

**Kwin Tsaniine Das Delh (Returning to the Home Fire):
An Indigenous Reclamation**

by

Molly Wickham
Bachelor of Arts, University of Victoria, 2008

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

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Human and Social Development



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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This thesis explores how the Canadian colonial practice of systematic separation of Indigenous children from families and communities has affected displaced Indigenous people and how grassroots community efforts may serve to bring home stolen generations, thereby re-asserting Indigenous control over cultural survival. Given that the thousands of Indigenous children currently in the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development will grow up disconnected from their communities, this research addresses a dire need amongst Indigenous populations. Through in-depth interviews with displaced individuals, this study seeks to not only illuminate the experiences and needs of displaced people; it also situates this trauma within the context of colonialism. Further, using the Gitdumden (Bear/Wolf) clan of the Wet'suwet'en Nation in northern British Columbia as a case study, this research illuminates how a community can strategize solutions for re-integrating displaced community members as a direct response to Canada's colonial project.

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I have always firmly believed that the battles I face are not solely won by my own efforts. I am fortunate to have a wealth of love and support from my family, friends, and Indigenous community. Many of these people have participated in and contributed to this research. I would like to thank the displaced participants for sharing their time, stories, and energy with me during this process. I continue to be inspired by their strength and encouraged by their persistence. I would also like to thank the Gitdumden community for opening their arms to me and welcoming me home. Without their support I would still be struggling to find my place in this world. I would like to thank my family for constantly inspiring me and pushing me forward as I struggled to make my academic work personal and meaningful. I owe my success to them for keeping me grounded and reminding me that my family is at the heart of my Indianness. Massih to my Mom and Jen for teaching me resilience and the power of Wet'suwet'en women, and to Carla for making this journey with me. I owe a great deal to Dr. Waziyatawin for supervising my work, encouraging me, and challenging my thinking. I also give many thanks to Dr. Jeff Corntassel, and Dr. Taiiiake Alfred for redirecting me in academia, thus saving my Indian mind from unnecessary suffering. I especially want to thank my ancestors for struggling so that I could be here today doing this work, and the children-Samson, Levi, and my unborn child- who make the work I do mandatory and fulfilling.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to those who have left this world without knowing who they are as Indigenous people, and to the children who are at risk of this same fate.

Yuhh

Turn left on the Rocky Mountain road.
Follow your heart through this dark
time, let those family ties pull you in.
Call on your ancestors to light the way
along the rocky riverbed. Listen
for her voice in the waves, guiding you.

Remember, this fight upstream can get to you;
many have forged ahead on this lonely road
to freedom, free from having to listen
to their lies. Tricksters, laughing in the dark
distracting you from finding your way
through this city; back to *keyo*, in
the loving embrace of deciduous leaves, in

blankets of moss, down on your knees, you
remember when you were the stars. Way
back now; we have since forgotten the road
that brought us down, and further... this dark
dream caught so many, they won't listen
anymore. They have forgotten how to listen.

The sweet song of loved ones as you come in;
beaten up, but not down, groping in the dark
your heart summons another beat, knowing if you
can make it around this bend in the road,
your people wait for you to find your way.

So few remember this lost ancient way.
The mountains mourn. Listen.
They long to feel your feet on the red road,
sing those songs- you carry them in
your blood. The words sung when you
were born, bringing light into the dark.

Keeper of the fire, memories of dark
places and stories untold, lead the way
back. Find your roots; wherever you
ended up, you are needed. Listen
to the old ones; they invite you in
with open arms. Waiting, watching the road
for a sign in the dark. If you listen,
your spirit guides the way, back through, and in,
to that place in you where you will find the road.

By: Jennifer Wickham

Chapter One: Awakening from the Den: A History of Displacement

Introduction

Kneeling, I unravelled a homemade cloth ribbon tied with blue string and laid it out on the ground. At the bottom someone had written, "I Remember" and I was instructed to write on it the name of a loved one who had died on the street. I remembered Aunty Joyce. I wasn't there to remember her, but somehow she came to mind and that's what I wrote. I didn't stay at the vigil long; the streets remind me of a different time in my life when I couldn't escape the realities of dysfunction. I thanked everyone for sharing and said I had to leave. As I walked away, I remembered Aunty Joyce; how she managed to buy my sister and me dolls for Christmas one year even though she was homeless, how she always hugged us and told us Jesus loved us, and how we searched for her son for years after she passed. Once my tears subsided a profound thought entered my mind: she never got to know she was Wet'suwet'en. She was never hugged by our elders and she never had a say in our politics. Perhaps she wouldn't have wanted to be involved, and perhaps she had already been too far gone, but now we will never know. I can only reflect on my own experiences of loss, trauma, death and alienation and the life stories I have seen played out over and over again. It's not every displaced Indigenous person's story, but it's mine, and it is familiar to all of us who have been systematically and intergenerationally disconnected from our cultures and homelands. The stories are always similar; it's the ending that must change for us now.

Like many Indigenous people in Canada, my family has suffered some of the most devastating consequences of colonization. My grandparents were both victims of residential school, followed by my older aunts and uncles. When the residential school era was coming to an end, the younger children were sent to white foster homes where many of them were abused, neglected and made to feel inferior and unloved. These schools and homes fostered hatred and anger, which was then turned inward and resulted in the death of five of my grandparent's eleven children. Just recently, after a visit with my great uncle, I was informed of two older uncles who were sent to Le Jac Residential School where they died of tuberculosis and neglect. Luckily, their bodies were sent home, although we aren't aware of where they were buried. They are buried somewhere in our homeland along with the rest of my family that was torn away from everything they knew. Those who did not die violent deaths caused by murder, suicide, alcohol and drug overdose, or alcohol related deaths, have grown up near one another without knowing their siblings and without knowing their cultural values, teachings, or history. Without these things and without a hope of securing a positive Indigenous identity and a sense of pride, for many years our family, as a whole, remained disconnected, dysfunctional, and lost. Yet, the desire to find a place in the world and to find an Indigenous identity has led many of us towards one another. Like others who share their stories here, reconnecting is a process and journey that cannot be rushed and is at times painful, but which is ultimately necessary for a complete sense of self and the strengthening of Indigenous families and communities.

The Research

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the experiences of displaced Indigenous people in order to strategize ways community, using my community as a case study, can contribute to a positive sense of belonging and identity in the displaced individual while strengthening community cultural transmission in the face of ongoing colonial attacks on our families. By community I am referring to the relationships between Indigenous peoples from a particular nation. Jim Silver's, *In Their Own Voices*, describes community in terms of urban Aboriginal people living in Winnipeg, whereas my notion of community is rooted not only in Indigenous values, but specific Indigenous values and teachings which come from a particular geographical place and history.¹ My passion for this work comes from my own displacement and the effects of displacement that I have witnessed in my lifetime. I am not only involved in this project on a personal level, but also on a communal level. I trust that the Wet'suwet'en description of how we are to live in the world, *yinkadini ha'ba a'ten* (the ways of the people of the surface of the earth), is what Indigenous people must work towards in order for liberation to become a reality. Similarly, in *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred identifies a need for youth's connection to community when he says, "Stable societies are secure in the transmission of their culture from one generation to the next because the young people are shaped by respected elders."² Indigenous young people maintain the responsibility of carrying the culture forward, but they can only do this if they have been provided the necessary means to do so such as living the values and culture. By providing

¹ Jim Silver. *In Their Own Voices: Building Urban Aboriginal Communities*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2006.

² Taiaiake Alfred. *Peace, Power, Righteousness: an indigenous manifesto*. Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1999), 29.

displaced people with opportunities to meaningfully engage with their nations, they and their communities can begin the decolonization process together. My research focuses on finding meaningful engagement between displaced people and community, specifically, the Wet'suwet'en community. When referring to displaced people I am referring to Indigenous people who are or have been in care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), or who have experienced urbanization, adoption, or the effects of either residential school or the sixties scoop. I focus my research on the Wet'suwet'en Nation as a case study because, as my own family experience has demonstrated, our nation has taken steps to welcome displaced people home. The purpose of the research process and outcome is to identify the needs of displaced people who hope to engage in meaningful relationships with their home communities while strengthening the possibilities of grassroots frameworks for doing so, and thus, cultural continuity.

In other words, decolonization in this context means that in the face of genocide and trauma to our families, we must work towards securing extended familial ties, upon which Indigenous governance is founded. Wet'suwet'en traditional governance is based on the strength of extended familial ties, which also serves as the lifeline for cultural transmission. Thus, strengthening these ties and the health of our families will necessarily strengthen our ability to govern ourselves in a traditional way. In addition, returning to the values and practices of our ancestors must be a conscious effort, involving both displaced individuals and community. This is so because our ways of being in the world as Indigenous Peoples have been purposefully denied by the colonizers, thus making it necessary to be active and forceful in our reclamation.

In order to understand the experiences and needs of displaced people, it is first necessary to introduce the colonial context. I then explain the research process, and my own background and experiences as a displaced Wet'suwet'en woman. Included in the first chapter is a discussion of what the existing literature says about the impacts of displacement on identity and cultural transmission. Second, I lay out the impacts of colonization on the displaced participants' sense of identity and belonging, as well as their needs and ideas for reintegration. Third, I give voice to my community, the Gitumden (bear/wolf clan) of the Wet'suwet'en Nation, and provide a view of displacement from a community perspective. Finally, drawing on the needs of displaced people and the responses from my community, I provide a framework for reconnecting displaced Indigenous peoples with their communities.

The Colonial Context

First, it is necessary to understand the context in which we must struggle. Colonization, as defined by the Indigenous Governance 530 class, refers to the processes of establishing and maintaining the subjugated condition of Indigenous life.³ Critical to the maintenance of subjugation are institutions such as the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) that continue to regularly remove Indigenous children from our communities and place them in white foster homes. As of March 2010, Indigenous children in British Columbia represented over 54 percent of children in care of the MCFD, making Indigenous children six times more likely to be removed from their homes than non-Indigenous children.⁴ Removing Indian children from their homes

³Indigenous Governance 530 Class. Personal communication, September 17, 2008.

⁴Canadian Council of Provincial Child and Youth Advocates. *Aboriginal Children and Youth in Canada: Canada Must Do Better*, 2010.
<http://www.rcybc.ca/Images/PDFs/Reports/Position%20Paper%20June%2016%20FINAL.pdf>

is a continuation of residential schools and the sixties scoop. The purpose of this continuation is to separate Indian children from the influences of their parents and extended families in an effort to annihilate cultural transmission, thus weakening the nation.

In response, Linda Tuhiwai Smith in *Decolonizing Methodologies*, refers to decolonization as awareness of a time before colonization as well as a critical analysis of the process of colonization.⁵ In order to critically reflect on one's experiences, Indigenous people must seek to understand the values inherent in our traditional way of life and how this way of life has, and continues to be, impacted by colonization. Further, Angela Wilson, in *Remember This! Dakota Decolonization and the Eli Taylor Narratives*, asserts the importance of a decolonizing agenda as, "co-creating a culture of resistance."⁶ This means that, not only must we begin to understand the processes and history of colonization, we must work together to overpower the impacts colonization has on our minds, spirits, and bodies. This research works with displaced Indigenous people and an Indigenous community to identify the impacts of colonization on our identities, our communities, and cultural transmission. As a decolonization effort, this project seeks to illuminate Indigenous people's ability to resist this aspect of colonization and strengthen our communities, thus attempting to co-create a culture of resistance. The decolonization process is central to the research project.

For generations, the colonialists have been attempting to legitimize colonization. This has caused institutions to perpetuate the oppression of Indigenous people. Specific

⁵ Linda Tuhiwai Smith. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. New York: Zed Books Ltd, 1999), 24.

