, 2017; Richardson, 2016a). As they mature, this knowledge will be passed on to the next generations, contributing to intergenerational pride and overall well-being in Métis communities (Edge & McCallum, 2006; Flaminio et al., 2020; Richardson, 2016b).

As prevention-based programming continues to grow, there remains a need for effective supports for youth. With recognition that the child welfare system has created vulnerability for youth aging out of care, Kikékyelc helps to prepare Indigenous youth to live independently. As a result of the collective efforts of staff, Elders, and youth residents, Kikékyelc is contributing to belonging and independence. Belonging, identity, and wellness are further strengthened through a focus on kinship care, rather than foster care. Métis culture serves as a way of remembering and restructuring the ways in which children can be supported by their extended families.

Kinship care is a traditional practice, and LMO has worked alongside Métis families to find ways of supporting children to remain connected to their own kin. Further, the inclusive approach to services at LMO not only engages children but involves entire families, creating a supportive environment where Métis culture is celebrated, and its strengths are highlighted. In this research, several families shared that the children are the ones that are bringing culture back into their homes—they are taking what they have learned at LMO and sharing it around the kitchen table. Not only is cultural identity an important outcome for each child and youth's wellness, but it also will have an impact that is passed down across generations, where future children and grandchildren will be more likely to be raised with a strong understanding of who they are and where they come from (Auger, 2021; Oster & Lizee, 2021). Fostering a sense of cultural pride and identity for young Métis people creates a foundation for long-term benefits—throughout each individual child's life, carrying through to adolescence and adulthood—as well as wider impacts from ongoing learning and sharing with their families and communities.

LMO's approach to embedding Métis culture into all aspects of service is successful as a result of the Michif Elders Council. Through intentional design, Métis Elders are at the forefront of LMO's work. The Elders are continually involved in providing support to Métis children, youth, and families, as well as LMO staff. Importantly, they have also guided the development and refinement of the Michif Practice Model.

Wise practices in Métis child welfare are cemented within LMO's Michif Practice Model, which reflects a localized adaptation of the Signs of Safety approach within the context of Métis culture, ways of being, and values. Upholding traditional practice through the Piihitikway, the balanced assessments, visiting, and Wahkotowin, the Michif Practice Model reflects LMO's unique approach to walking alongside families as they work toward safety and

wellness. Their model is a result of years of dedication toward supporting families in wholistic and culturally responsive ways—ways that are reflective of how Métis people have always supported their children, youth, and families. The outcomes tied to LMO’s approach—including the relationships, skills and independence, family preservation, cultural resurgence, and belonging—illustrate the immense value of recentring Métis culture and values, and returning to traditional practices.

Recommendations

The focus on wise practices within this research speaks to the importance of grounding Métis child welfare practice within culture, developing culturally responsive practice models, and the value of involving Elders throughout the design and delivery of services and supports. At a structural level, this research points to two key recommendations for strengthening Métis child welfare.

Use inclusive approaches to defining Métis within child and family services. Identity is complex, and opinions around who is Métis, and who is not, can have significant and far-reaching impacts for people—many of whom are working against generations of colonial oppression and violence—as they seek to reclaim their identities and places of belonging. As a whole, identity politics have contributed to exclusion; such experiences—which may constitute lateral violence—can have significant negative impacts on Métis children and families’ sense of self and wholistic wellness (Richardson, 2016a). In alignment with LMO’s inclusive approach to supporting self-identified Métis children, youth, and families, this research intentionally privileges a more inclusive understanding of Métis identity in recognition of the impacts of colonialism on Métis identity and its impacts for Métis children who have been disconnected from their families and communities. This approach to identity also acknowledges diversity

across Métis communities. These views are generally supported by a number of Métis women and allies, who are scholars of Métis history and helping professions (Carrière, 2017; Macdougall, 2010, 2017; Raven, 2018; Richardson, 2016a; St-Onge & Podruchny, 2012). The journey of finding belonging and place—or *miskâsowin*—extends to all Métis people (Clark & Smith, 2021). Within the context of child welfare, Carrière et al. (2021) assert that inclusive practice should promote opportunities for children to belong:

Children in the system disconnected from cultural community have the right to be Métis. Rather than create rigid categories that exclude, Métis youth can be supported to participate in culture, connect with community, and be given some of the responsibility that comes with belonging. (p. 182)

Therefore, broader definitions may be more inclusive of Métis families who are in the early stages of recovering their identities and re-establishing a sense of *Wahkotowin*.

Increase funding for prevention-based child welfare services. Within the field of Métis child welfare, it is widely recognized that Métis family services are under-funded. One of the most commonly identified needs within the field is the provision of adequate and sustainable funding for prevention-based services (Manitoba Metis Federation & the Metis Child and Family Services Authority, 2013; RCY, 2020; Richardson & Carrière, 2017a). Upstream solutions and support requirements are less resource-intensive and provide a greater impact in the long-term (Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work & the Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario, 2023). The shift from intervention to prevention provides an avenue to move away from the need for resource-intensive supports. Staff consistently shared that a greater investment in prevention-focused, culturally responsive supports are needed—both within a Métis context as well as for other ICFS agencies.

The implementation of *DRIPA* (2019) and the Province of BC's (2022) resultant action plan may provide a timely and appropriate avenue for increased funding dedicated toward

prevention-based services. Specifically, the Province has articulated a commitment toward developing a fiscal framework with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in BC (Action 4.16; Province of BC, 2022). A shift toward prioritizing prevention would also support the goal of preventing First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children from coming into care (Action 4.17; Province of BC, 2022). Indeed, it is widely understood that adequate and sustainable funding is critical to facilitating success in child welfare prevention (Gerlach et al., 2017; Quinn & Saini, 2012; West Coast Leaf, 2019).

Strengths, Limitations, and Opportunities for Future Research

This dissertation brings together the knowledge of Métis Elders, LMO staff, Métis families, and Indigenous youth—all of whom generously shared their stories, perspectives, and wisdom. The partnership with LMO, enveloped within relational approach to this research, was foundational to the overall success of this work. Relational accountability requires that this work continues, and collaborative planning for knowledge mobilization is currently underway.

Given the comprehensive range of services and supports that are offered to Métis children, youth, and families by LMO, there were natural limits to the scope of this research. Beginning in 2020, LMO has operated Kikékyelc, a supportive housing development for Indigenous youth who have aged out of care. Because this dissertation research was specifically focused on Métis child welfare, a deep exploration of the strengths and challenges of Indigenous youth housing were beyond the scope of the current research. The findings within this research speaks to some of the strengths and the uniqueness of Kikékyelc and LMO's model for supporting Indigenous youth; further research would help to better understand the strengths and challenges that LMO has faced in doing this transformational work. More broadly, supportive

housing for Indigenous youth is a topic that requires further attention. Specifically, models for housing youth and Elders together—as Kikékyelc does—may be of value to other organizations.

This research was conducted from 2022 to 2023. Specifically, knowledge gathering with LMO staff occurred from September to December 2022, and conversational interviews with families and youth were held in July 2023. These conversations did not substantively touch on the COVID-19 pandemic. The notable absence of this topic may be a result of timing as well as prevailing burnout and exhaustion among both frontline workers and families. Research has shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has had both profound and lasting impacts on the ways in which Métis people gather and uphold their kinship systems (Jones et al., 2024). As such, the impacts of COVID-19 on practice within the specific context of the Michif Practice Model are worthy of consideration. Future, research studies may wish to look specifically at both retrospectively at the challenges in upholding relational practice in the context of a pandemic, as well as any potential long-term impacts that Métis families may be living with.

Considering the diverse range of Métis children, youth, and families that may utilize child welfare services, there are also numerous areas and supports needs that warrant consideration. Unfortunately, the scope of this research was limited, and not all topics within the broader context of Métis child welfare services and supports could be exhaustively examined. Due to the open-ended nature of the conversational interviews and the broad scope of questions posed, this research is also constrained to the topics that participants chose to discuss. Naturally, there are several areas that were not discussed, but their absence is not a reflection of value within Métis child welfare. Broadly speaking, gender was not a factor specifically considered in this research—neither with respect to the stories shared by participants, nor as a variable considered in the qualitative analyses. Of note, specific support needs for Métis Two-Spirit

children and youth were not examined in this research. While the topic did not arise within this current research, recent reports—including *The Right to Thrive* (RCY, 2023)—have called for the Province of BC to enhance programs that support Two-Spirit children and youth, as well as their caregivers. In an open letter to Two-Spirit youth, Kíwetinohk Kísik (2017) reminds helpers and researchers, among other community members, of collective responsibilities for creating spaces that are both inclusive and protective of Two-Spirit youth. Future research is required to understand ways in which Métis Two-Spirit children and youth can be supported within child and family support services.

Concluding Reflections

In my past work, I witnessed the child welfare system at its worst; during this time, I also began to understand that the child welfare spans beyond the mainstream system. It includes ICFS agencies that are pushing back against a colonial system, determined to wholistically support Métis families to care for their children. I am hopeful that this research helps to demonstrate that different outcomes are possible when dedicated helpers and leaders work alongside community to remember and reclaim how Métis children and youth can be cared for.

The opportunity to learn about the ways in which Métis children, youth, and families can be supported and embraced within their culture was a gift. I am also grateful to have had the opportunities to visit with and learn from Métis Elders from across the province. They were generous with their teachings, understanding that Métis culture, values, and ways of being have the ability to influence the child welfare system. This spirit of generosity is also present throughout LMO. Their work is creating a difference, and they hope that others will follow in their footsteps.

The Elders, leadership, and staff of LMO have dedicated themselves to walking down a different path so that they can provide culturally responsive and prevention-based supports for Métis children, youth, and families. While pathways toward jurisdiction remain uncertain, it is important that Métis Elders, children, youth, and families lead the way in reclaiming and re-imagining an entire system that is directly responsive to the needs of their own people.

