Voices of Urban Aboriginal Youth: Addressing their barriers and needs in relation to educational attainment

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This report was prepared for the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians-BC Region (OFI-BC) who implements the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) in Metro Vancouver. The UAS strives to improve socio-economic life opportunities for urban Aboriginal people and has identified education as a priority area. This report seeks to address the barriers and needs of urban Aboriginal youth in relation to high school retention and graduation. The complex and intergenerational socio-historical, socio-cultural, and socio-economical realities facing urban Aboriginal peoples has resulted in a myriad of inter-related out-of-school barriers, which have resulted in low high school graduation rates – 32 percent in the City of Vancouver.

Aboriginal peoples migrate to urban centres with aspirations of a better quality of life, with the majority of Aboriginal peoples now living in urban centres; however, the intergenerational barriers create a cycle of poverty that is difficult to overcome. The realities of this intergenerational cycle of poverty become critical for youth during their transition into high school and results in the majority of Aboriginal youth dropping out before they reach grade 12. Addressing these out-of-school barriers to increase high school graduation rates can provide numerous socio-economic life opportunities to urban Aboriginal youth and help break the cycle of poverty through increased access to higher education, better employment opportunities, and increased self-resiliency.

The objective of this report was to identify the out-of-school barriers urban Aboriginal youth in the City of Vancouver experience in relation to high school retention and graduation. Additionally, this report sought to identify how OFI-BC can implement the Urban Aboriginal Strategy with its government and community partners to address the identified out-of-school barriers and needs.

METHODS

This research project is a qualitative analysis of the out-of-school barriers affecting urban Aboriginal high school attainment and identifies what is needed to address the barriers from the perspective of Aboriginal youth in the City of Vancouver. The report consists of multiple research sections: a thematic literature analysis, a jurisdictional review of promising practices, and youth sharing circles. The literature analysis and jurisdictional review were conducted to obtain a foundation and complement the sharing circle data of what the out-of-school barriers are and what has been effective in addressing out-of-school barriers.

The sharing circles were implemented as a qualitative data collection tool to integrate Indigenous research methods and youth engagement into the report, as the report sought to identify what youth themselves perceive their barriers and needs to be. Youth participated in four sharing circles where they were asked pre-determined open-ended questions to gain insight on their personal out-of-school barriers and what they need to succeed in high school in the City of Vancouver. The literature, promising practices, and sharing circle data were analyzed to provide recommendations on how to move forward in addressing the identified out-of-school barriers.

FINDINGS

The literature analysis and jurisdictional review of promising practices supported and complemented the findings from the sharing circles of what the out-of-school barriers are and what is needed to address the identified barriers to increase the high school retention and graduation rates of urban Aboriginal students. The youth identified numerous out-of-school barriers that are resultant of the socio-historical, socio-cultural, and socio-economic realities they face as urban Aboriginal youth in Vancouver. The out-of-school barriers identified by the youth are poverty, parental involvement, negative social environment, mobility, access to services, lack of community support, racism, family structure and dissolution, adult responsibilities, unpreparedness for city life, lack of connection to land and culture, and behaviour problems. Additionally, the youth emphasized the interconnectedness of the out-of-school barriers, where many of the barriers are related to, or a result of, another out-of-school barrier.

The youth experienced multiple out-of-school barriers, which increases the complexity in addressing the identified intergenerational barriers. As such, the youth identified the need to address the barriers in a holistic cultural approach that addresses multiple barriers rather than focusing on one issue. To address the barriers and increase the high school retention and graduation rates of urban Aboriginal youth in the City of Vancouver, the participants identified a variety of things that are needed: support, positive parental involvement and home stability, positive role models and mentors, positive social environment and peers, community-school connection, sense of belonging, and practical work and life experience opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the out-of-school barriers to high school graduation for urban Aboriginal students in the City of Vancouver, OFI-BC was recommended to build upon previous UAS successes in education initiatives in three areas:

- Increase family-school relationships and parental involvement;
- Increase access to positive role models and support networks; and
- Develop the community-school and community-youth connection.

The recommendations will be implemented in partnership with other federal departments, provincial and municipal governments, and the Aboriginal community. The literature and data collected from the youth sharing circles identified the barriers as being complex and inter-related with one another. As such, these recommendations seek to address a multitude of barriers, integrating elements identified in the promising practices where a range of barriers were addressed. In addressing the out-of-school barriers, urban Aboriginal youth in the City of Vancouver are expected to have increased ability to succeed in and graduate from high school, resulting in increased socio-economic life opportunities.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Urban Aboriginal people are one of the poorest populations in Canada. Intergenerational poverty has resulted in a cycle of unemployment, homelessness, criminal involvement, and low education levels in one of Canada's most vulnerable populations (Hanselmann, 2001, p. 2). As the youngest and fastest growing population in Canada, the urban Aboriginal population will be an important economic resource to fill the looming labour shortage. For urban Aboriginal peoples to meet their full potential, the low education levels being attained must be addressed with the goal to ultimately improve the number of Aboriginal students who graduate from high school, which is often the minimum requirement to enter the Canadian labour force.

This project examines the intergenerational socio-culture, socio-historical, and socio-economical issues that Aboriginal youth living in urban centres face and how these issues have resulted in lower high school graduation rates. The report provides an analysis of the out-of-school, or external, barriers that have resulted from the intergenerational issues, from the perspective of urban Aboriginal youth and recommendations on how the identified barriers can be addressed to their high school retention and graduation rates. In addressing the out-of-school factors, the ever-increasing trend of high mobility rates for Aboriginal peoples will be explored to address barriers related to transitioning to a new city and whether there different needs for mobile and non-mobile youth. Urbanization, migration, and mobility of Aboriginal youth and families, is explored to highlight how these trends contribute to low socio-economical indicators and cycle of poverty, which perpetuate the low high school retention and graduation rates (Hanselmann, 2001, p. 5).

Aboriginal peoples migrate to the City of Vancouver, much like other urban centres across Canada, to access increased economic life opportunities, but the intergenerational socio-historical, socio-cultural, and socio-economical realities often result in continued poverty and other low socio-economic factors (Hanselmann, 2001, p. 9). To increase urban Aboriginal economic self-sufficiency and resiliency, high school graduation rates need to be increased by addressing the out-of-school barriers. The Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS), delivered by the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians (OFI), has identified education as a key priority to increase the socio-economic status of urban Aboriginal peoples in the City of Vancouver. By addressing the out-of school social, economical, historical, and cultural barriers urban Aboriginal youth face in the City of Vancouver and that have negative impacts on their ability to remain in and graduate from high school, OFI seeks to improve the status of Aboriginal peoples in the urban centre.

1.1. PROBLEM DEFINITION

1.1.1 DEFINING THE PROBLEM

In British Columbia, approximately 70 percent of Aboriginal people live off-reserve and it is estimated that 14 percent of the 70 percent live in Metro Vancouver (Helin, 2008, p. 239). The number of Aboriginal people living in urban areas continues to grow rapidly. Aboriginal people, especially youth, are migrating to urban centres for a variety of reasons, including better educational and housing opportunities. In addition, youth from remote communities are often required to migrate to urban centres for high school because their home communities do not have the resources to offer secondary schooling (Rheaume, n.d., p. 15).

While life in the city provides many new opportunities, it also poses many new risks and challenges for migrating youth, such as lack of community support, loss of connection with

culture/traditions, vulnerability to gangs and substance abuse, racism, high costs of living and homelessness, among many others (McKenzie, 2010, pp. 3-5). These risks put increased pressures on youth in their critical learning years and can make it difficult for youth to successfully complete high school. While the educational system itself is often pinpointed as impacting the educational outcomes of Aboriginal youth, the many external social and economic factors are also huge factors regarding Aboriginal youths' success in secondary school.

Many of the social and economic factors affecting educational attainment are either intertwined with mobility, or are worsened, when the issue of mobility is added to the equation. The likelihood of dropping out increases by 30 percent every time an Aboriginal student changes schools (Raham, 2010, p. 4). Mobility also makes it increasingly difficult for youth to access the programs and services they require because they are often unaware of where or how to locate them.

Although more than half of Canada's Aboriginal population lives in urban areas, the majority of research and policy discussions still focus on reserve populations. This research will help to provide insight into the needs of urban Aboriginal people in Metro Vancouver, from their perspective. With the number of Aboriginal people in Metro Vancouver increasing, it is important to identify the effects the high mobility rate and life in the city is having on the educational attainment of Aboriginal youth and work to mitigate these effects to increase the life opportunities for current and future populations.

1.1.2 Identifying the Client and Problem

The client for this project is the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Metis and Non-Status Indians – BC Region for the Government of Canada, which seeks to improve the socio-economic conditions of urban Aboriginal people in the province of British Columbia. More specifically, OFI has identified both youth and education as priority areas in the City of Vancouver under the federal Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS).

The Interlocutor role was created in 1985 and its initial purpose was to be an advocate within Cabinet for Métis, non-status Indians and Inuit issues(Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada [AANDC], 2012a, para. 5). Additionally, it was to serve as the main point of contact between federal Ministers and Métis and non-status Indian groups (AANDC, 2012a, para. 5). The UAS was established in 1998 as a response to the socio-economic challenges and needs of urban Aboriginal people (Alderson-Gill & Associates, 2005, p. 2) The Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians was created as in 2004 as part of *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan* (2003) – a response to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Alderson-Gill & Associates, 2005, p. 2). The OFI-BC Region office was created in 2007 to address the socio-economic challenges of urban Aboriginal people in the BC Region, with strategic cities in Vancouver and Prince George.[1]

Education is often pinpointed as the main foundational necessity that urban Aboriginal people need to improve their socio-economic conditions. Research demonstrates that individuals with low levels of education are less likely to be successful in the economic labour market as there is often a link between educational attainment and employment rates and levels of income

[1] "As of September 4, 2012 the part of the Office of the Federal Interlocutor (OFI) that deals with urban programming has joined the department's Regional Operations branch in order to streamline program management and business processes to deliver efficient, effective and accountable programs" (AANDC, 2012b, para. 1) The March 2012 budget extended the UAS program for 2 years and the BC UAS operations was integrated into the AANDC BC Region office.

(Brunnen, 2003, pp. 8-10; Hull, 2008, p. 42; Richards, 2008, p. 2; Richards & Vining, 2004, p. 1). The employment rate is almost double when an individual graduates from high school; as such it is imperative to ensure that Aboriginal youth are not lost in their crucial years (Richards, 2008, p. 2). Although research demonstrates that retention and graduation rates for urban Aboriginal youth have increased, there is still a relatively large gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth (Cardinal & Adin, 2005, p. 54). The 2010-2011 high school graduation rates in the Vancouver School District for Aboriginal students was 32 percent compared to 85 percent for non-Aboriginal students (BC Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 28).

Through the UAS, OFI develops partnerships, with municipalities, provincial ministries, other federal departments, and community organizations to address the problems facing urban Aboriginal people. This research will be used by OFI to further their problem-solving partnerships with other orders of government to improve the socio-economic conditions of urban Aboriginal people in Metro Vancouver and specifically, to address the needs of secondary school learners related to mobility and city life.

1.1.3 Project Objectives

The objective of this project is to provide OFI-BC with research into the needs of Vancouver's urban Aboriginal youth, particularly during their transition stages, to increase their levels of high school educational attainment. The main goal of the research is to identify the out-of-school barriers of urban Aboriginal youth and what they need to address these identified barriers, from their perspective. The research also seeks to identify whether there are distinct differences in the needs of mobile and non-mobile urban Aboriginal youth.

This report seeks to provide findings on two main research questions: 1. What are the barriers and needs of urban Aboriginal youth, from their perspective, in relation to the out-of-school factors that negatively affect their school transitions and their educational attainment at the high school level? and 2. How can the Office of the Federal Interlocutor-BC Region work with its government and community partners to address the effects of the out-of-school factors, in particular mobility and city life, on urban Aboriginal youth to increase secondary school educational attainment in Vancouver? Additionally this research report seeks to determine whether the needs to increase the levels of secondary school educational attainment for mobile urban Aboriginal youth and non-mobile urban Aboriginal youth are different.

The expected outcome of this research is to provide recommendations to OFI – BC on how they can further the successes of urban Aboriginal learners and increase their opportunities for high school graduation by partnering with other federal departments, the provincial government and the municipal government to work with the Aboriginal community and other external stakeholders in addressing the identified barriers and needs. For the purposes of this report Aboriginal community refers to Aboriginal service providers, Aboriginal educators, Elders, and parents of Aboriginal students in the City of Vancouver. The recommendations will be based on the analysis of the barriers and needs identified by the urban Aboriginal youth and the issues and barriers identified in the thematic literature analysis.

1.2 Importance of Topic

The costs of dropping out of high school are high – not only for the individual, but also their family, local community, Canadian society, and subsequent generations. Lower levels of education will affect an individual's ability to be self-sufficient and results in increased costs

related to crime, unemployment, social services, and health (CCL, 2009a, p. 2). Increasing educational attainment, beginning with high school certification, empowers individuals to achieve greater life opportunities and helps build the Canadian economy. In fact, a report from the Centre for the Study of Living Standards states, "the key to increasing educational attainment is to increase the number of Aboriginal Canadians graduating from high school, as this not only increases the potential economic contribution of these individuals but also creates a larger pool of potential university graduates" (Sharpe, Arsenault, Lapointe & Cowan, 2009, p. 70).

1.2.1 Increased Access to Higher Education

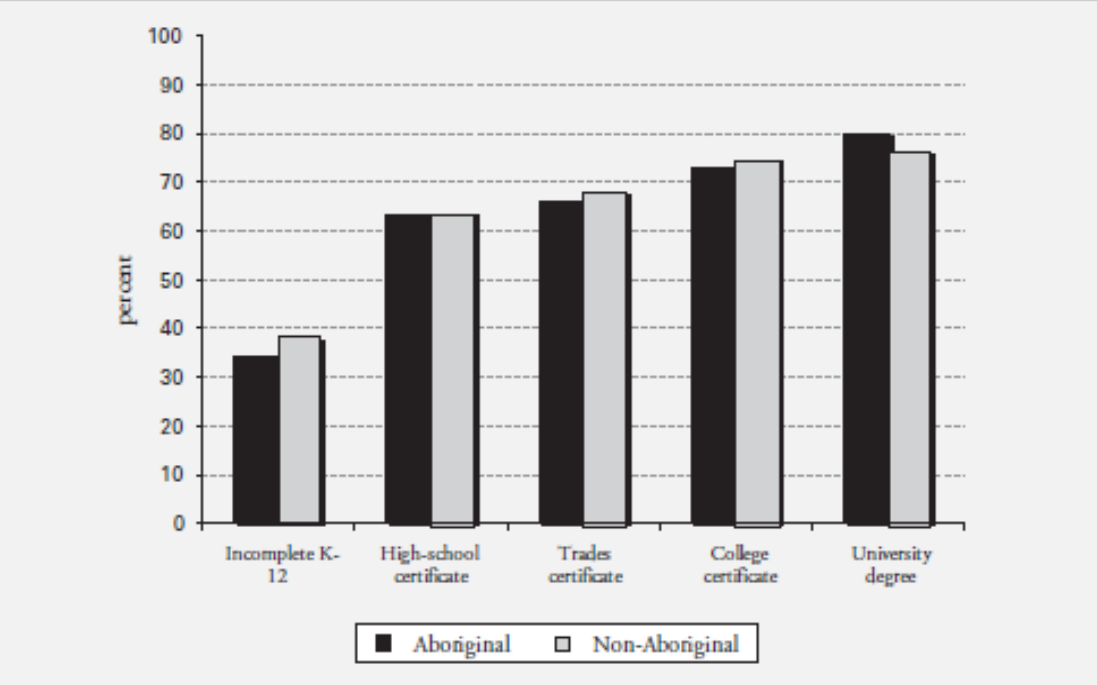
Without high school certification, it is difficult for individuals to pursue any form of higher education, without significant levels of upgrading. Aboriginal students who do complete high school are more likely to continue onto post-secondary education and the educational gap between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal post-secondary attainment is much narrower than the gap at the high school level (CCL, 2009b, p. 5). Therefore, if Aboriginal students are able to graduate from high school, a greater percentage is expected to have access to educational opportunities at the post-secondary level.

In Canada's maturing economy, jobs are becoming more and more specialized or skilled based, and the requirement of post-secondary education is becoming the norm for obtaining gainful employment. It has been reported that nearly 70 percent of Canada's 1.7 million new jobs will require post-secondary education (CCL, 2009b, p. 2). This places even greater emphasis on the need to increase the educational attainment of urban Aboriginal peoples at the high school level to enable them to pursue higher education.

1.2.2 Economic Benefits

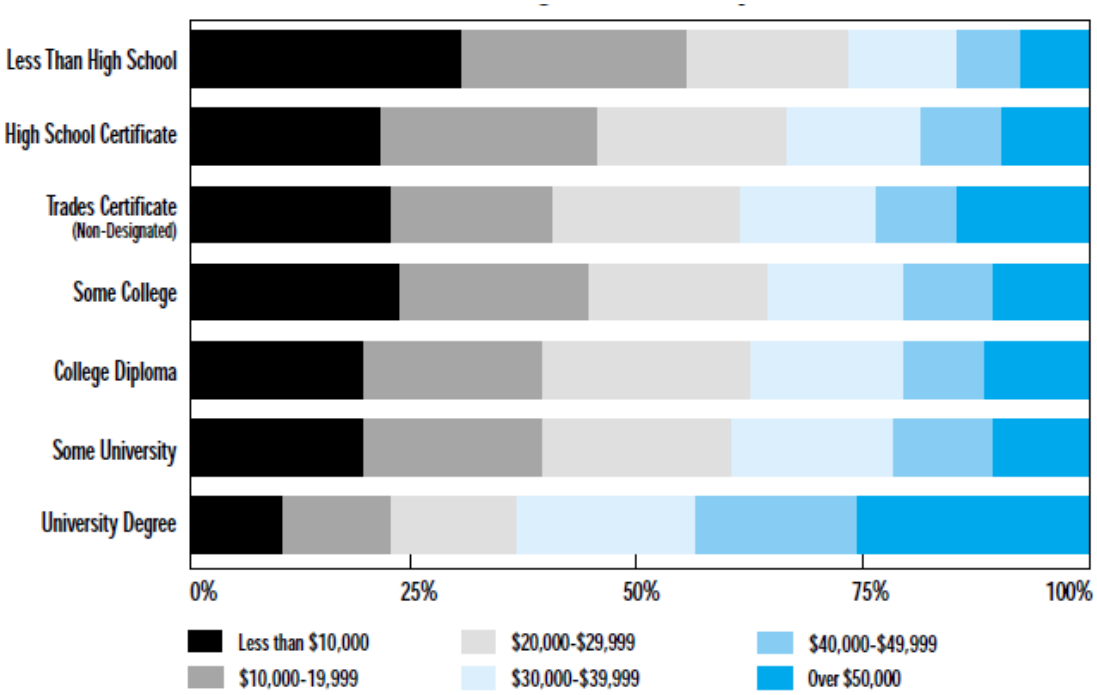
The Aboriginal population will have an opportunity to play a vital role in the success of an economy facing a looming labour shortage, with one-third being under the age of 20. It is known that the rate of employment for Aboriginal peoples significantly increases with obtainment of high school certification (Figure 1) and income levels continue to increase with each new stage of education completed (Figure 2). When Aboriginal people complete high school their employment rate is equal to that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Richards, 2008, p. 2).

Figure 1: Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Employment Rate, by Education Level, 2006, Canada



Source: Richards, 2008, p. 2

Figure 2: Urban Off-Reserve Aboriginal Incomes by Educational Attainment



Source: Derived by Canada West Foundation from Statistics Canada as cited in Brunnen, 2003, p. 13

An increase in the number of Aboriginal youth completing high school will have a positive impact on lowering the over-representation of Aboriginal peoples' poverty levels and dependence on income assistance. In fact, according to a report by the Canadian Council on Learning (2009a), 34 percent of people on income assistance dropped out of high school, compared to only 7 percent of those who completed high school (p. 3).

The Canadian economy is facing a looming labour shortage with an aging population. The Aboriginal population being younger – median age of 26.5 years compared to 39.5 for non-Aboriginal – and growing at a rate of more than twice that of non-Aboriginal populations, will be a vital resource for the Canadian economy (Sharpe et al., 2009, pp. v-viii). With higher levels of education, the Aboriginal population has the potential to help address the looming labour shortage. Research suggests that increasing the educational attainment of Aboriginal peoples will not only increase their levels of labour market participation and income levels, but will also help to increase Canada's GDP, tax revenues, and decrease government social expenditures (Sharpe et al., 2009, p. xii).

1.2.3 Decreased Involvement in the Criminal Justice System

Research demonstrates that there is a relationship between lower socio-economic characteristics and involvement in the criminal justice system (La Prairie & Stenning, 2003, pp. 185-187). Additionally, there is a relationship between dropping out of high school and the criminal justice system, where 74 percent of British Columbia's inmates did not complete high school (CCL, 2009a, p. 3). The ages 15 to 24, the high school years, are often labelled as high risk years and there is a higher proportion of urban Aboriginal youth who, within this high-risk group, have lower levels of education, higher rates of unemployment, and higher rates of substance abuse, which makes them more susceptible to becoming criminally-involved (La Prairie & Stenning, 2003, p. 187).

There is an over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system (18 percent of inmates of Aboriginal, but less than 4 percent of the Canadian population is Aboriginal) and the majority of the criminal activity by Aboriginal peoples occurs in urban centres (Canadian Council on Social Development, n.d., para. 3; Richards, 2001, p. 14). Over-representation in the criminal justice system is not only present in today's urban Aboriginal youth, but also the generations before them due to consistently lower-socio-economic characteristics and historical inequities, such as the residential school legacy and over-representation in the child welfare system (Trevethan, Auger, Moore, MacDonald, & Sinclair, 2001, p. ii). This has resulted in generations of parents who have not been able to properly care for their children, be involved in their schooling, and direct them away from negative social influences. By increasing the levels of educational attainment of urban Aboriginal youth they will be at a lower risk of becoming criminally involved and future generations will be at a lower risk of becoming criminally involved.

1.3 Background Information

1.3.1 Urban Aboriginal Strategy Initiatives to Address Problem

The UAS responds to national and local identified priorities with an aim to improve socio-economic and life opportunities for Aboriginal people living in urban centres. In Metro Vancouver, local identified priorities of 'Staying in School' and 'Transferring Traditional

Knowledge' have supported initiatives around increasing school connectedness and graduation rates. Additionally, these initiatives focus on addressing out-of-school barriers affecting urban Aboriginal youth.

This section will reflect on the relevant UAS initiatives from 2010-2012 that have addressed out-of-school barriers. Highlighted in each reflected initiative will be what the goals are, how the goals are being achieved, and the expected or actual outcomes. While some of these initiatives did not occur in the City of Vancouver, many of the out-of-school barriers are similar for all urban Aboriginal people regardless of location as informed by the literature analysis. The following initiatives are examined: Aboriginal Student Retention Program, Tree of Life Project, Mathematics Program for Aboriginal Learners, and Intergenerational Urban Aboriginal Landed Learning Garden Project.

1.3.1.1 Aboriginal Student Retention Program

The New Westminster School District (SD40) had realized that they were experiencing difficulties in retaining Aboriginal students, Aboriginal parental involvement was very low, and grade 12 graduation rates were well below the provincial average. (Metro Vancouver Urban Aboriginal Strategy [MVUAS], 2012a) The Aboriginal Student Retention Project was started to help keep students connected to school from a young age through to high school graduation. SD40 placed significant emphasis on parental involvement because they knew from research that when Aboriginal parents are more involved in their child's education the students tend to do much better at school (MVUAS, 2012a).

In increasing parental involvement, and in turn student-school connection and student success, SD40 held Aboriginal community events at the school under the guidance of Elders for families to develop early family literacy. The purpose of these events is to not only celebrate Aboriginal culture in the school and community, but also to encourage parents to help their students with their school, become more involved in their education, and encourage school engagement from a young age (MVUAS, 2012a). These community events have helped parents to become more comfortable in the school, increased Aboriginal culture within the school, increased the sense of community between students, parents, and the school, as well as an increased sense of belonging and self-confidence (MVUAS, 2012a).

For high school students, SD40 began an after school program to help keep youth connected to school by engaging them in a positive social environment, Aboriginal cultural activities, health and wellness workshops, and life-skills activities – many of which were facilitated by Elders, encouraging support network development and intergenerational transfer of cultural knowledge (MVUAS, 2012a). Additionally, academic-based programs, such as peer tutoring and mentoring from college and university students provided high school learners with the opportunity to increase their academic grades and better prepare them for higher education. Each student is also met with individually in grades 10-11 to map out their specific barriers, goals, and post-secondary plans, thus providing strong support on a personal level (MVUAS, 2012a).

Since the implementation of this program Aboriginal students in SD40 have experienced tremendous growth in grade-to-grade transition rates and decrease in course failures. Over the last three years the high school grade-to grade transition rates have increase by 28 percent overall (MVUAS, 2012a). SD40 had realized that they were losing many Aboriginal students between grades 10 and 11, and in an attempt to mitigate this, SD40 focused on finding out and addressing what the students' personal barriers were and provided tutoring support and got them involved in extracurricular activities (MVUAS, 2012a). Overall, the Aboriginal high school completion rate

has increased significantly from 17 percent in 2004 to 35 percent in 2008 to 62 percent in 2011 placing the Aboriginal graduation rate above the provincial average (MVUAS, 2012a). Student-school attachment has also increased with many graduating students returning to mentor current students.