⁶ Waziyatawin Angela Wilson. *Remember This! Dakota Decolonization and the Eli Taylor Narratives*. London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 14.

to Indigenous young people, the colonial institution is MCFD and the individuals who are responsible for fulfilling its mandate. The rationalization continues to be the racist belief that Indian people are unable or unwilling to care for their own children. Albert Memmi, in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, describes this rationalization saying that the colonialist adjusts his ideology to the reality of his life.⁷ The reality is that Indigenous people are targeted by the MCFD because of the racist ideologies held by mainstream society, are deemed incapable parents because we often do not hold up to western society's economic standards, and are forbidden from handling our own affairs according to our traditional systems. Racism, used as an ideology by the colonialist, is tied to the nature of the colonized, allowing the colonialist to use the ideology of racism to justify a superior position resulting in a paternalistic relationship. It is this paternalistic relationship and the images the colonialist has created that this research attempts to unveil and overcome. In this case, the paternalistic relationship involves the theft of Indigenous children from their families and their people based on racist mainstream ideologies and policies, and our reliance on this same institution to make changes in our communities. It is this type of colonial institution that should be challenged on a fundamental basis. My research allows for the development of Indigenous alternatives to overpower the colonial system through the reclamation of their displaced members and the strengthening of community capacity and organization. Although this research is a response to the devastation wrought by the colonial project, focusing on engaging dialogue with Indigenous peoples on this topic, as well as engaging community's reliance on our traditional systems attacks the legitimacy of colonial institutions and works to

⁷Albert Memmi. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1965.

strengthen community capacity to overpower them. Throughout the research process I challenge both interview participants and the Gitdumden focus groups to consider community control and grassroots initiatives in their search for identity and cultural continuity. Further, I have designed the research process to empower Indigenous people affected by various tools of colonization by shifting the focus of regeneration towards Indigenous communities. By doing this, communities can gain the strength and organization to resist the impacts of institutions like the MCFD and regain control over the health of our families through our traditional governance system.

Understanding the Process (Methodology)

This following section provides the rationale behind each phase of the research, beginning with my place within the research process, and how I have sought to use an anti-colonialist approach. This is then followed by an explanation of the interview process conducted with service providers and displaced people. I close with the process of the Gitdumden focus groups. Throughout this section I articulate how this process attempts to empower Indigenous peoples in the process of decolonization.

My Place

In order to fully understand my place in the research, I have and will continue to share my experiences as a displaced woman. It is from my experience of displacement that my work emerges. Kathy Absolon and Cam Willett, in “Putting Ourselves Forward: Location in Aboriginal Research,” assert the importance of researcher location in Indigenous research saying it is critical to know who is doing the research, how it will be

carried out, and for what purpose.⁸ Thus, a proper introduction is necessary. My Grandmother is the late Emily Isaac, daughter of Paddy Isaac, a hereditary chief of the Wet'suwet'en Nation from the Duncan Lake village in north-western British Columbia (B.C). All of Emily's children, including my mother, were stolen from her during the residential school era through to the 'sixties scoop.' As a result, my mother, sister and I were disconnected from our community and spent many years away from our traditional territory.

I speak on behalf of my own experiences as a displaced Wet'suwet'en woman who has also spent a number of years in an academic setting. My community values education, yet they also recognize my lack of cultural teachings. Academic success is also viewed by the western world as a position of privilege and power, yet without relationships within the community, my academic work holds very little weight. Although I was not raised within Wet'suwet'en culture, I was raised with the cultural teachings of the Nlaka'pamux people near Merritt B.C. It is from these teachings that I ground my research in Indigenous values of accountability and interconnectedness. It is from my place as a displaced Indigenous person and my cultural teachings that I seek to reconnect myself and others in an effort to counter the colonial trauma affecting our nations. I believe that every Indigenous person has a particular role, and that, like everything else, we are all connected and accountable to one another. It is from this place of accountability that my work supports an Indigenous struggle for freedom.

⁸ Kathy Absolon, and Cam Willett. "Putting Ourselves Forward: Location in Aboriginal Research." In Brown, Leslie., and Susan Strega ed., *Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous, & Anti-Oppressive Approaches*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2005.

Anti-Colonialist Approach

Our focus must not remain on colonial systems of oppression. Our focus must be on our own communities, utilizing the strength we have been given by our ancestors. In *The Book of Elders*, Janet McCloud offers her own knowledge about young ones. She says that if Indigenous people want their children to have a better future, we had better remember we are the teachers and children learn through example. If Indigenous people want the next generation to resist the colonial system and to live healthy lives, we must show them what that looks like.⁹ Let us not assume the strength of the colonial system. Let us focus on our own strengths as Indigenous people. Similarly, Thowhegwelth, a Haida Elder, looks forward to the day when we will once again have freedom, and the power to govern our own affairs and our own children.¹⁰ She says that the colonial mindset has exploited Indigenous people, including the children. She describes her own loss of identity when she married a non-status Indian saying that she felt she lost her right to her own identity as a Native person.¹¹ Traditionally, it was not the parents who taught children. It was always the grandparents, aunts, uncles and other relatives; it was the community that held that responsibility. Thowhegwelth has been working on challenging the adoption of Indigenous children into white homes, and reminds us that, previous to colonization, there were no such things as orphans because extended family upheld their responsibility to care for the children. Likewise, my research approach challenges the systems of oppression that facilitate the theft of our children and places the authority and

⁹ Sandy Johnson. *The Book of Elders: The Life Stories of Great American Indians*. New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 1994), 62.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 190-191.

responsibility in the hands of our own communities. By focusing on what our community can do I am redirecting responsibility in hopes of strengthening community cohesiveness, the organization of Wet'suwet'en, and initiating a shift in responsibility for displaced people with hopes of creating a model of reintegration that can be useful to other Indigenous communities. In *Wasase*, Taiaiake Alfred discusses leadership and culture with Oren Lyons, a respected "Faithkeeper of the Onondaga Nation." Alfred asks Lyons how he was able to overcome his identity crisis from being caught up in the white man's world of education, goals and values. Lyon spoke of the Elders and the cultural teachings he received, specifically saying, "I had a grandmother who called me back."¹² Through this work, I am encouraging Indigenous nations to begin the process of calling back their lost family and community members as a step towards the decolonization of our families and the liberation of our communities.

The People

First, I share the purpose behind this the interview process followed by a description of the process of interviewing service providers and displaced people. The work, the people and the stories, have all emerged through my belief in empowering and validating the lives of displaced people. Exposure to Indigenous research has taught me that Indigenous knowledge must be a process, and although I hadn't known the full extent of what this meant until I was well into the heart of my research, the interview process was a fine example of how knowledge is created and recreated by people through interactions and relationships. My initial agenda of empowerment began with reflection on my own stories, history and experiences in mainstream society. It was empowering for

¹² Taiaiake Alfred. *Wasase: Indigenous pathways of action and freedom*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2005), 240.

me to reflect on the impacts of colonization on my family and community, so that I might better understand what decolonization requires. I began from a belief that my community has a responsibility to my family, just as each of us has a responsibility to our community.

Since I would be focusing my research on my home community, I began by researching the types of services available to people in my area, as well as urban displaced people in general. First I contacted four service providers, one in Victoria, Prince George, Burns Lake, and Smithers, British Columbia. I have a strong belief in the work that Indigenous people are doing for one another, and while I take issue with the bureaucratization of this work at times, I believe in the intention and knowledge that Indigenous service providers often possess. I was able to carry out interviews with two service providers, one in person and one over the telephone. I spoke with Diana Vantunen, the Reconnect worker at the Office of the Wet'suwet'en in Smithers British Columbia, over the phone, and Peter Morin, the Roots worker from Surrounded by Cedar Child and Family Services, in Victoria British Columbia. Both interviews were instrumental in helping me understand each position and the possible resources available to displaced people. Each interview was partially guided by a set of open ended questions (Appendix A); however, my goal was to let the discussion flow in the direction of the service provider's own process and understanding of the work in which they were engaged. While I was awaiting the second interview I began interviewing adult displaced people.

For many of the adult displaced participants, the concept I was setting forth was nothing new. I had discussed the experience of displacement with several of the

participants throughout the past few years and had been collecting my thoughts and ideas about it throughout my education. It was finally time to take the next steps and begin inviting others to engage in this process of awakening and action. I sent out invitations to particular friends who had expressed interest in the project. After sending my research proposal to various organizations (Appendix B), I received permission to go ahead and post the invitation (Appendix C) for interviews at Camosun College, the Native Student Union (NSU), and the Student Counsellor's office at the University of Victoria, the Dze L Kant (Smithers) Friendship Centre, and the Victoria Native Friendship Centre (VNFC) in January of 2010. I chose to include all of these urban organizations in an attempt to draw a wide range of displaced experiences to the research. I was in constant communication with representatives of these organizations and interested friends and colleagues. My first interviews began in February and were nearly complete by March, with the exception of one adult interview and the youth interviews. In retrospect, my invitation for youth participants needed to be revamped, which was done in April (Appendix D). The new youth invitation posters were sent to Camosun College, the NSU and the VNFC. I ended up with one interested participant for an interview and a group of youth willing to participate in a focus group.

The purpose of these interviews was to become more aware of the cultural needs and expectations of displaced Indigenous people so that communities could work towards supporting cultural transmission in this context. Interviews took place in an informal setting of the participant's choice and were, for the most part, audio recorded with the permission of each participant. This allowed me to be fully engaged in the conversation without compromising the integrity of the information. The interview process itself was

informal although guided by a set of open ended interview questions (Appendix E), allowing for conversation to flow, and for the participant to offer what he/she viewed as important needs of a displaced person. I also offered what knowledge I collected about current initiatives and services for displaced Indigenous people to reconnect with their communities. At this point I asked for feedback on these services, and explored ideas about what each participant might see as a useful way to reconnect with community. After each interview, I debriefed with the participant, in accordance with my own debriefing training and experience. Following each interview I sent a transcription of the interview to participants and provided each participant with the opportunity to engage in a follow-up interview, add or omit information and make changes to the information provided.

The youth focus group was kept informal, was scheduled during the evening, and included a pizza dinner with refreshments. The focus group was also audio recorded while ideas and thoughts were recorded on a flip chart for everyone to view and discuss. This group included five youth between the ages of sixteen and twenty five and followed a circle format, allowing each youth to add his/her thoughts or feelings about any given topic or youth focus group question (Appendix F). I also posted the themes provided through the youth focus group at the youth drop in centre at the VNFC as well as in the community room to allow for youth to make changes or edits to the information.

Throughout my experiences as a displaced person, and my experiences with others, I have come to know that feelings of irrelevance and inadequacy as an Indigenous person are pervasive in our lives. Therefore, the first step in the project was to provide space for their experiences to be heard and validated. I chose to recognize their struggles,

and initiate dialogue about the possibility and importance of reconnecting to culture and community. In a small sense the process validates them as Indigenous people who belong somewhere, and “that somewhere” will be located and sent a copy of this thesis. Absolon and Willett advocate for a process of “re-connecting” throughout the research process saying, “Contextual validation makes our reality, experiences, and existence as Aboriginal Peoples visible.”¹³ In this sense, by recognizing the colonial context, these stories become validated and our experiences are revealed and open to action. By contextualizing the experience of displacement, and shifting responsibility evenly to community, we can begin to understand and move to change the effects that colonization has had on our families and communities. Consequently, each adult participant chose to be identified within the final document and to have their experiences attributed to them. Youth are not identified by name, except for the one youth interview participant who has agreed to have her experiences attributed to her. In addition, copies will be sent to the urban organizations who service displaced Indigenous people and Wet’suwet’en organizations with the hope they will serve as a catalyst for creating a welcoming community. Not only will their stories be heard, but their experiences will also be used to promote action within communities and provide insight into the lives of so many of us who have suffered the intentional displacement of colonization.