Throughout the stories shared in this research, there was a demonstrated understanding that decolonizing Métis child welfare is possible. In fact, LMO has illustrated that, with a great deal of hard work and dedication, it is possible to take a piece of a colonial system and rebuild programs, policies, and practices from the ground up.

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Appendix A. Example Assessment Tools

The following assessment tools were provided by LMO and are included for illustrative purposes:

Attachment 1. Intake Screening Map (Revised April 25, 2023)

Attachment 2. Michif Family/Youth Assessment (Revised June 14, 2023)



INTAKE SCREENING MAP



Li Zhoornii:
 Nom di Screener:
 Nom di Caller & Role:
 Contact Information for Caller:
 Type of Call:

Lii Famii/ Li Zhenn Moond:
 Telephone Number di Famii/di Zhenn Moond:
 Mailing Address di Famii/ di Zhenn Moond:

What Are We Worried About?	What's Going Well?	What Needs to Happen?
<p>PAST HARM:</p>	<p>EXISTING STRENGTHS</p>	<p>NEXT STEPS:</p>

SCREENING SCALES**CALLER****Immediate Safety Scale:**

10 – means even though there have been behaviours that could be, or were harmful for the child, I am confident the child is currently safe.

0 – I believe the child is being harmed, or will be in the coming days or weeks, where would you rate this situation for this child/ren today?

- Number:
- Rationale:

Context Scale:

Considering what you know about this situation and the information you have told me today, on a scale of 0 to 10 where 10 - means there are some worries for this family and these children but no more so than for anyone else in the community/school/neighbourhood and

0 - is this is the worst case of children being hit/hurt/neglected/abused that I have seen where would you rate the situation for these children today?

- Number:
- Rationale:

SCREENER**Immediate Safety Scale:**

10 – means even though there have been behaviours that could be, or were harmful for the child, I am confident the child is currently safe.

0 – I believe the child is being harmed, or will be in the coming days or weeks, where would you rate this situation for this child/ren today?

- Number:
- Rationale:

Context Scale:

Considering your experience and knowledge of child protection work, on a scale of 0 to 10, where

10 – this is one of the least serious reports we receive at LMO and there is nothing that stands out as urgent and

0 – this is one of the most serious reports of child abuse we would see at LMO, where would you rate this situation.

- Number:
- Rationale:

ELDER**Immediate Safety Scale:**

10 – means even though there have been behaviours that could be, or were harmful for the child, I am confident the child is currently safe.

0 – I believe the child is being harmed, or will be in the coming days or weeks, where would you rate this situation for this child/ren today?

- Number:
- Rationale:

Context Scale:

Considering your experience and knowledge of child protection work at LMO, on a scale of 0 to 10, where

10 – this is one of the least serious reports we receive at LMO and there is nothing that stands out as urgent and

0 – this is one of the most serious reports of a child(ren) being hit/hurt/neglected or abused we would see at LMO, where would you rate this situation.

- Number:
- Rationale:

TEAM LEADER**Immediate Safety Scale:**

10 – means even though there have been behaviours that could be, or were harmful for the child, I am confident the child is currently safe.

0 – I believe the child is being harmed, or will be in the coming days or weeks, where would you rate this situation for this child/ren today?

- Number:
- Rationale:

Context Scale:

Considering your experience and knowledge of child protection work at LMO, on a scale of 0 to 10, where

10 – this is one of the least serious reports we receive at LMO and there is nothing that stands out as urgent and

0 – this is one of the most serious reports of a child(ren) being hit/hurt/neglected or abused we would see at LMO, where would you rate this situation.

- Number:
- Rationale:

INITIAL GENOGRAM

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for drawing an initial genogram. The box is mostly white, with a yellow header bar at the top containing the text 'INITIAL GENOGRAM'. The rest of the box is blank, providing space for the user to create a family tree diagram.

OUTCOME:

- PCC Summary (IRR/DRR) Completed**
- Close - No Further Action
- Needs Further Child Safety Assessment
 - Load to a Memo and upload to ICM
 - Create an Incident or Service Request on ICM
 - Refer to Michif Child Safety Assessor
 - Harm Analysis Matrix Required (Michif Child Safety Assessor only)
- Divert to Prevention Services Team (voluntary)
- Divert to Early Childhood Development Team (voluntary)
- Divert to Child & Youth Mental Health and Wellness Team (voluntary)
- Divert to Youth Support Services (voluntary)
- Other_____

RATIONALE FOR OUTCOME:

SCREENER:

1. What is keeping child safe at this time (i.e.: Refer to Existing Safety)?

2. If diverting to another LMO Prevention Team, what is your rationale for diverting family/youth to this team?

ELDER:

1. Why do you believe the child is safe or unsafe at this time?

2. Do you think another LMO Prevention Team would be better to support this family/youth? If so, which one and why?

TEAM LEADER:

1. What is keeping child safe at this time?

SCREENER TO COMPLETE:

- Guardian/youth is interested and willing to receive services from a LMO Prevention Team Yes _____ No _____
- If yes, guardian/youth has been notified that a referral will be made to another LMO Prevention Team?
- The Intake Screening Map is attached to the referral.

SIGNATURES:

SCREENER:		Date:
ELDER:		Date:
DELEGATED TEAM LEADER:		Date:



Michif Family/Youth Assessment



Lii Famii/ Li Zhenn Moond:
Li Zhoornii (Date):

Kaniikaniit (Facilitator):
Wiichihew (Support/Advisor):
Li Pleu Vyeu (Elder):

TO COMPLETE WITH PARENT/GUARDIAN/YOUTH

WHAT ARE WE WORRIED ABOUT?	WHAT IS WORKING WELL?	WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?
<p>PAST HARM (Past Concerns/Critical Worries)</p> <p>FUTURE WORRIES (Future Wellbeing Concerns/ Critical Worries) <i>The final analysis assessment will include honouring and the importance of connection to our values and way of being as Métis People.</i></p>	<p>STRENGTHS (Awareness/Insight-Based)</p> <p>EXISTING SAFETY/WELLBEING/SUCCESS (Action-Based in relation to worries)</p>	<p>SAFETY/WELLBEING/SUCCESS GOAL</p> <p>NEXT STEPS What are the next smallest steps to get to the Safety/Wellbeing/Success Goals?</p>

COMPLICATING FACTORS		
-----------------------------	--	--

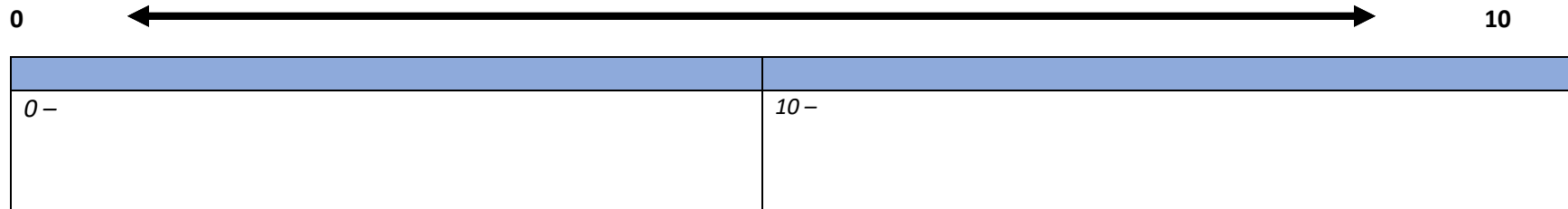
SAFETY/WELLBEING SCALE
(USE ONE FOR EACH SAFETY/WELLBEING GOAL)

0 ←————→ 10

0-	10-
----	-----

- Scale each person involved – (Rationale should be in the above assessment in the correct analysis category)

SAFETY/WELLBEING SCALE
(USE ONE FOR EACH SAFETY/WELLBEING GOAL)



- Scale each person involved – (Rationale should be in the above assessment in the correct analysis category)

Add another scale if necessary.

INTERIM SAFETY/WELLNESS PLAN

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

THESE ARE THE PEOPLE WHO HELPED WITH THIS ASSESSMENT:

Name & Pronoun	Relationship to Parent/Youth	Contact Information	Signature

OFFICE USE ONLY

OUTCOME OF ASSESSMENT

<p style="text-align: center;">To be completed by the Child Safety Assessor CHOOSE <u>ONE</u> ONLY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Close Incident/Assessment – No Further Action <input type="checkbox"/> Close Incident/Assessment – Open Family Service File or Service Request for on-going Child Safety Services <input type="checkbox"/> Close Incident/Assessment – Family/Youth has been informed and willing to receive LMO Prevention Services. Divert to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Prevention Family Support Services <input type="radio"/> Early Childhood Development Services <input type="radio"/> Child & Youth Mental Health & Wellness Services <input type="radio"/> Michif Youth Services <input type="radio"/> Other _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Does the child have Metis Citizenship? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> Application in Submitted <input type="checkbox"/> Attach this document to referral to LMO Prevention Services. 	<p style="text-align: center;">To be completed by the Prevention Team Leader to which the family/youth is being diverted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Close – Child/youth assessed as safe and family/youth not willing to engage in voluntary/prevention services. <input type="checkbox"/> File Opened <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Assigned Case Manager: _____ <p>Comments:</p>
	Prevention Team Leader Signature: Date:
	Assigned Case Manager Signature: Date:

RATIONALE FOR OUTCOME (WHAT IS KEEPING THE CHILD/YOUTH SAFE/WELL AT THIS TIME)**1. Child Safety Assessor:**

Scaling Number:

Rationale:

2. Li Pleu Vyeu:







Scaling Number:

Rationale:

3. Team Leader:

Scaling Number:

Rationale:

WAHKOHTOWIN	
Natural Supports	Community Supports
 Name Relationship: Contact:	 Name Role: Contact:
 Name Relationship: Contact:	 Name Role: Contact:
 Name Relationship: Contact:	 Name Role: Contact:
 Name Relationship: Contact:	 Name Role: Contact:

GENOGRAM FURTHER DEVELOPED FROM SCREENING

Assessor Signature: Date:
Team Leader Signature: Date:

Appendix B. Interview Guides

The following interview guides are attached:

Attachment 1. Elders and Knowledge Keepers

Attachment 2. Staff

Attachment 3. Family Members

Attachment 4. Youth

Interview Questions for Elders and Knowledge Keepers

1. Can you talk about Métis traditional approaches to child rearing / supporting families?
2. How can these traditional practices, values and approaches be integrated into Métis child welfare? What about Métis families more broadly?
3. In your opinion, what is needed to restore our ways of taking care of each other?
4. Can you talk about the importance of Métis identity and culture for children?
5. As we look to “evaluate” the Michif Practice Framework, what should we look to measure as signs of success?
6. Would you be interested in coming together with other Métis Elders to look at all of the stories collected through these interviews?