1.3.1.2 Tree of Life Project: Urban Aboriginal Youth Project

The Surrey School District (SD36) developed the Tree of Life: Urban Aboriginal Youth Project to integrate Aboriginal culture and learning opportunities into the school, increase awareness and understanding of Aboriginal values, cultures and traditions, and strengthen the sense of belonging and cultural identities for Aboriginal youth (Urban, 2012, pp. 35-37). Students participate in intergenerational learning activities facilitated by Elders from the 'Elders in Residence Program,' which allows them to gain a deeper understanding of their culture and feel supported. Additionally, the inclusion of Aboriginal cultural activities has allowed non-Aboriginal students and teachers to develop a greater understanding of their classmates' culture, which has helped to build a mutual respect between the many cultures that make up Surrey's diverse student population (Urban, 2012, p. 35-37).

1.3.1.3. Mathematics Program for Aboriginal Learners

The Mathematics Program for Aboriginal Learners (MPAL), administered through Native Education College in 2011-12, strives to Aboriginal student participation, retention, and graduation rates, while providing students with a solid foundation in math to prepare them for post-secondary (MVUAS, 2012b, para. 6). For many Aboriginal students, inadequate qualifications in math have limited their progress into post-secondary education and skilled trades. MPAL is an after-school program delivered at targeted high schools in the City of Vancouver and seeks to develop a practical academic support system for Aboriginal high school students (MVUAS, 2012b, para. 6). MPAL is provided in a culturally appropriate environment for Aboriginal learners and integrates support from role models and mentors. MPAL provides Aboriginal students with scholarships for successful participation to help alleviate poverty-related issues such as hunger (Ward, 2012, para. 45).

With the implementation of this program increased numbers of Aboriginal students are enrolling grade 11 and 12 math classes, with some schools seeing their very first Aboriginal student graduate with math 12 between 2009 and 2012 and the academic grades in Math 8-12 are improving (Ward, 2012, para. 7). Increasing numbers of students are attending on a regular basis and a number of students have transferred into the regular academic mathematics stream. In addition to increasing retention rates, academic success, and school-attachment, MPAL is also helping to develop a sense of belonging and empowering Aboriginal students to succeed in all aspects of their lives (Ward, 2012, para. 64).

1.3.1.4. Intergenerational Urban Aboriginal Landed Learning Garden Project

The Intergenerational Urban Aboriginal Landed learning Garden Project (IUALLP) serves to create a bridge between Elders and urban Aboriginal youth to revalue their cultural knowledge and relationship while addressing other health, social and learning needs (Urban, 2012, pp. 31-34). Youth learn about traditional foods, herbs, healing medicinal plants, and cultural practices from Elders. IUALLP recognizes that there are few Aboriginal role models in the urban school system and Aboriginal youth struggle to find a cultural identity, which often results in them

becoming at-risk for substance abuse, becoming street-involved, and leaving school early (Urban, 2012, pp. 31-34). By connecting youth with Elders and other positive Aboriginal role models, the Garden Project helps youth develop a greater sense of belonging and connection to the land and culture (Urban, 2012 pp. 31-34).

The IUALLP benefits urban Aboriginal students, as well as schools and communities, by fostering increased academic achievement in students and helping them develop personal relationships which enhance the self-esteem necessary to have confidence and resiliency in school and at work (Urban, 2012, pp. 31-34). Social skills, teamwork, and communication skills are improved through students working together with other students, adults, and Elders. Students cooperate on real life projects with tangible outcomes and develop a sense of ownership, direct connection to results, and responsibility for those results (Urban, 2012, pp. 31-34).

The project has helped youth, in particular youth from Alternative education programs, remain in school. It has also helped youth who had previously dropped out return to school and complete their graduation requirements (Urban, 2012, p. 31-34).

1.4 Jurisdictional Roles and Responsibilities

Jurisdictional complexities regarding which government is responsible for urban Aboriginal peoples has further complicated the myriad of out-of-school barriers affecting the educational attainment of urban Aboriginal youth. Each order of government, federal, provincial and municipal, has different roles and responsibilities regarding Aboriginal people, education, and socio-economic issues. There are a number of complexities that arise over jurisdictional roles and responsibilities concerning urban Aboriginal people. This has often resulted in insufficient services and funding for Aboriginal people living in cities and has a significant negative impact on many aspects of their lives, including educational attainment (Wherrett & Brown, 1994, p. 90). As a result of the insufficient services, programs, and funding due to jurisdictional complexities, urban Aboriginal youth and their families have been marred by ongoing socio-economical issues that often lead to the lower high school retention and graduation rates.

1.4.1 Jurisdictional complexities

The complexity arises as a result of the jurisdictional issues within the *Indian Act* and the constitutional jurisdiction given to the federal government under section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act, 1867*. Under the *Indian Act*, on-reserve Aboriginal people, including their education, is the responsibility of the federal government (Chalifoux & Johnson, 2003, p. 18). The Act does not extend to urban Aboriginal people and the federal government has historically contended that their fiduciary responsibility ends at reserve boundaries (Abele & Graham, 2011, p. 162).

According to some academics, for decades federal policy had been shaped on the interpretation that when Aboriginal people move off the reserve, it is a decision to assimilate into Canadian society, making them “citizens of the province” much like any other person living in Canada who they no longer have jurisdiction over (Abele & Graham, 2011, p. 164; Graham & Peters, 2002, p. 8; Newhouse & Peters, 2003, p. 7). Provincial governments, on the other hand, have historically argued that all Aboriginal people, regardless of location, fall under the responsibility of the federal government and, as a result, they have no specific responsibilities towards Aboriginal people (Graham & Peters, 2002, p. 8; Newhouse & Peters, 2003, p. 7). Yet, it should be noted that with enhanced focus on Aboriginal peoples in recent years, by both the federal and provincial

governments, there has been movement away from these historical views (Abele & Graham, 2011, p. 162).

This jurisdictional complexity has not gone unnoticed by academics, policymakers, or the Aboriginal community. In fact, they are quite aware that it has had a profound impact on the life outcomes of many urban Aboriginal people because it makes it difficult for them to access the services and programs they need. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) (1996b) noted:

> Intergovernmental disputes, federal and provincial offloading, lack of program coordination, exclusion of municipal governments and urban Aboriginal groups from discussions and negotiations on policy and jurisdictional issues, and confusion regarding the political representation of Aboriginal people in cities have all contributed to a situation that has had serious adverse effects on the ability of Aboriginal people to gain access to appropriate services in urban centres (pp. 411-412).

While education itself, for any person living off-reserve, is the responsibility of the provincial government, it is often the out-of-school socio-economic, socio-cultural, and socio-historical issues that have a profound impact on the educational outcomes of urban Aboriginal youth; for these youth the barriers to educational attainment do not stop at the classroom walls. Therefore, the complex, broad, and inter-related issues affecting urban Aboriginal youths' educational attainment fall within the responsibility of all orders of government in some aspect, regardless of which government is jurisdictionally responsible for education.

1.4.2 Federal Government

With the substantial increase in urban Aboriginal populations, the federal government has begun to focus more policy attention on addressing the intergenerational issues impacting their socio-economic and life opportunities. With this increased focus on the intergenerational socio-historical, socio-cultural, and socio-economical issues impacting urban Aboriginal people, there has also lead to increased prioritization of increasing the retention and graduation rates of urban Aboriginal youth; rates that are lower than the national average due to the intergenerational issues.

In 1996, the RCAP increased awareness about the issues facing Canada's Aboriginal population. While the report focused largely on status Indians and reserve populations, it did highlight the growing trend of urbanization, the needs of urban Aboriginal people, and the importance of cultural identity being intrinsically linked to the socio-economic success of urban Aboriginal people (Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal People [RCAP], 1996b, p. 383-392). The report also recommended that federal, as well as provincial and municipal, governments increase their role in policy making and programming on urban Aboriginal issues (Canada. RCAP, 1996b, p. 399).

In 2002, the Speech from the Throne highlighted the necessity of the federal government to address the disproportionate poverty of urban Aboriginals by expanding programming and address the specific needs of Aboriginal peoples through increased coordination with provincial governments (Canada, 2002, para. 27; Charlifoux & Johnson, 2003, p. 20). Also in 2002, the Task Force on Urban Issues made recommendations on priorities for Canadian urban areas, with several being specific to urban Aboriginal people. Among these recommendations was increasing the strategically coordinated intergovernmental approach to urban Aboriginal programming in

order to better address various issues including poverty, unemployment, housing, and education (Srgo, 2002, pp. 30-31).

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Historically, research on urban Aboriginal people has been limited, with the majority focusing on First Nations on-reserve populations. Recently research in the areas of urban Aboriginal peoples has increased significantly, due in part to increased numbers of Aboriginal people living in urban areas. In addition, there has been an increase in literature around off-reserve education because a large majority of Aboriginal populations, including those living on reserve, attend provincially-funded schools (Richards & Vining, 2004, p. 5).

The theoretical framework for this project will draw upon previous research that suggests the lower educational attainment among urban Aboriginal youth and the educational gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth is a result of a complex mix of intergenerational social, economic, historical, and cultural realities that exist within the urban Aboriginal population (Battiste & Barman, 1995, as cited in Cherubini & Hodson, 2008, para. 5; Castellano et al., 2000, as cited in Cherubini & Hodson, 2008, para. 5; Hill & George, 1996, as cited in Cherubini & Hodson, 2008, para. 5).

Much of the literature points to the educational system, the curriculum, or teachers as the main reasons for poor levels of high school educational attainment. While the in-school factors do undoubtedly impact educational outcomes, research indicates that there are also many out-of-school factors affecting the outcomes. Academic Joy Dryfoos stresses that educational achievement gaps must be addressed by looking outside the education system and focusing on external socio-economic factors (in Phillips, 2008, p. 7). Similarly, White & Beavon (2009) theorize that levels of educational attainment will not be increased unless the various social and economic issues are addressed (pp. 5-7).

This complex mix of socio-economic, socio-historic, and socio-cultural factors includes economically poor communities, families with low educational attainment norms and/or negative views of schooling, lack of community social supports and networks, low family income, inadequate housing, poor health, low community and family involvement in schooling, disconnection from land and culture, and poor peer relationships (Canadian Council on Learning [CCL], 2008, p. 3; White & Beavon, 2009, pp. 5-7). Many of these factors are intensified for those who migrate from reserves and rural areas to urban centres or who are mobile within urban centres (Aman, n.d., p. 8; CCL, 2008, pp. 3-4). The intertwining out-of-school factors create a number of barriers to educational attainment that many Aboriginal youth have difficulties overcoming, which results in lower graduation rates (White & Beavon, 2009, p. 3).

Applying this theoretical framework as a guide, this report uses thematic literature analysis and sharing circle discussions to identify the out-of-school needs, related to mobility and city life, of urban Aboriginal high school learners in Vancouver to increase their levels of educational attainment. Through the literature analysis and sharing circles findings, this report will recommend the priority areas where the federal, provincial, and municipal governments should partner in working with the Aboriginal community to best address the identified needs.

1.6 OUTLINE OF PROJECT REPORT

This report provides an analysis of the out-of-school barriers that negatively affect the high school retention and graduation rates of urban Aboriginal students. The first section of this report introduces the project, the client, and the problem being researched. The methodology section outlines the research methods used to collect and analyze the data, as well as highlights why the specified research methods were chosen based on the nature of the research and the needs of the Office of the Federal Interlocutor.

The third section provides a current state analysis of urban Aboriginal people, focusing on the intergenerational socio-historical, socio-cultural, and socio-economical realities that have resulted in a myriad of problems within today's Aboriginal population in Canadian urban centres. The current state analysis also details the difficulties Aboriginal youth face in the critical transition stages during the adolescent years and how these correlate with the socio-historical, socio-cultural, and socio-economical barriers. Additionally, a demographic overview of Aboriginal peoples is provided in this section indicating the significant changes in the demographic composition of Canada's Aboriginal peoples through increased urbanization, the outcomes of ethnic mobility and the importance of acknowledging this trend in urban Aboriginal research, and the current population and socio-economic characteristics of Vancouver's Aboriginal population.

The fourth section consists of a thematic literature analysis identifying the out-of-school factors that affect urban Aboriginal high school retention and graduation. This section serves as a complement to the data collected for this report. The fifth section, a jurisdictional scan, highlighting promising practices within Canada, Australia, and the United States that have been implemented to address out-of-school barriers affecting the high school retention and graduation of urban Aboriginal and socio-economically disadvantaged students.

The research findings from the youth sharing circles are detailed in section six. This section outlines, according to thematic frequency, the out-of-school factors that affect the high school retention and graduation rates of Aboriginal students in the City of Vancouver. Also included in the research findings are perceptions from the youth on how to address the out-of-school factors they identified. Section seven provides a discussion of the research findings, highlighting any trends found within the data and how the findings correlate with the Urban Aboriginal Strategy, delivered through the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians. Lastly, section eight provides recommendations based on the analysis of the research findings. Three recommendations are provided on how the Urban Aboriginal Strategy can move forward on addressing the out-of-school barriers to increase the high school retention and graduation rates of urban Aboriginal youth in the City of Vancouver.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This section provides an overview of the research methods used in this report. Outlined is why particular methods were chosen and how they were integrated due to the nature of the intended outcomes. It also indicates how participants were selected and the importance of incorporating Aboriginal youth engagement into the research methods. Additionally, it provides an overview of the methods used to analyze both the qualitative findings and the secondary literature research findings.

The research is based on qualitative methods, which are designed to understand the complex issues related to an individual's experiences. A qualitative approach was used in preference of quantitative or mixed methods because the study seeks to identify the perceived out-of-school barriers to high school retention and graduation from the perspective of urban Aboriginal youth themselves, which can be most thoroughly obtained through narratives from participants. In addition to qualitative methods, this report incorporates an Indigenous research approach through sharing circles to capture data on the needs of Aboriginal youth living in Vancouver.

2.1 DEFINITIONS

The following terms have been used throughout the report. The definitions below provide a background to understand the context under which these terms have been used.

Aboriginal
Aboriginal will be inclusive of Status Indians, Inuit, Métis, and non-Status Indians.

Aboriginal Community
Aboriginal community refers to Aboriginal service providers, Aboriginal educators, Elders, and parents of Aboriginal students in the City of Vancouver.

Mobile Youth
Mobile youth are categorized as those who have changed communities to an urban setting, whether it is from a reserve to urban, rural to urban, or intra-urban. Mobile youth will also include those who changed schools within their community at a non-required time (i.e. between grade 8 and 9 or partway through an academic year).

Non-Mobile Youth
Non-mobile youth are those who have lived in the same community and have not transferred schools during their school, bearing in mind any changes that would have occurred due to requirements (i.e. moving from elementary school to middle school or middle school to high school etc.).

Transition Stages (for Mobile Youth)
For mobile youth, transition stages will refer to the period in time when they transition from one school and community to another school and community, regardless of whether or not it is the beginning of high school.

Transition Stages (for Non-Mobile Youth)
For non-mobile youth, transition stages will refer to the period in time when they begin high school.

Dogwood Diploma
The term used by the BC Ministry of Education in referring to the British Columbia Certificate of Graduation, this is received by students upon successful completion of the provincial high school requirements.

2.2 Thematic Literature Analysis

The purpose of the literature analysis was to identify the main out-of-school barriers to urban Aboriginal educational attainment at the high school level. An emphasis was placed on the barriers associated with mobility and city life. The larger socio-economic, socio-cultural, and socio-historical issues, or barriers, that affect urban Aboriginal youth and their educational attainment at the high school level were also explored.

The research incorporated a review of academic journals and books, conference papers, reports, and publicly available statistical information. The literature review also encompasses information from a variety of previous studies on Aboriginal learners and urban Aboriginal people. Literature regarding the out-of-school barriers to educational attainment for non-Aboriginal socio-economically disadvantaged students was used to complement the information identified in the Aboriginal literature. The literary timeframe for this review was between 2000 and 2011, although earlier sources were used in some cases when statistical data was not concerned.

2.3 Sharing Circles

Previous research, analyzed through the literature review, highlighted that there has been little research conducted on the self-identified needs of Aboriginal youth living in Vancouver in relation to their education, and more specifically the needs that result from mobility and transition in relation to education. Based on this finding, it was concluded that the most effective way to enhance the recommendations and address the needs of Vancouver's Aboriginal youth would be to conduct focus groups to gain insight into their individual needs, as they identify them.

To incorporate Indigenous research methods, this project used sharing circles as the method of inquiry to gather individuals' perceptions and needs (see Appendix A for a copy of the questions and responses). Sharing circles provide an environment where individuals can speak freely, without judgment, about their experiences (Lavallée, 2009, p. 28). While there are many similarities between sharing circles and the focus groups typically used in qualitative research, they differ in the cultural meaning sharing circles have to Aboriginal people and the personal transformative development that can occur for participants (Lavallée, 2009, p. 29).

Sharing circles have healing qualities that allow participants to learn from others, express themselves, build supportive relationships with others who can relate to what they are going through, and build self-confidence (Joseph, 2005, para. 4; Lavallée, 2009, p. 29). The sharing circle is a respectful, healing environment where there is "recognition that the spirits of our ancestors and the Creator are present in the circle and guide the process" (Lavallée, 2009, p. 29). In order to facilitate the research, the sharing circles were audio recorded and transcribed, which is in contradiction to cultural traditions where thoughts shared with the circle are typically not repeated outside the circle.

The sharing circles for this research strayed slightly from the traditional method by asking specific discussion questions in order to facilitate the research. The circles were facilitated by the

researcher who led the group through a semi-structured format, which included open-ended pre-set questions that were used to guide the discussion. Participants were informed prior to the beginning of the sharing circle that should they feel uncomfortable sharing something with the rest of the circle that they can share it privately after the closing of the circle should they wish.

2.4 Recruitment of Participants

Due to time restraints, random sampling was not feasible and therefore an informal recruitment method was used to identify potential participants. Participants were recruited through self-identification, snowball networking, and identification of potentially suitable and interested participants by organizations funded through the Metro Vancouver Urban Aboriginal Strategy. Since focus groups, or in this case sharing circles, typically do not result in quantifiable data it is often not necessary to have strict random sampling (UpFront Consulting, n.d., p. 1). It must be noted that focus groups are not typically generalizable because the sample is not representative of the larger population and is too small (Fern, 2001, p. 124).

Recruitment of students was done through the Vancouver School Board. The District Principal for Aboriginal Education was contacted and informed about the research being conducted. Being a topic that the School Board is interested in addressing themselves, the District Principal offered to inform Aboriginal students in the school board about the project and allow for voluntary participation from the students. Once students self-identified themselves as being interested in participating in the research they were invited to participate in a sharing circle. Youth from MVUAS funded projects were also informed about the opportunity to participate and once they self-identified an interest in participating they were invited to a sharing circle. 17 youth were recruitment through the aforementioned methods to participate in the sharing circles. This research sought to obtain an equal gender representation. As such, the youth sharing circles consisted of 8 female and 9 male participants.

2.5 Voices of Urban Aboriginal Youth

Youth were selected as participants for the research because of the importance of providing a voice to the urban Aboriginal youth community. They themselves are the experts in their lives and therefore they know what they need in to have increased success at the high school level (Centre for Native Policy and Research, 2005, p. 1). Many Aboriginal organizations highlight the importance of providing a voice to the community in policy development and decisions about a variety of issues, including service delivery (Centre for Native Policy and Research, 2005, p. 1). There have been a number of reports in recent years that focus on engaging Aboriginal youth, a method which provides a great amount of detail into what is centrally important to them and also provides a sense of empowerment to the participating youth (Bonneau, Ee & Lauzon, 2006; Melchenko & Horsman, 1998, p. 3; Rheaume, n.d., p. 7; Silver, Mallet, Greene & Simard, 2002, p. 10; Smith, Peled, Albert, Mackay, Stewart, Saewyc, & The McCreary Centre Society, 2008, p. 10, p. 7; Styres, 2010, p. 11)

In a study by the Centre for Native Policy and Research (2005), youth in Vancouver were asked to discuss why they think youth engagement is important in urban Aboriginal communities. Their responses centred on the following themes:

- youth are the leaders of tomorrow and the carriers of knowledge for the next generation;
- organizations and government need to listen to youth to provide useful services and support;

- youth bring new energy, resources, and ideas;
- provides empowerment for youth and creates a stronger community where youth feel more accepted;
- reinforces traditional roles and culture where youth are treated as equals (pp. 4-5).

Aboriginal youth across Canada have been advocating for equal representation and for their voice to be heard and their voice is important as they account for over half of the Aboriginal population (Matthew, 2005, p. 2). As a result this report aims to address youth engagement by providing urban Aboriginal youth the opportunity to share their voices, thoughts, and opinions to gain a better understanding of their needs related to educational attainment at the high school level.

2.6 Data Analysis

Findings from the literature review and the sharing circles were combined and served to complement the data gathered from each process. Data from the sharing circles was analyzed using a thematic analysis to identify the most common recurring themes and patterns. These themes were showcased in terms of frequency and a critical analysis of the perceived out-of-school barriers and needs was used to identify recommendations to increase secondary school educational attainment of urban Aboriginal youth. The data analysis was reported in a narrative format. The literature review and sharing circle data provided information that can be used by the various stakeholders who are interested in improving the educational outcomes of urban Aboriginal learners.

2.7 Project's Limitations and Delimitations

The strength of the qualitative data obtained is dependent on how much information participants in the sharing circles are able to share. Although raw data was collected from individuals living in and attending school in the City of Vancouver, the statistics used in the current state analysis encompasses the entire Metro Vancouver Aboriginal population. Due to the limited number of individuals participating in sharing circles as a result of time restraints and the research methods used (sharing circles, or focus groups), findings are not be generalizable to the entire Vancouver Aboriginal population as it cannot be a true representation. The number of participants varied greatly as a result of how many individuals were willing, and able, to participate in the sharing circles.

The research originally intended to have 4-6 sharing circles of 6-8 students each, but unexpected limitations occurred that made recruitment of youth difficult. In designing the data collection it was anticipated that students would be recruited through the school board. The District Principal for Aboriginal Education had connected the researcher to Aboriginal educators at the high schools to recruit students; however, due to teacher action and a change in the District Principal for Aboriginal Education during the recruitment phase, it was difficult to connect with and inform potentially interested students about the research.

Additionally, this report required the research participants to be willing to reflect on very personal stories, which many youth might only feel comfortable sharing with somebody they know and trust. In the Aboriginal community, it can take years of continued relationship building to earn that trust. Due to time constraints, this factor made it difficult to recruit youth.

This study only interviewed Aboriginal youth, ages 13-29 living in the City of Vancouver. Due to time limitations, this report is not longitudinal but rather a current snapshot of what urban Aboriginal youth feel they need to increase their levels of educational attainment. The study focuses on the perceptions of Aboriginal youth from the City of Vancouver and therefore may not be generalizable to other jurisdictions, including the rest of Metro Vancouver. The literature review is not of an exhaustive measure, but addresses what previous research and academics suggest are the out-of-school barriers to high school retention and graduation, with an emphasis on barriers related to the mobility and city life of urban Aboriginal youth.

3.0 CURRENT STATE ANALYSIS

The current state analysis develops a contextualization of the myriad issues and realities facing urban Aboriginal youth. The socio-historical, socio-economical, and socio-cultural realities inter-relate with each other to provide a basis for explaining the barriers and challenges urban Aboriginal youth must contend with while transitioning into and attending high school. This section provides a synopsis of the intergenerational realities facing Canada's Aboriginal peoples, the critical transition stages for urban Aboriginal youth, and a demographic overview highlighting urbanization, household and school mobility, ethnic mobility, and the characteristics of the Aboriginal population in Vancouver.

3.1. REALITIES OF CANADA'S ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

The current context of urban Aboriginal issues and the resulting lower levels of educational attainment for Aboriginal youth are centered within the intergenerational socio-historical, socio-cultural, social economic issues that continue to have substantial impacts on the opportunities and lives of urban Aboriginal peoples. These issues, some of which extend back to colonial times, are complex and often deeply intertwined. Many academics point to these complex issues as the foundation for understanding the current realities facing urban Aboriginal peoples, the reasons for urbanization, and the multiple barriers affecting the educational attainment of urban Aboriginal students.

3.1.1. SOCIO-HISTORICAL

The legacy of colonization provides insight into the current situation of Aboriginal families, communities, identities and overall wellbeing (Silver, Ghorayshi, Hay & Klyne, 2006a, p. 10). The trauma resulting from the historical legacies, most notably: residential schools, establishment of reserves, and forced adoption, have affected urban Aboriginal people in a variety of substantial ways. The historical legacies have resulted in poor parenting skills, addictions, mental and physical health problems, loss of land and language, disconnection from culture, poor economic well-being, and general lack of preparedness for life in cities (Bombay, Matheson & Anisman, 2009, p. 13; Bougie & Senécal, 2010, pp. 19-22; Kirmayer, Simpson & Cargo, 2003, p. S15; Silver et al., 2006a, p. 10). The institutional abuses Aboriginal peoples have experienced have had a long-term, intergenerational impact on the educational attainment of Aboriginal youth.