In addition to empowerment through the validation of their experiences, these interviews and focus group were an opportunity to name the experiences that led to their displacement. I chose not to spend a significant amount of time probing into the often traumatizing experiences; however, much of the conversation often referred back to the

¹³ Absolon and Willett. “Putting Ourselves Forward: Location in Aboriginal Research,” 117.

weapons and impacts of colonization. These interviews were a source of empowerment through validation and naming of experiences. In “Dakota Commemorative March: Thoughts and Reactions,” Chris Mato Nunpa describes the murder of his Dakota relatives during the war of 1862, and reminds us that like the Jewish survivors of Nazi Germany, Dakota people must remember that their ancestors did not merely ‘die,’ but were murdered. He says, “We must begin calling a thing or act for what it is, to name the crime, and to name the perpetrator.”¹⁴ In initiating dialogue about displacement, my intention was to create a time and space for participants to name what had happened to them. It was about giving them the opportunity to name the processes or actions of individuals or institutions that had caused them to experience displacement. It wasn’t about blame, but recognition. The questions I asked were to invoke reflection upon the systems of colonization, and redirect negativity from oneself or family, to its rightful perpetrator. In a discussion on trauma and recovery, Mary Beth Faimon, in “Ties That Bind: Remembering, Mourning, and Healing Historical Trauma,” contends that if “the core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others, then the first principle of recovery must be to empower the survivor.”¹⁵ The process of naming experiences and reflecting upon those experiences was a central aspect of the interview process. These people shared their stories with me for the benefit of the research and other displaced people while the research process allowed their stories to be heard in a larger, liberating, action-based context.

¹⁴ Chris Mato Nunpa. “Dakota Commemorative March: Thoughts and Reactions.” In Wilson, Waziyatawin Angela, ed., *In the Footsteps of our Ancestors: The Dakota Commemorative Marches of the 21st Century*. St. Paul: Living Justice Press, 2006), 80.

¹⁵ Mary Beth Faimon. “Ties That Bind: Remembering, Mourning, and Healing Historical Trauma.” In Wilson, Waziyatawin Angela, ed., *In the Footsteps of our Ancestors: The Dakota Commemorative Marches of the 21st Century*. St. Paul: Living Justice Press, 2006), 87.

Gitdumden (Bear/Wolf- meaning 'People of the Weir')

The following portion of the research process focuses on my clan (the Gitdumden). I chose to include my clan in the research because, like most other Indigenous communities, we have been impacted by an imposed governance system, which is embedded within the colonial relationship. Here I discuss the implications of this relationship, its effects on communities like mine, and the process of reclaiming authority which I hope to employ within and following the research process.

We must keep in mind that the image and condition of the colonized is a creation of the colonial relationship. Memmi describes the position of the colonized as one that does not allow for meaningful citizenship or autonomy. By being excluded, the colonized loses the ability to govern and hold power. This is the condition in which colonized peoples continue to be subjected to, of which this research process attempts to alter. Autonomy must be practiced, and connectedness must be grasped vigorously in an attempt to resist the colonial relationship. With resistance comes a greater need for autonomy and the power to assert the rightful role that Indigenous communities hold in regards to their children. Does the Wet'suwet'en community have the capacity to meaningfully reconnect displaced people? If so, how can the Wet'suwet'en community reconnect with displaced members suffering the effects of colonialism like cultural identity loss? And, can reconnecting displaced people with community contribute to cultural survival for the Wet'suwet'en and other Indigenous communities? These are critical questions that were addressed throughout the process of my research. Through Indigenous eyes, I can see Wet'suwet'en capacity to reclaim our children in a holistic

engagement with traditional cultural values through research and the development of a grassroots reconnecting framework.

Throughout my journey I have come to connect with the traditional Wet'suwet'en way of doing business. A critical element of this system is the clan system, which makes up the traditional governance system of the Wet'suwet'en. Each clan governs particular tracts of land and families and uphold certain responsibilities to the nation. Focusing on the Gitdumden clan furthered my own reintegration and involvement within my community. I began this journey much earlier the previous year, and committed myself to be involved in our political meetings and clan gatherings. Two focus groups were held in June of 2010, one in Moricetown, which is located in the north-western corner of our territory, and one in Duncan Lake, which is located near Burns Lake, closer to the eastern border of our territory. Each focus group was advertised through word of mouth, invitation posters (Appendix G), the Moricetown Band office, the Smithers Friendship Centre and the Wet'suwet'en First Nation (WFN) band office, as well as via the Gitdumden email list-serve. The first focus group was held on a Sunday afternoon in Moricetown after the monthly Gitdumden clan meeting, while the other was held on a Monday afternoon at the WFN band office board room and went well into the evening. Food and door prizes were provided at both meetings.

Each focus group was set up to communicate the knowledge and stories shared by the service providers and displaced participants. This knowledge was shared with the clan after I analyzed the data. To do this, I contrasted the service provider information from the two interviews and included the roles and functions of each service provider. I used this information as examples for the Gitdumden to work from or with. After re-reading

each interview transcript themes began emerging. I then separated ideas and stories by the emerging themes to present to the focus groups. After each theme was presented, the focus group was asked a particular question related to the themes and challenges presented (Appendix H). Each comment and discussion was documented on a flip chart for all of the clan members to view and reflect upon. The first focus group lasted about an hour and a half and consisted of community members who had attended the Gitdumden clan meeting. The second focus group lasted for several hours and consisted of a variety of community members, including elders and youth. Since the second focus group was conducted in my home community, many of the members in attendance were relations of mine, some with whom I was familiar and some whom I'd just met. In both sessions, we covered all of the themes and information shared by service providers and displaced people as well as documented feedback on most of the questions regarding these themes.

After the final focus group, I was approached by a participant who had wanted to be involved, but who for one reason or another was unable to connect over the phone. He had driven all the way from Smithers to attend the meeting and was interested in doing an interview with me. It was late in the evening and he still had to drive home, but insisted it was no trouble to meet up with me to talk about his own displacement. Several hours later, the research was complete. I was exhausted and inspired and fell asleep that night excited about the work ahead. My hope is that this process was as fulfilling and educational to all involved as it was to me.

Identity, Community, and Cultural Continuity

As I've briefly discussed thus far, Indigenous people and families continue to struggle against colonial domination. Now, I discuss the state of existing literature,

impacts of colonization on our identities as displaced people, and cultural transmission, which is necessary for our survival as nations. It is also imperative to note that many of the impacts I refer to are suffered by all Indigenous people to some degree. I focus on displaced individuals specifically because of my own experiences and the fact that displaced people often experience greater cultural loss, which may come from generations of displacement and result in assimilation.

The existing state of literature on Indigenous people requires a discussion about what Indigenous people can do to ensure the continuity of Indigenous culture in the face of ongoing colonial assaults on our families. Existing research has shown the detrimental effects on Indigenous peoples when their cultural identity is lost or suppressed. Researchers within their respective fields are advocating for policy changes within those fields. While policy changes are needed, a crucial element has not been explored: community responsibility and reclamation of their displaced members. Bonita Lawrence's work is similar to the work done here in terms of identity but departs in *'Real' Indians and Others* by focusing on mixed-blood, urban native people without researching either their reintegration in community or the community's role in it.¹⁶ She concludes that urban mixed-blood identity is critically impacted by a variety of factors, such as location, racism, and connection to native-urban communities, yet does not include strategies for reconnecting. Community connectedness and cultural transmission for displaced people must become a priority for Indigenous communities. My research aims to explore these opportunities by rediscovering grassroots cultural capacity to reclaim displaced individuals.

¹⁶ Bonita Lawrence. *"Real" Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004.

We are all in search of what makes us who we are as Indigenous people, and with that comes the need to identify the cause of the initial loss. As Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel assert in *Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism*, “Indigenusness is an identity constructed, shaped and lived in the politicized context of contemporary colonialism.”¹⁷ The government of Canada has been administering systems of cultural genocide for decades. These are the sites of identity loss for Indigenous peoples. Researchers like Cathy Richardson and Bill Nelson, in “A Change of Residence: Government Schools and Foster Homes as Sites of Forced Aboriginal Assimilation,” have asserted their disgust at the continued theft of Indigenous children from their families and thus, their culture. It began with the residential schools, followed by the ‘sixties scoop,’ and has carried on into the twentieth century where, just like residential schools, mainstream Canadian foster homes do not speak Indigenous languages, do not teach Indigenous spirituality or culture, and promote Christian values.¹⁸ Not much has changed in the last century. In fact, the theft of Indigenous children has increased. There are three times more children in foster homes today than there were children in residential schools at the height of the Residential School Era.¹⁹ To add to this, the majority of children in correctional facilities come from the foster care system.²⁰ The Canadian

¹⁷ Taiaiake Alfred, and Jeff Corntassel. *Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism*, 2005: 597 http://www.corntassel.net/being_indigenous.pdf

¹⁸ Cathy Richardson, and Bill Nelson. “A Change of Residence: Government Schools and Foster Homes as Sites of Forced Aboriginal Assimilation- A paper Designed to Provoke Thought and Systemic Change.” *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 3 (2007): 75-83.

¹⁹ Morris, Kristine. “(A Literature Review) Re-examining issues behind the loss of family and cultural and the impact on Aboriginal youth suicide rates.” *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 3 (2007): 133-142.

²⁰ The McCreary Centre Society. *Time Out II: A Profile of BC Youth in Custody*. Vancouver: The McCreary Centre Society, 2005. http://www.mcs.bc.ca/pdf/time_out_2.pdf

government's policies continue to kill Indigenous culture, which inhibits cultural transmission and the survival of Indigenous Peoples, both physically and culturally.

Impacts

The consequences of identity loss are twofold; identity loss negatively affects feelings of belonging and place in the world, while Indigenous nations and communities suffer trauma and the loss of cultural transmission for generations to come. Just as residential schools were meant to “take the Indian out of the child,” so too was the removal of Indigenous children placed into white foster homes. Y.H.L Brave Heart and L. deBruyn, in “The American Indian Holocaust: Healing historical unresolved grief,” argue that in the case of the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890 where hundreds of Lakota were killed and their bodies piled into mass graves, the effects on the surviving community included elevated rates of suicide due to the denial of traditional grieving.²¹ The same genocidal tools are implemented when children are forcibly removed from their families and families are removed from their communities; removal from family influences assist in the denial of cultural values, beliefs, and language.²² This blockage of culture naturally leads to the negative impacts on individuals who are stripped of the support and teachings necessary to survive such attacks.

Specific to assimilative and genocidal identity policies, many displaced people are further removed from their communities through alienation and invalidation by their own people. Although Indian status is a controversial issue, because of governmental policies on Indian status and its consequent link to identity, it is important to include

²¹ Y.H.M Brave Heart, and Debruyn, L. “The American Indian Holocaust: Healing historical unresolved grief.” *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research* 8 (1998): 56-78.

²² Elizabeth Fast, and Delphine Collin-Vézina. “Historical Trauma, Race-based Trauma and Resilience of Indigenous Peoples: A Literature Review.” *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 5 (2010): 126-136.

here. The question of Indian identity carries on the legacy of genocide and has become integrated into our everyday lives as Indigenous people. In the past the government of Canada has used gender, mixed-bloodedness, intermarriage and urbanization to keep Indigenous peoples at war with each other within their nations and between nations. Bonita Lawrence describes the processes of alienation and division as real consequences with which we must contend saying, “none of these descriptors-appearance, status, or reserve background-are ultimate signifiers of a Native identity.”²³ Rather, they are all part of the “system that enabled Canada to deny and bypass Indigenous sovereignty, by replacing “the Nation” with “the Indian.”²⁴ Today, we see the implications of Indigenous identity played out in the experiences of displaced people, and we must keep in mind that these imposed systems of determining Indigenous identity and belonging have become integral to the way we think about ourselves and the way we determine community and community members. Silver also discusses the reality of urbanization and impacts on identity, yet his notion of decolonization and revitalizing ‘Aboriginal culture’ relies on building urban Aboriginal organizations in urban settings rooted in ‘Aboriginal values’ such as community and sharing.²⁵ Although connecting to other Indigenous people in urban settings can be a critical aspect of finding one’s Indigenous identity, Silver’s work relies on pan-Indian teachings. Throughout the research I specifically bypass the issue with my own community and focus on Gitdumden clan membership, which partially solves our challenges with belonging and membership; however, these issues of

²³ Lawrence. *“Real” Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood*, 228.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 229.