Interview Questions for Staff

Part 1: Introductions

1. Can you briefly tell me about yourself?
2. Can you tell me about why you choose to do this important work with LMO?

Part 2: Aspects of LMO's Approach / Practice

3. Can you talk about the ways that Métis culture, ways of knowing, and ways of being are reflected in your work?
4. What are the strengths of this type of practice?
5. What are the challenges?
6. What is needed to better support Michif practice at LMO?

Part 3: Impacts (Most Significant Change)

7. What outcomes stand out for you for youth and families that have received services and supports from LMO?
8. In particular, can you share a story that resonates with you about a youth or family that was impacted by the services and supports from LMO? (Note: Please do not use any names or other information that would be identifying.)
9. Why was this story significant for you? (Probe: What difference has this made? OR: What difference will it make in the future?)

Interview Questions for Family Members

Part 1: Introductions

1. Can you briefly tell me about yourself? (I won't include anything identifying of you in the research, unless you want me to, but I do appreciate the opportunity to get to know you!)

Part 2: Aspects of LMO's Approach / Practice

2. When is the last time you received services from LMO? Which services were you connected with?
3. Thinking back to those services and LMO's approach, what worked well?
4. Did you feel safe in accessing these services? Why or why not?
5. Were there any services or supports that you wish you had received but were not available to you?
6. In your opinion, did receiving family supports from a Métis agency make a difference for you? Why or why not?
 - a. Did reconnecting with Métis culture and identity make a difference for you? If so, in what ways?
7. What else about LMO's approach made a difference for you and your family?

Part 3: Impact (Most Significant Change)

8. Do you have a story about how you and your family were impacted by the services and supports from LMO?
9. Why was this story significant for you? (Probe: What difference has this made? Or what difference will it make in the future?)
10. Did you and/or your family experience any other changes as a result of working with LMO? What did these look like?

Interview Questions for Youth

Part 1: Introductions

1. Can you briefly tell me about yourself? (I won't include anything identifying of you in the research, unless you want me to, but I do appreciate the opportunity to get to know you!)

Part 2: Aspects of LMO's Approach / Practice

2. Can you tell me about your experience with LMO?
 - a. What did the supports look like?
 - b. Was it a good experience? A negative experience?
3. When is the last time you received services from LMO?
4. When you were involved with LMO, what sorts of things were helpful?
 - a. Was anything harmful? (Or not at all helpful?)
5. Which services were you connected with?
6. Did you feel safe in accessing these services?
 - a. Is there anything in particular at LMO that helps you to feel safe? Or,
 - b. Is there anything in particular at LMO that prevents you from feeling safe?
7. Were there any services or supports that you wish you had received but were not available to you?
8. In your opinion, did receiving supports from a Métis agency make a difference for you? Why or why not?
 - a. Why do you think this made a difference? (Or why do you think it didn't matter?)
9. Did reconnecting with culture and identity make a difference for you?
 - a. Why do you think this made a difference? (Or why do you think it didn't matter?)
10. What else about LMO's approach made a difference for you?

Part 3: Impacts (Most Significant Change)

11. Do you have a story about how you and your family were impacted by the services and supports from LMO?
12. Why was this story significant for you? (Probe: What difference has this made? Or what difference will it make in the future?)

Appendix C. Consent Forms

The consent forms included in this appendix do not represent an exhaustive list. Several participant groups (e.g., Elders and Knowledge Keepers, Family Members, and Youth) were offered either a written or verbal consent forms. The information contained within each option was identical. Only one version for each group is included to avoid redundancies. The following consent forms are attached:

Attachment 1. Verbal Consent Form for Elders and Knowledge Keepers

Attachment 2: Written Consent Form for Staff

Attachment 3: Written Consent Form for Family Members

Attachment 4: Written Consent Form for Youth



Verbal Participant Consent Form: Elders and Knowledge Keepers

For individuals who prefer Verbal Consent

Verbal consent will be obtained if:

- Participant has limited literacy; and/ or
- To ensure cultural appropriateness as there may be participants who would prefer not to provide written consent (for example due to suspicion of research due to the history of research with Indigenous communities, or being uncomfortable with written English); and/or
- Participant does not have access to an email address.

Interviewer must check each box below to ensure that they have read and reviewed each section with the participant.

Project Title: You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Notre Zaanfaan (Our Children): Supporting the wholistic wellness of Métis children, youth, and families through prevention-based child and family support services* that is being conducted by Monique Auger in partnership with Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services.

About the Researcher: Monique Auger is a graduate student in the Social Dimensions of Health program at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by email at augerm@uvic.ca. As a graduate student, Monique is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for her PhD. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Renée Monchalin, Assistant Professor in Public Health and Social Policy, University of Victoria. You may contact Renée by email at rmonchalin@uvic.ca or phone (250-472-4431).

Purpose and Objectives: The purpose of this research project is to understand how Métis culture, ways of knowing, and values can contribute to a prevention-focused child welfare system. This research is important because it aims to find ways to best support the wellness and safety of Métis children, youth, and families. It aims to strengthen the services and policy for Métis child welfare.

Participant Selection: You are being asked to participate in this study because you have been identified as a Métis Elder or Knowledge Keeper and are 19 years of age or older. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no impact on your position in the Métis community or with Lii Michif Otipemisiwak.

What is involved in the research: If you agree to participate in this research, you will participate in an interview following this information session. You will sign the consent form before the interview takes place to confirm that you understand what this research will entail. Please know that signing this consent form is optional, and you can provide verbal consent before the interview if you prefer. In the interview, you will be asked about Métis culture and traditional approaches to raising children and supporting families. You will also be asked about how these traditional approaches could be used within a Métis child welfare system today. You can skip any question that you do not want to answer.

Location of the interview: If you are located in Victoria, BC or Kamloops, BC, you have the option of participating in the interview in-person at a location of your choosing. If you do not live in one of these locations, or if you prefer to participate in the interview remotely, the interview can take place over Zoom. Please know that Zoom servers are located outside of Canada, and that Zoom stores user's names and usage data outside of Canada. If you agree to have the interview recorded, the recording will be stored on an encrypted file at the University of Victoria (not on the Zoom servers). You can better protect your identity and increase the protection of your personal information if you use a nickname or substitute name while using Zoom. You can also choose to turn your camera off while the Zoom interview takes place. Zoom interviews will be protected by a password and locked once the interview has begun to ensure privacy; no uninvited individuals will be able to join the Zoom session.

COVID-19 Precautions: This research will follow the guidelines in place by BC's Provincial Health Officer, as well as the health and safety requirements of Lii Michif Otipemisiwak and the University of Victoria. While public health restrictions are easing in BC, this research continues to consider ways to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. The researcher will conduct a daily health assessment, and will contact you to reschedule the interview if they are unwell. If you are feeling unwell, please contact the researcher to reschedule the interview. For in-person interviews, the researcher will provide hand sanitizer. You can let the researcher know if you feel most comfortable with masks being worn for the interview.

Recording and transcription: Interviews will only be recorded if you give consent. Recordings will be sent to a third-party transcriptionist. The transcriptionist is also Métis and has signed a confidentiality agreement, meaning that they will not discuss the interview with anyone outside of the research team. You will be given a copy of the transcript if indicate that you would like one. Audio recordings will be destroyed once the transcribed interviews have been analyzed.

If at any point during the interview you would like to stop the recording, you are able to do so. The interview can also proceed if you do not want it to be recorded; in these cases, the researcher will take notes. Transcripts and notes will be assigned identification numbers and will not be labeled with your name or other identifiers.

If you would like a transcript of the interview, it will be sent to you via registered mail to you within one month of the interview date. Once you have received the transcript you are able to provide any feedback or changes to your information (e.g., requesting deletions, adding more information, etc.). You will be sent two copies of the transcript: one to keep and one to send back, if you wish. You will also be sent a return envelope with postage to ease this process. There is a risk of unintentional release of information if you choose to have your transcript mailed to you. After two weeks of mailing the transcript back to you, the researcher will follow up with you to see if you have had time to review the transcript and to discuss any changes that you would like to make, if any.

Duration: The interview will last approximately 1.5 to 2 hours.

Privacy and Confidentiality: Confidentiality will be respect unless you request to have your name acknowledged in association with the knowledge that you share. Your name will only be included in this research if you indicate as part of this consent process that you would like to be named. You can also

choose to remove your name later in the research; the researcher will follow up with you before anything is published so that you can confirm that you are comfortable with being named.

In all other cases, your identifiable information will not be included in any form of publication or sharing of the research. The researcher will use a study number to analyze your transcript, and only the researcher will have access to a code sheet that links your name with your number. The code sheet will be kept in a password-protected encrypted file with the University of Victoria. Despite these efforts, there remains a risk of an unintentional release of information, though the chance that personal information or study data will be accidentally released or accessed without authorization is small. Confidentiality will also be limited in cases where the researcher is required by law to disclose information. For example, if there is a disclosure of abuse or acute risk to harm yourself or others.