Precursors to the current day reserve system are dated prior to Confederation and the *Indian Act* when land was delegated to through churches for missionaries to Christianize Aboriginal peoples in the seventeenth century (First Nations Studies Program – UBC [FNSP-UBC], 2009a, para. 5). The *Royal Proclamation* (1763) acknowledged that Aboriginal land could only be ceded by treaty with the Crown (FNSP-UBC, 2009b, para. 1). While this process was to allow for some consent between the Crown and First Nations in the treaty making, the process established Crown monopoly over Aboriginal lands (FNSP-UBC, 2009b, para. 2). When settlement expanded following Confederation, the creation of reserves was one measure implemented as a solution to conflicts between Aboriginal peoples and the settlers (FNSP-UBC, 2009a, para. 6). However, the methods for determining land allocation in treaties varied and were unfavourable for Aboriginal peoples, for example they were often given land that was unsuitable for agriculture, some bands were not consulted on the location, and some reserves were created outside traditional territory (FNSP-UBC, 2009a, para. 9). Many of the reserves were small, had few resources, were geographically distant and culturally isolated from the rest of Canadian society. For colonialists,

reserves were seen as a mechanism to assimilate and eradicate the culture of the First Nations peoples (Letkemann, 2004, p. 242). Aboriginal peoples had to adapt to critical lifestyle changing elements as the Crown implemented their new responsibilities, for example lost access to traditional hunting/fishing lands, division of long-established kinship relations, houses structured for western nuclear families, non-traditional economics, and an onslaught of other discriminatory legislation (FNSP-UBC, 2009a, paras. 13-15). The isolation, extreme poverty, and substantial social differences between reserves and Canadian cities make the transition to urban centres difficult for Aboriginal peoples.

The residential school system, operating in Canada from the mid 1800s to 1996, was intended to assimilate Aboriginal youth into Canadian society by removing them from their communities and stripping them of their language, culture, and traditions (Bougie & Senécal, 2010, p. 7). While attending the schools children reported frequent physical and sexual abuse, poor health care and fatal diseases, and the general lack of actual education (Bombay et al., 2009, p. 14; Bougie & Senécal, 2010, p. 7; Ristock, Zoccole, & Passante, 2010, pp. 11). Many children never returned to their families, while others returned emotionally broken with little ties to their family and community (Silver et al., 2006a, p. 10; Stout & Kipling, 2003, p. 30). Additionally, children left the schools being ashamed of their culture, having low self-esteem, and having developed abusive or unhealthy behaviours as a result of the treatment they had received (Bombay et al., 2009, p. 14).

The residential school system has resulted in loss of Aboriginal language and culture, identity loss, substance abuse, family violence, poor mental health, dysfunctional parenting, poverty, unemployment, and low levels of education, among others (Bombay et al., 2009, p. 14; Bougie & Senécal, 2010, p. 21; Durst, 2009, p. 95; Kirmayer et al., 2003, p. S17; Silver et al., 2006a, p. 10, Stout & Kipling, 2003, p. 33). These intergenerational impacts continue to have crippling effects on Aboriginal peoples today, many of which have resulted in barriers to urban Aboriginal youth's retention in, and graduation, from high school.

The legacy of the residential schools has left many Aboriginal people with a distrust in the education system today and parents have difficulty becoming involved in their children's education because of their negative educational experiences, low educational levels, or because they do not feel welcome in the schools (Charlifoux & Johnson, 2003, p. 67; Silver et al., 2002, p. 14; Silver et al., 2006a, p. 11). For example, one study has found that off-reserve Aboriginal youth have lower levels of educational attainment if their parent attended residential schools (Bougie & Senécal, 2010, p. 30).

Starting in the 1960s (through to the 1990s) the government began to use the child welfare system to assimilate children (Alston-O'Conner, 2010, para. 4). The government began to remove large numbers of Aboriginal – Status, Non-Status, and Métis – children from their families and placed them with other families in a forced adoption and foster care program, termed the 'Sixties Scoop' (Alston-O'Conner, 2010, para. 7). The intention was to remove 'neglected' children and put them into a caring home because of the belief that Aboriginal parents could not provide a stable upbringing (Kirmayer et al., 2003, p. S17). There was very little screening when selecting families to place the children with and there was often no follow up support once the child had been placed, which has resulted in reports of abuse and poor living conditions (Alston-O'Conner, 2010, para. 6-11).

It is estimated that 15,000 children were adopted into non-Aboriginal families across Canada and the United States, with Aboriginal children accounting for 30 to 40 percent of legal wards while only making up 4 percent of the Canadian population by the end of the 1960s (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 83; Ristock et al., 2010, p. 12). This system of forced removal resulted in complex and

intergenerational destructive effects on Aboriginal peoples, including loss of identity, culture and language, mental and emotional health problems, substance abuse, dysfunctional parenting, poverty, and low education levels that continues to affect the educational attainment of Aboriginal youth today (Kirmayer et al., 2003, p. S17; Lavell-Harvard & Lavell, 2006, p. 144).

3.1.2. SOCIO-CULTURAL

Many of the issues and barriers facing urban Aboriginal learners today are a result of the socio-cultural realities that have caused long-term systemic barriers. The societal values of Aboriginal peoples are very different from those of western peoples. The pressures that have been placed on Aboriginal peoples since colonization in terms of assimilation, government institutions, the legal system, child and family services, and the educational system have shaped the lives of Aboriginal people over time, creating a loss of cultural identity (Silver, Hay, & Klyne, 2006b, p. 10). This cultural dislocation has also resulted in loss of self-esteem and self-resiliency, making it difficult for the transition into urban centres.

Throughout history, western society has stigmatized Aboriginal peoples, resulting in systemic discrimination, stereotyping, and barriers that continue to break down the cultural threads of Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal people continue to struggle to overcome this negative context as generations have been marred by the structural inequality and resultant family and community breakdown, cultural dislocation, and loss of self-esteem and identity (Deanne et al., 2007, as cited in Peters, 2011, p. 83). The cultural differences, systemic discrimination and historical legacies interlace to the point where Aboriginal people feel socially excluded from mainstream Canadian society and life, making them feel like the “other” and increases the feelings of alienation felt by urban Aboriginal peoples (Silver et a., 2006a, p. 11).

3.1.3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC

The socio-economic marginalization of Aboriginal peoples has resulted in a population demographic that is frequently cited as the most disadvantaged in Canada (Cardinal & Adin, 2005, p. iv; Kendall, 2001, p. 43). Due to a combination of the socio-historical and socio-cultural realities along with the resultant outcomes, such as low levels of education and high unemployment, many Aboriginal peoples have been affected by an intergenerational cycle of poverty that continues today.

Presently, the socio-economic disadvantage of urban Aboriginal peoples is apparent in nearly every indicator from education and criminal involvement to health and employment, where they significantly lag behind the general Canadian population in every socio-economic measure (Kendall, 2001, p. 43). The disproportionately low socio-economic conditions of urban Aboriginal peoples have devastating effects on educational attainment, as the majority of the out-of-school barriers are resultant of the various socio-economic conditions, including unstable housing, living in poor neighbourhoods, low income, low education, unemployment, and living under the LICO.

3.1.4. SUMMARY

The socio-historical, socio-cultural, and socio-economical realities are heavily intertwined and this marginalization has negatively impacted urban Aboriginal peoples, resulting in a cycle of poverty and dependency. This intergenerational cycle continues to have negative impacts on the life opportunities of urban Aboriginal peoples today, including their educational attainment.

Together these realities have resulted in the majority of the out-of-school barriers urban Aboriginal learners' face in successfully graduating from high school.

3.2. CRITICAL TRANSITION STAGES

The transition into high school has been identified as one of the most difficult periods in a youth's development, especially for Aboriginal youth. The UAS in Metro Vancouver has also identified that challenges associated with the transition stages need to be addressed. As such, they have had various initiatives focus on ensuring urban Aboriginal people are able to smoothly transition between life's different stages, including into high school.

The literature notes that it is these high school "transitions years when the weight of their family history and their nation's history begins to weigh them down along with the issues they are facing in communities" (Canada. National Council of Welfare, 2007, p. 49). It is during the transition stage to high school when Aboriginal youth begin to feel the pressure of the socio-economic, socio-historic, and socio-cultural realities and they begin to understand the systemic challenges that they must contend with.

The transition to high school can present different challenges for many youth as they are forced to adapt to a new and larger environment, harder academics, changes in education delivery models, and many new faces, both teachers and peers. This is occurring at, what is arguably one of the most challenging times of their life, where they are trying to find themselves and where they belong (Desroches, 2005 as cited in MacIver, 2010, p. 46). During this transition to high school, the likelihood of disengagement and alienation from education is increased substantially as a result of the changes (Howard & Johnson, 2004, p. 1). This difficult transition that all youth make is made even more difficult for urban Aboriginal youth due to a variety of reasons including low socio-economic status, poor parenting skills, and the effects of the historical legacies (Perry, Dockett, Whitton, Vickers, Johnston, & Sidoti, n.d., p. 46).

Many academics have noted that the transition year into high school is when youth, especially those at-risk, are 'lost' and that it is the turning point for disengagement (Alspaugh, 1998, p. 20; Lord et al., 1994 in Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007, p. 9). Aboriginal students are more likely than non-Aboriginal students to drop out between the first and second years of high school, highlighting the transition year as crucial to their educational outcomes (Brunnen, 2003, p. 3; Heslop, 2009, p. 7). They are unable to effectively adapt to and meet the new challenges, and consequently their self-esteem decreases, they become involved in negative social networks to find sense of belonging, and have lower achievement in academics (Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007, p. 9). All of which have been found to increase the likelihood of dropping out of high school.

Transition into high school is even more difficult for Aboriginal youth who are migrating to the city from reserves or rural communities. Although they face the same barriers as Aboriginal youth who grew up in the city, they will often face additional barriers such as homesickness, distance from family and community, unaware of where to access services, distance from friends, new lifestyle and societal structure, increased risk of feeling alienated, and lack of Aboriginal culture and awareness that they would have had on the reserve (MCEETYA Task Force, 2001, p. 11).

3.3. Demographic Overview of Aboriginal Peoples

There have been significant changes in the demographic composition of Canada's Aboriginal population since the mid-twentieth century. These changes, most notably urbanization and mobility, have had large impacts on the lives of Aboriginal peoples. Additionally, large increases in ethnic mobility since the mid-1980s have had major impact on the demographics of the Aboriginal population and accounts for a large portion of the increase in the urbanization of Aboriginal peoples. The Aboriginal population is the youngest and fastest growing segment of Canada's population and, as a result, the urban Aboriginal population has also been increasing steadily. Yet, this growing population typically lags behind the non-Aboriginal population in all socio-economic indicators: employment, education, living conditions, income, etc.

This demographic overview shows the changes in composition, the socio-economic gaps currently present between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations, and the mobility that has resulted from these socio-economic gaps. Aboriginal migration and urbanization continues to change Canada's urban centres and is a major factor in the realities facing today's urban Aboriginal youth; affecting many aspects of their lives, including educational attainment. Addressing the needs that arise due to mobility and city life can help to decrease the existing gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples will have a significant positive, long-term impact on the life opportunities of urban Aboriginal peoples and Canada's cities, Aboriginal communities, and society as a whole.

3.3.1. Urbanization and 'Churn Migration'

Many Aboriginal people, especially youth, leave their reserve and rural communities for the city because they are drawn to the potential for an improved quality of life or because high school is not available in their home communities. They come in search of employment, better educational opportunities, access to better health services, safer communities, better living conditions, to reunite with family members who have already moved, and increased selection of sporting activities and entertainment, among others (McKenzie, 2010, pp. 2-4). Although with the myriad challenges and barriers they run into while transitioning into the city many will be forced to move within the city or back to the reserve or rural area. For some, these moves can be frequent and as a result very disruptive on students.

Academics refer to this mobility and migration of Aboriginal peoples as 'churn mobility,' whereby individuals migrate into, out of, and within cities (Heritz, 2010, p. 1; Norris & Clatworthy, 2003, p. 63). For example in Canada, between 1991 and 1996, 61 percent of Aboriginal people who moved off reserves migrated to cities, 69 percent of Aboriginal people who moved to reserves were migrating from cities, and nearly 50 percent of individuals living in a city moved within that same city at least once (Norris, Beavon, Guimond, & Cooke as cited in Beavon, Wingert, & White, 2003, p. 198; Norris & Clatworthy, 2003, p. 55).

The reasons for high mobility rates are broad and overarching and include, housing, family issues, lack of employment opportunities, poor economic and living conditions, poor health care, drugs and alcohol abuse, nepotism and band politics, boredom, isolation, lack of recreational and sporting activities, violence, negative social environment, and lack of educational opportunities (Cooke and Belanger, 2006, p. 158; McKenzie, 2010, p. 2; Norris & Clatworthy, 2003, p. 66; Rheaume, n.d., pp. 13-14).

The 'churn mobility' and urbanization of Aboriginal peoples is not a new or unexpected phenomenon; as early as 1967, studies indicated that Aboriginal peoples would need to migrate

off reserves to have access to better life opportunities. The Hawthorne Report (1967), commissioned by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, argued that Aboriginal people needed to migrate from reserves to industrialized urban centres where they would have access to an abundant job market and, as a result, experience an increase in their economic well-being (Cairns, Jamieson, & Lysyk, 1967, p. 61). Since this time the Aboriginal population is becoming more and more urbanized, searching for better life opportunities for themselves and their families.

Prior to the 1980s much of the mobility and migration of Aboriginal peoples was a consequence of political policies, including residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and the loss of status rights through marriage or service in the armed forces (Newhouse, 2003, p. 243; Ristock et al., 2010, pp. 11-13). In more recent decades the mobility and urbanization experienced by Aboriginal peoples has been a result of socio-economic issues. Many Aboriginal people have moved off-reserves due to numerous push factors, particularly poor education and employment opportunities. They are drawn to the city by anticipated improvements in life opportunities; however, they are often met with a different reality of poverty, high costs of living, unemployment, and poor living conditions. These urban conditions often result in high mobility within the city.

Previous research has concluded that housing is one of the main reasons for Aboriginal mobility to and within cities and is often a direct result of poverty. (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation [CMHC], 2002, p. 1; Graham & Peters, 2002, p. 20; McKenzie, 2010, pp. 2-4; Norris & Clatworthy, 2003, p. 67). The lack of housing and poor living conditions on reserves, for example overcrowding and need for repair, push Aboriginal people off reserves and into the city (Norris & Clatworthy, 2003, p. 66). While lack of access to affordable housing, living in poor and unsafe neighbourhoods, poor housing conditions, and discrimination from potential landlords exacerbates residential mobility in the city (Norris & Clatworthy, 2003, p. 70; Rheaume, n.d., p. 16).

Another often cited reason for mobility to and within cities is family related issues, particularly family dissolution, domestic violence, and to rejoin family who may have previously moved (CMHC, 2002; Norris & Clatworthy, 2003, p. 67). Rates of family dissolution in Aboriginal households are high and many youth will move frequently between their mothers, fathers, or grandparents households, which may result in frequent community and school changes. While other youth are subjected to frequent moves between foster care or group homes.

The ‘churn mobility’ and urbanization of Aboriginal peoples is a result of numerous reasons, most of which are associated with poverty and low socio-economic status. While already faced with the barriers related to poverty, mobility adds new barriers and makes the existing ones more severe. Although many Aboriginal peoples are moving to the city to improve their life opportunities, they are faced with systemic barriers that are a result of the socio-cultural, socio-historical, and socio-economical and make it difficult to transition into life in the city.

3.3.2. Ethnic Mobility and its Impact

While the Aboriginal population, in Canada, is on average younger and growing faster than the non-Aboriginal population, this trend does not fully explain the increase in Aboriginal populations, particularly in urban centres. Ethnic mobility further explains the anomaly of the Aboriginal population nearly doubling between 1986 and 2001 (Guimond, Robitaille, & Senécal, n.d., p. 6). Ethnic mobility refers to a change in the manner in which individuals self-identify their ethnic origin, i.e. from non-Aboriginal to Aboriginal (Siggner & Costa, 2005, p. 5).

Some academics contend that ethnic mobility has occurred due to re-connection to cultural identity and pride through increased public awareness and media coverage about Aboriginal rights, issues, and history since the 1980s (Guimond et al., n.d., p. 12). As a result, more Aboriginal people have been embracing their Aboriginal identity.

The majority of theories on Aboriginal peoples' ethnic mobility is based on a number of important political changes that have occurred. The adoption of Bill C-31, in 1985, allowed legislative reinstatement of status previously lost under the *Indian Act* (Siggner & Costa, 2005, p. 11). Between 1986 and 1991 there was a 40 percent increase of those identifying as 'North American Indian' and nearly 85 percent of individuals who regained status under Bill C-31 continued to live off-reserve, many in urban centres (Norris & Clatworthy, 2003, p. 63; Siggner & Costa, 2005, p. 11). In addition, the number of individuals self-identifying as Métis increased by 43 percent between 1996 and 2001, likely a result of the recognition of Métis in the RCAP (Siggner & Costa, 2005, p. 12). More recently, Bill C-3 introduced in March 2010 newly entitles approximately 45,000 people to registration as Status Indian (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2011, para. 1). Bill C-3, as an amendement to the *Indian Act*, allows grandchildren of women who lost their Indian status as a result of marrying non-Indian men to become entitled to registration as a Status Indian (Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2011). It is estimated that many of the individuals becoming entitled to Indian Status under Bill C-3 live in urban centres (Quebec Regional Advisory Committee, 2011, p. 17).

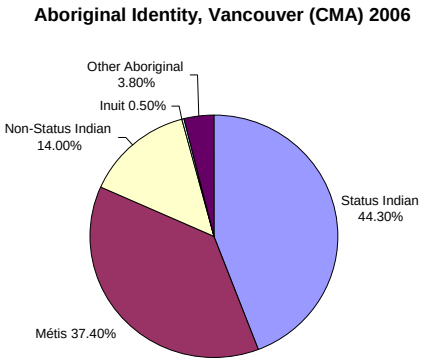
These population increases due to ethnic mobility are valuable to consider when addressing socio-economic issues. This large increase in ethnic mobility has the potential to have a huge impact on the reported socio-economic conditions of the overall Aboriginal population. Research indicates that many of those who have begun to self-identify as Aboriginal since the mid-1980s often have higher socio-economic characteristics than those who have continuously identified as Aboriginal (Siggner, 2003, p. 140).

For example, level of educational attainment is one characteristic that has been impacted by the increase in ethnic mobility. Between 1986 and 1996 the number of Aboriginal people with a university degree increased by 276 percent and research by Siggner (2003), which purposefully accounted for ethnic mobility, demonstrated an upward shift in the levels of educational attainment, which was concluded to be largely impacted by ethnic mobility (p. 155; Guimond et al., n.d., p. 11). Therefore, it is important to consider the effects of ethnic mobility when assessing the statistical improvement of socio-economic characteristics of the entire Aboriginal population.

3.3.3. Characteristics of Vancouver's Aboriginal Population

Metro Vancouver has the largest Aboriginal population in the province of B.C., with a total population of 40,310, comprising 1.9 percent of the population (Statistics Canada, 2006, n.p.). Vancouver's Aboriginal population is diverse with the largest Aboriginal identity being First Nations Status Indian – from more than 35 different first nations (as shown in figure 3) (Statistics Canada, 2006, n.p.; Todd, 2001, as cited in Heritz, 2010, p. 2). Metro Vancouver has the third largest Aboriginal population in Canada, behind Winnipeg (68,380) and Edmonton (52,100) and comprises 20.6 percent of B.C.'s total Aboriginal population (Metro Vancouver, 2008, p. 2). The City of Vancouver has the largest Aboriginal population in Metro Vancouver with 11,145 people (Metro Vancouver, 2008, p. 3).

Figure 3: Aboriginal Identity, Vancouver (CMA), 2006

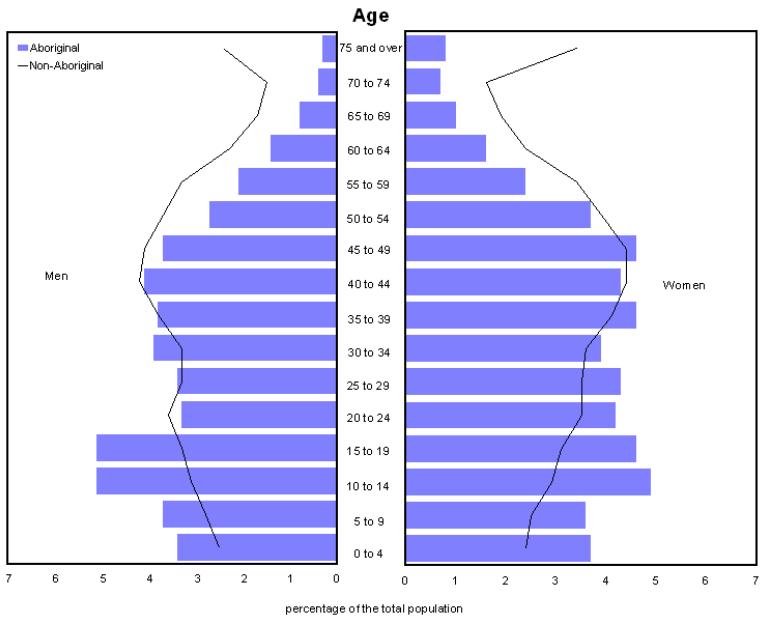


Source: Statistics Canada, Census Population, 2006

A YOUNG AND GROWING POPULATION

Vancouver's Aboriginal population, similar to B.C.'s, is young and growing. The Aboriginal population grew by 9 percent between 2001 and 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2006, n.p.). Additionally, the Aboriginal population has grown by 29.4 percent since 1996 (Metro Vancouver, 2008, p. 2). In comparison with the non-Aboriginal population, Vancouver's Aboriginal population is relatively young. In fact, 41 percent of the Aboriginal population is under the age of 25 compared to 30 percent of the non-Aboriginal population (Milligan, 2010, p. 5). Figure 4 shows the demographic make-up of Vancouver's Aboriginal population compared to the non-Aboriginal population. As can be seen the Aboriginal population is much younger with a higher birthrate and a smaller aging population.

Figure 4: Population Pyramid for the Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Populations, Vancouver, 2006

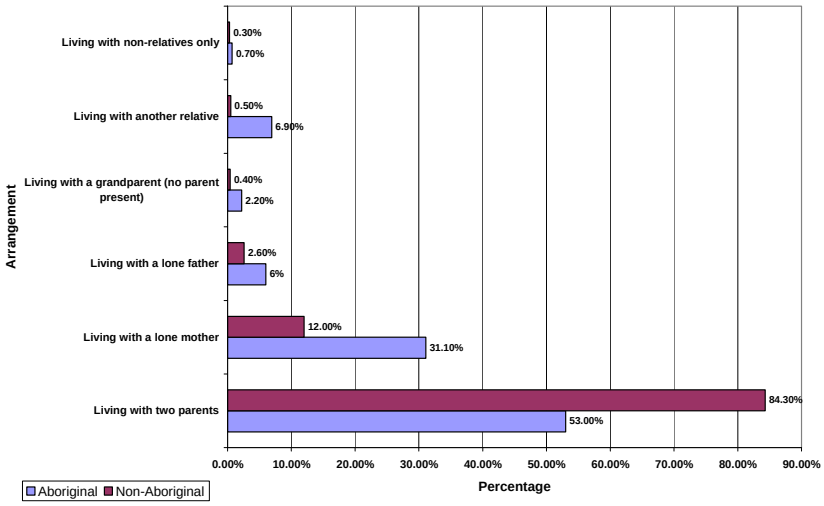


Source: Statistics Canada, Census Population, 2006.

POOR LIVING CONDITIONS

While figure 4 indicates a young and growing population, research demonstrates that many of these young urban Aboriginal youth are at a higher socio-economic disadvantage than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. A higher percentage of Aboriginal children live in single-parent households or other non-traditional family living situations (as shown in Figure 5), which puts them at a higher risk of being low income, being influenced by negative social pressures, being more mobile, and having lower levels of educational attainment (Norris & Clatworthy, 2003, p. 69).

Figure 5: Living Arrangements of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Children aged 14 and under, Vancouver, 2006



Source: Statistics Canada, Census Population, 2006.

In fact, more than one-third of Aboriginal children under the age of 14 live under the low income cut-off (LICO), compared to less than one-quarter of non-Aboriginal children (Milligan, 2010, p. 13). The Aboriginal population, in general, earns less than the non-Aboriginal population, $37,419 compared to $43,336, and has a higher tendency to be unemployed, 9.7 percent compared to 4.5 percent (Milligan, 2010, pp. 10-13). The housing conditions of the Aboriginal population are a direct reflection of the over-representation of Aboriginal people living below the LICO, earning lower incomes, and who are unemployed. The Aboriginal population is more likely to rent their housing, live in older buildings, and live in housing that requires major repairs (Statistics Canada, 2006, n.d.).

LOWER LEVELS OF EDUCATION

Although there has been an increase in the levels of educational attainment for Vancouver's Aboriginal population, this number still lags behind the non-Aboriginal high school completion rate. This gap is apparent in a study comparing the change in graduation rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students across Metro Vancouver's school districts between 1999/2000 and 2003/2004 (as shown in Figure 6). While this study demonstrates that the completion rates are increasing for students in some school districts, the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students is still large and the two school districts with the largest Aboriginal populations, Vancouver and Surrey, had a decrease in completion rates (Cardinal & Adin, 2005, p. 54). More recently the Vancouver School Board has seen an increase in the number of Aboriginal graduates

from 14 percent in 2003/04 to 32 percent in 2010/2011 (BC Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 1; Cardinal & Adin, 2005, p. 53).

Figure 6: Dogwood Completion Rates in Metro Vancouver School Districts, 1999/00 – 2003/04

School District	Aboriginal students			Non-Aboriginal students		
	1999/00	2003/04	% Change	1999/00	2003/04	% Change
35 (Langley)	36%	66%	+30%	73%	77%	+4%
36 (Surrey/White Rock)	44%	39%	-%5	77%	83%	+6%
37 (Delta)	45%	56%	+11%	86%	86%	0%
38 (Richmond)	38%	32%	-6%	85%	90%	+5%
39 (Vancouver)	22%	14%	-8%	79%	82%	+3%
40 (New West.)	27%	17%	-10%	61%	74%	+13%
41 (Burnaby)	29%	37%	+8%	79%	85%	+6%
42 (Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows)	54%	63%	+9%	75%	80%	+5%
43 (Coquitlam/Anmore/Port Coquitlam/Port Moody)	47%	65%	+18%	80%	85%	+5%
44 (North Vancouver/Lions Bay)	36%	28%	-8%	81%	81%	0%
British Columbia	**39%**	**46%**	**+7%**	**74**	**78**	**+4%**

Source: Ministry of Education, 2004 District Reports for Districts 35 to 44

Source: Cardinal and Adin, 2005, p. 53.