²⁵ Silver. *In Their Own Voices: Building Urban Aboriginal Communities*, 133.

belonging and identity are pervasive in all our lives and must be constantly revisited on our path towards decolonization.

The psychological impacts of identity loss are devastating on a personal level; however, it is also necessary to view these impacts from a community perspective. For each suicide, families are left behind. Every stolen child leaves devastated family members. Every denial of ancestry impacts generations to come and every generation of displacement brings us closer to extinction as Indigenous Peoples. Les Whitbeck, Gary Adams, Dan Hoyt and Xiaojin Chen, developed the Historical Loss Scale and the Historical Loss Associated Symptoms Scale Latent in conjunction with tribal elders from reserves in both Canada and the United States. The losses identified by the elders included loss of land, language, culture, spiritual ways, family and family ties, self-respect, trust, people through early death, as well as children's loss of respect for elders and traditional ways. The historical losses identified included psychological impacts such as sadness, depression, anger, anxiety, nervousness, shame, loss of concentration, isolation or distance from other people, loss of sleep, rage, feeling uncomfortable around white people, feeling as though it is happening again, and feeling like avoiding places or people.²⁶ Whole communities are facing these losses, which makes it extremely difficult for families and communities to step out of trauma and work towards reconnecting to culture and, more specifically, to each other. The consequences of disconnection, loss of identity, and consequently, loss of culture are devastating on both an individual and community level. Death, jail, unhealthy communities and loss of cultural transmission are among the long list of the consequences to displacement. It is necessary to view this loss

²⁶ Les Whitbeck, Gary Adams, Dan Hoyt and Xiaojin Chen. "Conceptualizing and measuring historical trauma among American Indian People." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 33 (2004): 119-130.

of identity on a community level in the context of colonization. To do otherwise would be to lay the responsibility and blame on the individual.

Cultural Transmission: The Colonial Agenda

The theft and imprisonment of Indigenous young people is an attack on cultural transmission. Alfred and Corntassel would say that displacing youth is working in favour of the colonial state as a means to assimilate or culturally annihilate Indigenous cultural transmission.²⁷ It is painfully obvious that it is not working in favour of the children and families in which it claims to serve and protect. The current mainstream system approach is individualistic and fails to consider the damage that has been done by colonialism.

Traditional Indigenous teachings are embedded in a way of life that preserves the integrity of all beings. The transmission of this knowledge has been disrupted resulting in unhealthy Indigenous people, and generations of cultural identity loss. Jeanine Carriere, in “Promising Practice for Maintaining Identities in First Nation Adoption,” advocates supporting Indigenous organizations’ programs of repatriation because displaced youth emphasized that an individual loss of tradition means that every generation afterwards suffers that loss.²⁸ Recognizing that displaced children are at risk of cultural annihilation in the colonial context, Raven Sinclair asks the pivotal question, in “Identity lost and found,” “Who is available to explain that context to them?”²⁹

A positive sense of identity comes from knowing an Indigenous way of life.

When that way of life has been severed, the task is then to reconnect. The Highlights on

²⁷ Alfred, and Corntassel. *Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism*, 597.

²⁸ Jeannine Carriere “Promising Practice for Maintaining Identities in First Nation Adoption.” *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 3 (2007): 46-64.

²⁹ Raven Sinclair. “Identity lost and found: Lessons from the sixties scoop.” *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 3 (2007): 65-82.

the Report of Canadian Aboriginal People recommended three kinds of immediate action: rehabilitation services, prevention services, and continued reform of existing services.³⁰

These recommendations have yet to be heeded by the Canadian government in a meaningful way. By this, I mean that we have yet to see fewer youth committing suicide, fewer being stolen from their families, and fewer being incarcerated. What needs to occur is a change in the way that we think about our community members. The change needs to be holistic. The recommendations of child welfare professionals and justice workers only involve those professional realms. Taking into account a broader approach, Taiaiake Alfred, in *Peace, Power, and Righteousness*, advocates for the regeneration of our communities which necessitates the transmission of culture and the involvement of youth as future leaders.³¹ In order to do this, our communities must struggle to reclaim our lost ones and advance cultural transmission in a politicized context.

Journeying Home Through Clan Meetings

Each time I take the long drive north comfort seeps in as I begin to recognize the landscape. The birch trees, influx of brightly coloured flowers in the spring and summer, and the abundance of wildlife which can be seen from the infamous ‘highway of tears’ where I grew up starts filling me with a sense of home. However, these places hadn’t always provided me with anything positive. For years it was nothing to me but the highway we hitchhiked to get from one small northern town to another, where young Indigenous girls consistently went missing and wound up dead somewhere along the side of the highway. It was such a vast expanse of seemingly foreign life which grew visually

³⁰ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. People to people, nation to nation: Highlights from the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996. http://www.aincinac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sgmm_e.html

³¹ Alfred. *Peace, Power, Righteousness: an indigenous manifesto*.

unscathed by the destruction of colonization although the people who inhabited the villages and reserves around those parts were steeped in alcoholism, violence, and the other social ills that I would learn later in life were common reactions to colonization. This journey is part of my own process to decolonize my life, my family, and my community in an effort to not only survive, but thrive as we once did. When I left the north ten years ago I swore I would never return. Just like anything else in the journey of life, change is good.

I attended my very first clan meeting in June of 2009. It was a meeting specifically for Gitdumden clan members to discuss issues such as culture, land and politics. The Wet'suwet'en nation is made of five clans: Laksilyu (small frog), Gilseyhu (big frog), Laksamshu (Fireweed), Tsayu (beaver), and Gitdumden (bear/wolf). Clan membership is matrilineal and requires clan members to care for particular tracts of land within the territory and makes up a complex governance system which has served Wet'suwet'en people for thousands of years. Each clan is made up of house groups, which are matrilineal, based on family groups responsible for particular parts of territory within our clan territories. Mostly it was a meeting designed to get our people thinking and working together again as a clan. I belong to this clan through my mother and grandmother. Our lineages run matrilineally, but our connection had been severed through foster care, and compounded by Bill C-31 which, previous to 1985, stripped native women of their status if they married a white man. We had lived in Burns Lake- our home territory- for years of our lives, yet I had never participated in this type of gathering. Our Elders were there and many of our extended family we had never met before, or had only known as acquaintances. I saw girls from school who had lived on the

reserve, who I never knew were from the same nation, let alone clan. Back then I didn't even know there was a difference between Indians; they were all the same to me. I wrote a million things in my journal-words, places, teachings, and stories; however, they are just reminders of the places we were that weekend, and the words and stories used to describe these places on our territory. We showed up at a lake in the heart of our territory and got off the bus to eat lunch. One of our hereditary chiefs walked into the woods a ways and came back out a few minutes later with wild celery. He gave us all a piece to try and showed us how to peel it. Later, some others showed us how to identify wild rice and we sat in an old dug out pit in the ground which once housed a Gitdumden family as we cheered for a picture. My mom, sister, nephew, cousins and aunties were there and it felt almost surreal.

The next day we arrived back at the community hall in Moricetown to end the three days of meetings. A relative of ours got up and asked my mom, sister and I to stand up with the chiefs and facilitators of the meeting. She stood us up in the small feast hall and talked about how mom had been taken away from the community through the sixties scoop, and that this is why we had been away so long. She asked that the entire clan to come up individually and welcome us home. One by one, each Gitdumden clan member hugged each of us and said, "Welcome home." Those words brought my sister and me to tears. My mom fought the tears, and I could see that it was only a beginning for her; she had experienced too much pain to just let it all go in that moment. However, I believe the recognition shook her as it did me. Our community recognized us that day, and I suddenly didn't feel like the outsider I felt I was at the beginning of the meeting. Now, people knew who I was, and more importantly, they knew that I was back and that I

belonged there. I felt like I belonged there. That summer we spent a week with our great aunties and the rest of our family learning how to smoke fish. We had a house meeting at my great grandparents' old place on Duncan Lake, which was only my second of many gatherings as a Gitdumden clan member. Along the way I would get to know family and tradition and feel more and more belonging in that land and with those people; it was my land and they were my people. Since then I have participated in two more all-clans gatherings in Moricetown where I would gain recognition while I soaked up the words of Elders and took notice of clan member behaviour. I believe this process of journeying home through the clan meetings was instrumental in the research process and my own process of resisting the impacts that colonization has had on my identity and belonging as a Wet'suwet'en woman.

Chapter Two: Shared Experiences of Displacement

This chapter is dedicated to the voices and lived experiences of the displaced participants who generously contributed their insights to this study. Given the way that displaced people's voices are often relegated to the margins or ignored all together in discussions about how colonialism has impacted the lives of Indigenous people, in this section I have sought to bring their voices to the forefront of the discussion. But, first it is necessary to introduce each interview participant in an effort to personalize the very real experiences caused by displacement. To do this, I begin with what these displaced people felt caused their displacement, the impacts their displacement has on identity and belonging, the importance of relationships, the relationships they've built outside of their home communities, and their needs in building relationships within their communities. Later I discuss the importance of face-to-face interactions as an identified need for displaced people seeking cultural teachings. Finally, I close with the continued impacts of colonization which displaced people identified as challenges to reconnection with their communities. Allow me to introduce the people who have shared their experiences and identified their needs in reconnecting with their cultures and communities.

Shared Impacts of Displacement

"Sounds Familiar"

Throughout the research process I continually refer to research participants as "displaced people," "research participants," and other titles given to those who share information and are the subjects of research. I have chosen to share their words and experiences here as I will share pieces of mine. Each story shared with me was inspiring and supportive as I too have shared in many of these feelings and experiences. Although

my interactions with these people have been inspiring and hopeful, I do not intend to overshadow the trauma and painful experiences displacement causes. I am inspired simply because of the strength that these people carry in changing their situation for the generations to come. The stories are personal in the deepest sense, as they impact the very core of our beings as Indigenous people--our identity--the essence of what makes us who we are. It would therefore be inappropriate, in light of their permission to be identified, for these experiences, which have shaped us and impacted the people we are today to be left nameless, or without introduction.

Meag

My friend Meag met up with me for the interview at a busy little coffee shop. We met each other a few years back in the Native Student Union room at the University of Victoria and spent many blocks of time debriefing about our classes and relating to our shared university experiences. We have since become very close friends and I feel as if we have both been journeying along a similar path. She identifies as Eastern Woodland Métis from Nova Scotia with ancestry tracing back to the Mi'kmaq people. Her family comes from a town called Saulnierville. Her Indigenous roots come from her father's side, who comes from a town called Digby and her grandfather from a town called Yarmouth. Meag was born in Manitoba, but grew up in Vancouver and Victoria, away from her father's extended family and any knowledge of where she comes from on her paternal side. She visited her grandpa in Manitoba a few years ago but didn't find out any information other than the name of the elected chief at the time. She struggles with not knowing her own history and the stories of her ancestors just like the rest of us who have experienced the trauma of displacement. She agreed to participate in this work in hopes that something might come of it from her community--perhaps that I can help her and others like her to reconnect.

Trevor

I visited Trevor at his house after a brutal leg injury on the ball hockey court! He had been holed up in his house for some time when I caught up to him for the interview. We have also known each other a while and spent some time together both at school and volunteering in the broader community. Trevor comes from the Snuneyuxw nation, but has lived mostly in urban centres. Trevor's displacement comes from his continued urbanization due to a lack of a land base and employment within his nation. Although he feels disconnected, he was fortunate enough to have pockets of family around the city who would teach him what they knew about culture and an Indigenous way of life. His journey has led him to be surrounded by his tribal group, which has granted him the access to certain teachings through family, books, and friends. Trevor's story reminds us of the challenges that urban Indians face, and the desire for continued learning.