Disposal of data: Audio recordings will be destroyed after your interview is transcribed and verified. All other study data will be stored in password protected encrypted files at the University of Victoria for 5 years, following the completion of the study. After 5 years, the researcher will dispose of the saved transcripts. For those who indicate that they would like a copy of their personal interview transcript, you are not required to dispose of it after 5 years and may keep it indefinitely.

Inconvenience: Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time you take to participate in the interview (up to two hours). You also have the option of reviewing your transcript and a summary of the themes from your interview. Further, if you would like to participate in a collaborative session where we make meaning of the knowledge gathered, this would also take about a day of your time.

Risks: While the conversations that we have may bring up personal experiences that are associated with different emotions, the risk of harm in this research should not exceed what you would experience in your daily lives.

Benefits: Through learning from your knowledge and experiences, this research aims to improve the child and family support services provided to Métis people in British Columbia.

Honoraria: As a way to compensate you for any inconvenience related to your participation, you will be offered a \$100 honorarium for your time. The researcher will e-transfer you this honorarium at the beginning of the interview. If you are participating the interview in person, and prefer not to receive an e-transfer, the researcher can offer you a cheque. You will be asked to sign a sheet indicating that you received the cheque.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to decline to participate in this study, or to withdraw from this study at any point with no negative consequences. You can leave the interview at any time, and you can choose to withdraw from the research after the interview has been completed. If you decide to stop your participation in the study, you can keep the honorarium. If you decide to leave the interview while it is in progress, it is your choice whether the questions you previously answered will be included in the research. We respect your choice and if you decide to fully withdraw, we will remove all of your data from the study. During the interview, you may also choose to not answer any question for any reason. The expected duration of

your participation in this study, inclusive of this discussion, the interview, the optional review your transcript, and your optional participation in meaning making is up to 3 months.

Study Results: This research will be shared in written publications, a community report, the researcher's doctoral dissertation, and other reports that aim to benefit Métis families. The results may also be shared orally in conferences or other public forums. Your quotes will only be attributed to your name, if you indicate that you would like to be acknowledged (at the end of this consent form).

Contacts for Questions and Concerns: You can contact the researcher, Monique Auger, or her supervisor, Renée Monchalin, using the information at the top of page 1. In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

After reading through the consent form with the participant, ask them the following: This research study has been explained, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have the right not to participate and the right to withdraw. The potential harms and benefits of participating in this research study have been explained to me. I know that I may ask now, or in the future, any questions I have about the study. I have been told that data relating to me will be kept confidential and that no information will be disclosed without my permission unless required by law. I have been given sufficient time to read and discuss the above information.

Yes

No

Would you like to have your name acknowledged in the study (next to your stories and quotes, for example)? You will have an opportunity to review your stories in any written reports before publication.

Yes

No

For future contact with the researcher:

I would like to receive a copy of the interview conversation transcript

I would like to receive a summary of the research findings

If yes, please provide an **address** for the transcript to be sent to and **phone number** to follow up:

Address:

Phone Number: _____

Do you consent to have your interview audio recorded?

Yes

No

How would you like to be given the honorarium?

E-transfer

Cheque

If you select an e-transfer, please provide e-transfer information for your honorarium (either a phone number or email address):

I, the interviewer, have explained to the participant named _____ the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participation in this research study. All questions that have been raised about the research have been answered.

Name of Interviewer

Signature of Interviewer

Date



Participant Consent Form: Staff

Notre Zaanfaan (Our Children): Supporting the wholistic wellness of Métis children, youth, and families through prevention-based child and family support services

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Notre Zaanfaan (Our Children): Supporting the wholistic wellness of Métis children, youth, and families through prevention-based child and family support services* that is being conducted by Monique Auger in partnership with Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services.

About the Researcher: Monique Auger is a graduate student in the Social Dimensions of Health program at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by email at augerm@uvic.ca. As a graduate student, Monique is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for her PhD. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Renée Monchalin, Assistant Professor in Public Health and Social Policy, University of Victoria. You may contact Renée by email at rmonchalin@uvic.ca or phone (250-472-4431).

Purpose and Objectives: The purpose of this research project is to understand how Métis culture, ways of knowing, and values can contribute to a prevention-focused child welfare system. This research is important because it aims to find ways to best support the wellness and safety of Métis children, youth, and families. It aims to strengthen the services and policy for Métis child welfare.

Participants Selection: You are being asked to participate in this study because you have been identified as a someone who works at Lii Michif Otipemisiwak. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no impact on your position in the Métis community or with Lii Michif Otipemisiwak.

What is involved in the research: If you agree to participate in this research, you will participate in an interview following this information session. You will sign the consent form before the interview takes place to confirm that you understand what this research will entail. Please know that signing this consent form is optional, and you can provide verbal consent before the interview if you prefer. In the interview, you will be asked about the strengths and challenges related to the services and supports provided by Lii Michif Otipemisiwak, and the difference that these services/supports make for Métis children, youth, and families. You can skip any question that you do not want to answer.

Location of the interview: You have the option of participating in the interview in-person at a location of your choosing, or if you prefer to participate in the interview remotely, the interview can take place over Zoom. Please know that Zoom servers are located outside of Canada, and that Zoom stores user's names and usage data outside of Canada. If you agree to have the interview recorded, the recording will be stored on an encrypted file at the University of Victoria (not on the Zoom servers). You can better protect your identity and increase the protection of your personal information if you use a nickname or substitute name while using Zoom. You can also choose to turn your camera off while the Zoom interview takes place. Zoom interviews will be protected by a password and locked once the interview has begun to ensure privacy; no uninvited individuals will be able to join the Zoom session.

COVID-19 Precautions: This research will follow the guidelines in place by BC's Provincial Health Officer, as well as the health and safety requirements of Lii Michif Otipemisiwak and the University of Victoria. While public health restrictions are easing in BC, this research continues to consider ways to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. The researcher will conduct a daily health assessment and will contact you to reschedule the interview if they are unwell. If you are feeling unwell, please contact the researcher to reschedule the interview. For in-person interviews, the researcher will provide hand sanitizer. You can let the researcher know if you feel most comfortable with masks being worn for the interview.

Recording and transcription: Interviews will only be recorded if you give consent. Recordings will be sent to a third-party transcriptionist. The transcriptionist is also Métis and has signed a confidentiality agreement, meaning that they will not discuss the interview with anyone outside of the research team. You will be given a copy of the transcript if indicate that you would like one. Audio recordings will be destroyed once the transcribed interviews have been analyzed.

If at any point during the interview you would like to stop the recording, you are able to do so. The interview can also proceed if you do not want it to be recorded; in these cases, the researcher will take notes. Transcripts and notes will be assigned identification numbers and will not be labeled with your name or other identifiers.

If you would like a transcript of the interview, it will be sent to you via registered mail to you within one month of the interview date. Once you have received the transcript you are able to provide any feedback or changes to your information (e.g., requesting deletions, adding more information, etc.). You will be sent two copies of the transcript: one to keep and one to send back, if you wish. You will also be sent a return envelope with postage to ease this process. There is a risk of unintentional release of information if you choose to have your transcript mailed to you. After two weeks of mailing the transcript back to you, the researcher will follow up with you to see if you have had time to review the transcript and to discuss any changes that you would like to make, if any.

Duration: The interview will last approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

Privacy and Confidentiality: Confidentiality will be respected unless you request to have your name acknowledged in association with the knowledge that you share. Your name will only be included in this research if you indicate as part of this consent process that you would like to be named. You can also choose to remove your name later in the research; the researcher will follow up with you before anything is published so that you can confirm that you are comfortable with being named.

In all other cases, your identifiable information will not be included in any form of publication or sharing of the research. The researcher will use a study number to analyze your transcript, and only the researcher will have access to a code sheet that links your name with your number. The code sheet will be kept in a password-protected encrypted file with the University of Victoria. Despite these efforts, there remains a risk of an unintentional release of information, though the chance that personal information or study data will be accidentally released or accessed without authorization is small. Confidentiality will also be limited in cases where the researcher is required by law to disclose information. For example, if there is a disclosure of abuse or acute risk to harm yourself or others.

Disposal of data: Audio recordings will be destroyed after your interview is transcribed and verified. All other study data will be stored in password protected encrypted files at the University of Victoria for 5 years, following the completion of the study. After 5 years, the researcher will dispose of the saved transcripts. For those who indicate that they would like a copy of their personal interview transcript, you are not required to dispose of it after 5 years and may keep it indefinitely.

Inconvenience: Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time you take to participate in the interview (up to one hour). You also have the option of reviewing your transcript and a summary of the themes from your interview. Further, if you would like to participate in a collaborative session where we make meaning of the knowledge gathered, this would also take about a day of your time.

Risks: While the conversations that we have may bring up personal experiences that are associated with different emotions, the risk of harm in this research should not exceed what you would experience in your daily lives. Your participation in this research will have no impact on your employment with Lii Michif Otipemisiwak.

Benefits: Through learning from your knowledge and experiences, this research aims to improve the child and family support services provided to Métis people in British Columbia.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to decline to participate in this study, or to withdraw from this study at any point with no negative consequences. You can leave the interview at any time, and you can choose to withdraw from the research after the interview has been completed. If you decide to leave the interview while it is in progress, it is your choice whether the questions you previously answered will be included in the research. We respect your choice and if you decide to fully withdraw, we will remove all of your data from the study. During the interview, you may also choose to not answer any question for any reason. The expected duration of your participation in this study, inclusive of this discussion, the interview, and the optional review your transcript, is up to 1 month.