While Aboriginal high school retention and graduation rates are low, those who do make it grade 12 perform quite well. In the City of Vancouver their success rates in grade 12 core courses are comparable to those of non-Aboriginal students (95 percent compared to 86 percent in English, 84 percent compared to 89 percent in Communications, and 60 percent compared to 87 percent in Math for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students respectively) (City of Vancouver, n.d., p. 1). Additionally, Aboriginal students who do complete high school have high rates of post-secondary enrollment. In fact, nearly 70 percent of those aged 25-34 who have graduated high school have completed some form of post-secondary education, ranging from trades apprenticeships to post-graduate degrees (Statistics Canada, 2006, n.p.).

In addition to lower completion rates at the high school level, Aboriginal youth ages 15-24 are less likely to be attending school, 57 percent attendance rates compared to 70 percent for the non-Aboriginal population (Milligan, 2010, p. 5). According to the 2006 Aboriginal Peoples Survey the main reasons for not completing high school were "wanted to work," "bored with school," "had to work," and "pregnancy" (Milligan, 2010, p. 9). While Aboriginal students have lower graduation rates than non-Aboriginal students, studies do indicate that more Aboriginal people return to school as adult learners (Milligan, 2010, p. 9).

A HIGHLY MOBILE POPULATION

Vancouver's Aboriginal population is highly mobile; moving from reserves or rural areas to the urban centre, from another city, or within the city. For example, over the course of a five year period 55 percent of the Aboriginal population was mobile. Of those who were mobile, 30.4 percent moved to a new residence within within Vancouver, 19.1 percent moved to moved to Vancouver from another municipality, reserve, or rural area in B.C., and 4.9 percent moved from a different province or territory (Statistics Canada, 2006, n.p.).

3.3.4. SUMMARY

Overall, this demographic overview has attempted to describe the changing composition of urban Aboriginal peoples and provide context for the realities of urban Aboriginal youth. As a steadily growing population, the socio-economic gaps that currently exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in urban centres have become more apparent and the resulting mobility has, and will continue, to make addressing these existing gaps more difficult. While there have been

positive increases in the socio-economic indicators for urban Aboriginal people, they still continue to lag behind significantly. Furthermore, with the rise in ethnic mobility, it has been argued that much of the positive increases have been a direct result of individuals with higher socio-economic statuses now identifying as Aboriginal.

3.4. CONCLUSION

The current state analysis of Aboriginal people demonstrates how the historical and social issues have had an intergenerational impact on Aboriginal people, resulting in high mobility, low levels on virtually all socio-economic indicators, and challenges to positive life opportunities in the city. The socio-historical and socio-cultural impacts have, and continue to, result in large socio-economic gaps between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population, as demonstrated by the characteristics of the Aboriginal population in Vancouver in the demographic overview. The various aspects presented in this current state analysis provide insight into the out-of-school challenges and barriers urban Aboriginal youth must contend with and overcome to graduate from high school.

4.0 THEMATIC LITERATURE ANALYSIS

Graduation from high school is a determining factor in life outcomes for all Canadian youth. Without completion of high school, labour market participation and incomes decrease significantly, as does the ability of the individual and their family to be self-sufficient and resilient. While in-school factors are critical to high school success, this literature analysis focuses solely on the out-of-school barriers affecting urban Aboriginal high school graduation. In the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS), more than half of the participants indicated that they dropped out of high school for factors other than school-related reasons, with the majority indicating family or work-related reasons (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002, p. 42).

While the common out-of-school barriers presented in the literature are encountered by various disadvantaged groups, the educational gap between the urban Aboriginal population and the non-Aboriginal population is greater than other disadvantaged groups. While all disadvantaged groups experience barriers to high school retention and graduation, urban Aboriginal learners' needs and barriers are often unique due to the various socio-historic, socio-economic, and socio-cultural realities that exist within the population. Since urban Aboriginal learners have needs and barriers that are unique to their population, the solutions too will be specific to the cultural needs and existing realities of Aboriginal peoples.

4.1. OUT-OF-SCHOOL FACTORS AFFECTING URBAN ABORIGINAL HIGH SCHOOL RETENTION AND GRADUATION

The existing socio-economic gaps between urban Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada have a profound impact on urban Aboriginal learners' ability to successfully complete high school. Furthermore, due to the intergenerational socio-economic, socio-cultural, and socio-historical realities, the common out-of-school barriers tend to be over-represented in urban Aboriginal population. The literature analysis is designed to provide an overview of the common out-of-school barriers to high school graduation for the socio-economically disadvantaged population, highlighting how they are intrinsically tied to factors that specifically affect Urban Aboriginal people, particularly mobility and living in the city.

Many of the problems Aboriginal people living in urban centres today are not much different than the problems faced by urban Aboriginals 40 or 50 years ago, demonstrating the issues are intergenerational (Williams, 1997, p. 80). Aboriginal peoples living in urban centres are still facing a number of problems ranging from disconnection from land and loss of culture to racism and lack of community supports, but at increasing proportions due to the rising rate of urbanization and mobility. These problems form a complex mix of issues that are intertwined and often have long term negative effects on the individual and the community. More specifically, many of the implications that arise from urbanization have a negative effect on youth's ability to successfully complete high school and move on to higher education or meaningful employment.

4.1.1. SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND LIVING CONDITIONS

Many academics agree that socio-economic status is the most important factor related to educational attainment, where those living in poverty have a higher tendency to drop out of high school (Alspaugh, 1998, p. 23; Bushnik, 2003, p. 12; Ingrum, 2006, p. 78; Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007, p. 18). Low socio-economic status is an overarching factor that interplays with a number of other out-of-school factors, such as parental support, living in poor neighbourhoods, adult

responsibilities, poor health, and negative social activities. Low socio-economic status has been found to be linked to lower grades, lower parental involvement in school, higher rates of grade repetition, absenteeism, and poor behaviour at school (TkMC & Alberta Coalition for Healthy School Communities [ACHSC], 2006, pp. 12-14).

The high cost of living in cities often has an adverse effect on urban Aboriginal youth, many of whose parents are unemployed or underemployed due to the socio-economic, socio-historical, and socio-cultural realities. Statistics demonstrate that there is an over-representation of Aboriginal families and youth who live in poverty below the LICO (Milligan, 2010, p. 13). Families often must find housing in low-income neighbourhoods, while there are others who are forced to live in shelters.

Low-income families living in poor neighbourhoods are often victims unemployment, family instability and abuse, substance abuse by themselves or neighbours, higher crime rates, and disruptive neighbours; all of which can have long term consequences for youth growing up in these unstable circumstances (Jargowsky, 1996, p. 5; Mochama, 2001, p. 2; Richards, 2001, p. 13). A six year study (1998-2004) on the effects of mobility on Aboriginal students found that there are lower levels of Aboriginal high school completion when there are higher numbers of low-income families in the neighbourhood (Aman & Ungerleider, 2008, p. 31).

Many Aboriginal families living in poverty have difficulties providing the basic necessities for themselves and their children on a daily basis, as a result many children are malnourished and in poor health (Brown, Rodger, & Fraelich, 2009, p. 49). The economic stress that urban Aboriginal families are under to simply survive leaves school to be anything but a priority. As a result many students do not perform well in school because they lack support from their parents or they drop out to earn an income to supplement their families' living expenses (Brown et al., 2009, p. 48). Additionally, this economic pressure can also decrease the parents' ability to afford educational resources or positive social activities for their children and decreases their ability to provide adequate supervision to their children (Southwest Comprehensive Centre [SCC], n.d., p. 1).

There is a higher proportion of Aboriginal youth who are street-involved, those who live in the streets or shelters. In a study by the McCreary Centre Society (2008) on street-involved youth in British Columbia more than 50 percent of respondents were Aboriginal (Smith et al., 2008, p. 5). Being street-involved has a negative effect on a youth's likelihood to graduate from high school, with over half of the youth surveyed did not attend school (Smith et al., 2008, p. 6). Over-representation of street-involved Aboriginal youth is another result of the various socio-historical, socio-cultural, and socio-economic realities where parents do not have the proper skills to raise children.

4.1.2. MOBILITY

The high mobility rate of urban Aboriginal people is a commonly identified barrier to high school retention and graduation for urban Aboriginal learners in the literature (Aman & Ungerleider, 2008, p. 32; Brunnen, 2011, para. 3; CCL, 2008, p. 3; Norris & Clatworthy, 2003, p. 69). For students from low-socio-economic backgrounds, who are already dealing with a multitude of barriers, mobility can be devastating to their school success; whereas students from higher socio-economic backgrounds often have more supports to rely on to help them adjust more seamlessly when mobility occurs (Rumberger & Larson, 1998, p. 28).

With the high rates of churn migration for Aboriginal families due to the socio-economic, socio-historical, and socio-cultural realities many youth are frequently moving to new communities and schools. For example, "students may begin the school year in an urban school; the family may

return to the reserve at some point during the fall; the family may come back to city in the spring" (Richards & Scott, 2009, pp. 44-45). In this case students are not only changing schools, but they are changing frequently between different school systems that have different standards and processes.

The socio-economic conditions of urban Aboriginal peoples often have a direct impact on the high mobility rates within the city. A large percentage of urban Aboriginal people who are mobile within the city are young, poorly educated, and single parent-families who rely on income assistance, a population which has been determined to move residences at least once a year (Larner, 1990 as cited in Mochama, 2001, p. 2; Norris & Clatworthy, 2003, p. 70; Schuler, 1990 as cited in Aman, n.d., p. 12). Buerkle (1997) argues that mobility for the urban poor is a method of coping with the lack of affordable housing and poor housing conditions that individuals face (as cited in Mochama, 2001. p. 48). This high mobility rate creates unstable home environments that negatively impact a youth's ability to succeed in school.

Urban Aboriginal people often have difficulties accessing affordable housing, live in poorer and less safe neighbourhoods, and live in older homes that are in need of repair. In particular, many youth who no longer live with their parents find themselves living with friends or extended family in non-permanent situations (Rheaume, n.d., p. 16). This is especially common for youth who must move to the city to attend high school and are billeted with distant family members or non-Aboriginal families (Rheaume, n.d., p. 16). Mobility can further limit youth's knowledge about accessing services and a lack of community support networks.

CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH SCHOOL MOBILITY AND TRANSITIONING

Mobile students develop a higher likelihood of lower academic success due to constantly changing schools and support networks (Rumberger, 2003, pp. 10-11). A study by Aman (2008) on Aboriginal Students, who have higher mobility rates than their non-Aboriginal counterparts, found the graduation rate diminishes every time a student changes schools (p. 372; CCL, 2008, p. 3). Many of the out-of-school factors that negatively affect urban Aboriginal high school graduation, such as socio-economic status and family dissolution, disproportionately increase their rates of school mobility (Aman & Ungerleider, 2008, p. 33; Rumberger & Larson, 1998, p. 3). Figure 7 indicates the findings from Aman's study, where more than half of Aboriginal students changed schools at least once during their high school education and even those with no school changes had a graduation rate of just over 50 percent.

Figure 7: Number of School Changes and Completion Rates in the BC 1998 Aboriginal Cohort

Number of School Changes (High School Only)	*Percentage of 1998 Aboriginal Cohort*	*6-Year Completion Rate (Graduation June 2004)*
No school changes	31.8%	56.4%
1 school change	36.6%	48.9%
2 school changes	19.8%	28.1%
3 school changes	9.7%	17.3%
4 school changes	2.6%	11.3%

Source: Aman, 2008, p. 372

As demonstrated by Aman's study, mobility for Aboriginal students in public high schools is common and it has a negative effect on their ability to graduate.

Mobile learners experience poorer levels of school performance due to discontinuities in their learning environments. An American study by the Government Accounting Office, in 1994, found that students who change schools frequently were more likely to be below grade level in reading and math than students who had never changed schools (41 percent compared to 26 percent) (Norris & Clatworthy, 2003, p. 71). Mobile students are also frequently found to receive lower test scores and are more likely to repeat grades, which can lead to a student's disconnection from their education, low self-esteem, and dropping out (Rumberger, 2003, p. 10). Mobility has also been found to be related to increased misbehaviour and violence, increased enrollment in alternative programs, decreased participation in extracurricular activities and lower levels of parental involvement (Mochama, 2001, p. 42; Reynolds, Chen, & Herbers, 2009, p. 11; Rumberger, 2003, p. 8; Rumberger & Larson, 1998, p. 21).

Poorer school performance of mobile students is related to the adjustment to a new school, new curriculum, and new teachers (Mochama, 2001, p. 41). Students must adjust to these factors in addition to trying to fit into a new social group and building a new sense of belonging (Pribesh & Downey, 1999 as cited in Aman, 2008, p. 367). School connectedness, which decreases with every school change, is crucial to keeping at-risk youth engaged and attached to school (Smith et. al., 2008, p. 45). The Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) found that high school leavers were more than four times as likely to feel like an outsider during high school, a feeling that school mobility intensifies (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002, p. 35).

School changes are even more difficult for Aboriginal youth who are mobile between a reserve community and the city. In a new community, and oftentimes adjusting to a new family, these Aboriginal youth do not have the necessary supports at home leading them to compensate for being behind and "an outsider" through other avenues such as behaviour problems and substance abuse, which can result in disengagement, alienation, loneliness, low self-esteem, suicide, and dropping out (Regional Multicultural Youth Council [RMYC], 2010, p. 6).

4.1.3. Social Environment and Extracurricular Activities

Academics have drawn numerous links between participation in positive extracurricular activities and academic success, while those who do not participate in these sorts of activities have been found to have a higher likelihood of dropping out (Bush, 2003, p. 7; Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003, p. 867; McNeal, 1995, 65). In fact, less than one half of the dropout respondents in YITS had participated in structured activities prior to dropping out (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002, p. 35).

Aboriginal learners, in particular those who are mobile, are less likely than non-Aboriginal learners to be involved in after school activities, often because of other out-of-school factors including socio-economic status, mobility, and low parental involvement (Bonneau et al., 2006, p. 2-6). When students have positive social environments to spend their excess time, they will be less likely to participate in negative social activities with high-risk peer groups (Bush, 2003, p. 7; Eccles et al., 2003, p. 870). Extracurricular involvement as a preventative measure is found to be strongest for high risk students because it can work as a crucial mediator to increase school attachment and positive sense of belonging (Bush, 2003, pp. 9-10).It has been found that the probability of graduation for high-risk students increases with participation in more than one positive extracurricular activity (Gilman, Meyers, & Perez, 2004, p. 37).

For urban Aboriginal youth, the depression, loneliness and decrease in self-esteem that results from racism, disconnection from culture and land, and lack of community supports that tends to develop in the urban setting has a variety of negative social effects, including becoming street-

involved, gang activity, prostitution, and substance abuse (Durst, 2009, p. 95). These youth are more likely to associate with high risk peers and participate in negative social activities that increase their risk of dropping out of high school. Urban Aboriginal youth participate in negative social activities at higher rates than their non-Aboriginal counterparts due to poverty, racism, mental health problems, lack of community supports, poor parental involvement, higher proportion of single parent families, residential school legacies, lack of connection to culture, foster care, low self-esteem, and the desire to feel a sense of belonging among Aboriginal youth (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2007, p. 1; Totten, 2009, pp. 139-141).

In Canada, 48 percent of gang members are under the age of 18 and 21 percent are Aboriginal, a high over-representation of the population (Public Safety Canada [PSC], 2007a, p. 2). Aboriginal youth who are new to the city are more vulnerable to becoming gang-involved (Buddle, 2011, p. 173). Many urban Aboriginal youth join gangs to obtain a sense of belonging or to earn money; however, others are coerced into the gangs through threat of violence to themselves or their families (Brown et al., 2009, p. 51). Gang involvement results in delinquency, poor school performance, low educational goals and school attachment, and unsafe communities, and drug and alcohol use (PSC, 2007b, p. 2).

Urban Aboriginal youth have higher tendencies to participate in drug and alcohol use than non-Aboriginal youth, occurring at even higher rates for those who are gang-involved and street-involved (Elton-Marshall, Leatherdale & Burkhalter, 2011, p. 483). Students who use drugs and alcohol more frequently have been found to have higher truancy rates, eventually leading to higher dropout rates (Mensch & Kandel, 1988, p. 95).

4.1.4. Access to Services

While being a barrier for all urban Aboriginal people, mobile youth and families have even less knowledge of programs and services in their new communities or neighbourhoods (Distasio, 2004, p. i; SIIT, 2004, p. 36). The lack of knowledge can have a negative impact on adjusting to life in a new city. This limited or lack of knowledge about accessing services will often perpetuate mobility within the city as urban Aboriginal people will continue to move because their needs are not being met (Charlifoux & Johnson, 2003, p. 11). This creates a cycle of mobility where individuals move to find services; however, due to lack of knowledge they often do not find the support in the new neighbourhood or community either, forcing them to move again. This type of inter and intra-city mobility has a negative effect on youth who change schools every time their family moves.

Accessing housing is frequently identified as one of the main barriers Aboriginal families and individuals face upon their arrival in a new city (Distasio, 2004, p. i). A study by the Institute of Urban Studies found that the majority of Aboriginal people who move to a new city will not be able to find or afford housing because they are unaware of the support services available and, as a result, will often live temporarily with family or friends (Distasio, 2004, p. i). Families who have recently moved to a new city may move multiple times before they find stable housing (Distasio, 2004, p. 18). Many families live in overcrowded houses with relatives or friends, shelters, or temporary homes for years, affecting the schooling of their children by living in an unstable environment or forcing them to change schools frequently.

Many Aboriginal people, especially youth, who migrate from reserve and rural communities to urban centres are frequently unprepared for life in the city, and as a result, experience negative aspects and barriers while living in the city. When youth are unaware of the recreational, cultural, and support programs available to them, they will find other ways to spend their time –which is

often negative social activities that can lead to dropping out of school and more serious criminal activity (Rheaume, n.d., p. 15). Additionally, mobile parents who are unaware of the supports and services available in the city are more likely to be unemployed than those who had been able to access services making it difficult to provide a stable learning environment for their children (Distasio, 2004, p. iii).

4.1.5. Loss of Connection to the Land and Culture

For many urban Aboriginal people, living in the city results in a distinct loss of connection to the land, culture, and Elders. The RCAP (1996b) identifies cultural identity as the main issue Aboriginal people must contend with in the city and that strong cultural identity is the key to urban Aboriginal success (pp. 398-399). There is a direct lack of culture in the urban setting and this has a negative impact on urban Aboriginal people's employment and education, health, self-esteem, resiliency, and general quality of life (Newhouse, 2003, p. 245). It is difficult to maintain contact with Elders, language, the land, and spiritual ceremonies in an urban centre, all of which are fundamental to cultural identity (Heritz, 2010, p. 4).

For many Aboriginal people, their culture is the core of who they are, as one Aboriginal youth has stated, "It's not a status thing. It's not a piece of paper. It's a spiritual thing, an emotional thing, a mental thing, a physical thing" (Heritz, 2010, p. 4). Difficulty in maintaining their cultural identity makes it even more difficult for urban Aboriginal people to successfully navigate their lives, something that can already be difficult in urban centres due to the various other barriers. The RCAP (1996a) found that Aboriginal youth's feelings of isolation and alienation that develops in the city due to the loss of culture and identity pushes youth towards negative social environments or relationships and away from education (pp. 147-148).

While there are opportunities for cultural opportunities and activities occurring in the city they are often is either reflective of the cultural traditions of the majority nation in the city or is of a pan-Aboriginal focus. Yet, there is a large diversity of Aboriginal nations and cultures present in the city, each unique. Aboriginal populations in the city are a mosaic of peoples from different nations across Canada, each with distinct languages, culture, and traditions. Not only are there intrinsic differences between First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Non-Status Indian populations there is also distinct diversity between the different First Nations living in the city. Peters (2011) contends that this diversity makes it difficult to establish a feeling of community in urban centres (p. 88).

Living in the city can make it difficult for members of different nations to participate in cultural activities and traditions that solely reflect their nation's protocols. For example, urban Anishnabe people living in Toronto must travel to their home reserve if they want to experience their traditional protocol and language. When living in Toronto, Anishnabe people find that they must partake in other First Nations customs and practices, or forms of pan-Aboriginal events, because they are a minority nation in the city (Peters, 2011, p. 89). The pan-Aboriginal approach often used in cities as an inclusive method meant to appeal to the wide diversity of cultures, is often seen to "homogenize distinctiveness" of the diverse nations (Proulx, 2003, p. 163-164 as cited in Peters, 2011, p. 89). This approach to the diversity has led to a fear among many urban Aboriginal people that certain Aboriginal cultures and traditional practices will erode as they are overcome by larger nations (Proulx, 2003 as cited in Peters, 2011, p. 89). Aboriginal people who are not able to practice culture and traditions in the city have a higher likelihood of feeling alienated, both in the city and as an Aboriginal person.

4.1.6. FAMILY STRUCTURE

A disproportionate number of urban Aboriginal children are raised in non-traditional families, most commonly single female-headed households, extended family households, or in adoptive and government care (Canada. National Council of Welfare, 2007, p. 19; Cardinal, 2005, p. 32). Aboriginal youth are also more likely to be affected by family dissolution, where families become divided and often live in different cities, regions or reserves. Aboriginal youth from dissolved families are more mobile between and within cities to live with different family members on a frequent basis, which can result in numerous school changes. Additionally, youth who live in non-traditional or dissolved families may have more family or adult responsibilities, such as looking after younger siblings or obtaining employment to help pay bills, which can make attending school on a regular basis difficult (Donovan, 2011, p. 131).

While the mobility associated with family dissolution can negatively impact education, family structure itself has been found to have a profound impact on the educational outcomes of students. Children raised in a traditional family, both biological parents in the same household, have higher graduation rates than those who do not live in a non-traditional family or who experience family dissolution during their educational years (Pong & Ju, 2000, p. 149; Song, Benin, & Glick., 2012, p. 20). A study by Anderson & Bruce (2004) found that 15 percent of youth living in a single-parent household are predicted to drop out of high school in comparison to 8.5 percent of youth who lived with both parents drop out of high school (para. 17).

Not all non-traditional family structures will affect educational outcomes in the same ways. For example, children from single-father households have higher graduation rates than single-mother households, often due to economic reasons, and children from single-mother families have more parental involvement in their education than children from step-father/biological mother families, which can lead to higher academic success (Song et al., 2012, p. 20). Changes in family structure, such as separation, divorce, and re-marriage, during high school years have been linked to higher dropout rates (Song et al., 2012, p. 21). Financial resources are often tightened during this time and parents may have less time to provide social support and supervision, which can lead to less parental involvement in schooling and greater increase in negative social activities, both of which can lead to poor educational success and dropping out (Song et al., 2012, p. 21).

The historical legacy of Aboriginal children in foster care still pervades the urban Aboriginal population today. For example, 31 percent of the Ministry for Children and Family Development's child in care caseload in Vancouver is Aboriginal children (Cardinal, 2005, p. 32). Youth in government care have poorer adult supervision and are more susceptible to a variety of barriers that negatively affect educational attainment, including poverty, cultural dislocation, malnutrition, unstable housing, high mobility, poor physical and mental health, teen pregnancy, low parental involvement, substance abuse, and negative peer networks or social environments (Smith, Stewart, Poon, Saewyc, & the McCreary Centre Society, 2011, p. 5). \

Youth living in non-traditional families are more likely to live in poverty due to single-parent incomes, parent unemployment due to childcare responsibilities, or low-incomes due to low parental educational attainment (Pong & Ju, 2000, p. 149; Song et al, 2012, p. 20). In urban centres, where the cost of living in significantly higher than other areas, it can be difficult for parents in these situations to provide stable homes that foster positive learning environments and students have higher likelihoods of dropping out of high school (Pong & Ju, 2000, p. 149; Song et al, 2012, p. 20).

4.1.7. Parental Involvement and Capacity

Parental and family involvement, or lack of, is a major influence on academic success of and the decision to drop out of Aboriginal students (Melnechenko & Horseman, 1998, p. 9). It has been found that when parents are engaged, are supportive, and have high expectations for success, Aboriginal students have a higher likelihood of performing at a higher level and graduating (Friedel, 1999, p. 139; Melnechenko & Horseman, 1998, p. 10). In fact, for students from low socio-economic backgrounds it has been suggested that positive parental involvement is the most protective factor in determining their academic success (Childs & Roberts, 2003 as cited in TkMC & ACHSC, 2006, p.13). When parents are not involved in their children's education, the student is more likely to be more involved in negative social behaviours including, drugs and alcohol, skipping class, and delinquency (McNeal Jr., 1999, pp. 124-125). These negative social activities have been found to increase the likelihood of dropping out.

Academics link low Aboriginal parental involvement in education to their distrust of the schooling system due to the historical legacy associating education with colonization and assimilation policies (Phillips, 2008, p. 120). The residential school legacy has developed a mistrust of the education system, where parents have negative views on education and do not feel welcome in the schools (Brown et al., 2009, p. 47). The residential school legacy has left many Aboriginal people to associate attending school with forced loss of culture (Friedel, 1999, p. 151).