Margaret

Like my mother, Margaret's mother was a victim of the sixties scoop, which was, and still is, governmental policy removing Indigenous children from their homes and placing them in non-Indigenous foster homes. Consequently, her family grew up not knowing each other, which resulted in Margaret's disconnection from her community. She began reconnecting when she was 18 years old after she graduated from high school. She decided to visit one of her uncles and slowly began to meet other family members and build relationships with members of her community. She comes from the Sechelt nation and has a growing relationship with them and her extended family. We became friends through Tribal Journeys--an ocean-going canoe journey hosted every year by a different coastal nation. I have witnessed Margaret's openness and willingness to share

her experiences and her knowledge for the betterment of herself and other Indigenous people.

Joey

Joey just began identifying as Namgis from the Kwakwak'awakw Nations within the last five years. He says he thinks he started to identify more because he began believing it more. For Joey, being separated from his siblings in foster care and growing up in urban centres challenged his ability to learn a way of life which he believes defines him as a Kwakwak'awakw person. Joey was fortunate enough to maintain a strong relationship with his extended family throughout his lifetime, practicing potlatching as a child, and growing more involved with potlatching as an adult; however, somehow, he still feels hesitant to say, "I'm Joey, and I'm from the Namgis Nation."

Amanda

Possibly the most in-depth discussion I had was with my friend, and roommate at the time, Amanda. We had talked about this issue before during our many long discussions as friends, but this conversation was raw for me. It was also honest and inspiring. I tried to imagine what it would be like to grow up around only non-Indigenous people as she did; she journeys with amazing strength and dignity. Amanda was adopted into a Catholic family at six days old and grew up not knowing her biological roots or any of her history. Since then she has discovered that her mother comes from the Dene Tha' Nation in Northern Alberta and that her father is Métis. Her journey has been to overcome the racism that has existed within her adoptive family and community as well as search for answers about her parents and the nation from which she comes. Like any journey, Amanda faces many challenges in finding her roots; however, as she grows she realizes the necessity of finding out her true Indigenous identity and what it means to belong to a community.

Mel

It took Mel until he was 37 years old to finally feel accepted as Gitksan. Ironically, he has a wealth of knowledge passed down from his paternal grandmother of Wet'suwet'en history and cultural teachings; however, he has been yearning for his Gitksan identity for years. His love and connection with Wet'suwet'en ways is obvious when he says, "The Wet'suwet'en side of me has been instilled in me since birth...an example is my great grandmother Mary MooseSkin Jim. She held me as a baby and sang songs to me. Now I'm older and I sing those same songs and I remember that I was nurtured that way. Songs were given with love." Mel named colonization as one of the reasons why he has been disconnected from his Gitksan side. Among the many symptoms of colonization, Christianity, paternalism and lateral violence were identified as causes. It had taken many failed attempts at being recognized and many years of rejection before he has finally, just recently, felt accepted by his Gitksan chief.

Alexa

Alexa and I sat outside in the sun one morning talking about her history and tackling some difficult, thought provoking questions about identity. She's twenty two years old and grew up in a community she jokingly refers to as a "commune" on the Shuswap River. Her Indigenous roots come from her father's side, and she was raised on the land being told she was Métis. We laughed about the fact that she was eligible for Métis status in B.C-because it doesn't really mean much to her- and talked about identifying as Métis. Although she can trace her Métis ancestry back to the Red River settlement, she remains unsure of what nation her Métis ancestry comes from. Alexa has a strong personality and spontaneous nature. She feels like her Indigenous identity comes

more from practicing the way of life she grew up with, but feels her identity is often under attack in urban settings.

I sat in a circle with five youth for a focus group to discuss their connection to culture and community. Many of these young people live in or near their home communities but still feel a sense of disconnect. One person attributed the disconnection to the effects of Residential School and others agreed. They also attributed their disconnection to a host of problems such as a general loss of culture, an increase in alcoholism, fighting between families and a lack of willing cultural teachers. Each story varied in degree from not knowing anything about their history and culture to feeling fairly well connected to one side of the family's culture or another family member's cultural teachings. Each youth knew what was needed to feel connected, and voiced what was lacking in their lives. For most participants, the desire to learn and connect is present and awaiting action.

Tools of Colonization

While not all of the participants used the word colonization, the displaced adults attributed their displacement to the far reaching impacts of colonization. Many of the youth attributed their displacement to a loss of culture, dysfunction within communities due to an increase in alcoholism, and emotional turmoil resulting from residential schools. They felt that many of these problems were caused by the impacts of government residential schools, which were used as a tool of colonization meant to eradicate Indigenous people. To add to this, youth felt their continued displacement stemmed from their lack of relationships with community members and their location within urban centers. Although urbanization has remained central as an indicator of colonization, due to the removal of Indigenous peoples from our lands and onto reserves, and a barrier to experiential learning, some young people who lived on their home

reserves still felt displaced. This speaks to the breadth of experiences of what it means to be a displaced Indigenous person. I described displacement as embodying a variety of feelings of disconnection--disconnection from community, land, family, or culture. I then allowed youth to determine what displacement was for them and whether or not they felt they were displaced from community or culture. They all felt displaced in some way. These feelings of displacement were echoed by the adults.

The experiences of my adult peers spoke to the genocidal attacks on family perpetrated by the Canadian state that the majority of Indigenous families struggle against. Ranging from the personal to the communal level, the participants have named what they view as the cause of their displacement. Each spoke to the things I have either experienced intergenerationally or have seen the effects of in loved ones. Among the most devastating, the lives of children have been deeply affected by foster care, adoption, and residential schools; all imposed systems of child theft which continue to be controlled and advanced by the state, and specifically in British Columbia, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Each familial experience carries with it growth and learning, but also provided insight into the pain, loss, and suffering through which these wonderfully strong Indigenous people have been struggling. Along with disrupted families, intermarriage has housed the racist ideologies initiated and sustained by the colonizers to oppress Indigenous people. Not only have our families experienced racism, but we have internalized racism, the teachings of Christianity and Catholicism, and have used those teachings against other community members. As a result, whole communities have experienced the loss of culture and land, which is glaringly apparent to those who desperately desire to build a relationship with that culture and land. Whole communities have been displaced resulting in a shared struggle to revitalize the rich cultures they once lived on a day to day basis. For instance, Trevor said that his reserve is now the smallest reserve in B.C due to the ongoing theft of land by the Canadian

government. In addition, the banning of the potlatch between 1884 and 1951 was identified as a major tool used to displace Indigenous people from our cultures. Every displaced person has their own story to share; each has carried the burden of being alienated from their culture, which necessarily requires the courage to embark down an often scary path of vulnerability and learning. However, not only do some displaced people not survive the impacts of displacement, but many do not have the opportunity to reconnect. Some participants are unsure of the exact reasons for their displacement, but make educated guesses. My belief is that although displaced people may experience displacement in a variety of different ways, their lives are similarly impacted.

Impacts on Identity and Belonging

“I used to wish I didn't know that I was Métis because, when I found out, I didn't know what to do with it. I don't feel like that now because I know physically (aesthetically) I could 'pass' in the white world, but inside (spiritually, emotionally, mentally) I couldn't.”

--Meag

Each story took me on an emotional journey of processes, and life experiences. I marvel at the range of life pathways that have been the consequence of displacement and how each individual has struggled to overcome what was meant to destroy our Indianness forever. For example, the sixties scoop, residential schools, and adoption were designed by the Canadian government to culturally annihilate Indigenous peoples by separating Indian children from their families, thus denying the transmission of culture and way of life. For the most part, the negative consequences are familiar to me, but the strengths I have witnessed from all of these people are inspiring. Meag's displacement made her uncomfortable identifying as Indigenous, yet she continues on her search of rediscovering what it means to be an Indigenous woman. Indeed, courage and strength are prerequisites to the challenges that displaced people face on their journey of rediscovering their identities and the families to which they belong. In this section, the displaced people

express the impacts displacement has on their identities and belonging such as feelings of inadequacy from a lack of knowledge, and feelings of not belonging in the white world or within their native communities.

Part of the discomfort comes from 'not knowing,' which is a consequence of colonization that has purposefully separated Indigenous peoples from their histories, lands, and cultures. As previously mentioned, Indian children were forced into non-Indian homes and were often forbidden to speak their languages or practice culture and they were separated from their way of life. Today, we still see Indian children being forced into non-Indian homes or forced to live in urban areas where they are often away from their families and do not have access to cultural teachings or an Indigenous way of life. The consequences of this separation for the displaced participants range from not knowing anything about their history whatsoever to feelings of inadequacy or illegitimacy from not knowing enough. Bonita Lawrence, in *'Real' Indians and Others*, describes this as a negotiation of internal assumptions about identity and external standards.³² For many of the participants, the idea of their belonging and the consequent responsibility of their communities to facilitate their reintegration were foreign and uncomfortable. The humbleness expressed by each of these people could have been confused with the belief that they, as displaced Indigenous people, were not entitled to their culture and communities. Lawrence argues that because of a history of white supremacy and pressure to assimilate Native people, many displaced Indigenous people become alienated from their Indian identity, and, "...demonstrate a profound separation in their minds between how they see themselves, and the "real Indians" they feel they should be."³³ Most of the participants did not feel that being Indigenous meant they had any sort of entitlement to their cultures. Many of them felt that they would have to prove

³² Lawrence *"Real" Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood*, 151.

³³ *Ibid.*, 128.

themselves to their communities in some way in order to be accepted. Joey, for example, who has been identifying as Namgis for the past five years, remains hesitant to identify himself as belonging to the Namgis People because he believes he lacks the knowledge and practice of what it actually means to be Namgis. He sees true Indigeneity as something apart from himself, something which he strives to achieve or attain. This idea that we are not Indian enough because of our disconnection from our communities is a purposeful consequence of colonization. This has been accomplished through identity politics, such as the imposition of Indian Status in Canada, where the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (INAC), determines who and who is not Indian in the eyes of the state. Unfortunately, the imposed band council system receives funding dollars based on Indian status and band membership, which alienates those who are not eligible, and creates a divide within our communities.

However, some participants were very aware that the complexities of Indigenous ways of being in the world were also something their communities were struggling with. Two displaced people illuminated this idea by describing traditional socialization whereby Indigenous societies began teaching young people culture and language from birth. Young people were the centre of ceremonies, participated in ceremonies, and were presented with particular teachings and knowledge throughout their lives. In contrast, today we not only have displaced adults attempting to learn who may not even be recognized in the community, but we also have community practices which are now being revitalized after years of suppression through laws like the banning of the potlatch. Whole communities and displaced individuals are beginning this process much later in the game, and the consequences are that even those who are interested in learning have a difficult time finding the appropriate teachers, or the time, energy and sometimes courage to facilitate the practice of culture.

This courage to learn must push through the anger, pain, and fear that come from the trauma of colonization. For some displaced people, there exists a fear of reconnecting because of the pain and anger that is often associated with the cause of displacement. Amanda says, “I’m still in search of my whole identity.” She carried anger with her and wonders why she was the only one out of her four brothers who was adopted out. This lack of understanding continues to affect her identity and belonging. For instance, Lawrence describes one woman’s transition to her Indigenous identity:

For this individual, beginning to identify as a Native person involved confronting a profound sense of loss and pain, of suddenly realizing that all of her life she had been cut off from her own roots, and of beginning to realize that Native people were *her* people.³⁴

Many of the participants fear what knowing might bring, yet they continue to search for the courage to learn, although as Amanda puts it, “I think I have a slight confusion which will never go away.” Her fear is that things could turn out badly if she returns to her community holding onto that anger. However, the need to know is often stronger than the pain, sadness, discomfort, and fear combined. The people I spoke with continue to search for their place in the world as Indigenous people.