Study Results: This research will be shared in written publications, a community report, the researcher's doctoral dissertation, and other reports that aim to benefit Métis families. The results may also be shared orally in conferences or other public forums. Your quotes will only be attributed to your name, if you indicate that you would like to be acknowledged (at the end of this consent form).

Contacts for Questions and Concerns: You can contact the researcher, Monique Auger, or her supervisor, Renée Monchalain, using the information at the top of page 1. In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Consent: This research study has been explained, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have the right not to participate and the right to withdraw. The potential harms and benefits of participating in this research study have been explained to me. I know that I may ask now, or in the future, any questions I have about the study. I have been told that data relating to me will be kept confidential and that no information will be disclosed without my permission unless required by law. I have been given sufficient time to read and discuss the above information.

Yes

No

Would you like to have your name acknowledged in the study (next to your stories and quotes, for example)? You will have an opportunity to review your stories in any written reports before publication.

Yes

No

For future contact with the researcher:

I would like to receive a copy of the interview conversation transcript

I would like to receive a summary of the research findings

If yes, please write an **address** for the transcript to be sent to and **phone number** to follow up:

Address:

Phone Number: _____

Do you consent to have your interview audio recorded?

Yes

No

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.



Participant Consent Form: Family Members

Notre Zaanfaan (Our Children): Supporting the wholistic wellness of Métis children, youth, and families through prevention-based child and family support services

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Notre Zaanfaan (Our Children): Supporting the wholistic wellness of Métis children, youth, and families through prevention-based child and family support services* that is being conducted by Monique Auger in partnership with Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services.

About the Researcher: Monique Auger is a graduate student in the Social Dimensions of Health program at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by email at augerm@uvic.ca. As a graduate student, Monique is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for her PhD. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Renée Monchalín, Assistant Professor in Public Health and Social Policy, University of Victoria. You may contact Renée by email at rmonchalín@uvic.ca or phone (250-472-4431).

Purpose and Objectives: The purpose of this research project is to understand how Métis culture, ways of knowing, and values can contribute to a prevention-focused child welfare system. This research is important because it aims to find ways to best support the wellness and safety of Métis children, youth, and families. It aims to strengthen the services and policy for Métis child welfare.

Participants Selection: You are being asked to participate in this study because you have been identified as a someone who is 19 years of age or older, who has previously accessed services and/or supports through Lii Michif Otipemisiwak. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no impact on your position in the Métis community or with Lii Michif Otipemisiwak.

What is involved in the research: If you agree to participate in this research, you will participate in an interview following this information session. You will sign the consent form before the interview takes place to confirm that you understand what this research will entail. Please know that signing this consent form is optional, and you can provide verbal consent before the interview if you prefer. You will be asked about the strengths and challenges related to the services that you received from Lii Michif Otipemisiwak. Questions will touch on your experience with the supports you received, what your experience was like, and the difference that these services/supports made in your life. You can skip any question that you do not want to answer.

Location of the interview: If you are located in Victoria, BC or Kamloops, BC, you have the option of participating in the interview in-person at a location of your choosing. If you do not live in one of these locations, or if you prefer to participate in the interview remotely, the interview can take place over Zoom. Please know that Zoom servers are located outside of Canada, and that Zoom stores user's names and usage data outside of Canada. If you agree to have the interview recorded, the recording will be stored on an encrypted file at the University of Victoria (not on the Zoom servers). You can better

protect your identity and increase the protection of your personal information if you use a nickname or substitute name while using Zoom. You can also choose to turn your camera off while the Zoom interview takes place. Zoom interviews will be protected by a password and locked once the interview has begun to ensure privacy; no uninvited individuals will be able to join the Zoom session.

COVID-19 Precautions: This research will follow the guidelines in place by BC's Provincial Health Officer, as well as the health and safety requirements of Lii Michif Otipemisiwak and the University of Victoria. While public health restrictions are easing in BC, this research continues to consider ways to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. The researcher will conduct a daily health assessment and will contact you to reschedule the interview if they are unwell. If you are feeling unwell, please contact the researcher to reschedule the interview. For in-person interviews, the researcher will provide hand sanitizer. You can let the researcher know if you feel most comfortable with masks being worn for the interview.

Recording and transcription: Interviews will only be recorded if you give consent. Recordings will be sent to a third-party transcriptionist. The transcriptionist is also Métis and has signed a confidentiality agreement, meaning that they will not discuss the interview with anyone outside of the research team. You will be given a copy of the transcript if indicate that you would like one. Audio recordings will be destroyed once the transcribed interviews have been analyzed.

If at any point during the interview you would like to stop the recording, you are able to do so. The interview can also proceed if you do not want it to be recorded; in these cases, the researcher will take notes. Transcripts and notes will be assigned identification numbers and will not be labeled with your name or other identifiers.

If you would like a transcript of the interview, it will be sent to you via registered mail to you within one month of the interview date. Once you have received the transcript you are able to provide any feedback or changes to your information (e.g., requesting deletions, adding more information, etc.). You will be sent two copies of the transcript: one to keep and one to send back, if you wish. You will also be sent a return envelope with postage to ease this process. There is a risk of unintentional release of information if you choose to have your transcript mailed to you. After two weeks of mailing the transcript back to you, the researcher will follow up with you to see if you have had time to review the transcript and to discuss any changes that you would like to make, if any.

Duration: The interview will last approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

Privacy and Confidentiality: Confidentiality will be respected unless you request to have your name acknowledged in association with the knowledge that you share. Your name will only be included in this research if you indicate as part of this consent process that you would like to be named. You can also choose to remove your name later in the research; the researcher will follow up with you before anything is published so that you can confirm that you are comfortable with being named.

In all other cases, your identifiable information will not be included in any form of publication or sharing of the research. The researcher will use a study number to analyze your transcript, and only the researcher will have access to a code sheet that links your name with your number. The code sheet will be kept in a password-protected encrypted file with the University of Victoria. Despite these efforts, there remains a risk of an unintentional release of information, though the chance that personal information or study data will be accidentally released or accessed without authorization is small.

Confidentiality will also be limited in cases where the researcher is required by law to disclose information. For example, if there is a disclosure of abuse or acute risk to harm yourself or others.

Disposal of data: Audio recordings will be destroyed after your interview is transcribed and verified. All other study data will be stored in password protected encrypted files at the University of Victoria for 5 years, following the completion of the study. After 5 years, the researcher will dispose of the saved transcripts. For those who indicate that they would like a copy of their personal interview transcript, you are not required to dispose of it after 5 years and may keep it indefinitely.

Inconvenience: Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time you take to participate in the interview (up to one hour). You also have the option of reviewing your transcript and a summary of the themes from your interview. Further, if you would like to participate in a collaborative session where we make meaning of the knowledge gathered, this would also take about a day of your time.

Risks: While the conversations that we have may bring up personal experiences that are associated with different emotions, the risk of harm in this research should not exceed what you would experience in your daily lives.

Supports: If you experience any type of discomfort or stress as a result of participating in this research, we encourage you to access counselling supports. The Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Centre has an available mental health clinician on staff who can be reached at 250-376-1296.

Benefits: Through learning from your knowledge and experiences, this research aims to improve the child and family support services provided to Métis people in British Columbia.

Honoraria: As a way to compensate you for any inconvenience related to your participation, you will be offered a \$50 honorarium for your time. The researcher will e-transfer you this honorarium at the beginning of the interview. If you are participating the interview in person, and prefer not to receive an e-transfer, the researcher can offer you a cheque. You will be asked to sign a sheet indicating that you received the cheque.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to decline to participate in this study, or to withdraw from this study at any point with no negative consequences. You can leave the interview at any time, and you can choose to withdraw from the research after the interview has been completed. If you decide to stop your participation in the study, you can keep the honorarium. If you decide to leave the interview while it is in progress, it is your choice whether the questions you previously answered will be included in the research. We respect your choice and if you decide to fully withdraw, we will remove all of your data from the study. During the interview, you may also choose to not answer any question for any reason. The expected duration of your participation in this study, inclusive of this discussion, the interview, and the optional review your transcript, is up to 1 month.

Study Results: This research will be shared in written publications, a community report, the researcher's doctoral dissertation, and other reports that aim to benefit Métis families. The results may also be shared orally in conferences or other public forums. Your quotes will only be attributed to your name, if you indicate that you would like to be acknowledged (at the end of this consent form).

Contacts for Questions and Concerns: You can contact the researcher, Monique Auger, or her supervisor, Renée Monchalain, using the information at the top of page 1. In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Consent: This research study has been explained, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have the right not to participate and the right to withdraw. The potential harms and benefits of participating in this research study have been explained to me. I know that I may ask now, or in the future, any questions I have about the study. I have been told that data relating to me will be kept confidential and that no information will be disclosed without my permission unless required by law. I have been given sufficient time to read and discuss the above information.

Yes

No

Would you like to have your name acknowledged in the study (next to your stories and quotes, for example)? You will have an opportunity to review your stories in any written reports before publication.

Yes

No

For future contact with the researcher:

I would like to receive a copy of the interview conversation transcript

I would like to receive a summary of the research findings

If yes, please write an **address** for the transcript to be sent to and **phone number** to follow up:

Address:

Phone Number: _____

Do you consent to have your interview audio recorded?

Yes

No

How would you like to be given the honorarium?

E-transfer

Cheque

If you select an e-transfer, please provide e-transfer information for your honorarium (either a phone number or email address):

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.



**University
of Victoria**

Participant Consent Form: Youth

Notre Zaanfaan (Our Children): Supporting the wholistic wellness of Métis children, youth, and families through prevention-based child and family support services

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Notre Zaanfaan (Our Children): Supporting the wholistic wellness of Métis children, youth, and families through prevention-based child and family support services* that is being conducted by Monique Auger in partnership with Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services.