Many parents are not engaged in their children's education because they are either unaware of how to become engaged or do not have the necessary parenting skills and resources to provide their children with a stable upbringing as a result of the long-term effects of the socio-historical and socio-economic realities (Jeynes, 2007, p. 102). For some Aboriginal families the top priority is simply staying alive – putting food on the table and a roof over their heads – making parent involvement in school difficult (Smith, 1999, p. 163). While youth who move to the city on their own to attend high school, often leave their family and community supports miles away and, as a result, their parents are cannot be present in their daily lives to provide the necessary supports (Taylor, Friedel, & Edge, 2009, p. viii).

When parents lack the fundamental parenting skills, have substance abuse problems, or are criminally involved they typically do not provide their children with an appropriate amount of supervision, interaction, and positive influence in both their personal and academic lives (Brown et al., 2009, p. 53). As a result, youth get involved with negative social activities, do not have the resources and support to succeed in school, and suffer emotionally.

Many Aboriginal parents have low educational levels that make it difficult for them to help their children in school (Brown et al., 2009, p. 52). When parents have lower levels of education their children are more likely to have lower educational attainment themselves. For example, in cases when both parents do not have high school diplomas, the likelihood of a male student dropping out of high school is at 21 percent, whereas is if both parents have obtained a university degree the likelihood of a male student dropping out is only 2 percent (Anderson & Bruce, 2004, para. 9-10). Parents who have higher levels of educational attainment will often have higher educational aspirations for their children and increased parental involvement.

4.1.8. Racial Discrimination

Many urban Aboriginal people have expressed that they face racism from various non-Aboriginal peoples and organizations, which has a negative impact on their ability to thrive economically and socially within the city setting. Urban Aboriginal people experience racism on many different

levels: directly, systemically, institutionally, and unconsciously (Heritz, 2010, p. 5). Racism can affect their ability to obtain safe and affordable housing and employment. It can also have a strong impact on their self-esteem, pride and sense of belonging in the community, at the workplace, and in school. A number of studies on Aboriginal students have indicated that numerous youth have experienced discrimination, racism, and lack of knowledge about Aboriginal peoples from peers, teachers, and administrators (Silver et al., 2002, pp. 23-24; Styres, 2010, p. 19). The racism and racial profiling also undermines Aboriginal cultural identity development in the city because many individuals hide their identities to limit the negative outcomes associated with racial discrimination (Peters, 2011, p. 84).

The racism many urban Aboriginal people feel has led them to prefer to receive programs and services, including education, from Aboriginal agencies because they are perceived to be more culturally-sensitive and can be more trusted (Newhouse, 2003, p. 245). Within cities there are a wide variety of programs and services that are designed for the general public, and while urban Aboriginal people have access to these programs and services, they often do not take into consideration their cultural and spiritual needs of Aboriginal peoples (Heritz, 2010, p. 5). Whereas Aboriginal peoples and institutions advocate for holistic healing, intended to heal the entire person, many public programs and services focus one issue, i.e. unemployment or addictions (Heritz, 2010, p. 5). Aboriginal programs take into consideration the socio-historic, socio-cultural, and socio-economic issues that have had intergenerational effects on Aboriginal peoples. As a result, urban Aboriginal organizations are being relied on to provide these services, although they are often underfunded and do not have access to the necessary resources to provide services to the growing urban community (Heritz, 2010, p. 6).

4.1.9. UNPREPAREDNESS

Life in the city is much different than life on the reserve, or even from small rural communities. The transition to living in the city is undoubtedly overwhelming, particularly for youth who are moving to the city on their own to live with people they might not know very well, or at all, while they attend high school. When moving to an urban centre, Aboriginal people are often unprepared for life in the city. It is quite often a culture shock, similar to the experience of immigrants, where they do not know the ‘rules’ or how to approach things in terms of everything from basic daily activities to searching for employment and interacting with peers in the classroom (McKenzie, 2010, p. 5). Youth who migrate from reserve and rural settings often do not even have the skills to deal with the social issues that they will be confronted with in the city (Charlifoux & Johnson, 2003, p. 56).

Individuals often perceive the city as a place of great opportunity, and while it does certainly have that potential, many are not prepared for the high cost of living, competitive labour market, and fewer cultural-specific services (McKenzie, 2010, p. 3). When they arrive in the city from a reserve, a rural community, or even another city, newcomers are often unaware of where to access services, where to find affordable housing, and often do not know anyone else (Rheaume, n.d., p. 15). This leads to disconnection and loneliness; those who are transitioning into urban life go from a culturally-sensitive community where they know everybody to a large and unfamiliar melting pot of diverse cultures.

4.1.10. LOSS OR LACK OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT NETWORKS

As individuals move to different communities, the social support networks that they have built up, and often rely on, are weakened. For Aboriginal peoples, community-based social support systems have traditionally served as their foundation for a wide variety of support mechanisms. When moving to new communities, individuals leave their friends, routine, and familiarity with places, such as social services and other activities including grocery shopping and Laundromats (Mochama, 2001, p. 3). Mochama (2001) argues that this can be especially difficult on youth, who when pulled from their familiar network, lose their sense of belonging in their school and community (p. 4).

Not only do individuals with high mobility rates feel as though they do not belong to a close-knit community, it also difficult for neighbourhoods with high mobility rates to create a strong sense of community because individuals feel no attachment. Mochama (2001) argues, highly mobile individuals feel no long-term vested interest to make it a better or more engaging environment for themselves and their children to live (p. 4). This in turn makes it an unappealing destination for individuals and families who are less transient to stay rooted in these neighbourhoods because the high mobility rate increases "the social distance between residents" (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995 as cited in Mochama, 2001, p. 45). The high mobility rate makes it incredibly difficult for a community to develop and even more difficult for residents to feel as though they are weaved into the fabric of the community.

4.1.11. ADULT RESPONSIBILITIES

When youth take on adult responsibilities during their high school years it can have a negative effect on their ability to graduate. Many disadvantaged youth take on too many adult responsibilities, with teen pregnancy and employment being the most common (Bowlby & McMullen, 2003, pp. 37-39; Luong, 2008, p. 5). A cycle of poverty is created by the high rates of urban Aboriginal teen pregnancy and school-leaving for employment.

For Aboriginal families living in urban centres, living in poverty can be very difficult and trying to provide even the necessary basics, such as a roof, clothes, and food, can be a challenge. As a result, many high school aged youth will need to contribute to the family finances or are already living on their own and have significant financial responsibilities. As a result, urban Aboriginal youth may be required to work too many hours, which affects their ability to complete homework and attend class, or will drop out of school completely to work full time (Charlifoux & Johnson, 2003, p. 53). While employment during teen years has been found to be beneficial to youths' life skill development and educational attainment, studies also find that when too many hours are worked it leads to low academic success and dropping out (McNeal, 1997, p. 216). In fact, according to YITS, youth who held a part-time job had a lower dropout rate than those without a job; however, those who worked over 30 hours a week had the highest rate of dropping out (Bushnik, 2003, p.11).

Teen pregnancy in urban centres can make it difficult for Aboriginal youth from low socio-economic backgrounds to complete school. Due to poor parenting skills, low parental involvement and lack of positive social influences or environments, urban Aboriginal youth have higher teen pregnancy rates than the non-Aboriginal population (Charlifoux & Johnson, 2003, p. 71; SmithBattle, 2006, p. 131). For both teen mothers and teen fathers the added responsibilities of raising a child will make attending school difficult. Urban Aboriginal teen mothers are more likely to drop out of high school to look after their child, because they cannot afford childcare or they have little parental support to assist in child rearing, while urban Aboriginal teen fathers might have to work too many hours to help support the mother financially (Charlifoux & Johnson, 2003, p. 72; Luong, 2008, p. 5; SmithBattle, 2006, p. 132).

4.1.12. HEALTH

The literature indicates that there is a strong relationship between poverty and poor health, especially for those living in impoverished inner city neighbourhoods (Phipps, 2003, p. 13; World Health Organization & World Bank [WHO & WB], 2002, p. 2). Living in poor housing conditions and not having access to proper nutrition makes socio-economically disadvantaged populations more susceptible to physical and mental health problems, which can make it difficult for youth to attend school or for their parents to be involved in their education (WHO & WB, 2002, p. 2).

There are a number of health issues affecting the educational attainment of urban Aboriginal youth, many of which are heavily related to the socio-economic and socio-historical realities. Physical and mental health issues such as depression, hyperactivity, suicide, addictions, fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), malnutrition and hunger, anxiety, and diabetes, among others, are related to a number of root causes including residential school legacy, poverty, racism, substance abuse, family violence, child abuse, poor living conditions, and poor nutrition (Canada. National Council of Welfare, 2007, p. 67; Totten, 2009, p. 11).

These physical and mental health issues, many of which are hard to diagnose, can have a severe impact on a student's ability to graduate high school and are disproportionately present in the Aboriginal population. FAS, in particular, has been related to poor academic performance or behavioural problems at school, leading to eventual dropping out, and is highly over-represented in the Aboriginal population (Tait, 2003, p. 91). The transitions into high school or into new schools can be even more difficult for Aboriginal youth with mental and physical health problems, especially if family involvement and supervision is low due to family structure and supports (Tait, 2003, p. 244).

4.1.13. BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS

Residential and school mobility have been found to increase behavioural problems in Aboriginal learners, which have a negative effect on graduation rates. Behavioural problems, which often stem from socio-economic conditions, are more common for Aboriginal learners (Canada. National Council of Welfare, 2007, p. 67). Although they are more common in Aboriginal children due to the socio-economic and socio-historical realities, many Aboriginal learners tend to be over-diagnosed in terms of behaviour and learning problems (Cardinal, 2005, p. 58). Additionally, youth who must leave their communities to attend high school in an urban centre and live with an unfamiliar family tend to have higher rates of behavioural problems (McBride & McKee, 2001, p. 15; p. 44). While mobility appears to be a cause of behavioural problems, it is also a symptom when some students are forced to transition into a new school due to behaviour-related suspension (McBride & McKee, 2001, p. 46).

In a BC Public School study on students with severe behavioural and learning problems, many students did not live in a traditional family (34 percent lived with a single-mother and 38 percent lived with a guardian – often grandmother or foster care), had high mobility rates, and had other health issues, most notably 15 percent were diagnosed with fetal alcohol syndrome and 25 percent with ADHD (McBride & McKee, 2001, p. 2). Additionally, greater numbers of cases were first identified during the critical transition years into high school (McBride & McKee, 2001, p. 15).

Students with behaviour and learning problems are often streamed into alternative, non-academic learning programs, where they receive a 'school leaving certificate', severely reducing their

ability to graduate and to develop the skills and knowledge required for meaningful employment or post-secondary education (Cardinal, 2005, pp. 58-59; First Nations Education Steering Committee [FNESC], 2008, p. 7). In the City of Vancouver, 18 percent of Aboriginal students who are streamed into special education classes are because of behavioural problems (City of Vancouver, n.d., p.1). As a result of low parental involvement, awareness, and knowledge, many parents are either unaware that their child will not obtain a dogwood diploma when streamed into these programs, while others are unaware that they were streamed into these programs in the first place (FNESC, 2008, p. 7). While many other parents are simply incapable of advocating on behalf of their child to keep them in a regular academic program to increase their likelihood of graduating (McBride & McKee, 2001, p. 4).

4.2. CONCLUSION

This literature review demonstrates the multitude of out-of-school barriers that urban Aboriginal students are faced with. While many of these barriers could be faced by non-Aboriginal disadvantaged students, they are typically more severe for urban Aboriginal students and are far more disproportionately represented in the urban Aboriginal population. There are also a number of barriers that are specific to urban Aboriginal people, which would not affect the general population, such as loss of connection to land and culture, school transition difficulties associated with moving from a reserve school to an urban centre school, or the negative effects of the residential schooling legacy.

The literature review indicates that the out-of-school barriers Aboriginal learners face in regards to educational attainment at the high school level are often inextricably intertwined, and as such, students will often experience a number of barriers. For example, lack of parental involvement and supervision is often related to increased participation in negative social activities, but also, low parental involvement can be caused by mobility and being working-poor. Additionally, many of the barriers are resultant of the intergenerational effects of the socio-historical, socio-cultural, and socio-economical realities that are present in the lives of urban Aboriginal people. As such, the causation for low parental involvement has been related to the negative intergenerational effects of the residential schools and forced adoptions.

5.0 PROMISING PRACTICES: A JURISDICTIONAL SCAN

In urban centres across Canada and Australia, strategies are being developed and implemented to help close the various socio-economic gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Many of these programs are focused on increasing the educational outcomes of urban Aboriginal youth by focusing on the needs or barriers highlighted in the literature review, most notably: mobility, poor access to services, low parental involvement, lack of community, poor health, and negative social environments. This jurisdictional scan will provide insight into some programs that are currently being implemented and have been successful, or show promise, in increasing urban Aboriginal levels of educational attainment.

A study commissioned by the Australian Department of Education, Science and Training (2004) on addressing student mobility found that the majority of best practices established in schools with high at-risk populations implemented initiatives that address the social and emotional needs of students using a holistic approach (p. 4). The best practices identified that these out-of-school needs must be met before a student has the ability to learn. Other best practices identified by the study are effective linkages between the school and community, the family-school connection, and family support (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2004, p. 5). The promising programs covered in the section follow these identified best practices to increase the educational attainment of disadvantaged, at-risk, and mobile learners and are designed to meet a multitude of out-of-school barriers. The majority of the programs in this section are specifically targeted for urban Aboriginal students, while others are focused on helping socio-economically disadvantaged learners who experience out-of-school barriers similar to urban Aboriginal students.

Australia was included in the jurisdictional scan because the socio-economic issues facing their Indigenous peoples are similar to those of Canada's Aboriginal population. Their Indigenous population is also becoming increasingly urbanized and is highly mobile. Additionally, there are a number of common issues and challenges facing Aboriginal learners in Canada and Australia, including: gap in educational attainment levels, high dropout rates, impact of socio-historic legacies, and low parental involvement (Aman, 2008, p. 4; Australia High Commission – Canada, 2011, para. 1-5; Groome & Hamilton, 1995).

Also included in the jurisdictional scan is a successful program for urban Latino students in the United States, which, as a model, has been identified as a promising practice to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Australia (Helme & Lamb, 2011, p. 9). Although not focused on Aboriginal students, it is an intervention program for a low-income, highly mobile, urban, and cultural minority student population, who often face similar challenges as urban Aboriginal students, that works to address the various out of school factors affecting the educational attainment of disadvantaged students.

5.1 CANADA: PATHWAYS TO EDUCATION

Pathways to Education is a community-based program currently being delivered in 11 socio-economically disadvantaged urban communities across Canada to address the high dropout rates and low academic achievement. As a non-profit organization, Pathways is designed to be a grassroots initiative led by the community and works in partnership with governments, school boards, universities, community organizations, and the private sector to address the challenges and barriers these socio-economically disadvantaged students while trying to complete high school (Pathways to Education, 2011). In Winnipeg, the program is being delivered in a

neighbourhood where more than 70 percent of students are Aboriginal (Pathways to Education, 2011).

Students enroll in the program in grade nine and receive consistent out-of-school support throughout high school. The program provides financial support for students with good attendance, such as bus tickets and lunch vouchers, and $1,000 post-secondary tuition bursaries for each year the program is successfully completed (CEDA, 2010, para. 4). The program also offers daily after-school tutoring and mentoring, during which students receive healthy meals and Aboriginal cultural activities (CEDA, 2010, para. 4). Every student is provided with a Student-Parent Support Worker (SPSW) who works as the bridge between students and the school. The SPSW goes further than the role of the school to ensure students from families with low academic background and low parental involvement remain connected to school by carrying out responsibilities such as:

- monitoring academic placement;
- tracking school attendance;
- monitoring and encouraging participation in tutoring and mentoring activities;
- informing students and parents when expectations are not met; and
- providing information about community resources (Pathways to Education, 2010, pp. 2-3).

SPSW monitors the students' involvement in the program and provides them with the extra support that most schools do not have the ability to provide to students who are at-risk of dropping out.

In each city the program is flexible to adapt to the cultural context of the population and address the needs specific to the community. In Winnipeg, the four pillars of the Pathways program: financial, academic, advocacy, and social support is being delivered along a medicine wheel model and Aboriginal culture has been made an integral part of the program (Community Education Development Association [CEDA], 2010, para. 2). The four pillars are designed to address the whole individual rather than just specific issues, and therefore acknowledging multiple barriers. Additionally, the Winnipeg program provides Aboriginal cultural supports to the students, including traditional ceremonies and increasing students' self-esteem through cultural awareness.

As described, the program seeks to improve educational attainment by addressing the socio-economic barriers that affect high school graduation, increasing student attachment through increased academic performance and sense of belonging, and increasing parental involvement. Although little data has been obtained about the Aboriginal focused program in Winnipeg, because it began recently in September 2010, Pathways has found improved credit accumulation and reduced absenteeism in all project communities (Pathways to Education, 2011). More specifically, the original community of Regent Park in Toronto, which began in 2001, has a 92 percent Pathways enrollment rate, with a 70 percent reduction in dropout rates and 30 percent increase in post-secondary enrollment (Pathways to Education, 2010, p. 1; Pathways to Education, 2011; Phillips & Nanda, 2011, p. 1). Additionally, Pathways is estimated to generate a $24 return to society for every dollar invested (Phillips & Nanda, 2011, p. 1).

Pathways has been effective in increasing retention and graduation rates in socio-economic disadvantaged communities through addressing the common barriers that traditionally affect the educational outcomes of learners in these communities. Additionally, because of its flexibility of delivery and community-based approach it can be effective at addressing the barriers that are

related to specific diverse cultures, including those pertaining to urban Aboriginal peoples as seen in the program implementation in Winnipeg.

5.2. CANADA: ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Across Canada, entrepreneurial community schools are being established to provide students with a bridge between school, real life, and the community. The majority of these schools have been developed in francophone minority schools to help students increase students' sense of belonging and purpose, both within school and the community, as well encourage cultural connection, pride, and awareness (Chiasson, n.d., p. 1). Many of the entrepreneurial community schools seek to address the socio-economic needs of the community, prevent poverty and dropping out, and to provide students with a balanced and holistic adult life (Levesque, 2009, p. 2).

This model is based on schools, families, and the community building partnerships to increase long-term life opportunities for students (Levesque, 2009, p. 7). Through this means, sound education is a shared responsibility of all the partners involved. Partnerships are created unique to the needs of each community, but are often developed with municipal governments, the commercial sector, financial institutions, and non-profit organizations (Canada. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2010, p. 2).

The model has been effective in communities where the majority of students do not normally go on to post-secondary education because it provides them with the skills they need to succeed in the 'real world' (Macleans, 2005, para. 2). The following provides a sample of various established community partnerships:

- Municipality: students benefit from working mentorships from municipal employees to foster relationship between students and the city, as well as increase awareness of employment opportunities within the municipality (Chiasson, n.d., p. 6);
- Commercial: students in a community with strong presence of the paper industry were provided with hands-on learning experience about the types of employment the industry offers. While other students are able to learn entrepreneurial skills through running a small business (Macleans, 2005, para. 2);
- Financial Institutions: a credit union branch is run out of the school where the board of directors is made up of students who are able to develop managerial experience while learning smart money practices (Chiasson, n.d., p. 7);
- Community: community members have access to a list of students who have acquired the necessary certification for babysitting. This allows parents to access a culturally sensitive community service that they might not otherwise have access to and allows students to develop life skills and responsibilities, while earning some money (Chiasson, n.d., p. 12).

The various partnerships not only allow the students to learn practical experience, but it also provides the community with services it requires.

In addition to providing students with an opportunity to develop life skills, work skills, and earn some money, the model is designed to encourage students to become resourceful, responsible, resilient, and active members in their community (Levesque, 2009, p. 5). Students become engaged in their community through the partnerships; this gives them a greater sense of belonging or community connection and has a positive effect on their cultural identity (Canada. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2010, p. 2).

5.3. CANADA: THE URBAN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION PROJECT – LAKEHEAD DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Urban Aboriginal Education Project (UAEP) in the Lakehead School District is a school-community partnership program designed to address the identified needs of, and increase supports for, urban Aboriginal students. The school board, in collaboration with the provincial government, Lakehead University, and the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, is focused on reaching out to Aboriginal parents, families, the community, and service delivery organizations to increase student retention and graduation rates (Ontario Public School Boards' Association, n.d., para. 1).

In consultation with the community, the priority areas of Aboriginal student supports, staff supports, school supports, and community supports were identified to increase urban Aboriginal educational attainment (Canada School Boards Association, n.d., para. 5). The initiatives established under student supports and community supports address out-of-school barriers related to educational attainment, including mobility, transitioning to urban life, connection to culture, and parental involvement.

To assist students who move to the city from First Nations communities, the district has created the Aboriginal Transitions program. The program provides a number of supports such as "coordinating and accompanying students to community events," "liaising with students and their teachers or guidance counselors," "contacting parents and communicating regularly with school social workers, school guidance counselors, and boarding home parents to discuss student achievement and social issues," and "linking students with social workers or guidance counselors" (Canada School Boards Association, n.d., para. 13).

The UAEP has increased partnerships between the school board and community organizations to provide numerous events and projects for urban Aboriginal students, including annual harvest feasts, Aboriginal youth recognition awards, annual First Nation student welcome orientation event, Aboriginal youth empowerment program, Aboriginal life skills projects, and a neighbourhood capacity building project (Canada School Boards Association, n.d., para. 31). Under the UAEP the school board has also created the Aboriginal Parent/Guardian Advocacy Program to "assist parents and guardians who may need additional supports to understand education practices, policies and procedures, to resolve concerns regarding their child/children's needs, to connect with community resources and to engage in their child/children's education" (Canada School Boards Association, n.d., para. 32).

Since the UAEP's inception in 2008, the school board has noted positive changes in both parent and student engagement. Schools have also become a community hub, where new and existing Aboriginal students are able to access the supports they need and are able to develop a sense of belonging (Canada School Boards Association, n.d., para. 43).

5.4. AUSTRALIA: SCHOOL FOCUSED YOUTH SERVICE – WELFARE CENTRE

The School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) is a partnership approach to support at-risk students, ages 10-18, by addressing the out-of-school needs that are often barriers to educational attainment, including poverty, teenage pregnancy, family instability, homelessness, foster care, physical disabilities, and mental health (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development [DEECD], 2009, p. 8; Lamb & Rice, 2008, p. 27). The program is not exclusive to

Aboriginal students but rather at-risk students, although one of their specific focus populations for the program are students from "Indigenous and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse "(CALD) communities (DEECD, 2009, p. 8).

In its partnership approach, SFYS focuses on strengthening the relationships between communities, service organizations, and schools at a local level to increase the effectiveness of support for at-risk youth (DEECD, 2009, p. 4). The program is tailored to the needs of each community based on identified gaps in local service delivery (DEECD, 2009, p. 4). Through strengthening partnerships to enable effective integrated service models and on-site support services in schools, learning, development, and health outcomes have been improved for disadvantaged youth and their families (DEECD, 2009, p. 4; Helme & Lamb, 2011, p. 8). As such, SFYS seeks to provide early intervention and prevention of barriers to increase the educational outcomes for at-risk students.

SFYS initiatives focus on welfare supports to address personal and family related problems of at-risk students. To achieve this, one school has implemented a welfare centre to provide coordinated services for students, including a school nurse and visiting doctor, and delivers a variety of programs on social issues affecting the students (Lamb & Rice, 2009, p. 27). One such program is for at-risk students in their first year of high school to support them through the transition into high school and with the associated issues (Lamb & Rice, 2009, p. 27). Other initiatives under the SFYS program at this school are community mentors, a breakfast club, and a homework club. This local program was developed in consultation with the Indigenous community, which has been identified as key to the success of this project (Helme & Lamb, 2011, p. 8).

5.5. AUSTRALIA: WHOLE OF SCHOOL INTERVENTION STRATEGY

The Whole of School Intervention Strategy is a national strategy by the Australian government to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students. This program is a supplement to mainstream education programming, consisting of two elements: Parent School Partnerships Initiative (PSPI) and Homework Centres (HWC). The purpose of the strategy is to bring the Indigenous community, community organizations, parents of Indigenous students and schools together in innovative partnerships to address the local barriers to educational attainment for Indigenous students (Department of Education, Science and Training, n.d., p. 1).

Using partnerships, the PSPI community-based initiative provides funding to schools, non-profit organizations, and corporations in collaboration with parents of Indigenous students and community members individually proposed projects addressing local barriers (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, p. 40). Through the strengthening of parental and community capacity to support students and the development of local networks to support students inside and outside of school, PSPI is working to achieve the following objectives:

- increase attendance rates;
- improve literacy and numeracy skills;
- increase retention rates;
- increase graduation rates;
- improve transitions at critical times of education and into the workplace (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, p. 40)

The projects supported under PSPI vary according to local identified priorities. Projects can focus on any element so long as they are working to achieve the objectives of the Initiative. For example, one school established the "Parental Involvement and Community Capacity Building Program" and the "Leadership and Transition Program." The parental involvement program established a Community Education Worker in the school to engage Indigenous parents in the school, as well as to increase their access to and encourage them to participate in community programs to increase their skills and capacity (Cherbourg State School, 2006b, p. 1). The leadership and transition program focuses on providing mentoring (Elders, community members, and Indigenous students already in high school) and personal development for students during the school year before they transition into high school to increase self-esteem, self-awareness, successful transition and retention (Cherbourg State School, 2006a, p. 1).