These participants feel the strain of living in between two worlds; not feeling full acceptance in the non-Indigenous world and searching for belonging with their own people. Most of them either completely lacked a relationship with their community or had a limited relationship with their community. Lawrence describes the struggle of a “double identity” saying that although some people feel they belong nowhere, some feel like they’re living in a polarized society where it is impossible to mutually exist as both white and native.³⁵ Trevor struggles with being surrounded by white-stream society and is

³⁴ Ibid., 145.

³⁵ Ibid., 149.

constantly searching out other Indigenous people and spaces. He says, “I didn't really realize the difference between coming from a community where you're always surrounded by Indigenous people and it just made me realize how used to and jaded I am with the whole experience of living in Victoria.” Both Trevor and Margaret have limited relationships with their communities, but still feel hurt when community members don't know them or fail to acknowledge that they're a part of the community.

In contrast, Alexa who has no relationship at all with her community says she feels like she can't identify as being from a particular nation because she knows nothing of the language and doesn't practice the culture, yet still feels more Indian than Métis. These feelings impact belonging within mainstream society as well as within one's own Indigenous community. Similarly, Meag feels disconnected due to a lack of a land base. She identifies with Métis people and stories, but doesn't really connect with the Métis community in Victoria. Alexa, on the other hand, feels more connected to a way of life than to the Métis community—a way of life which is not mirrored by mainstream society. Both women share a common struggle to find their places as Métis women living in white-stream society without feelings of belonging in their home communities. Of course, as we have seen in the range of displaced people's stories, the factors which determine one's knowledge of ancestry are many and are unique to each individual's life experiences and place in the process. Although each participant experiences this process of reconnecting at their own pace, relationships with community have remained a central theme in their process and vision of reconnecting.

Decolonization as a Process of Relationship Building

In order to live out *yinkadini'ha ba a'ten* (the ways of the people of the surface of the earth), decolonization needs to occur at multiple levels simultaneously. It is true that each individual must decolonize from the inside outwards, but we must also work

together for our communal survival. By decolonization I mean the process of identifying and resisting colonial oppression and ideologies within our own lives *and* within our communities. In order to decolonize with community, displaced Indigenous people must begin reconnecting with their communities. This is no easy task. Colonialism is complex and multifaceted and so requires not only an equal attack but a more powerful one. Daniel Wildcat, in *Power and Place: Indian Education in America*, says the biggest lesson is that, “knowledge and understanding come from our relatives, the other “persons” or “beings” we have relationships with and depend on in order to live. And it is through these relationships, physical and psychological, indeed spiritual, that human beings begin to understand who, why, and even to some degree what we are.”³⁶ Indigenous academics like Daniel Wildcat and Vine Deloria Jr. recognize the need for the existence of intimate relationships between people and place in the process of decolonization, and these interview participants who have been given the opportunity to explore their needs as Indigenous people have recognized this same, very critical, element of what it means to be Indigenous. This section explores relationship building with community as a way to resist cultural annihilation caused by displacement.

Everyone who was interviewed felt that relationships with members of their community were central to their process of learning and reconnecting. Alexa states:

I wouldn't just barge into a place thinking that I belong, or wanting to belong and assuming that I could. I would definitely have to have that personal connection with some people.
Probably to help affirm certain things, but that would be a first step.

For those who do have relationships with their families or members of their communities, access to cultural knowledge can be easier. However, when whole families are disconnected, relationships with community members are instrumental in accessing

³⁶ Daniel Wildcat, and Vine Deloria Jr. *Power and Place: Indian Education in America*. Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 2001), 31.

cultural knowledge and family history. For example, my family has been disconnected from our relatives since my mother's childhood. This meant that although we were very close as a small family unit, our knowledge was limited to what my mother knew about our history and culture. It wasn't until we began to establish relationships with aunts and uncles that we had access to more family history and cultural teachings. Even within those relationships, cultural knowledge was limited due to the impacts of residential school and foster care. Many of us floundered our way through this process of reconnecting, children and parents alike. At times there are teachings and knowledge that I share with older members of my family, because the transmission of knowledge has been severed, and it has become up to all of us to support each other in learning. Thus, relationships, whether with family or community, are necessary in establishing a sense of community and creating the circumstances for learning.

Even relationships with the land, which many believe are a central element of Indigenous identity, are incomplete without relationships to community. Mel talks about his recent reconnection with his Gitksan territory and says that when he first ate the berries from the territory, drank the water, paddled, hiked, slept there and dreamed there, he finally felt like he was part of his land and a part of the whole reason why he existed. He says, "The whole reason why I'm a human being, I was finally able to connect with last summer." Yet, he recognizes that this was a part of the process in which he was able to reconnect on his own, but still requires the teachings of his matriarchs and chiefs to show him boundary markers, cultural heritage and how to respect the land. For him, a connection to the land requires that relationship with community and family. For others, a relationship to one community member or connected family member could make all the difference in the world. The reality is that we still live in a colonized world and face all the challenges inherent in that reality. This often means that we must make do with what

we have at any given time, and implement survival techniques we have acquired along the way.

Relationships as Survival Techniques

In order to build a positive Indigenous identity, many displaced people seek out a sense of Indigeneity. Reconnecting displaced family members to their Indigenous identities includes reconnecting with community, land, and culture. However, many of my friends find that their location and disconnection necessarily inhibits these desired relationships with community and land. Therefore, many displaced people seek out alternatives. I see these alternatives to relationships with their own community and land as survival techniques. Many of the participants also view these relationships and the experiences derived from them as safe ways to nurture a sense of cultural belonging. Lawrence argues that urban cultural settings “function as replacements for the land base to which urban Native identity can be nurtured and freely expressed.”³⁷ Often, survival as an Indigenous person depends on these spaces of Indigeneity and the relationships built with other Indigenous people. They provide strength and motivation to seek out our own cultural teachings and practices.

One of the main themes emerging from the stories shared with me is that this search for identity is an ongoing process. As previously discussed, being uncomfortable with one's Indian identity is one consequence of displacement which can impact the process of reconnecting. Feeling safe and comfortable with Indigenous people can be facilitated through interactions with other Indigenous people and communities. For example, Amanda describes her experience growing up in a non-Indigenous family, surrounded by non-Indigenous people. She tells me that she was the only native kid in her private Catholic school growing up except for two twins who she felt were very “well to

³⁷ Lawrence. “Real” Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood, 169.

do,” and with whom she had no connection at all. She expressed her gratitude for working and living in Coast Salish territory, and how she feels really comfortable here. Amanda's experience with the Coast Salish community helps in her own process of reconnecting with culture. She says,

They basically gave me a strength and courage that I never thought I had, especially when it focused on an Indigenous side or an Indigenous identity. And I know that, from here, I will probably want to go back, but it's hard to say what I would want from them. That's the thing. I think I would probably want what I had here, you know. Like support and leadership and guidance, friendships, and family maybe; recreate a community. I don't know because community could be almost anything. Acceptance; acceptance would be a huge one. Being a middle person all the time, it's always difficult to be entirely accepted.

Amanda's relationship with the Coast Salish community has opened doors for her, and given her the strength to carry on in search of her own identity. She compares her relationship with the local people to the experience she had with the remote Fort Good Hope Dene community in the Northwest Territories saying,

It's that kind of relationship where you feel extremely accepted and they love you and they care about you but they're not immediate family you know? It's kind of that analogy where your immediate family would do absolutely anything that you wanted. Anything in the world that you wanted they would be there for, sort of thing. That was kind of what it was like with the whole community. And here it's kind of like, you know your second cousin and they love you and want to guide you and they want to help you out and show you the way, but you're also independent.

Although her connection with Fort Good Hope only lasted a short while, she felt like that connection could be the kind of acceptance she might find from her own community. In Fort Good Hope the community began to trust her and become comfortable enough with her to call it her home. Like many relationships with Indigenous people or community, the rewards are often what keep us going when mainstream reality becomes unbearable, and yet, the void from our displacement continues to propel us towards the unknown. In

other words, although we often feel great comfort and acceptance within a certain relationship or setting, the feelings caused by displacement require a real connection with our heritage. Margaret says that, “just being around other native people really also contributed to me wanting to further my exploration in my own culture from Sechelt and exploration within my family.” Trevor agrees saying “what works for me is being around other Indigenous people in a community.” The relationships we build with Indigenous people in urban settings are what keep us going in many instances.

Everyone wanted to be around other Indigenous people and being exposed to cultural teachings and ceremony has been invaluable in the process of learning and reconnecting with an Indigenous identity. A number of the participants have shared in Tribal Journeys--an ocean-going canoe journey which happens every year on the West Coast of Canada and the United States. My involvement began with the Victoria Native Friendship Centre and has changed the way I view my relationship to land and culture. My first journey awakened within me an urgency to learn my own culture and to become steeped in my own teachings and relationships with my territory. It exposed me to a different way of life--an Indigenous way of life. Although this journey is a coastal cultural event, it impacted me in a very profound way and helped me along my own path. Meag and I both shared our first journey together. When I asked her about her connection with other Indigenous communities, she spoke about Tribal Journeys and said, “I think that feeds some sort of emptiness, a waiting for something that I don't know how to describe. It feels like that's what I'm supposed to be doing.” She wasn't aware that paddling was a part of her ancestry until just before her first journey, stating, “Métis people were excellent paddlers.” She says she feels safe and connected through her interaction with Tribal Journeys and the urban native community. Similarly, many of the youth had also participated in Tribal Journeys and have said that this type of interaction has created opportunities for reconnecting with family along the way.

Although there is no substitute for one's own teachings and territory from which those teachings emerge, Lawrence asserts that, "the kinds of life experiences that shape urban mixed-blood Native identity are highly contingent on the kinds of urban spaces that constitute their homes."³⁸ Although many of the participants in Lawrence's study on urban mixed-blood people found comfort in Native traditions, many questioned whether or not urban traditions were adequate in cultural teachings from specific nations. One woman said, "I think urban traditionalism should be used as a stepping stone. It will give you strength to realize who you are. But use that to find out where you're from. Use that, you know, to find out who you REALLY are."³⁹ Meag agreed saying that she wants to know her own specific teachings, and isn't interested in pan-Indian teachings. As these displaced Indigenous people have attested to, the mere space to be Indigenous and to physically see other Indigenous people is critical to their survival as Indigenous people; however, it does not fulfill the void caused by not knowing one's own cultural teachings. Lawrence agrees that although urban communities are vital in the survival of Indigenous identities, there remains a need to develop connections to on-reserve communities and emphasize collective values in order to address realities such as language loss and barriers to cultural transmission.⁴⁰ As a result of this thinking, these displaced people have named the types of relationships they need from their home communities.

Building New Relationships

As previously discussed, displaced Indigenous people seek acceptance and belonging within their own communities in order to build a healthy Indigenous identity. These people have identified the need to build relationships with family and community members as necessary for them to carry on with their process of reconnecting, regardless

³⁸ Ibid., 8.

³⁹ Ibid., 164.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 170.

of how far along they've already come. The ways we go about initiating these relationships depend on past experiences and the ease with which we relate to other Indigenous people and cultures. I asked Meag what she would like her community to do to facilitate her reintegration and she said, "Exactly what they normally do. It's not a crash course, it's a lifelong journey." She adds that she has no idea what a relationship with her community would look like, except that she believes it will just evolve in a natural way once communication begins. Most of the participants are ready to take the plunge and only need a contact person to whom they can reach out, whereas a few others are more cautious and would move more slowly towards reconnecting.

The following ideas have been identified by the displaced participants as necessary initiatives in the process of building and maintaining relationships with their communities. These themes are also further discussed in chapter four within a framework for reconnecting. As you will see, these initiatives are actions and behaviors that every community is capable of. They do not require a lot of time or money, yet can be life changing for community members who have never experienced communication with their community, acceptance, or welcoming.