About the Researcher: Monique Auger is a graduate student in the Social Dimensions of Health program at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by email at augerm@uvic.ca. As a graduate student, Monique is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for her PhD. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Renée Monchalin, Assistant Professor in Public Health and Social Policy, University of Victoria. You may contact Renée by email at rmonchalin@uvic.ca or phone (250-472-4431).

Purpose and Objectives: The purpose of this research project is to understand how Métis culture, ways of knowing, and values can contribute to a prevention-focused child welfare system. This research is important because it aims to find ways to best support the wellness and safety of Métis children, youth, and families. It aims to strengthen the services and policy for Métis child welfare.

Participants Selection: You are being asked to participate in this study because you have been identified as a someone who is 16 – 27 years of age, who has accessed services and/or supports through Lii Michif Otipemisiwak. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no impact on your position in the Métis community or with Lii Michif Otipemisiwak.

What is involved in the research: If you agree to participate in this research, you will participate in an interview following this information session. You will sign the consent form before the interview takes place to confirm that you understand what this research will entail. Please know that signing this consent form is optional, and you can provide verbal consent before the interview if you prefer. You will be asked about the strengths and challenges related to the services that you received from Lii Michif Otipemisiwak. Questions will touch on your experience with the supports you received, what your experience was like, and the difference that these services/supports made in your life. You can skip any question that you do not want to answer.

Location of the interview: If you are located in Victoria, BC or Kamloops, BC, you have the option of participating in the interview in-person at a location of your choosing. If you do not live in one of these locations, or if you prefer to participate in the interview remotely, the interview can take place over Zoom. Please know that Zoom servers are located outside of Canada, and that Zoom stores user's names and usage data outside of Canada. If you agree to have the interview recorded, the recording will be

stored on an encrypted file at the University of Victoria (not on the Zoom servers). You can better protect your identity and increase the protection of your personal information if you use a nickname or substitute name while using Zoom. You can also choose to turn your camera off while the Zoom interview takes place. Zoom interviews will be protected by a password and locked once the interview has begun to ensure privacy; no uninvited individuals will be able to join the Zoom session.

COVID-19 Precautions: This research will follow the guidelines in place by BC's Provincial Health Officer, as well as the health and safety requirements of Lii Michif Otipemisiwak and the University of Victoria. While public health restrictions are easing in BC, this research continues to consider ways to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. The researcher will conduct a daily health assessment and will contact you to reschedule the interview if they are unwell. If you are feeling unwell, please contact the researcher to reschedule the interview. For in-person interviews, the researcher will provide hand sanitizer. You can let the researcher know if you feel most comfortable with masks being worn for the interview.

Recording and transcription: Interviews will only be recorded if you give consent. Recordings will be sent to a third-party transcriptionist. The transcriptionist is also Métis and has signed a confidentiality agreement, meaning that they will not discuss the interview with anyone outside of the research team. You will be given a copy of the transcript if indicate that you would like one. Audio recordings will be destroyed once the transcribed interviews have been analyzed.

If at any point during the interview you would like to stop the recording, you are able to do so. The interview can also proceed if you do not want it to be recorded; in these cases, the researcher will take notes. Transcripts and notes will be assigned identification numbers and will not be labeled with your name or other identifiers.

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Duration: The interview will last approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

Privacy and Confidentiality: Confidentiality will be respect unless you request to have your name acknowledged in association with the knowledge that you share. Your name will only be included in this research if you indicate as part of this consent process that you would like to be named. You can also choose to remove your name later in the research; the researcher will follow up with you before anything is published so that you can confirm that you are comfortable with being named.

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information or study data will be accidentally released or accessed without authorization is small. Confidentiality will also be limited in cases where the researcher is required by law to disclose information. For example, if there is a disclosure of abuse or acute risk to harm yourself or others.

Disposal of data: Audio recordings will be destroyed after your interview is transcribed and verified. All other study data will be stored in password protected encrypted files at the University of Victoria for 5 years, following the completion of the study. After 5 years, the researcher will dispose of the saved transcripts. For those who indicate that they would like a copy of their personal interview transcript, you are not required to dispose of it after 5 years and may keep it indefinitely.

Inconvenience: Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time you take to participate in the interview (up to one hour). You also have the option of reviewing your transcript and a summary of the themes from your interview. Further, if you would like to participate in a collaborative session where we make meaning of the knowledge gathered, this would also take about a day of your time.

Risks: While the conversations that we have may bring up personal experiences that are associated with different emotions, the risk of harm in this research should not exceed what you would experience in your daily lives.

Supports: If you experience any type of discomfort or stress as a result of participating in this research, we encourage you to access counselling supports. The Child and Youth Mental Health and Family Wellness team at Lii Michif Otipemisiwak is available to provide counselling support to you (free of charge). You can contact them at 250-554-9486. If you prefer to access external counselling support, the Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Centre has an available mental health clinician on staff who can be reached at 250-376-1296.

Benefits: Through learning from your knowledge and experiences, this research aims to improve the child and family support services provided to Métis people in British Columbia.

Honoraria: As a way to compensate you for any inconvenience related to your participation, you will be offered a \$50 honorarium for your time. The researcher will e-transfer you this honorarium at the beginning of the interview. If you are participating the interview in person, and prefer not to receive an e-transfer, the researcher can offer you a cheque. You will be asked to sign a sheet indicating that you received the cheque.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to decline to participate in this study, or to withdraw from this study at any point with no negative consequences. You can leave the interview at any time, and you can choose to withdraw from the research after the interview has been completed. If you decide to stop your participation in the study, you can keep the honorarium. If you decide to leave the interview while it is in progress, it is your choice whether the questions you previously answered will be included in the research. We respect your choice and if you decide to fully withdraw, we will remove all of your data from the study. During the interview, you may also choose to not answer any question for any reason. The expected duration of your participation in this study, inclusive of this discussion, the interview, and the optional review your transcript, is up to 1 month.

Study Results: This research will be shared in written publications, a community report, the researcher's doctoral dissertation, and other reports that aim to benefit Métis families. The results may also be shared orally in conferences or other public forums. Your quotes will only be attributed to your name, if you indicate that you would like to be acknowledged (at the end of this consent form).

Contacts for Questions and Concerns: You can contact the researcher, Monique Auger, or her supervisor, Renée Monchalín, using the information at the top of page 1. In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Consent: This research study has been explained, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have the right not to participate and the right to withdraw. The potential harms and benefits of participating in this research study have been explained to me. I know that I may ask now, or in the future, any questions I have about the study. I have been told that data relating to me will be kept confidential and that no information will be disclosed without my permission unless required by law. I have been given sufficient time to read and discuss the above information.

Yes

No

Would you like to have your name acknowledged in the study (next to your stories and quotes, for example)? You will have an opportunity to review your stories in any written reports before publication.

Yes

No

For future contact with the researcher:

I would like to receive a copy of the interview conversation transcript

I would like to receive a summary of the research findings

If yes, please write an **address** for the transcript to be sent to and **phone number** to follow up:

Address:

Phone Number: _____

Do you consent to have your interview audio recorded?

Yes

No

How would you like to be given the honorarium?

E-transfer

Cheque

If you select an e-transfer, please provide e-transfer information for your honorarium (either a phone number or email address):

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix D. Handouts Shared at the Elders Gathering

The following hand-outs are included in this appendix:

Attachment 1: Stories Shared by Métis Elders and Knowledge Keepers: Preliminary

Analysis [Summary document shared with Elders, with optional feedback forms]

Attachment 2: Example Slides from the Elders' Gathering

**Stories Shared by Métis Elders and Knowledge Keepers:
Preliminary Analysis**

Stories about Being Métis

Area	Description
Identity	Stories about identity often included different journeys towards understanding what it means to be Métis. Some people were raised as Métis, while others were not. Many spoke about the importance of embracing those who are still learning about what it means to be Métis, while also recognizing that they may not be in positions to speak on behalf of Métis people. Discussions focused on the importance of knowing who you are and where you come from, which is critical for all Métis children. Elders also discussed the different terms that we have used to describe who we are, and the importance of sharing our pride as Métis people.
Culture and Language	This area highlights the importance of culture and language for our people. Many Elders shared their stories about Métis languages (e.g., Cree, Michif), including the importance of teaching the languages to young people. Some Elders shared specific cultural activities and practices, like beading. The diversity of our culture and languages was reflected across the conversations, and at time explicitly stated. Some Elders spoke about how learning our culture can reawaken our spirits, with reference to the meaning of blood memory. There is overlap between this area and the importance of culture for Métis children in care.
Family and Community	Elders described how traditionally Métis families were big, strong, and interconnected. Families and communities created natural support systems for Métis people. Elders spoke about the importance of Métis children knowing who their family is. There is overlap between this area and discussion around kinship as part of raising children.
Connection to Land and Place	Stories about land and place were diverse. This area includes stories that highlight the value of land-based activities and outdoor education, and the ways in which these activities can teach children and youth about our traditional values and life skills, which are very relevant today. Elders also talked about what it means to be living on the territories of BC First Nations.
Spirituality	This area included discussion around the importance of reconnecting with spirit through, for example, prayer and ceremony, as well as meditation. Discussions around spirituality were interconnected with connection to land.
Belonging	Elders discussed the power of being surrounded by your own people and being in spaces that are reflective of who we are as Métis people. Belonging was discussed in terms of promoting safety for children, youth, and families.

Area	Description
Balance	The importance of balance and wellness. This included balancing multiple ways of knowing (the western and Traditional sides) and taking care of all sides of our wellness (mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical). Elders spoke about the impact of experiencing an imbalance – which can manifest itself in mental health challenges, addiction, self-esteem and confidence. We can use the power of connection and healing to protect and strengthen our wellness.
Métis History	Elders shared about their family’s history specifically as well as Métis history more broadly.