Through bringing the parents and community into partnership with the schools, the Whole of School Intervention Strategy has increased the high school retention and graduation rates of Indigenous students in Australia (Raham, 2010, p. 4). As a result higher numbers of Indigenous students are entering post-secondary educational programs or successfully transitioning into the workforce (The University of Western Australia, 2009, p. 6)

5.6. UNITED STATES: ACHIEVEMENT FOR LATINOS THROUGH ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success (ALAS) was a program established in the 1990s for an at-risk student population who faces many of the same socio-economic and out-of-school barriers as Canada's urban Aboriginal population. For example, family dissolution, single-parent families, poverty, mobility from rural areas, misbehaviour, parents with low education, parents with limited knowledge on urban settings, parents who lack effective parenting skills, cultural barriers at school and in the community, live in poor neighbourhoods, and have higher tendencies to participate in, or be influenced by, negative social activities (Gandara, Larson, Mehan, & Rumberger, 1998, p. 10; Rumberger, 2001, p. 23).

The ALAS program targeted the at-risk Latino students, who like urban Aboriginal students are not only at high risk of dropping out of high school but also for "mental health problems, social-behavioral problems, delinquency, substance abuse, and teen parenting" (Gandara et. al, 1998, p. 8). The ALAS program was a dropout prevention program based on addressing three inter-related contexts simultaneously: family, school, and community. ALAS was designed to target the out-of-school factors that decrease educational attainment for at-risk urban students and to develop new bonds with a student population that did not have a sense of belonging in the school environment due to cultural differences (Posner, n.d., p. 2). In order to address the inter-related barriers, the ALAS program implemented a number of components:

1. *Students*: ALAS provided social and problem solving skills training and follow-up counselling to address disruptive and violent behaviour problems (Gandara et. al, 1998, p. 9). Student recognition activities, such as positive calls home to parents when goals were met or behaviour improved, were designed to increase self-esteem, while school bonding activities, such as lunch 'hangouts' in the ALAS lounge, provided for increased sense of belonging (Gandara et. al, 1998, p. 9; Rumberger, 2001. p. 24).

2. *School:* Students attendance rates were highly monitored to inform parents on a daily basis of truancy and students were provided with help to make up any missed time

(Gandara et. al, 1998, p. 10). Parents and students were provided with weekly or daily feedback about the students' academic performance (Gandara et. al, 1998, p. 10). ALAS also negotiated with the school to modify existing structures, such as changing disciplinary actions from suspension to providing additional tutoring and support (Posner, n.d., p. 2).

3. *Family*: Parents engaged in training to provide better support to their child's academic life, to be more involved in school activities, and to develop parent-child problem solving skills; parents' usage of the developed skills was monitored (Gandara et. al, 1998, p. 10).

4. *Community*: ALAS strived to better link school and home needs with community services. Youth and parents were provided with direct access to a variety of community services, including "psychiatric and mental health services, alcohol and drug counseling, social services, child protective services, parenting classes, gang intervention projects, recreation and sports programs, probation, and work programs" (Gandara et. al, 1998, p. 11).

By addressing the multiple contexts that affect at-risk students' educational outcomes, ALAS was providing an effective dropout prevention program for students who require more support than the average school provides.

The program had high success rates demonstrated by considerable increases in grade achievement, attendance rates, and retention. For example by the end of the ninth grade 97 percent of ALAS students were still enrolled compared to 82 percent non-ALAS Latino students, of which 75 percent of ALAS students were on track to graduate compared to 44 percent of non-ALAS students (Gandara et. al, 1998, p. 13). Researchers noted that although the ALAS program was very effective during the intervention years (grades 7-9), the increase in overall educational attainment was not sustained during the high school years when the students no longer had access to the ALAS program (Gandara et. al, 1998, p. 14). Although academics who have analyzed the program believe that if it had of been in effect throughout the duration of the students high school years, graduation rates could have been significantly raised based on the data during the years of intervention (Gandara, 1998, p. 14; Rumberger, 2001, p. 25).

5.7. CONCLUSION

These community-based programs designed to address the needs of Aboriginal and socio-economically disadvantaged students provide experiential insight into comprehensive measures that have been implemented to increase retention and graduation rates. A number of themes emerged from these promising practices in addressing out-of school barriers for at-risk Aboriginal students: 1) Parental involvement needs to be increased in youths' education; 2) programs should be community-based to increase connection the community, increase access to community services, and promote home stability; and 3) students need effective, individualized, and comprehensive support from family, role models, community members, and the school.

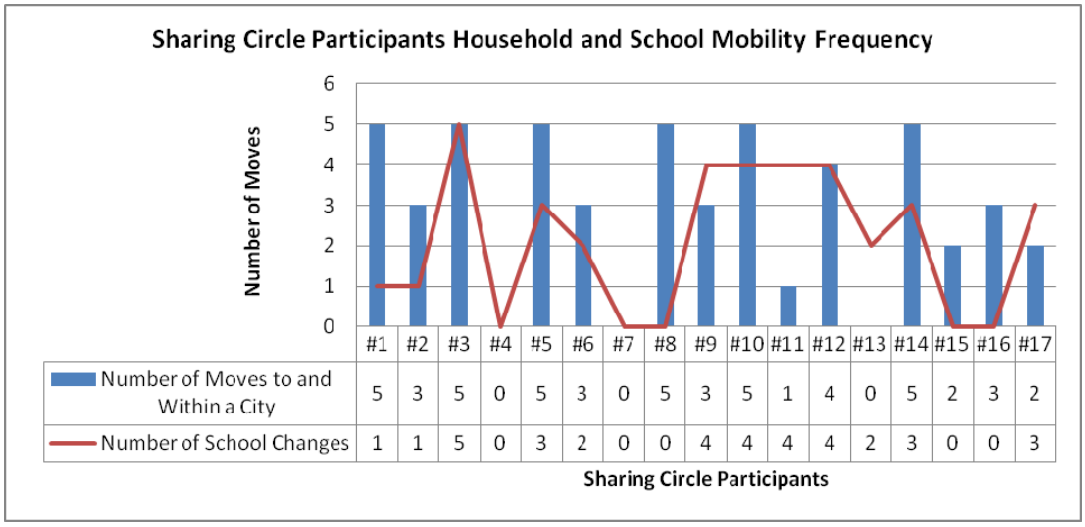
All of the programs reviewed in this section have seen increased retention and graduation rates through focusing their efforts on a myriad of out-of-school factors rather than individual issues, taking into consideration the complexity and inter-relatedness of the barriers faced by urban Aboriginal youth. These programs also highlight the importance of involving the Aboriginal community in the program design and engaging the community in the program delivery to develop stronger roots and support networks for at-risk youth.

6.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS – YOUTH SHARING CIRCLES

This section seeks to provide a summary of findings and a critical analysis of the barriers and needs identified by the sharing circle participants. The sharing circle participants provided a variety of experiences and thoughts about their out-of-school barriers and what is needed in order to address their barriers. The barriers and needs identified by the participants differed based on their individual and unique experiences, reinforcing the notion that the study topic is complex because the myriad issues facing one person are not the same as another person. In fact, one youth identified other urban Aboriginal youth not succeeding in high school as a result of "their own socio-economic and family background, their own history," supporting the theoretical framework for this study.

Five sharing circles were held and 17 youth shared their experiences and perceptions concerning the out-of-school barriers affecting the high school graduation rates of urban Aboriginal students in the City of Vancouver. Of the 17 participants the majority indicated high rates of mobility during their high school years, both in terms of school and housing mobility (Figure 8).

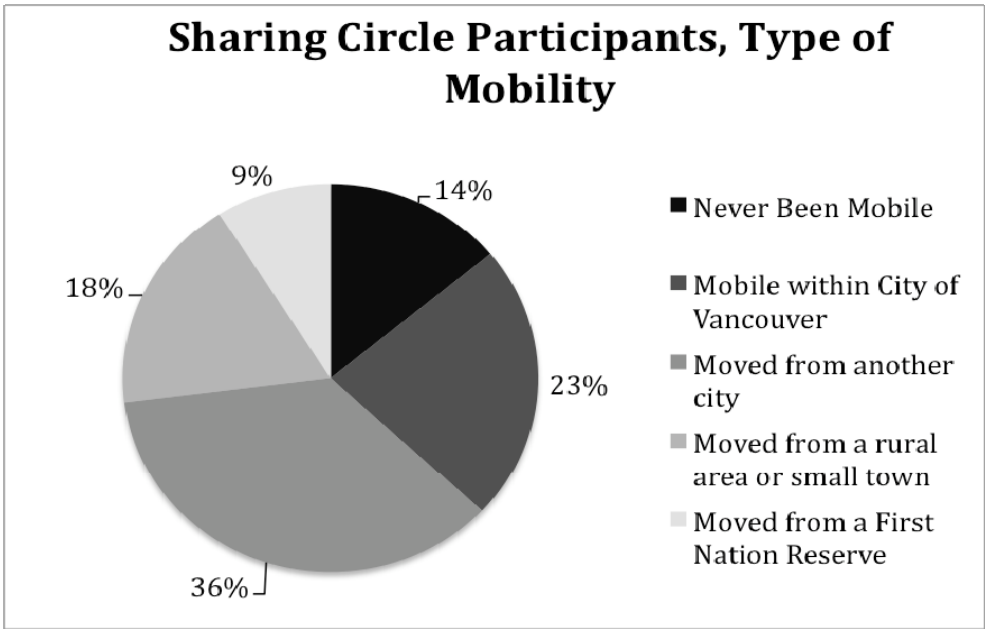
Figure 8 – Sharing Circle Participants Housing and School Mobility Frequency



	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12	#13	#14	#15	#16	#17
Number of Moves to and Within a City	5	3	5	0	5	3	0	5	3	5	1	4	0	5	2	3	2
Number of School Changes	1	1	5	0	3	2	0	0	4	4	4	4	2	3	0	0	3

These experiences with housing and school mobility, associated with the fact that the majority of those who were mobile moved from rural areas and reserves, allowed the youth to provide significant insight into the barriers they have been faced with and how transitioning into new communities has affected their high school attainment. Additionally, as shown in figure 9, the majority of youth were also mobile from other cities, reserves, rural community, or small towns, which provides further insight into the barriers affecting the highly mobile Aboriginal population.

Figure 9 – Sharing Circle Participants, Type of Mobility



Findings from the sharing circles are organized by thematic frequency in the following order: (1) themes related to the out-of-school factors that affect high school retention and graduation and (2) themes related to addressing the identified barriers.

6.1. YOUTH-IDENTIFIED THEMES RELATED TO THE OUT-OF-SCHOOL FACTORS

The research findings supported the literature analysis, which found the barriers and needs are often complex and intertwining. Many of the participant responses from the sharing circles were categorized into multiple themes because the youth associated individual barriers as being the result of another barrier; this re-enforced the literature that often emphasized the inter-relatedness of the different out of school factors. For example racism resulted in behavioural problems and lack of a sense of belonging, while poverty resulted in difficulty accessing services, racism, living in unsafe neighbourhoods, associating with high-risk peers, and low parental involvement.

6.1.1. POVERTY

Youth discussed a variety of socio-economic factors as being the most frequent, and overarching, barrier to their educational attainment in the high school, with poverty itself being the most common. Responses by participants related to poverty were complex and often associated with other barriers. For the youth, the high cost of living in the City of Vancouver and the poverty afflicting their families, due to unemployment, underemployment, substance abuse, or foster care, resulted in early work responsibilities, participation in negative social activities, living in poor neighbourhoods, not always having the basic necessities, lack of transportation to school, being homeless, and feeling different from other peers.

The youth found it stressful to live in poverty during high school because it made them feel different than other students at their school: “I didn’t have enough money; I didn’t have all the

nice clothes like everyone else did. I didn't have the simple things like bus fare and lunch money…It was just being less fortunate and not up to date with the crowd and learning how to deal with that, that was the hardest. And I would say that being on the poverty side and learning to adapt to the social life of high school was pretty tough."

A number also found it hard to see their parents struggle with financial difficulties and in trying to provide the basic necessities, such as clothes, food, and housing. A number of youth indicated that they had to leave school early to obtain employment to either help their parents pay bills or because they were cut off from their parents' welfare payments at the age of 18. While other youth became involved in selling drugs to pay their parents bills or to support their child. One participant noted how emotionally stressful it was to see your parents struggle with poverty, the socio-economic situations of his family was really hard to deal with: "You experience these problems at home…hard to watch your parents go through that. It's pretty tough to look at and you just have to help out."

Many of the youth reflected on their experiences with their families' inability to afford housing or living in impoverished neighbourhoods. The youth indicated that they had to live on friends' couches, in overcrowded housing, or were homeless as a result of the family poverty. Youth also frequently cited their inability to afford transportation to school as a barrier. Sometimes they would not go to school if they did not have money for bus tickets as they did not want to show up hours late for school and deal with the repercussions or embarrassment.

6.1.2. Parental Involvement and Capacity

All of the participants noted the effect of parental involvement and capacity on high school success; while most of the youth indicated that the lack of parental involvement and capacity acted as a barrier to their educational attainment, a couple, who were notably non-mobile, indicated that their educational success was a result of strong parental support. Youth with no parent figures growing up or whose parents had low capacity to provide housing and basic essentials indicated difficulties in attending school on a frequent basis, having an unstable home environment, and having to take on too many adult and family responsibilities that interfered with attending school.

In terms of lack of parental involvement and capacity, reasons frequently cited by the youth were the inability to provide basic necessities, having to work long hours due to high cost of living, having alcohol addictions, living in foster care, and low levels of parental education. Several participants indicated that they did not really have parents growing up and felt they did not have anyone to rely on except friends who, for a number, were high-risk peers. Another youth, due to his parents' substance addictions, grew up in foster care where he moved every couple of weeks and had no stable parental involvement. While another youth who lived in foster care during high school had experienced positive foster parental involvement: "When I found out I was pregnant, my foster mother encouraged me to go to school and my social worker brought me into this alternate program. She also encouraged me to continue to go to school once I had my daughter."

Parental and family substance abuse was indicated as a frequent barrier the youth experienced in high school. For a number of the youth alcohol and drugs had been around them from a young age and it negatively affected their parents' ability to be involved in their schooling. The youth also indicated that their parents contributed their negative social activities and high-risk peer associations because the substance abuse was always around them: "you see your parents drunk or getting high or what they do for a living – what not to do is all that's really there when you're growing up." For many, their parents were negative role models.

Interestingly, no youth referred directly to the legacy of the residential schools as impacting their parents' involvement in school or ability to provide a stable home environment. Although one youth discussed intergenerational impacts alcohol has had on her family: "my dad was violent towards my mom and he did drink a lot, and that did affect me and my siblings, just growing up around that. It all probably goes back to his parents too, drinking. My grandparents on both sides of my family kind of drink and it has affected us because how come they don't help themselves. Why do we have to live through this?" This youth expressed how her home experiences growing up impacted her early high school years; while trying to deal with her family situation she ended up turning to the wrong crowd of peers for support leading to disconnection from school and substance abuse.

The non-mobile youth who indicated strong parental support, had educational success and indicated fewer barriers to their high school education. One youth, who grew up in a stable, traditional family discussed the positive influence her parents' emphasis on education had on her success in school.

6.1.3. Negative Social Environment and Extracurricular Activities

The over participation of urban Aboriginal youth in negative social activities and associating with high-risk peers was illustrated by the youth's comments. The youth indicated that most of their participation in negative social activities and association with high-risk peers is because they feel different than other students and they began hanging out with the wrong crowd to try and fit in somewhere. A couple youth participated in selling drugs because they were in need of money. A common theme that evolved within this theme was that the urban Aboriginal youth felt different because of their socio-cultural, socio-historical, and socio-economical realities and associated with high-risk peers in negative activities to find a sense of belonging.

A number of youth felt that the racism and discrimination they felt, both individually and systemically, made them feel like they did not belong. A number of youth indicated the pressure to "fit in" or "conform" to the general student image, but that it was really hard for them since they felt different than their peers because of their race, their family situation, or their poverty. As a result, they associated with negative social groups to not be alone and to feel some form of belonging or support. Associating with the high-risk peers led to negative activities such as skipping school, selling drugs, substance abuse, and early sexual activity. One youth indicated that the peer pressure to partake in negative social activities was really high and that she did not have the confidence to say no because she wanted to belong somewhere.

All the participants noted strong presence of drugs and alcohol in their high school and neighbourhoods. The majority of participants indicated that their involvement in drugs and alcohol have affected their ability to attend school or do well in school. Youth discussed how their substance abuse began in transition to high school years because it was now an option that was available to them. For some it helped them deal with familial and home problems, for others it was because all their friends were using it too, while for most it was a combination: "I was still dealing with all the stuff that I had to growing up, which I couldn't communicate and I started to get involved in drugs and alcohol. Eventually I got so into it, I didn't bother going to school. Grade 8 I passed, it was in grade 9 that I started just skipping. I started using drugs and alcohol and skipping because of the people I was hanging out with; at first it started off with the people in school then their friends, then their friends. So it just got so far apart from those people to school that I chose to be with those people than stay in school."

The participation in negative activities and association with high-risk peers was even more common for the mobile youth, who did not know anyone when they moved to a new high school. In particular, those who moved from a reserve community to a public school in the city felt high levels of disconnection from the general student population, where they had a hard time fitting in and were subjected to labelling and discrimination from peers. For these youth hanging out with the wrong crowd was better than being alone in a new community where they knew no one. One youth who moved from a small reserve community to Vancouver during high school, attributed dropping out of high school to hanging out with the wrong crowd because she needed some sort of feeling of belonging.

6.1.5. MOBILITY

High mobility rates were common for a number of sharing circle participants. For these youth mobility appeared to have a significant impact on their lives and school success. When mobility was a factor, it was different for each youth; moving from a small community to the city, moving frequently between a reserve and the city, and moving frequently within Vancouver. The reasons for the moves were also different: to attend high school, involvement in fights, because parents lived in different communities, or foster care. Most of the mobile participants experienced 2 or more school changes during high school.

The highest housing mobility rate was that of participants living in foster care. One youth discussed his personal experience in foster care as a cycle of emotional abuse:

> I'd be a month here, a month there; they move you around a lot because they don't want you to get comfortable in one spot or too close to one particular foster parent. So I moved around a lot in Vancouver area. The transition every time was like jumping through the hoops again. It was like a big cycle of abuse pretty much, you go round and round and round again. So after a while I just attending high school was the hardest thing.

This youth found that although he never changed schools he constantly had to deal with moving and unstable home situations, which negatively impacted his ability to do well in school and be comfortable with himself.

Other youth from Vancouver, who lived in foster care, discussed how they were required to move to other cities within Metro Vancouver even though all their support networks, accessed services, and for some their school was still in Vancouver: "I got moved out to Richmond, so I didn't really want to live out there at first. I was like why the hell are you moving me all the way out to Richmond, I'm a Vancouver kid? They said that was the only place for me. I was still going to school in Vancouver." These youth reflected on their difficulties adjusting to the new city while still having to travel to Vancouver on a regular basis for school and life responsibilities.

The youth who moved from small communities or reserves found the transition to the city difficult. Sometimes they would not have a place to stay when first arriving in the city. Other identified challenges associated with moving into a new city and new school was not knowing anyone, losing strong community support, lack of culture in the city and public schools, not knowing where anything is or where to access services, and not knowing how to get around the city. One youth in particular found it difficult transferring from a band-run school to public schools on a frequent basis to the point where she stated, "I couldn't learn" as a result of the mobility. She discussed how on the reserve she had everything going for her, but moving to the

city changed everything; she went from a straight A student to eventually dropping out after falling in with the wrong crowd to peer pressure.

A number of participants who were mobile indicated that not knowing anyone in the city, and feeling lost or alone, led to association with high-risk peers. They also found it difficult to transition into a high school where they did not know anyone, especially if they were coming in during the school year because cliques were already formed and they felt like an outsider. The youth who were not mobile and never changed schools really stressed how beneficial it was for them emotionally that they still had all their friends from elementary school when they began high school. They indicated that this made the transition easier because they were not alone; they still had a support network, even if their parents were not really involved in their lives.

6.1.7. Challenges Accessing Services

The youth discussed the difficulty they experienced in accessing services, particularly housing. This barrier was more common for those who were mobile, were not living with parents, or were teen parents. The youth indicated that it was really difficult moving into the city because they did not have a place to stay when they arrived. They also had a hard time finding affordable and safe housing, and as a result a number indicated that they stayed with a variety of different friends.

In the smaller communities they knew where everything was located; however, after arriving in the city they had difficulty locating services and did not know where to go for help. One youth discussed how the first place neighbourhood he went to and saw was the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. He attributed learning his way around Vancouver to the homeless population. Not knowing where or how to access services was also commonly cited by youth from the City of Vancouver, particularly those living in foster care.

One of the youth, who grew up in Vancouver, indicated that although he had accessed a variety of services for youth, he found that the majority of them were unhelpful because they appeared to be "cookie-cutter" programs: "A lot of these youth programs they are just cookie cutters, watered out, or mainstream; all they want is that government funding and money to come in so they'll take the kids off the street and recruit youth, anything to keep that quota up without doing much, so that they have a job at the end of the day."

Transportation was another service that the youth discussed as a strong barrier directly affecting their education. One youth who was constantly moving every few weeks indicated that he did not always know the bus route to get to school because the route to school was always changing for him. This youth and the majority of other participants also discussed how living in poverty meant that they often could not afford transportation to school because sometimes their family could not afford other basic necessities. If they did not have the bus fare that day, they would simply not go to school.

Other frequently cited issues was not being able to access services because they were too far away, were unsure if they could afford the service, or were unsure if they qualified for the service. Additionally, youth indicated that there were too few services available for youth in their various situations and that the services that did exist were too small or understaffed to be effective.

6.1.9. Loss or Lack of Community Support Networks

The youth who grew up on reserves and small rural communities discussed the strong community support that they had and how this helped them to access services and stay on the straight and narrow." There was familiarity about were everything was located and how to access what they needed. One youth mentioned how on the reserve she had a strong family and friend support network, she was happy and doing really well in school, but when she moved to the city she lost this community, felt like an outsider and got lost on the wrong path because there was no community to guide her: "It was just not knowing anyone, not being connected to anything."

For these mobile youth, moving from a community where they know everyone and everything to a large city where they know nobody was very difficult. When they arrive in the city they no longer have that sense of community. They discussed how this impacted their ability to feel comfortable and do well at school, leading to association with high-risk peers, participation in negative social activities, behaviour problems, disengagement from school, and eventual dropping out.

Youth who were mobile around Vancouver also frequently cited loss of community support networks due to mobility, in particular youth in foster care. The youth living in foster care discussed how they felt alone and with little connection to their new schools and communities when they were required to move to new foster homes because they had no stable support network or figure. They frequently cited the difficulties associated with being moved away from everything and everyone they knew, especially their friends.

Mobile youth, to Vancouver and within Vancouver, also indicated the challenges of changing schools mid-school year. These challenges included not knowing anyone at the new school, lack of information around transportation to the new school, losing established support relationships from staff at their old school, and having little connection to the new school. Youth in these situations had a hard time finding a sense of belonging: "I just started really late so just being the odd person starting in the third term when everyone already started to get to know each other. So I had a hard time fitting in with everybody. I feel like I just kind of went by, did all my work, talked to a few people, but I didn't really feel connected to anybody or the school."

6.1.4. Racism and Discrimination

A consistent theme for all of the youth was the racism and discrimination they felt both in the city and at school. The youth indicated the racism they experienced from their peers had negative effects on their high school education and self-esteem, "there were all the Caucasian people and they had their own group and ways of doing things. And then you get the odd native person come in and they don't know how to react and a lot of insecurities are brought up. It was hard to get used to it, I'd always get angry instead of trying to use my head to solve the problem."

These racial differences and the discrimination led them to feeling different, to associating with high risk peers, to being embarrassed about who they were, and to behaviour problems. One youth really wanted to fit in at school, "I wanted everyone to like me, I wanted to be that popular kid," but when he got into high school he found that he was often the victim of racism and discrimination. While another youth was constantly embarrassed about who he was due to the racism and prejudice he encountered, which led to him having low self-esteem, skipping school, getting in fights, and substance abuse. One participant mentioned that the school seemed very racially segregated, yet the staff did little to change this.

The youth who were mobile from small rural and reserve communities were surprised by the racial discrimination and labelling they experienced when they moved to the city and public schools. They had not experienced the racism in their home communities. They thought they performed well in school in their home communities, they were happy, but after moving to the city they felt like they didn't belong because of the racism; a feeling which a couple participants indicated led to hanging out with high-risk peers, inability and loss of desire to learn, and eventual dropping out.

6.1.6. Family Structure and Dissolution

The youth who lived in an intact traditional family, both biological parents, indicated no household or school mobility and felt as though they experienced fewer barriers to being successful in high school. They also found that they had strong parental support to do well in and graduate from high school, limiting other responsibilities that might interfere with school because often school was held as their first priority.

Participants discussed the barriers they experienced associated with living in a non-traditional family, including frequent mobility, poverty, low parental supervision. One youth spoke about her experience of moving between her parents' households, one on reserve and one in the city, and the difficulties she had in adjusting to life in the city and a new school with every move. A couple youth indicated that they left home at an early age and became street-involved or lived on friend's couches. One of these youth indicated that he never really had parental figures growing up; he had relied on the small community he lived in guide him, but when he left for the city in high school he lost this.

Multiple youth reflected on their experiences growing up in foster care and the barriers to high school that affected them as a result. One youth discussed how difficult it was to be a high school student in foster care, such as living in poverty, but mostly he stressed how he never had a constant support figure in his life as a result of moving to a new home every couple of weeks. His life was constantly changing in his most formative years and he had a hard time coming to terms with this, affecting his self-esteem and personal sense of belonging. He discussed how he was embarrassed about being in a different living situation than the general student population and how this dictated most of the decisions he made in high school, including the crowd he hung out with, drug and alcohol use, skipping school, and getting in fights.