Communication

Communication was viewed as a critical aspect of building new relationships and reconnecting. The willingness of the community or family members to reach out to these displaced people was identified as a way to show initiative and acceptance. The participants recognized that building new relationships and building trust between themselves and their communities would take time, and could only be facilitated through communication. Some participants felt like a phone call could have made all the difference in the world; an invitation to an event where relationships could be fostered, or a newsletter with updates on what's going on with the community were identified by all

of the displaced people as ways that communication could happen without a lot of effort by the community or a lot of money. The youth identified weekly talking circles for displaced people who are near their communities. An invitation to a talking circle amongst youth and community would help youth to feel heard and important. They voiced that they would like to have their input considered and give direction on youth initiatives happening in the community. Meag feels like keeping the communication ongoing after initial contact could have made a huge difference for her. When she had originally called her band and applied for her Métis status, she felt as if she were saying, “I’m part of you,” yet she wasn’t met with a response that made her feel as if she really was. It is at these critical points that ongoing communication, along with acceptance and support is required for feelings of belonging to be fostered.

Acceptance and Support

Each participant spoke of acceptance and support from the community as ways that relationships with community would thrive. After all, acceptance is necessary for belonging, which is exactly what each of these people is seeking. Amanda feels as though she might find an unrestrained acceptance from her home community similar to what she felt from the Dene community in Fort Good Hope. When I asked Meag what her community could do to support her reintegration she said that support necessarily comes from acceptance. She wants her community to say, “We’re happy you’re home, and it’s O.K.” For most people, showing acceptance is a huge element of support. For instance, Mel talked about how a motion for him to come over was central in feeling recognized and accepted as Gitxsan. After years of being ignored at meetings within the Gitxsan community, his clan chief finally motioned him over to speak with them. He felt like he was born that day; it was his first day as Gitxsan. Mel’s story reminded me of how I was stood up with our clan chiefs and recognized as Gitdumden. These experiences brought us both to tears, and have changed something in us forever.

The youth also felt that acceptance should be included in supporting reintegration. They spoke about the need for their communities to be inclusive. They felt that because of family feuds within, and old quarrels between, communities, some people were excluded and deemed less important as others. They would like to see everyone included despite what family they belong to or what political position they hold. Another identified support was counseling to deal with the effects of residential schools, which they see as part of why their communities are so divided. In addition, they identified culture based self-esteem groups and suicide prevention as ways community could support youth through reintegration.

Welcoming

The experience of being formally recognized by my clan members dramatically altered my sense of belonging within the Wet'suwet'en community. Not only was the displacement of my family acknowledged by the community, but it was as if a door had opened and with it came the responsibility to be more active in the community. Since then, my participation in culture and politics has increased and my knowledge of Wet'suwet'en culture and history is exponentially greater than anything I had learned throughout my whole lifetime about who we are as Wet'suwet'en. Previous to this experience, I relied on outside sources for knowledge about my people. There is a book I have been meaning to read for the last few years about Wet'suwet'en people and culture which was written by a non-Indigenous man. My desire to read this book was based on my belief that I couldn't access my culture in a real way. Since the recognition I have felt the urgency to read this book dissipate and the urgency to be within my home territory rise. Not only did I feel more belonging after this welcoming, but I met more and more people who recognized me as Wet'suwet'en.

Similarly, each of the interview participants voiced their desire to be welcomed into their community. Some couldn't envision what that would look like, while others have specific ideas about the importance of a ceremony to welcome home displaced family and community members. Amanda says she would feel honoured if her band called her up and invited her to the community. She says, "I think where I stand right now in my life, I would feel quite...almost honoured that I was thought about. You know, that somebody thought of me and I wasn't just 123456 band Dene Tha' Nation status number..." Even though Amanda would feel honoured to be thought of, she reminds me that a simple phone call would be a good start to building a relationship in which she would feel comfortable returning to her community. Margaret also feels that a ceremony to honour and recognize those who are returning to the community is something she would value in her life. She sees this as a platform for introductions between displaced people and community. Similarly, Trevor feels like a celebration or ceremony to welcome people back into the community would be an important way to introduce people to other community members. As Trevor, Margaret, and Mel have all attested to, it is hurtful when you're not recognized by community members.

For all the people who've shared their story, one thing is obvious; reintegration and re-learning is a process. As I've discussed, each individual is at his or her own stage in this process. They have each identified reasons for their displacement, and have also identified their needs and desires from their respective communities. However, at the end of the day, each of them dreams of being an active part of their community in one way or another. The rationale for building these relationships is to be able to learn specific cultural teachings through face-to-face interactions with their community members. Then, they can become comfortable identifying and believing in their Indianness.

Cultural Transmission through Face-to-Face Interactions

All of the displaced people I interviewed asserted the necessity of cultural transmission through face-to-face interactions with community members. As Indigenous people our traditions are based upon our relationship with the land from which we come. Place is crucial for the implementation of an integration process that works to support families and provide holistic cultural transmission. Although a grassroots initiative will provide a necessary link to displaced persons the ultimate goal is to have them return to living as Indigenous people physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. In order to do this effectively, individuals need to have access to language speakers, traditional foods, traditional hunting and fishing skills, and most importantly, a relationship to the land and the people who live there. Keith Basso, in *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*, illustrates that 'a place' holds a complexity of significance for the Apache when he says "Apache constructions of place reach deeply into other cultural spheres, including conceptions of wisdom, notions of morality, politeness and tact in forms of spoken discourse, and certain conventional ways of imagining and interpreting the Apache tribal past."⁴¹ Places within our territories hold stories and teachings that make Indigenous people who we are. They create an awareness of history and belonging. Therefore, in order to fully understand the place from which one comes, one must fully know the place and the language that articulates this.

I asked the interviewees if they believed that specific cultural teachings from their territories contributed to their sense of identity and belonging. Every person indicated that, indeed, their lack of cultural teachings did impact their sense of identity and belonging. As previously discussed, some people felt that their lack of cultural knowledge and practice even prevented them from identifying as a member of their

⁴¹ Keith, H Basso. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), xv.

nation. Meag stated this plainly when she said, “I need knowledge.” She then described what that would be like when she said, “Specific cultural knowledge would increase my sense of identity and belonging. I would like to be able to say, 'These are my teachings.' I think that would make me feel really good.” Similarly, Margaret said, “If I had more cultural belonging and cultural traditional practice I think I would go more and...all of it would come into place.” Not only do these people feel a strong desire to learn their specific cultural teachings, but they have also identified the need to learn by being involved in their communities and participating in ceremony.

Whether or not this type of experiential learning must occur on one's home territory depends on the teachings that are being passed on. For instance, Mel described his desire to learn about his Gitskan way of life, which he feels must necessarily include his house chiefs, elders and matriarchs. He is interested in learning boundary lines, places and the stories and teachings that go along with those places. He mentioned that he has researched a lot about the Gitksan, and is now ready to take the knowledge he has to the next level. He feels as if he has spent a lifetime learning his Wet'suwet'en roots, and now must begin again, but is accepting of taking baby steps and being patient. He feels like there are so many elements within a nation that must be learned through interactive teachings. For example, Mel wants to learn protocol and any cautionary steps he should be taking while on the territory. Particularly, he wants to learn about specific historical and spiritual energies that one must be cautious of within the territory. Youth also talked about a connection to the land as necessary for their specific cultural teachings. When Trevor described his experience with Tribal Journeys, he said the most important aspect is the development of a connection to land. He shared something a friend had told him: “you can't describe a connection to the land, you just can't. You have it or you don't.” These are elements of culture, which must be learned through interaction.

Similarly, language and ceremony were both identified as important aspects of cultural teachings requiring participation and face-to-face interaction. These displaced people identified naming ceremonies, coming of age ceremonies, mourning protocols, burials, pregnancy protocols, dances, as well as songs and stories among the types of cultural teachings they would like to learn. Amanda said, "I would have to be there to hear stories and learn about land and stuff. I would kind of have to be there to learn dances and those deeply unheard of cultural traditional practices." She goes on to say that this is what she would need in order to know who the Dene are as a people. Margaret said that part of her vision with her community is to be immersed in her culture, which means interacting and practicing that culture as she learns. Everyone included culture camps as important avenues for interactive learning about language and culture on the land. Joey also identified potlatch practices for children, recalling that when he was a child living in Victoria, the Kwakwak'awakw community would hold potlatch practices for children and youth as an interactive way to learn about the potlatch while practicing songs and dances. Youth also identified participation in potlatches as a way to interactively learn culture. In addition, young women identified that learning the women's dances was very important to them and something they would need to be taught through regular practices. All of these cultural teachings cannot be fully understood or learned without face-to-face interaction. Youth stated their need for dedicated mentors training children through youth cultural centres and more interaction with the community. Specifically, Joey called for a language teacher for himself, and more importantly his children. He rightfully asserts that there is so much emotion and feeling in language that immersion is the only way to fully comprehend it. However, the reality is that all of these people suffer from a lack of relationships with their community, making interactive learning currently impossible or difficult at best.

Bridging Resources

In some cases other resources can be used as a bridge between learning about one's culture and history while increasing a positive sense of identity and the belonging to community that is necessary. Youth identified language CD's and books as resources that might assist them in learning more about their heritage. Other friends would be happy with any sort of information from their community like language resources, children's story books, books, and art work. In terms of resources, these might be the survival tools we use until those relationships develop and our time comes to reconnect in a more interactive way. Margaret said that, "I have heard elders speak the language and pray in the language fluently, and I know that they have done disks to revitalize language, but it's not the same as being in person and learning as you would pre-colonization right?" I agreed and mentioned the number of books and disks I had collecting dust on my shelf. Then I mentioned that we have to start somewhere and she agreed saying, "We have to roll with the time in modern times, culture shifts like in evolution you know? We have to reclaim ourselves and revitalize what has been lost. We have to make do with what is there as a resource and tap into those resources." Indeed, these resources can be the tools we need to assist us in our learning and reconnection despite barriers to reconnection like urbanization and a lack of community initiative or cohesiveness.

Challenges of Ongoing Colonization

Serious challenges to recovering an Indigenous identity are inherent within the current context. Indigenous people in general are struggling to revive an Indigenous way of life in a modern capitalist society, in which the state continues its domination and oppression of Indigenous people and lands. Thus, although all of the interviewed

displaced people expressed a strong desire to reconnect with their communities, we face personal, communal and structural challenges.

As previously discussed, the impacts on identity and belonging can leave deep emotional wounds that may inhibit successful reintegration. When I asked my adult and youth interview and focus group participants what barriers they face in their reconnecting they expressed a fear of rejection, a fear of the unknown, and a fear of judgment. Alexa stated, “I just find that youth don't act the same around adults and vice versa. Elders and youth can work together but there's still not this complete integration where everything can be open. People are so afraid of judgments.” Her concern was echoed by other youth who expressed that they feel judged by their communities as not being willing to learn or participate. In addition, because of past experiences, youth find it difficult to approach community members for fear of being rejected. The emotional impacts of displacement continue to affect our identities as Indigenous people and our relationship with community.

These displaced people see their Indigeneity closely linked to their communities, but struggle with not knowing enough about their culture or community to be able to navigate the challenges within those borders. For example, Amanda said that she had heard her community may be struggling but feels they may just need hope. Trevor believes that although there are problems in his community, he said that every community has its problems. The youth identified the fact that although alcohol, drug abuse and other dysfunctions were present on reserves, they felt that more traditional communities do exist and were uncomfortable labeling all reserves as places of social ills.

Aside from the social problems within traumatized communities, the displaced participants identified trust and commitment as ongoing barriers to reintegration. Youth see a lack of commitment from cultural teachers who begin a project and fail to follow

through with it. Alexa described this as a “disconnect between generations,” specifically between elders and youth. She described her relationship with her own family and said that there is a lack of trust that exists which inhibits her relationships with other elders. This makes it difficult for her to trust other elders who might be able to support her in this process. Thus, work would have to be done to establish trusting relationships with knowledge holders.