Optional Anonymous Feedback Sheet: Being Métis

Does the theme and description of “Being Métis” reflect your experience of being Métis?

- Yes
- No
- I don’t know

Is the theme “Being Métis” relevant to support and care for Métis children and families today?

- Yes
- No
- I don’t know

Are there any key areas missing from this list? If so, what?

Do you have any additional feedback?

Stories about Growing Up and Raising Children

Area	Description
Kinship	Stories about strong connections to family members, and in particular, these stories emphasize the importance of grandparents. When speaking about traditional approaches to childrearing, Elders often spoke about helping out other families and supporting each other in families and in community. This often included taking care of other children through customary adoption and kinship care.
Chores	Chores were a prominent theme in stories about growing up Métis. Many Elders shared stories about how they developed a strong work ethic as a result of being raised with chores. These teachings often carried over to the Elders' own children, who were brought up learning about work ethic through chores.
Discipline	Traditional approaches to discipline were described in many of the stories. While there was some variation in the types of discipline Elders experienced when growing up, most stories featured examples of teaching lessons through stories and gentle redirection, as well as natural consequences. Some also shared stories of punishment in response to troublemaking. Some Elders spoke about the ways in which discipline taught them about being responsible.
Visiting and Kitchen Parties	Elders shared stories about growing up around lots of their own family and other Métis families. They would visit each other, play games, gather and have kitchen parties. Gatherings and kitchen parties often included music, which was a prominent feature in many stories about happy Métis families.
Life Skills	Life skills were described as important parts of children and youth development into adulthood. Discussions around life skills focused on finances, housework, cooking, and relationships. Life skills were noted to be important for all children and youth, but in particular, gaps were noted in the context of children and youth in care. The importance of talking about identity, culture, healing from trauma were also described in relation to teachings about life skills.
Teachings	Many teachings were offered by the Elders. Some of these teachings focused on lessons around gardening, the Four Directions and Four Seasons, and the gifts that each person carries. Elders also spoke about the ways in which these teachings should be openly shared with Métis children, youth, and families. This can be done through role modelling and sharing stories. Teachings can also be shared in the context of cultural activities, like beading and cooking.

Area	Description
Education	Education was described in both a western sense and through culture and storytelling—both forms of education were described as important. Some Elders noted that a cultural foundation is the most important form of education.
Sports	Elders described their competitive spirit in childhood, which was channeled in part through sports.
Meals and Nutrition	Elders spoke about the healthy meals that they would eat growing up. They knew where the food came from and how it was prepared. These skills were often passed down to their children.
Discrimination	Many Elders shared stories about their experiences of racism and discrimination growing up. This largely occurred in school, as well as in sports.
Hunting and Trapping	Stories in this section included growing up with a close connection to the land, primarily through hunting and trapping, but also through gathering and harvesting plants. This section is related to Connection to Land and Place.
Sewing	Stories often included elements of being economical and resourceful, by way of making and repairing clothing. Fiscal necessity required parents to find creative solutions to worn and torn clothing. Elders noted that we do not see these creative options as much anymore.
“We never felt poor”	Elders shared stories about growing up in housing that did not have plumbing or electricity. They spoke about these stories fondly, often noting that they didn’t think of themselves as being poor.
Gender Roles in Parenting	Some Elders spoke about how their fathers were often working away from home, and they gave credit to their mothers who were tasked with a lot of the parenting, passing on the culture, and teaching the children.
Technology	Technology was described in both a favourable and challenging way in terms of parenting. While technology can be helpful, it can also be over-used.

Optional Anonymous Feedback Sheet: Growing Up and Raising Children

Does the theme “Growing Up and Raising Children” reflect your experience of growing up and raising children?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Is the theme “Growing Up and Raising Children” relevant to support and care for Métis children and families today?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Are there any key areas missing from this list? If so, what?

Do you have any additional feedback?

Values

Area	Description
Responsibility and Independence	Responsibility and independence, including how to take care of yourself, were important values in stories shared. This included stories about fostering leadership skills and self-sufficiency at a young age (e.g., taking care of yourself and having a strong work ethic). Elders also spoke about the importance of building up children’s self-esteem through nurturing healthy independence and autonomy.
Respect	Respect is an important value when we think about what is needed to restore our traditional ways of caring for one another. Respect was described as loving and valuing yourself, and your people. Elders also spoke about ways of teaching children and youth about respect through land-based activities.
Generosity	Elders shared strong examples of intergenerational generosity. Even when families were living in poverty, they found ways to share what they had in order to help and lift each other up.
Pride	Learning about culture and knowing who you are is important in instilling a sense of pride for Métis children, youth, and families.
Love and Kindness	Elders shared the power of leading with love in helping professions, and in supporting each other in the community.
Humour	Humour and joy in life were shared through finding opportunities to laugh and visit with each other.
Forgiveness and Tolerance	Forgiveness and tolerance were also described as important values in supporting other people in the community.
Problem Solving	Métis people were traditionally seen as being creative problem solvers, which was explained in historical context using the Red River Cart as an example of Métis ingenuity.

Optional Anonymous Feedback Sheet: Values

Does the theme “Values” represent your Métis values?

- Yes
- No
- I don’t know

Is the theme “Values” relevant to support and care for Métis children and families today?

- Yes
- No
- I don’t know

Are there any key areas missing from this list? If so, what?

Do you have any additional feedback?

Reflections on the Child Welfare System

Area	Description
Culture as the Foundation	Elders spoke about the importance of having a child welfare system that supports youth to reconnect with their culture, their identities, their families, and their histories. Elders spoke about the need to reorient Métis child welfare with a focus on Wahkotowin. Broadly, Elders also spoke about the need to address gaps in awareness and misconceptions around Métis identity among non-Métis social workers and foster parents.
Housing	Elders often spoke about how special Kikékyelc is, housing youth and Elders together. This will be further explored in the evaluation component of this research. Elders in other areas of BC spoke about how this model is needed in their cities. Additionally, Elders discussed the importance of Elders and families co-housing.
Gaps in Programs	Some Elders described specific gaps in programming at LMO, which will be explored in the evaluation component of this research. A few Elders spoke more generally to gaps in programming for youth, noting that some age groups receive far less programming than others. In particular, there is a gap for pre-teens and young teenagers. Some also spoke about a need for supports for parents, with a focus on communication and conflict resolution. Elders play an important role in mentoring and role modeling.
Systemic Funding Issues	Systemic issues with a lack of funding for Métis people and programs. This will also be explored in the evaluation component of this research.
Impacts of Foster Care	Elders spoke about the impacts of being disconnected from family and community and indicated that removing children should be a last resort.
Fear of Child Welfare System	Elders spoke about the fear that some families carry with respect to the child welfare system, referencing both historical and current harms caused.

Optional Anonymous Feedback Sheet: Child Welfare System

Does the theme 'Reflections on the Child Welfare System' represent your reflections on the child welfare system (aside from what you may have shared about LMO directly, which will be included in the evaluation)?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Is the theme "Reflections on the Child Welfare System" relevant to support and care for Métis children and families today?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Are there any key areas missing from this list? If so, what?

Do you have any additional feedback?

Example Slides from the Elders Gathering

ELDERS GATHERING: SHARING OUR PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services
April 21, 2023



MEANING MAKING PROCESS

- Analysis refers to the ways that we interpret and make meaning of knowledge shared during a research process
- Thematic analysis includes processes of forming categories of knowledge so we can wholistically understand all of the elements that were shared
- Cree scholar Dr. Danette Starblanket and colleagues developed a process called: *Nanâtawiho-win Âcimowina kika-môсахkinikêhk papiskîci-itascikêwin astâcikowina*, or NAPKA, meaning “Medicine and Healing Stories Picked, Sorted, Stored



OUR STEPS

1. Conversational and storytelling interviews with each of you
2. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and shared back with you
3. Further conversation about if, and how, you would like to be acknowledged in relation to your stories
4. Stories were read and we conducted a thematic analysis
5. We have come together to discuss the themes and share some quotes that exemplify these themes
6. We will determine if these themes reflect the stories, and make changes to them as needed



TOPICS OF CONVERSATION

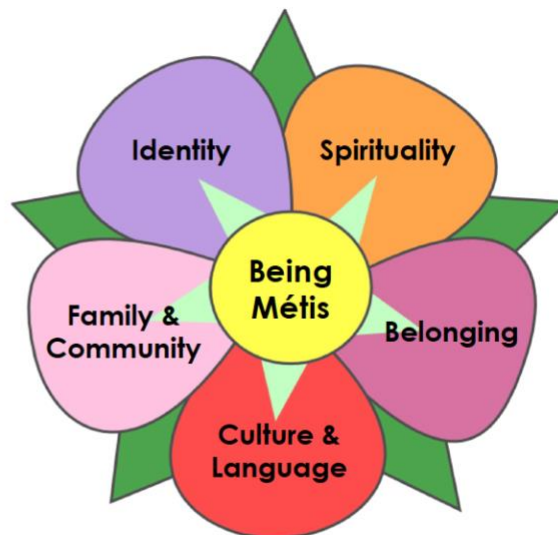
- Stories about:
 - Being Métis
 - Growing Up and Raising Children
 - Values and Teachings
- Reflections and critiques on:
 - The Child Welfare System



BEING MÉTIS

Additional areas:

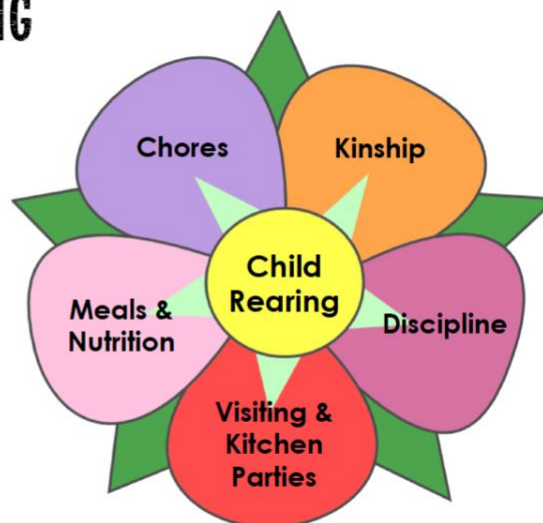
- Connection to land and place
- Balance
- Blood memory
- Métis history