6.1.8. Adult Responsibilities

Due to lack of parental involvement, parental capacity, and family poverty many of the youth identified the need to obtain jobs that interfered with their ability to attend school. One youth who lived in foster care described how he worked a lot in high school to provide himself with some of the basic necessities that he otherwise did not always have. Once his parents sobered up he went back to living with them, but he still had to deal with living in poverty. His parents could not always afford the basic necessities like rent and food: "the bills were piling up and my dad couldn't handle it anymore…I didn't get to finish school I had to go to work early; I had to pay the bills. I didn't have the luxury of sitting around and go to school anymore. I had to get a full time job…so I made the decision to leave high school."

Other youth discussed the barriers that affected students who became teen parents during high school. As low-income, some with very little parental support, youth expressed the barriers and challenges associated with teen pregnancy, including discrimination, judgements, increased out-

of-school responsibilities, and poverty. One youth, who had very little parental involvement and support in his life, began to sell drugs because he needed quick money to support the child he fathered while in high school. While, another youth reflected on the experiences of some of her Aboriginal peers who had to drop out of school because the responsibilities associated with raising a child were too great and they could not keep up with school work or attend on a regular basis.

A number of youth indicated that they had other familial responsibilities that affected their ability to attend school or would make them frequently late for school. Youth discussed their responsibilities around having to watch a sibling or other young relative during school hours because their parents had to work, while others had to take their younger siblings to school in the morning.

6.1.10. OTHER BARRIERS

UNPREPAREDNESS

Mobile youth cited unpreparedness as a barrier to their lives in the city as an urban Aboriginal youth. Youth coming from small communities and reserves felt they were unprepared for life in the city because they were unaccustomed to the high cost, increased access to negative social activities and high risk peers, lack of connection to the land, difficulties associated with transportation, not knowing where to access necessary services, not having housing, racial discrimination and simply not knowing anyone. One mobile youth found that she just did not have enough to time prepare herself when her foster mother bought a new home outside of the City of Vancouver. She suddenly lost her support network, had to change schools, and did not know where anything was located in the new city and neighbourhood.

CONNECTION TO LAND AND CULTURE

Youth varied on their personal connection to the land and Aboriginal culture. Some youth indicated they felt a strong connection to their culture, for example they had creative outlets in Aboriginal art. Another mobile youth from a small community had made a strong support relationship with a staff member from the same reserve, who he had developed a cultural connection with. While another youth indicated that he did not have a connection to the land or culture, but that it was not important to him. The majority of the youth indicated that they felt there was not enough Aboriginal culture in the city or their schools. Students from one school indicated that there are no Elders at their school. Many mobile students from reserves expressed how the culture in their home communities made them feel more of a sense of belonging and that they missed cultural activities like canoeing and being on the land.

BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS

Behaviour problems, more specifically fighting and violence, were identified as barriers for a number of youth. One youth discussed how she left her reserve community to move to the city after getting into a fight at school, while another youth missed a lot of school because of getting into fights with other students. This particular youth grew up in the Vancouver and associated most of his involvement in fights with racism and feeling different than other students because of his family situation. He did not know how to cope with the prejudice or being in foster care. He discussed how using drugs exacerbated the situation and made him more insecure and paranoid. He would get angry and react by fighting and this caused him to miss a lot of school: “I think the key factor for me was being embarrassed a lot and not having the courage to show my face again.”

Another youth described how he was essentially pushed out of high school because of his negative behaviour, including fighting and being a drug dealer. He explained how they graduated him early because of his negative influence and the problems he caused with other students, “I was the bad crowd. I graduated a year early because they basically kicked me out of school.”

6.2. Addressing the Barriers: Youth Perceptions

Sharing circle participants were asked to share their perceptions on what they felt themselves, and other urban Aboriginal youth in Vancouver, need in order to succeed in high school. The youth identified many things that they felt helped them in their high school experience, but there often was not enough of one thing, and many elements lacked completely. Their perceptions of what is needed to address the barriers were a direct reflection of the barriers they experienced related to mobility and life in the city. Particularly they identified the need to increase: support, positive social activities and environments, positive role models, their sense of belonging and self-confidence, parental involvement and home stability, practical work and life experience opportunities, and community-school connection.

6.2.1. Support

Support was the most frequently cited and overarching need that the youth associated with virtually every other barrier and identified need. The ones who were successful in overcoming barriers to succeed in, and graduate from high school, consistently returned to the notion of support. While those who did not graduate, or who are still in high school, also consistently identified the need for more support. In terms of support, the youth needed support on a variety of levels: from staff at their school, parents or guardians, Elders, positive social environments, role models, and community organizations.

The youth really emphasized parental and non-familial support as the basis for success in school, the city, and their lives. The youth find that they do not receive enough personal support within the traditional classroom or school. The youth who attend alternative programs emphasized how more comfortable and successful they feel in the smaller classrooms because of the feeling of community and support. Mobile youth in particular found the transition into schools where there is more personal support easier.

They discussed how having strong support, on a personal level, helped them to overcome barriers, deal with challenges in their lives and make positive changes, “We need more personal connections with who were are working with, so that way we feel like we are valued and not just another student; another person just to deal with.” They also expressed how strong personal support led to increased self-esteem, sense of belonging, and self-worth to live positive, healthy lives. One youth expressed the difficulties associated with attending school as a young mother, including the judgements, discrimination, and extra responsibilities, but reinforced the fact that it is not impossible – especially with a strong support network.

While youth indicated they needed strong support from non-familial figures, this was especially important to youth who had very little or no parental involvement, “just finding that support somewhere, if you can’t depend on your parents you need to find role models or somebody to turn to.” The youth who had dropped out of high school, discussed how their lives have begun to turn around post-high school as a result of developing strong support relationships to overcome their barriers. As a result they have either completed their GED or completed trades programs to live successful lives in the city.

6.2.2. Positive Parental Involvement and Home Stability

The youth related a lot of their barriers to high school to low parental involvement or capacity and problems in the home, ranging from substance abuse or domestic violence to living in foster care or long work hours due to poverty. A number of the youth reflected on how these were intergenerational issues where parents and grandparents are dealing with the legacy of past events and their ability to provide a stable, supportive home is sometimes low. The youth found that this put a lot of stress and burden on them outside of school and dictated the choices they made in regards to school, such as skipping classes, behaviour issues, associating with high-risk peers, and substance abuse.

The youth discussed how they felt that if their parents were more supportive of school that they would have more success in high school. The youth who had strong parental and guardian support largely attributed this to their success in high school, “home stability is a huge factor for success at school.” One youth discussed how she thinks she could have avoided many of the barriers she experienced during her transition stages to high school if she had had a better experience growing up, more connection to her parents, and a better foundation.

A number of the youth felt that it was important for parents to be more involved in school and that building the family-school connection could help to alleviate out-of-school barriers and increase success at school. One youth discussed the how parents need to understand the importance of school and making them feel comfortable in the school setting.

6.2.3. Positive Role Models and Mentors

Strongly associated with the frequently cited need of support, all the youth indicated that having a positive role model or mentor that they could talk to, learn from, and rely on would help them to feel more confident, increase their ability to cope with some of their underlying personal barriers, and succeed more in life and school. In one sharing circle the youth agreed that not having someone to talk to was the biggest problem they faced as urban Aboriginal youth.

The youth with little parental involvement discussed how growing up, with their family backgrounds and problems, all they had ever experienced was what not to do and they never had anyone to push them in the right direction or show them what they should be doing, “I’ve seen things I shouldn’t have seen and done things I shouldn’t have bothered doing.” The youth with little parental involvement indicated that they needed someone to inspire them and to believe in them because they did not receive this support at home.

One youth explained how Aboriginal youth are strong and have the strength inside of them, many just have trouble finding it because of all the intergenerational challenges in their lives, “I always knew that I was strong, somewhere, and I think everyone is like that. So I think they really need to see it in themselves, because it is there. Once you see it in yourself, and learn to respect yourself and respect others, you really start living for yourself.” This youth felt that having a positive role model could help youth, as it helped her, to find their strength and overcome their challenges in life.

Additionally, the youth explained who the role models and mentors need to have experienced and overcome similar barriers to that they were facing. The youth felt that many counsellors and support workers were pushy or did not really understand the problems they were going through because for them it was just their job, not their life. The youth stressed the importance of trust and

having a role model who is relatable, “I talk to him about everything that is on my shoulders bugging me; he gives me all these suggestions because he’s lived the life of abuse, he understands and can relate to the problems I’m dealing with.”

6.2.4. Positive Social Environment, Activities, & Peers

All of the youth discussed the positive benefits of engaging in healthy social activities and having positive social environments to spend their excess time in. The youth noted how detrimental associations with high-risk peers, or the “bad crowd,” can be to school outcomes and life opportunities. They felt from their own personal experiences that they had a lot of time after school and on the weekends when they did not know what to do with themselves and ended up participating in negative activities like alcohol and drugs because they had nothing else to do.

They indicated the need to have more activities after school to keep students away from drugs, alcohol, and high-risk peers. A number of youth indicated that sports and youth groups were two activities they had used to fill their time. For them these activities represented an opportunity where they could get away from the home and family problems they were dealing with, let go of some frustration through physical activity, and just really be a teenager. Having fun was something that they do not always get to do because of their poverty or adult responsibilities. It also allowed them to associate with positive peers and make new friends. One youth also indicated the benefits that sports can have for the health of urban Aboriginal youth to not only decrease drug and alcohol use, but also address long-term health issues like diabetes.

Although the youth did stress the value of these programs, one youth does find that youth programs have been around for so long but the problems facing Aboriginal youth have not changed. So he wonders how much they are actually working. He indicated that maybe new avenues need to be taken to really reach the youth because he sees many of the Aboriginal-youth focused programs to be ‘cookie cutters’ where all they are concerned about is the government funding. While other youth indicated that many sports programs might cost money or that there are not enough spaces available for all youth to participate on a regular basis.

6.2.5. Community-School Connection and Sense of Community

For many of the youth having greater access to community resources and feeling like part of a community was identified with feeling more confident in themselves and feeling that they have the ability to conquer their individual barriers. Youth suggested community gatherings and events that feature student successes and brings the community together to learn and grow. Youth described feeling more of a sense of community while attending school in their home communities because of the cultural aspects that were woven into the school, policies, and everyday life, as well as the lack of racism. The youth frequently discussed how racism affected them and how limiting this through cultural awareness would increase the sense of community and belonging.

Many of the youth stated that they did not have enough knowledge about services and resources in the community, but felt that having greater knowledge about what is out there to assist them would increase their ability to succeed at school. Mobile youth in particular wanted to more accessibility to community services to assist in their transitioning into the City. Some of the youth found that all of the Aboriginal services were too concentrated in one area, East Vancouver, but that sometimes it was too difficult to get there due to difficulties affording transportation or that it was simply too far. They felt that services should be accessible to Aboriginal youth who live and

go to school in other areas of the city. One youth found that she was spending a great deal of time trying to find and access resources for things that she needed in her life, such as affordable housing, youth shelters, and youth programs. She found that this took away time she could dedicate to school and other responsibilities.

6.2.6. Sense of Belonging

The youth in every sharing circle expressed a lack of sense of belonging or cultural identity, which they indicated resulted from living in the city, mobility, family problems, racism and poverty. For the youth a lack of sense of belonging also often lead to a number of the barriers, including behaviour problems, association with high-risk peers, and participation in negative social activities. The youth felt that culturally relevant programs, services, and out-of-school activities help to increase self-esteem, positive social environments, and belonging.

Youth felt that more presence of Aboriginal culture increased their sense of belonging. One youth in particular indicated that although she did well in high school, due to strong parental support, she did not have a cultural identity until University when the opportunities to embrace and learn about her culture were present. This youth expressed how more cultural activities, events, and courses for Aboriginal youth and their families would increase sense of belonging, self-esteem, and connectedness to school, “I found cultural identity at university…it made me feel connected to the school.” This youth also emphasized the need to include non-Aboriginal students and staff in the cultural activities and events to increase understanding and respect.

6.2.7. Practical Work and Life Experience Opportunities

The majority of the youth found that they had little connection to school because it was boring, not relatable to real life, and did not provide them with the skills they needed to get a job. The youth indicate that they would feel more connected and want to attend school if they were provided opportunities to gain practical work and life experience. The youth indicated that they wanted to learn more life and work skills, such as cooking, carpentry, or leadership, and earn necessary certificates such as First Aid and food safe. The youth expressed excitement over opportunities like this because it would help them be more employable.

The youth discussed how hands on learning activities helped them focus and truly learn the concepts because simply reading about it was not effective for them. They felt they needed to physically be shown what it is they are learning about. They discussed how this would make them feel more connected to the school, increase they self-esteem, and provide them with opportunities to increase their socio-economic conditions.

One youth explained how volunteering and working with Indigenous youth from other countries helped her come to terms with whom she is and who she wants to be; it taught her new skills and new things about herself. She thinks that service learning trips into the community locally and abroad could help awaken and inspire Aboriginal youth to see that the barriers they face are not limited to them and that it would help them to see beyond their own home situations, while gaining invaluable skills.

6.3. CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a detailed description of the findings from sharing circles with urban Aboriginal youth in the City of Vancouver. With the situations of each youth being unique from one another, the responses gathered from the sharing circles are broad and diverse. Each youth clearly identified that although the general out-of-school barriers they face are similar to that of other urban Aboriginal youth, they have individual characteristics which makes the barriers inter-relate in different manners than that of any other student. Bringing to the surface once again that the out-of-school barriers facing urban Aboriginal youth are complex. Although the responses are broad, diverse, and complex the analysis of the findings revealed a number of themes regarding the out-of-school barriers and needs of urban Aboriginal youth.

The youth provided their personal experiences and perceptions about the out-of-school barriers they face as urban Aboriginal youth to high school education and what they feel needs to be addressed to increase their retention in, and graduation from, high school. These sharing circle findings are complemented and strengthened by the thematic literature analysis, both of which will be integrated into the discussion of the analysis in the following section.

7.0 DISCUSSION

This study was designed to identify the out-of-school barriers and needs urban Aboriginal youth experience to high school success in the City of Vancouver. The thematic literature analysis on out-of school barriers for socio-economically disadvantaged youth, focusing on urban Aboriginal youth, provided comprehensive understanding of what the common barriers are and how they might affect high school retention and graduation rates. Additionally, the purpose of this study was to identify areas the BC Region - Office of the Federal Interlocutor can work with their government partners and other external stakeholders, under the UAS, to address the barriers and needs identified by the urban Aboriginal youth. As well as, whether the needs of mobile and non-mobile youth are distinct from one another. A scan of promising practices in Canada, Australia, and the United States offered insight into how other jurisdictions have addressed similar barriers and needs experienced by urban Aboriginal, or in some instances urban socio-economically disadvantaged, youth in their jurisdiction. The experiences, thoughts, and perceptions from the sharing circle participants provided additional information to answer the research questions. This section provides a synthesis of the thematic literature analysis, promising practices, and findings from the sharing circles, integrating the theoretical framework, upon which recommendations will be made on how to address the identified barriers and needs.

The literature analysis and the research findings analysis support the theoretical framework that the lower levels of educational attainment for urban Aboriginal youth is a result of the intergenerational and complex socio-historical, socio-cultural, and socio-economical realities facing this population. From the analysis it is clear that many of the out-of-school barriers affecting high school retention and graduation of urban Aboriginal students in the City of Vancouver are resultant of the complex realities. Furthermore, the majority of the main findings from the literature analysis are supported by the sharing circle findings.

The research findings provide considerable insight into the research questions:

- What are the barrier and needs of urban Aboriginal youth, from their perspective, in relation to the out-of-school factors that negatively affect their school transitions and their educational attainment at the high school level?

- How can the Office of the Federal Interlocutor work with its government and community partners to address the effects of the out-of-school factors on urban Aboriginal youth to increase secondary school educational attainment in the City of Vancouver?

- Are the needs to increase the levels of secondary school educational attainment for mobile urban Aboriginal youth and non-mobile urban Aboriginal youth different?

The findings of this study indicate that the barriers to high school attainment for urban Aboriginal youth are complex and differ for each youth depending on their personal family background and experiences. While the findings do not overly provide new or unexpected information on the issue, it does gather community perceptions, a process which the Urban Aboriginal Strategy engages in to guide its implementation in the community.

The youth identified a number of out-of-school barriers and what they feel is needed to address the barriers they are faced with as Aboriginal youth living in the city. The youth's perceived barriers and needs indicate they require stronger personal support, in particular from role models who have lived through similar experiences. There is also a need for more information on

available community and educational services, greater parental involvement, and an increased sense of belonging in all aspects of their lives.

The barriers and needs indicated by the mobile and non-mobile youth were similar. Although, in the sample population, the barriers for mobile youth were more frequent and the complexity of the various barriers was greater. The non-mobile youth indicated more home stability and parental involvement in their individual lives and their education. For mobile youth the need for non-familial support and positive role models is even more imperative as they struggle to succeed in precarious living situations with little guidance. The lower levels of parental involvement and capacity experienced by mobile youth also indicate a need for more information about community resources and services.

Similar to the literature, socio-economic status was identified as being the most important factor related to the educational attainment of Aboriginal youth in Vancouver during the sharing circles. Socio-economic factors were indicated by all participants as being a barrier in some form to their high school success, regardless of whether or not they graduated, were mobile, or had parental involvement. The high levels of poverty for Aboriginal youth in Vancouver, as indicated in the demographic overview and by the data collected in the sharing circles, has a large impact on their educational attainment. Additionally, poverty is related to, and possibly the cause of, a number of the other barriers including leaving school for work responsibilities, low parental involvement due to long work hours, participation in negative social activities, high rates of mobility, living in foster care, and access to transportation.

Lack of sense of belonging or feeling different appeared to be a recurring and overarching theme for all participants. The youth indicated that because of their out-of-school barriers, for example living in foster care, poverty, family dysfunction, parental substance abuse, racial discrimination from non-Aboriginal people, and high rates of mobility, many of them feel different than their peers because of what they are living through. This notion of feeling different leads to low self-esteem and participation in numerous negative social activities in search of a sense of belonging. For many of these youth this search results in them drifting further from school, with many dropping out. The youth also indicated that transitioning into high school was difficult, with it being the time when they started to notice the out-of-school barriers facing them. They began to participate in negative social activities with high risk peers or develop behavioural problems in an attempt to deal with their various family and personal situations. Interestingly, while the literature indicated lack of connection to culture to be one of the most crucial barriers for urban Aboriginal people, many of youth did not reflect much on this point. Yet, the literature does indicate that lack of sense of belonging is often associated with lack of connection to culture, which was highly discussed.

Other major recurring themes, which also coincided with lack of sense of belonging, were lack of family-school connection and lack of connection to the community. The youth need positive role models from the community to help them overcome their barriers and provide personal support in their daily lives, support they might not get at home. Many parents are not able to support their children emotionally, financially, or academically because of the socio-economic and socio-historical realities. Community-school based programs that bring this support to both the parents and the students can help to alleviate many of the barriers facing urban Aboriginal students. Students need support on a personal level to build their confidence to know that somebody believes in them. Community-school based programs also enable students to feel connected and more engaged with their school and community as they feel part of something larger and allows them to learn more about what is available in their community.

The findings from the literature and sharing circles also provide insight into increasing the scope and frequency of initiatives similar to those implemented by previously by the UAS. In Metro Vancouver, the local UAS identified priorities of 'Staying in School' and 'Transferring Traditional Knowledge' have supported initiatives around addressing many of the out-of-school barriers identified in the literature analysis and the by the youth in the sharing circles. They have also included some of the measures that the youth identified would help them succeed in school. These initiatives in Metro Vancouver have reported increases in retention and graduation rates, as well as increased sense of belonging and self-confidence, even though some of the projects are small in nature. Knowing that these initiatives have worked and that they correspond with the needs of the youth, as identified in the sharing circles and literature, integrating more initiatives of these types could help to further address the barriers of urban Aboriginal youth in Vancouver and increase their high school graduation rates.

In summary, the findings have highlighted the importance of continuing to further the UAS involvement in educational initiatives that address the out-of-school barriers identified by the youth during the sharing circle discussions and the literature. The out-of-school barriers and needs identified in the findings are substantial, complex, and intergenerational for both mobile and non-mobile urban Aboriginal youth. By working with government and community partners to address the identified barriers and needs, urban Aboriginal youth in the city of Vancouver will develop resiliency and will have access to increased life opportunities through higher educational attainment.

8. MOVING FORWARD: RECOMMENDATIONS

Urban Aboriginal youth are faced with a myriad of out-of-school barriers that affect their high school graduation rates, with 68 percent dropping out before completion in the City of Vancouver (BC Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 1). In addressing the various barriers and needs, Aboriginal youth will have greater ability to develop the positive sense of belonging that they require in order to increase confidence in themselves, as well as feel more connected to who they are and pride in their culture. By addressing their out-of-school needs and increasing their success at the high school level, urban Aboriginal youth will also have access to greater life opportunities for themselves and their families.

This section provides a broad set of recommendations to addressing the out-of-school barriers, which the Office of the Federal Interlocutor – BC Region can use to guide its work with government and community partners in the City of Vancouver. The following recommendations are based on the findings from the literature analysis and the youth sharing circles, as well as the identified promising practices. Additionally, the recommendations are supported by the previous education-related work the UAS has engaged in; they seek to expand upon what is already known and has been carried out successfully by the UAS-BC Region in the past. The broad recommendations are designed to address a multitude of barriers and be responsive to community needs.

Recommendations:

- Increase family-school relationships and parental involvement
- Increase access to positive role models and support networks
- Develop the community-school and community-youth connection

The programs identified in the promising practices provide concrete examples of addressing the out-of-school barriers based on the recommendations listed above. In particular, the community-based programs, such as Pathways to Education, The Urban Aboriginal Education Project, and the Entrepreneurial Community Schools provide insight into how schools, governments and community organizations can work together to address multiple barriers through increasing parental involvement, increasing support networks, creating community-school relationships, and increasing sense of belonging to achieve increased retention, graduation rates and individual resiliency.

8.1. INCREASE FAMILY-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parental, guardian, and family involvement in youth's lives and education has been found to be a determining factor in high school retention and graduation. Students whose parents and guardians emphasize the importance of education and provide them with strong support have higher success rates, greater sense of belonging, and decreased participation in negative social activities with high-risk peers. As a result of socio-historical and socio-economic realities, engaging Aboriginal parents in the school community can be met with difficulties. Many Aboriginal families do not feel welcome in the school or have little knowledge about school processes; personal connection can help to overcome these barriers. Additionally, many Aboriginal youth feel they do not have positive relationships with their parents; youth-parent relationships need to be nurtured and developed to increase positive familial-support.

The high rates of household mobility of urban Aboriginal people have a negative effect on educational attainment due to school mobility. Parents and families need to have greater access to community resources to deter home mobility due to poverty. Additionally, increasing families' connection to the community and the school could help to decrease mobility.

Liaise with partners and stakeholders to:

- Invite Aboriginal families to engage in classroom and school activities, in particular culturally appropriate gatherings to increase student-parent bonding, family-school connection, and student-school engagement;
- Provide opportunities to increase communication and relationship bonding between youth and their parents through culturally-appropriate activities, gatherings, sharing circles, and healing traditions;
- Create parent-friendly spaces at schools to make Aboriginal parents feel welcome in schools and where they can access resources and connect with other Aboriginal parents;
- Develop culturally-appropriate parental involvement and community capacity workshops to increase parents' ability to be involved in their children's lives and education (i.e. traditional child-rearing practices and values;
- Establish frequent home-school liaison support to ensure parents receive personal information on a regular basis about their students' academic progress, problems, and achievements;
- Hold community engagement forums with Aboriginal parents to gather insight into how they would like to become involved in their child's education and what they need in order to achieve this;
- Conduct more in depth analysis on barriers to parental involvement, in partnership with the school board and Aboriginal community organizations;
- Create a parent handbook to outline the educational systems policies, supports, and parental involvement in plain language.

8.2. Increase Access to Positive Role Models and Personal Support

During the sharing circles the youth consistently identified the importance of personal support either from parents and family or from other individuals when parents were not able to provide support. With the support and encouragement, many of the youth discussed how they had overcome barriers and difficulties in their lives. Many youth had also never had the opportunity to discuss their individual problems with someone they trusted or felt comfortable with and wished they had had the opportunity to do so. Strong personal support from even one person can be the determining factor in a youth's success; having someone who supports them mentally and emotionally can help them gain the strength they need to rise over their barriers as discussed by the youth in the sharing circles. Not only is it important for high school youth to have positive role models, but high school youth can learn a lot about themselves and life-skills by mentoring other Aboriginal children.

Liaise with partners to and stakeholders to:

- Increase the presence of community role models and working mentorships in career paths of interest to students;
- Provide culturally-appropriate counselling for students to help students communicate about their barriers and needs;

- Connect high school students, in grade 8, with Aboriginal youth in college, university, and who have entered into the workforce;
- Provide mentoring training and opportunities for urban Aboriginal high school youth to interact with and mentor K-7 students;
- Encourage participation in positive after school activities, mentoring, and tutoring programs with financial incentives, such as bus tickets, lunch vouchers, and scholarships upon completion to help youth stay in school;
- Increase support services for mobile youth transitioning to Vancouver from rural areas and reserves;
- Increase awareness about available community programs for youth to participate in positive social environments;
- Provide Aboriginal community organizations with funding to develop staff capacity to work more effectively in supporting youth and decrease staff turnover rates;
- Ensure every school has Elders involved to support youth and provide more opportunities for intergenerational learning.