GROWING UP AND RAISING CHILDREN

Additional areas:

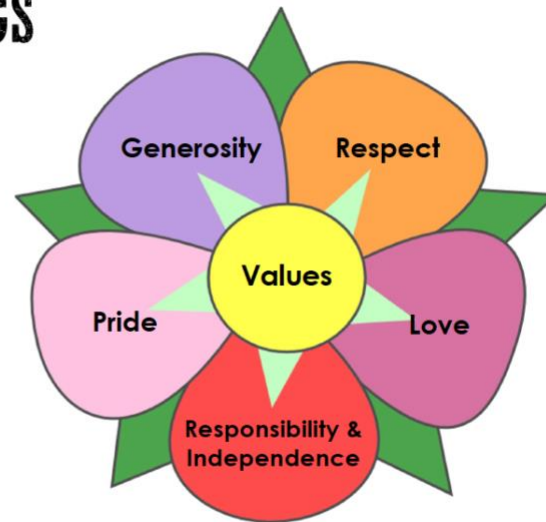
- Education and life skills
- "We never felt poor"
- Discrimination
- Teachings
- Hunting and trapping
- Sewing
- Technology



VALUES AND TEACHINGS

Additional values:

- Forgiveness and tolerance
- Humour
- Problem Solving



NEXT STEPS

- Was there anything that we didn't touch on that you would like to say?
- How would you like to see this knowledge shared? (for example, through a booklet that can be used at agencies)

Appendix E. Relational Analysis of Themes

The following diagrams are included in this appendix:

Attachment 1: Scope of Findings

Attachment 2: Relational Analysis

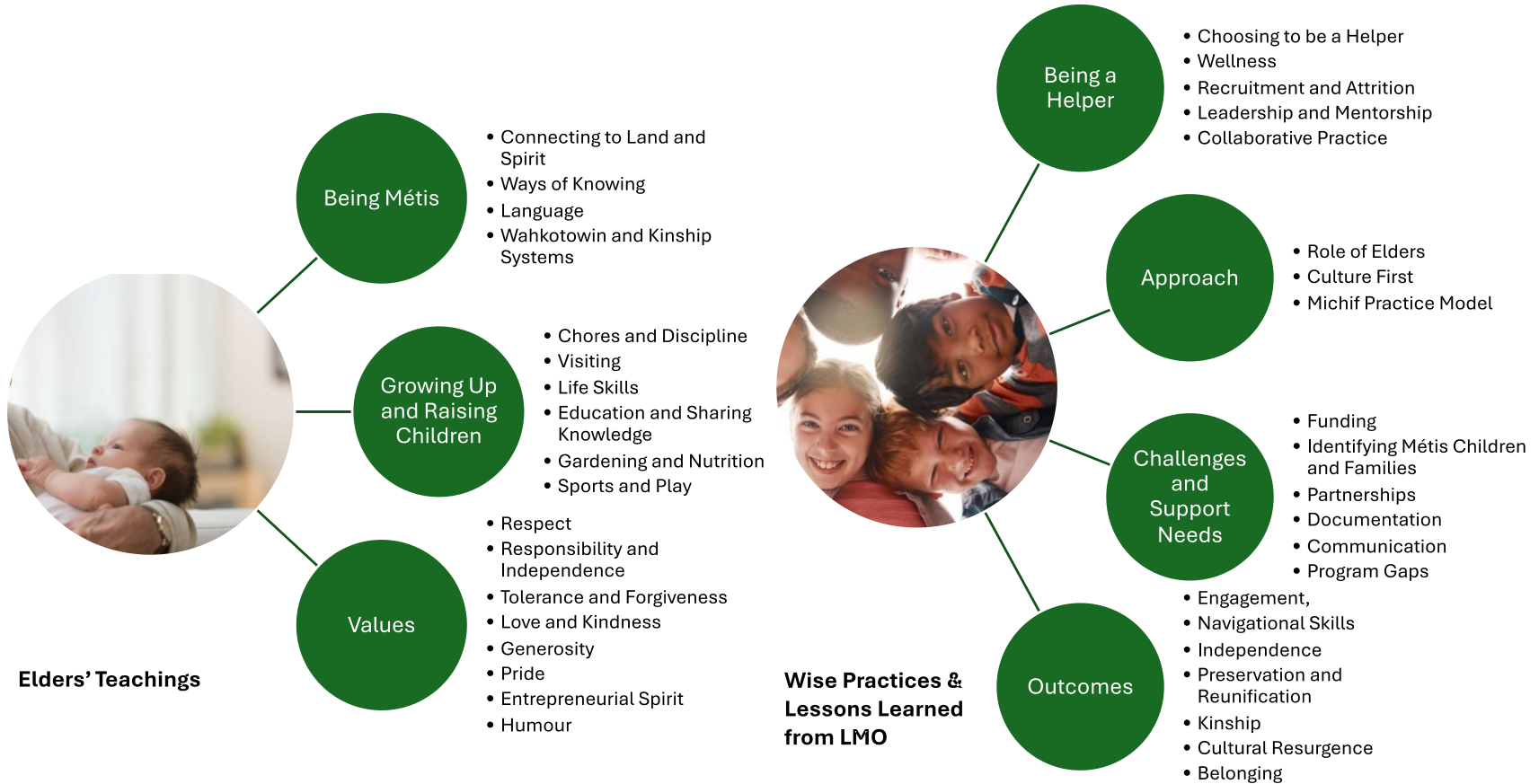


Figure 9. Thematic diagram illustrating the full scope of findings from this research.

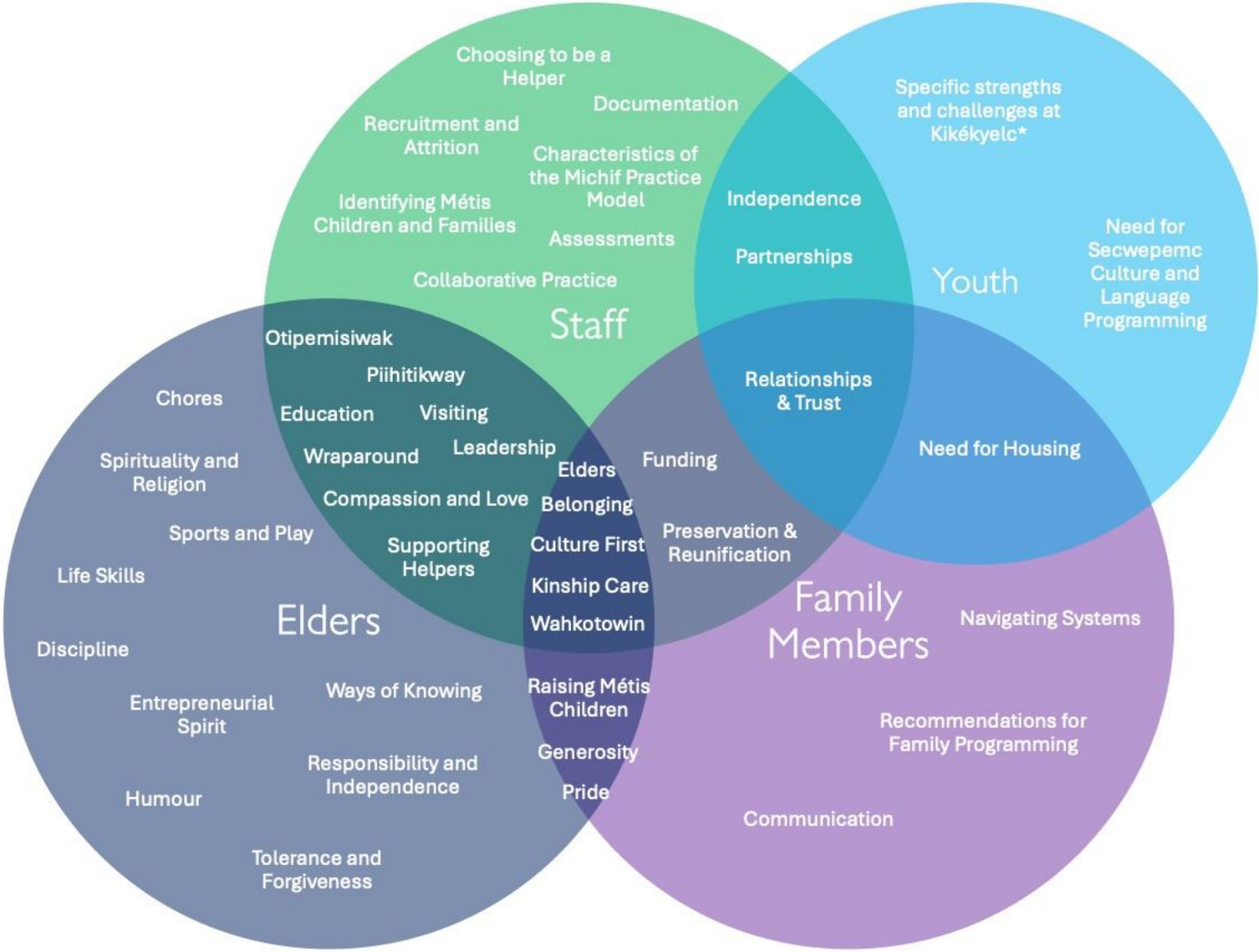


Figure 10. Venn diagram illustrating a relational analysis of themes by participant group.