8.3. Develop the Community-School Connection, Community-Youth Connection, and Sense of Community

Many urban Aboriginal youth do not have a strong connection to their community, either due to racial discrimination, high mobility rates, or lack of culture among others. The youth who came from smaller communities prior to living in Vancouver reflected on the feeling of community they had there, but when moving to Vancouver they felt little connection to anything or anyone. Additionally, many youth do not know what is available in their communities or how to get the help they need.

Schools are the central foundation for youth in their community; it is a place where they should feel comfortable, accepted. It is also a place they frequent on a regular basis and, as such, has the opportunity to play a vital role in Aboriginal youth and their families accessing services, especially for those who are new to the city or community. Many of the Aboriginal services in Vancouver are located in East Vancouver, but not all Aboriginal students live there or go to school there. With limited access to transportation services and, for mobile youth, lack of knowledge about the city layout, having more localized community services and information on where to access services could help to dispel the challenges associated with accessing community services and programs.

Liaise with partners to and stakeholders to:

- Hold cultural events for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and teachers to increase awareness about traditions and culture;
- Develop spaces at schools to serve as a ‘community hub’ where families and students can access certain community services such as doctors and dentists, and access information about, and receive recommendations on, accessing community services including health services, substance abuse counseling, recreation programs, employment training, parenting classes, and other social services;
- Develop a community support network for mobile students to learn about services and programs in the city as well as to help them orient themselves in a new city and meet other Aboriginal youth and mentors;

- Hold consultations with the community on developing a community-based program, such as Pathways to Education, to provide students with financial, academic, advocacy, and social support;
- Enable students to connect with their community through service-learning and entrepreneurial activities.

9.0 CONCLUSION

Urban Aboriginal youth currently face some of the most challenging and complex out-of-school barriers resulting from the intergenerational socio-historical, socio-cultural, and socio-economical realities. These realities and barriers have resulted in urban Aboriginal youth having some of the highest high school dropout rates in Canada, which decreases their socio-economic independence and self-resiliency throughout their lives. This report highlights the myriad of out-of school barriers and the complexity that arises from their intergenerational and inter-related nature.

This report sought to provide the Office of the Federal Interlocutor – BC Region with greater insight into the out-of-school barriers of urban Aboriginal youth in relation to their educational attainment at the high school level and what is needed to address the identified barriers, from the perspective of the youth. To identify the barriers, literature on the barriers to high school for Aboriginal and socio-economic disadvantaged students was analyzed, in addition to findings collected from sharing circles with Aboriginal youth. To identify measures to address the identified needs, a jurisdictional scan of promising practices was conducted and sharing circles were held to gain the perspective of the youth.

Many of the themes of barriers and needs identified in both the literature and the sharing circle findings complements the work previously carried out by the UAS. It highlights the need to expand upon these already successful projects. By increasing the UAS initiatives to further address the out-of-school barriers facing urban Aboriginal youth, they will be better able to successfully transition into life in the city and into self-sufficient adults. The recommendations made in this paper are designed to address the barriers identified in the findings to increase high school retention and graduation rates of urban Aboriginal youth, while increasing their sense of belonging, self-confidence, and self-resiliency.

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APPENDIX A: SHARING CIRCLE QUESTIONS AND FINDINGS

Part A: Barriers

1. *What are the main barriers and challenges you have experienced in moving to Vancouver from a reserve, rural area or another city?*

- I moved into different places, different cities and I didn't have a place to stay;
- Going into another community or city it's a little harder because you don't have a place to stay once you move there. I stayed with friends who were willing to help;
- I spent a lot of time moving in my childhood in foster care, I'd be a month here, a month there. They move you around a lot they don't want you to get comfortable in one spot or too close to one particular foster parent;
- The transition [*to new foster homes*] every time was like jumping through the hoops again;
- I didn't really have anyone to support me;
- My living was constantly changing;
- The transportation to get to school was the hardest for me [*with every move to a new foster home*];
- The transition from a small place to city school was pretty tough for me;
- I moved about four schools from the end of grade four to the end of grade six. And you know I couldn't learn;
- The racial discrimination I experienced when moving to the city and public schools, the reserve schools were more culturally sensitive;
- When you go into a new city you see the homeless people there. Majority of the time you'll see them first, that's all I knew when I first came;
- I seen all the drug addicts;
- Not knowing where to go;
- The only hard part was trying to make friends and stuff;
- I found it kind of hard getting friends. That was my biggest problem, because I was really shy when I first came;
- I like it better in a small town. I find it nicer, more calm.
- Loss of the community felt in the small town;
- I got moved out to Richmond, so I didn't really want to live out there at first. I was like why the hell are you moving me all the way out to Richmond, I'm a Vancouver kid? They said that was the only place for me. I was still going to school in Vancouver. I just have to wake up earlier. It was distant from everything and everyone I knew.
- Different people, because people in Vancouver are different from people in Surrey;
- Transportation too, it was kind of hard to move around. Especially since I didn't know where anything was;
- I don't think there were a lot of kids in that area;
- Finding a new house, transitioning to a new school, and trying to make new friends;
- Not knowing where anything was and not knowing anyone;
- It takes a lot longer to get to school now;
- I didn't know if my new neighbours were friendly or not;
- Trying to find financial support and mental support;
- Trying to find the resources in the new City;
- Finding people who you can trust;
- Finding a place to live;
- The main problem after moving to Vancouver was figuring out the streets and how to get to places, especially on time;
- Trying to find new places to hang out - there's not many nice areas in the hood *[Downtown Eastside];*
- Troubles looking for community resources and after school activities.

2. *What challenges did you experience in transitioning into a new school for the first time?*

- Not knowing anything or anybody;
- Uncomfortable trying to figure out what's what;
- It was just the stereotypes, the prejudice. Being that native guy;
- Being in a new building, a new school, being in high school;
- Not being smart enough, not being *that* social group;
- End of my grade 9 year I got into a fight at school so I went back to the city from the reserve school;
- Uncomfortable going in there where you didn't know nothing;
- There's always the one bad crowd that pressure you;
- I wanted a lot of people to like me, I wanted to be that popular kid;
- I was surprised at the racism, the labelling;
- I began to hang out with the wrong crowd because I didn't want to be alone
- Didn't have any friends;
- I just started really late so just being the odd person starting in the third term when everyone already started to get to know each other;
- I had a hard time fitting in with everybody;
- I didn't really feel connected to anybody or the school;
- I didn't really know where the school was or anybody there;
- Friends, and depending on during which grade I moved, sometimes it was what we were learning
- Meeting new friends;
- Having new teachers that I wasn't comfortable with and going from a lot of friends to having zero;
- Making new friends;
- Trying to fit in at the new school;
- Just trying to get to know people;
- Trying to gain the courage to not just follow the bad kids.

3. *What are the major challenges or barriers facing you as an urban Aboriginal youth while in high school?*

- I think it's a combination of a lot of things, drugs, alcohol, gangs, poverty, etc.;
- Yea, I think it's a lot of different things too;
- I'd always get angry [*re: being Aboriginal and facing racial discrimination*] instead of trying to use my head to solve the problem. So I ended up getting in a lot of fights;
- Yea so a lot of times I felt like I had to prove myself;
- It was being peer pressured and not having the words to say no;
- I've realized people who are racist and say a lot of stuff about you, they're just jealous;
- I was the bad crowd;
- smoking pot and skipping school because I hung with the bad crowd;
- graduated a year early because they basically kicked me out of school because of behaviour and trouble;
- I was the drug dealer;
- Being in the city there is basically all the drugs, you got to really avoid;
- Housing was probably the hardest, the prices are so high;
- The housing was hard because if you don't have family here and regular connections;
- Being in and out of foster care a lot it was hard;
- My parents are alcohol and drug addicts;
- The poverty;
- Even when my parents cleaned up and sobered up they was still the poverty;
- Not having bus fare to get to school, so I wouldn't go;
- The living that was the hardest [*family poverty*]. Just all the basic stuff like food and rent;
- I spent a lot of time couch surfing, I didn't have a home;

- Money for transportation to school;
- Living in poverty;
- Lived in a park for a couple years;
- Disconnected from family;
- Living in foster care;
- Selling drugs to earn money;
- There were a lot of drugs in my high school;
- I used to think it was bad, the neighbourhood I lived in, because there are so many drug deals and users;
- I really had no cultural identity at high school;
- I was worried about what other people were thinking I was doing or what I wasn't doing;
- I had to worry about the basic essentials before I could worry about anything else like school;
- Growing up in foster care you learn what not to do, instead of what to do;
- See your parents drunk or getting high;
- What not to do is all that's really there when you're growing up [*because of poor parenting, substance abuse, and poverty*];
- No one has the strength or the courage to stand up and say this is what I don't like, this is what I need, or I don't like it when you call me this;
- School seemed racially segregated;
- Poverty and parent unemployment;
- Financial difficulties for my family;
- Drugs and alcohol, been to extended programs up north and on the island;
- Trying to get a part-time job, a good one;
- Transportation is a big thing;
- I find drugs a problem here, too much drugs;
- Drugs are just my problem. I'm trying to get a job and when I have money I just buy drugs. So I just have to find other stuff to do;
- Drugs are pretty common. I got the same problem as him when I get money;
- Adult responsibilities: Sometimes I have to watch my nephew while they take my nieces to school;
- Adult responsibilities: I have to take my little brother to daycare everyday in the morning. He fights with me sometimes and it makes me late for school;
- Hard for my parents to be involved, dad's gotta work and my mom has to take care of the kids so they don't really have time;
- A lot of the other Aboriginal students don't have a strong cultural connection;
- The stereotyping and the discrimination;
- I was at two different parks with my daughter and I heard this one guy saying something like "Oh those Aboriginals they shouldn't be here" and it just really hurt because he doesn't know me and that I'm trying to go to school and that Amber is just there trying to play. The other one was a couple women with their kids saying something along the same lines, and those poor kids are hearing this from their parents and they're going to get the same thought and it's like a never ending cycle, they are probably going to think that about other Aboriginals around Amber's age;
- The discrimination and stereotyping; it's really hard to change somebody's mind;
- So I was really lucky with my foster homes, because I do hear some stories about Aboriginals and how they are put down or left aside by social workers, I don't know where that comes from;
- violence within the home, because my dad was violent towards my mom;
- My dad did drink a lot, and that did affect me and my siblings, just growing up around that. It all probably goes back to his parents too, drinking;
- Both of my grandparents on both sides of my family kind of drink so it has affected us because how come they don't help themselves, why do we have to live through this, what do we have to do, why do we have to do this, and how can we communicate because they are already set in their ways. It's really hard to try and get things out and move forward;
- You have two responsibilities now: you have school and you have to take care of your kid. Also, going through that every day, showing yourself as a young mom is hard too;

- My dad was always working to pay off the school because private school is really expensive;
- I think when we were younger, my parents were really involved but then when we started getting older and trying to live our own lives they got more distant;
- When I was using drugs and alcohol that was my rebellious stage, that was me saying hey this is my life, this is what I want, you're not listening to me, and they *[Parents]* assumed all this stuff from me, even before I was doing it. So it was just my way of saying, hey if you think I'm doing these things I might as well do it;
- I don't feel like I have enough information about services and programs in Vancouver. I'm trying to find all these resources and activities on my own and it's really hard accessing the information and finding them and seeing if I'm qualified for some of them;
- I didn't know anything about anything, so it's really hard to reach out to youth when they're kind of looking for something but they really don't know what they are looking for;
- There are lots of teams, but I just really wasn't sure if I could afford it, so I didn't bother looking;
- Judgement from non-Aboriginal people thinking that everything is just "given" to you and people expect you to spend all your welfare cheques on drugs and alcohol;
- There are a lot of causes to parents not being involved in school: they are not around, depression, uneducated, angry, alcohol and drugs;
- Living in a house with extremely dysfunctional foster care children has really affected me. Having to live in a toxic environment and just the thought of resentment of how things would be if my mom wasn't a foster parent looking after dysfunctional kids;
- Trying to get a home; a place to live;
- Trying to find a part time job;
- Ignorant people;
- It's hard to be taken seriously as an Aboriginal youth;
- Taking care of younger siblings;
- Hard for my parents to help because they have low education;
- The stereotypes that Aboriginals don't finish high school or that all Aboriginal youth drink and do drugs;
- I feel a lot of people have given up on helping clean up the downtown eastside, there are only a dedicated few who make a difference. My neighbourhood shows me a lifestyle I will never live, but it also gives me compassion to want to help the less fortunate.

4. *What factors are pushing pulling urban Aboriginal youth away from high school and causing high dropout rates?*

- I didn't get to finish school I had to go to work early;
- I had to pay the bills, I had to get a fulltime job;
- I never really had parents to support or help me;
- Being embarrassed a lot and not having the courage to show my face again [*after a fight*];
- In high school, even showing up late, I was afraid of what they were thinking, what they were going to say or the looks I was going to get because back then I wasn't as strong as I am now;
- doing drugs like marijuana, it dictate a lot of what I did and how I acted;
- The marijuana was a big one and it always made me feel insecure and paranoid;
- It all added up to a big weight on my shoulders [*drugs, foster care, poverty, racism*]. To where you just wanna go hide in a corner or something;
- It's the poverty too. I didn't have enough money, I didn't have all the nice clothes like everyone else did;
- I didn't have the simple things like bus fare and lunch money;
- Being on the poverty side and learning to adapt to the social life of high school was pretty tough;
- Being less fortunate and not up to date with the crowd;
- I had to go to work and the bills were piling up and my dad couldn't handle it anymore;
- When I moved back to the city with my mom, I didn't know anybody at the school;
- It was just not knowing anybody, not being connected to anything;
- I was smoking weed;

- I didn't care, I didn't have any priorities;
- Work, making the money to help out parents;
- Hard to watch your parents go through that [*poverty*]. It's pretty tough after a while to look at and you gotta help out;
- Growing up I never really had parents and I left home when I was about 16;
- I just wanted it to be over;
- I was selling weed and everybody was smoking weed;
- There was a lot of alcohol abuse going on when I was growing up;
- You experience all these problems at home and they are very hard to deal with sometimes
- Problems with parents and poverty;
- Emotional abuse [*due to poverty and home instability*]
- See your parents go through some tough times, addictions;
- I have somewhat of a drinking problem;
- I think the marijuana played a big part;
- After school parents have to work;
- Drugs and alcohol are always around me;
- I was 17 when my first kid was born, I started selling drugs to make money, fast money;
- because of me dealing with drugs all the time in high school;
- Kids just don't know what to do with their time;
- I was too embarrassed and insecure;
- Quit school to find work;
- I got into a lot of fights in high school;
- Being called a racist slur;
- Being labelled or being embarrassed in front of a crowd;
- Drugs and alcohol are a big thing;
- Youth don't know what to do with their time;
- There is the whole idea of selling drugs;
- Disappeared for a while and it turned out that he was in prison. He had beaten up the man who was living with his mother because the man was abusive. In my class he was a sweet, shy boy;
- The ones who do have kids have stopped everything to care for their young families;
- Belonging was key in dropping out;
- Fell in with the wrong crowd;
- Just being behind, I need to get my grade 10 before I can go to another alternative school;
- Mine used to be from skipping, but I don't skip now as much as I used to;
- Drugs, alcohol and relationships;
- Drugs and other things to do;
- Drugs and alcohol;
- High school was hard, because when I started out in grade 8, I still couldn't communicate properly, I was still dealing with all the stuff that I had to growing up;
- High school was when I started to experience the 'open world.' I went there by myself, went home by myself, I had all this freedom;
- It was just listening to other people's experiences about growing up and seeing their point of view with drugs and alcohol and all of a sudden it was an option, other than just at home like it was in elementary school;
- So I started to get involved in drugs and alcohol. Eventually I got so into it, I didn't bother going to school;
- it was in grade 9 that I started just skipping. I started using drugs/alcohol and skipping because of the people I was hanging out with; at first it started off with the people in school then their friends, then their friends. So it just got so far apart from those people to school that I chose to be with those people than stay in school;
- I think it's the judgements;
- Probably their own background; their own history. They probably have a worst experience than mine;

- Parents using alcohol, or they aren't supporting enough to push the students to graduation;
- Maybe some other Aboriginal students just didn't have that inner strength, maybe they didn't believe in themselves enough that they can actually get there;
- Problems at home, drugs, depression, poverty;
- When you have to work to help your parents pay rent, it affects your school;
- When you are depressed about every aspect of your life, it is hard to care about school or anything else;
- Teen pregnancy, drugs and alcohol, having to work instead of going to school, hanging out with the wrong crowd;
- Having friends who use drugs;
- In grade 10 I skipped a lot because I felt I lost all my friends. I became pregnant that year so I missed I my grade 11 year; now I'm graduating a year late;
- I have two toddlers at home, it was really hard to find a permanent sitter; I missed many months because of a lack of sitter;
- I think a lot of other native students do not graduate because they are introduced to drugs and alcohol at a young age;
- Drugs;
- There is a lot of pressure from society and a lot of Aboriginal youth don't know that they can succeed.

Part B: Needed Supports and Services

1. *Are there any supports, services or programs that you had or accessed in high school that positively impacted you?*

- I participated in a lot of sports;
- Going into high school I was lucky to still have all my friends from grade 7 with me, it made it easier;
- Always had your friends there to comfort you and make sure you're not getting into a badder crowd;
- My dad is really supportive and tries to provide as much as he can, he had a hard life and only wants the best for his children;
- Living on the reserve and going to school...I had all my friends, all the support, I had my dad. I lost this when I moved to the city;
- I never really had parents but the community was there to push me in a certain direction;
- being involved and putting myself out there really got me around the bend;
- Went to a pre-teen centre after school, it provided activities and dinner;
- do a lot of sports;
- I have someone that I can talk to about anything that's bugging me. He gives me all these suggestions cause he's lived the life of the abuse and he can relate;
- I went to a youth group after school;
- played lots of sports in school;
- Sports is a good one, you feel pretty good after it, they got me through if I was having a rough day or week;
- Maybe there could be another way of promoting an out of class/school tutoring thing for local kids to take the embarrassment factor out of the equation. There was so many times when I wanted to go in that classroom but I was too afraid or too embarrassed.
- Sports kept me out of drugs and alcohol.
- My mother was very serious about education;
- My mother really pushed school for me and my sisters. Not going to school was simply not an option;
- I had some really good friends and that made a huge difference for sure;

- I thank my mother for pushing school so much for me as I see that as the main reason for my success in school;
- What I loved about high school was playing sports. I was really into soccer and basket ball;
- I think the support worker is an amazing woman. Students came to her for help with everything and I know she made a huge difference;
- I felt transitioning into this school was a lot easier, because it was smaller. The work was different for sure. Easier to come here, smaller community;
- Transportation is a big thing, but the school gives you bus pass;
- They help us more than the other schools, usually the teacher would be busy, need more one on one;
- I like that this class is small;
- Are able to build strong relationships and connections with support staff and teachers;
- Me and *staff member* are from the same reserve so we have developed a close connection;
- I was pregnant, so the foster mom helped me find this other foster home who took in pregnant girls and she also didn't care about nationality;
- When I found out I was pregnant, my foster mother encouraged me to go to school, my social worker brought me into this alternate program. She also encouraged me to continue to go to school once my daughter was old enough;
- My youth and family worker;
- Teachers;
- I was part of the big sisters – I recently graduated because I'm 19 but we still talk and stuff;
- There has been a lot of things in life that could've helped me, just too stubborn to see it;
- I rely on my mom and dad;
- My mother is really educated and pushes us to finish secondary;
- I enjoy coming to school because I love knowing that I'm coming to a safe, community-feel, and judge-free place *[Attends an Aboriginal educational program]*;
- I attend Red Fox Healthy Living Organization, it has provided leadership training.

2. *What do urban Aboriginal youth need to succeed in, and graduate from, high school?*

- Cultural sensitivity;
- I needed to feel like I belonged;
- You have to have a role model before you succeed;
- I wanted to learn the basics of working, real life skills, things I could use;
- having a big brother or big sister [*mentor*];
- Some sort of role model to get you through those tough times;
- Biggest problem was not having someone to talk to about the difficult things I was going through;
- Someone who actually knows what's going on and can actually be effective to not just show up for the paycheck;
- Someone who could've said, "well I understand what you're saying, where you're coming from, I've been there". They have to have that experience themselves;
- I've seen things that I shouldn't have seen and done things I shouldn't have even bothered doing. If I had somebody to talk to most of my life as a youth I would've been ok and not started doing all these drugs and stuff;
- Skills that will help you get a job after graduation;
- If schooling could present more activities to keep you away from things like that [*drugs/alcohol use and dealing*];
- more hands on things that will actually help more people once they get out of high school, not everyone wants to go to college;
- If someone was stepping in to show you what to do, instead of what not to do, things could be a little bit different;
- Students who come from families who prioritize education seem to have clear goals and dreams;
- There should be events that all students in the school should participate in;

- There needs to be a push in Aboriginal communities to use birth control, condoms and wait to have kids later, the ones who do not have kids are largely going to college or university;
- I found that [cultural identity] at university in the First Nations House of Learning at UBC. It made me feel connected to the school, I didn't have cultural identity in high school;
- There should be more locally developed courses like that [BC First Nations 12], courses that are directly relevant to students lives;
- With the rise of childhood diabetes, I think sports should really be pushed for Aboriginal youth;
- I think schools need to involve the families, bring in the parents and make them feel comfortable in the school setting;
- The entire family needs to understand why school is important and that they should support kids in school but the school needs to support the family to do this;
- Schools should really integrate communities to be a part of the school;
- Hold events where everyone can come and have fun in a drug and alcohol free environment;
- I wish that Aboriginal people in Canada had more opportunities to interact with Indigenous peoples from other countries. There should be more opportunities for Aboriginal youth to have youth exchanges or service learning trips;
- I needed to feel like I was a part of the school community;
- Have more culturally mainstream activities as some Aboriginal kids can have identity issues and if they are shy and uncertain, they may not participate;
- Schools could organize community trash pickup or a community garden. They could visit an old folks home, a children's hospital. This could give the community a more positive view of the school and in turn, give the kids a more positive view of themselves;
- The school needs to host events to get parents to see the talents of their kids;
- A phone call home to get important messages to parents as letters usually disappear;
- The school could offer evening or weekend courses for parents on how to shop to save money and cook healthy and low cost food;
- I'd like to see certificate's brought in, like first aid. Cause I need to work on getting my level 3.
- Food safe, cooking skills. First aid. I think more certificates would be good;
- Having an Elder component;
- Need to stop drinking;
- Bus passes;
- You need someone to inspire you, a role model. Everyone needs a good one;
- Need strong support from at least one person;
- If I had more resources like where the community centres were or maybe even where the school was;
- I think a lot of support is needed;
- Maybe more programs for after school activities to help steer away from alcohol and drug use;
- Maybe some sort of counselling for getting over past issues;
- Just finding that support somewhere, if they can't depend on their parents they need to find role models or somebody to turn to.
- If I'd had a better foundation growing up and could communicate with my parents;
- So I think if I'd had a better experience growing up and more connection to my parents, I might've been able to go through it all with support from them instead of me having to turn to everybody else or myself because I know I did turn to the wrong people.
- Maybe if I was told about some services, because when I was younger all I really knew was the teen centre and that's just another place for people to hang out;
- I didn't know about any shelters that youth could've gone to or any other programs that youth could participate in;
- We need more personal connections with who were are working with, so that way we feel like we are valued and not just another student; another person just to deal with;
- I don't think there is enough Aboriginal culture with the city or the school;
- I don't think there is much out there [*culture*], my brother goes to Britannia and he doesn't really participate much and my sister says there aren't a lot of Aboriginal activities at Van Tech, and that's probably one of the better ones. But outside of that what about all the other schools?

- I think we need more access to resources;
- I'm trying to find housing, so I looked into Lu'ma Housing and Native housing, but I haven't heard yet. I guess they need more help;
- Maybe the Friendship centre and UNYA too they need more people to help with the programs and branch out from just the few areas that there are. Because compared to the whole city of Vancouver it's just one little area and there are a whole bunch of Aboriginals out there. It's really hard for people to access them because maybe they live too far or maybe they are too full;
- I always knew that I was strong, somewhere, and I think everyone is like that. So I think they really need to see it in themselves, because it is there. Once you see it in yourself, and learn to respect yourself and respect others, you really start living for yourself – instead of depending on other people because you really don't need it;
- A lot of parents are still healing and they are all at different levels. Many of them have no trust in the education system and understandably so. You have to look at each person individually on a personal level, but it's hard because there is a lot of hurt;
- Having someone to help you when you move to a new school would help the transition;
- A good home with no drugs and no alcoholics, but with love and tolerance;
- Have difficulties accessing information about services and for obtaining things I need like getting a SIN card;
- Aboriginal youth need to help each other at school;
- Getting to the programs is really difficult in Vancouver *[transportation]*;
- Need better friends and more self-confidence;
- Having access to free transit would have made transitioning into a new school and new city easier;
- Having snacks available at school;
- More understanding teachers, but who can still discipline appropriately;
- Need more one on one help;
- Need easier transportation;
- There should be more training services and better advertisement for where programs and services are available;
- There should be more safe places like gardens, parks, and sports fields to hang out at;
- More community sports activities.

3. *Sharing Circle participants interjected with thoughts on what is NOT working.*

- There were counsellors but that's a 9-5 job, it's just a job to them, there was no one that really cared or understood;
- The program (Aboriginal support centre) was for sure better than nothing but I am not sure about its long term stability. It just didn't seem like the rest of the school was on board to help;
- The whole sport thing and youth after school hangouts have been killed and played out; they've been using those ideas for so long;
- I think Aboriginal programs like [support centre] this must be integrated into the school better;
- I know counsellors try helping but then they seem too pushy or too forward where it doesn't seem like help anymore.