Along with trust and commitment, communities need to acknowledge the loss of culture on a communal level and how colonization has affected their ability to work together. Margaret told me that she feels like her whole community has been displaced. Although she sees things changing in this regard, she believes that more practice of culture is needed to counteract the impacts of colonization. As previously mentioned, Joey believes that his nation is playing catch up after years of potlatch banning and loss of culture. He said that it's not only individuals but the entire community that is trying to catch up on naming and other ceremonies that were outlawed by the Canadian government. Indeed, the emotional, personal and community challenges trickle down from structural challenges faced by all Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and elsewhere in the world.

When I think about the structural and institutional forces that my community faces, I can understand how many community members feel overwhelmed by the multitude of levels we must struggle against on a daily basis. Whole communities are facing these structural barriers to culture, just as displaced people are. As an impact of colonization, the lack of a land base has been one of the most poignant challenges Indigenous people face in their struggle for liberation and cultural revival. Coupled with the lack of land is the lack of resources that Indigenous people must share. Unfortunately, due to the Indian Act and the way that First Nations governments are set up in Canada, the structure does not breed an equal sharing of resources within many of our

communities. Trevor described his own lack of land and resources saying that his reserve continued to shrink until it was the smallest reserve in Canada. This means that he will not be able to move back to his community because of a lack of housing and employment on his reserve. In addition to this, he believes it will be difficult for urban Indians to give up the lifestyles they have been accustomed to in order to live in their communities. Joey agreed saying, "It's hard to go from a place that has everything you'd ever want and need right? Like an urban setting to a reserve." Yet he agrees that location is one of the biggest challenges he faces. Again, location determines one's ability to learn and integrate over time. Although land base will continue to be a struggle, the ideologies intended to legitimize the theft of land and the colonizer's ongoing occupation of our lands continues to affect our most personal struggles.

Lawrence draws attention to the fact that urban mixed-blood Native people contend with assimilatory desires and racism. She asserts that the colour of one's skin, mediated by class, gender, and location, increases access to resources the closer one gets to whiteness.⁴² Not only are people who could 'pass' as non-Indigenous more likely to not identify because of the benefits this would bring them, but racism within mainstream society also presents challenges to the transmission of ancestral knowledge. Amanda talked about her experiences with racism within her family and said that it's hard to be entrenched in so much negativity and racism and think about a different reality. She said it made it difficult for her to identify as an Indigenous person. She also described her relationship with her adopted father's side of the family. She said she was always closer to her Dad, but that he never spoke of his Cree ancestry. She told me about her Dad's ancestry:

My father was raised not to learn. He was never raised with Cree even though my grandparents were fluent in Cree. They didn't

⁴² Lawrence. *"Real" Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood*, 10.

want to teach him. I remember asking him why when I was a little girl. I was maybe eight or nine years old, right before I moved down to B.C. I asked my granny why she never taught us. She told me she didn't want any of her kids to learn Cree because of the accent.

The transmission of culture was severed due to the racism experienced at the hands of mainstream society. Amanda's adopted grandmother believed that her son would have an easier life if he did not sound Cree. Amanda compared the racism within her adopted family to generational trauma and said that even today the line of racist ideals or discriminatory traits has never been broken. She said that she learned about the patterns and was able to break free from them, but continues to struggle with this aspect of her upbringing. Lawrence says that racism in urban settings often leads Indigenous people to act less native around white people.⁴³ The threat of violence in white communities can silence Indigenous people's identity. Lawrence says that this silence is a consequence of not only white supremacy but also of shame. The cost to Indigenous people and communities is alienation and the rupturing of cultural transmission.⁴⁴ Racism within mainstream society and the internalization of racism within families is evidence of the challenges we face to reclaim our Indianness.

Through the interview process I have heard stories of displacement, sometimes similar and sometimes very different from mine. All of these experiences include a lack of belonging and negative impacts on identity; however, through the process of naming and discussing these issues, the displaced participants and I have had the opportunity to state our needs. Youth and adults alike recognize the need for the establishment and growth of long term relationships with community members as a means to cultural learning and survival. The strategies identified by interview and focus group participants have proven to be relatively straight forward and simple. These include things like

⁴³ Ibid., 120.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 129.

communication through telephone calls, newsletters, and emails, as well as acceptance through inclusivity. In addition, all of the participants identified their desire to be welcomed into the community through an invitation, ceremony or gathering. Despite often living and being socialized in mainstream society, these Indigenous people desire a return to a more traditional way of learning through face-to-face interaction, or experiential learning. They have identified the need for specific cultural teachings which must be transmitted through the relationships they desire, as well as resources that could be useful while they are building these relationships. Although challenges remain on a number of levels, these Indigenous people look to their communities for support, welcoming and belonging. Displaced people have identified their needs. I brought these needs and experiences to the Gitdumden so that they could both discuss and respond to them. In Chapter Three, the Gitdumden respond to the ideas discussed here, followed by Chapter Four, which outlines a merging of displaced peoples needs and a community perspective on how to respond to these needs.

Chapter Three: Gitdumden Response

In the last chapter, I discussed both the needs and perspectives of displaced people regarding the reintegration process. The experiences shared in the previous chapter are similar to those found in works like Bonita Lawrence's *'Real' Indians and Others*.⁴⁵ As previously mentioned, many displaced people experience similar impacts of displacement such as trauma, loss of identity, and cultural loss, which lead to much more serious social ills within individuals and communities. My research departs from the individualistic approach by also including community perspectives- using the Gitdumden as a case study. As discussed in chapter one, it is imperative that communities take charge of the reintegration and reconnection process. Attacks on our families through the continued theft of our children, and the lack of recognition of our ability to govern ourselves and our lands cannot go on. By organizing our communities and bringing awareness to the issues we face, Indigenous communities can advance control over their own affairs, thus strengthening their nation. This chapter explains the process of the Gitdumden focus groups as well as a discussion of emerging themes from a community perspective such as the roles and responsibilities of community, the need for healing, and the importance of strengthening our traditional clan system through the reintegration process.

Responding To Responsibility: Gitdumden Focus Groups

The Gitdumden focus groups were both conducted within Wet'suwet'en territory where many Gitdumden live. My focus on this particular group comes from my ancestral ties with them and my belief in the strength and legitimacy of our traditional governance system. I brought this issue forward because it has been something addressed by the clan through my own reintegration and happened to occur at a time when our clan system was

⁴⁵ Lawrence. *"Real" Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood*.

just beginning to organize again through the participation of all members, regardless of their standing within the community. Through the clan meetings I learned that it was a critical time for all Wet'suwet'en to return to the traditional clan system in an effort to reclaim our authority over our lives and our lands as Wet'suwet'en have the highest number of children in care of the MCFD in British Columbia, and continue to face extreme assaults on our territories by industry and governments. The number of Indigenous children in care in the north was 80.2 percent while the number of Indigenous children made up only 26.5 percent of the child population.⁴⁶ To me this meant that all Wet'suwet'en must act in unity toward the end goal of liberation and the protection of our homelands, which includes displaced people such as myself and my family. I also saw this as an important opportunity for my own reintegration and the reintegration of my family as politics are tightly woven within cultural practices and traditional knowledge. Traditionally, our chiefs and matriarchs are responsible to the people, and two of these responsibilities include the transmission of culture and the survival of our families. Therefore, I presented the issue to my clan chiefs, elders and members to legitimize the importance of our traditional system while creating space for the Gitdumden to respond to their responsibilities. Through this process we identified what responsibility the clan had and the roles that were needed to uphold that responsibility.

Process

I presented each clan with information about the services provided by interviews with the service providers along with the themes and needs of the displaced participants. Under each theme heading I communicated the main ideas and needs of the displaced participants and then posed a question based on these needs to the focus group. For example, at the beginning of each focus group I presented the clans with the impacts of

⁴⁶ Ministry of Children and Family Development. *Children in Care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development in the North*, 2009 http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/foster/pdf/Northern_CIC_2009.pdf

colonization that displaced people saw negatively affecting their identities and belonging within their communities--like adoption and residential schools. I also communicated the effects on identity and belonging that these assaults have had on the displaced people like fear, loss, and emptiness. I then posed the question, "How does displacement impact the community and cultural survival?" It was important to allow the focus group participants to understand the displaced peoples' perspectives and needs and be able to respond with a community perspective.

The first focus group was part of our very first scheduled monthly clan meeting. This meeting was confused with another clan meeting held later that month to address a specific concern. As a consequence, along with the many other factors that affect clan meeting attendance, few Gitdumden showed up. There were five other members not including myself and my cousin who would participate in the second focus group. However, we represented a variety of age groups and experiences. Among our group we had: an Elder, chief, wing chiefs and my beloved aunty who had helped orchestrate the most important part of the meeting--the food. We talked at length for several hours about clan business and then took a short break to clear our heads and get back to work. The clan members engaged with each question; however, our brains had been at it for hours already and the clan members were showing signs of fatigue near the end. I believe that, had this focus group not been held right after the clan meeting, the members may have engaged each question at greater length. The second experience was significantly different for a variety of reasons.

The second focus group was held at the Wet'suwet'en First Nation band office. This would have been my band had I been allocated "correctly" under the Indian Act. Instead, because my grandmother was previously married before meeting my grandfather, my family and I were placed with her ex-husband's band located about 100kms away. However, for that day nobody cared that I wasn't a band member, and I was treated as if I

belonged there in the office and amongst the community. I was fortunate to have family members working at the band office and all participating. The setting was informal, and many people arrived throughout the first hour of the focus group. Similarly, some of the participants were not able to stay for the duration of the five and a half hours the discussion lasted. At one point people were shifting in their seats and looked impatient. I asked the group how they would like to proceed, asking if they would like to cut some of the questions short or if they would like to proceed for a particular duration of time. The response I got was that when “we” do something, we always finish it, meaning that the Wet'suwet'en way is to finish what you started no matter how long it takes, and not to cut any corners. I was inspired by the energy and time the Gitdumden were putting into this project. It was obviously important to them that we discuss each question until we felt comfortable moving onto the next.

I knew that members of my family were personally impacted by displacement. What I didn't know was the extent to which even those I thought were connected and fluent in our language and culture also felt displaced and deeply scarred by the displacement of others. For me, this was a critical shift in the way I thought about reintegration and reconnecting to culture. I believe this speaks to the great disconnect between displaced people's perspective and community perspective. This also speaks to the degree that colonization has impacted our identities as Indigenous people regardless of where we've grown up. This became immediately apparent when I asked the clan how displacement affected community cultural survival. I had always known how it felt to be a displaced person and I was humbled to get a glimpse of the impact that my family's displacement had on the whole community. Not only was I being included in the community discussion, but I was included in stories I had never heard about my family's history.

I've heard people say that the old ones are the knowledge carriers and I've accepted that fact based on my experiences of learning language and culture from the old ones in a variety of cultural settings and geographical places. However, it has been on rare occasion that I have listened to the old ones talk about my particular family history. During that focus group, my great aunty told the story of when the Indian Agent and police came to take my mother and her siblings away. I had always wondered where the rest of our extended family had been when social services took them away from my grandparents, but my mother was too young to remember and it was too painful a question for any of us to inquire about further. Yet, at 28 years old, standing in a room full of strangers and estranged relatives, at "my band office" I was told the story.

My dad, Paddy Isaac, walked to town to get a food voucher from the Indian Agent to feed all of Emily's kids who were living there. Nine of them was too many to feed on his own. I was taken out of school at fourteen to take care of Emily's kids. I used to give them all a bath in the great big tub by the stove. I packed the water by hand, and washed the clothes by hand. My Dad wanted to get a food voucher for the kids but was denied, and the next morning two cars came in. The youngest of the Augusta girls still had soap on her hair. She had really nice, lots of hair, and she still had soap in her hair. I used to play around with her hair and put all her hair on top like a cap. All of a sudden the cars pulled up, they came in and snatched them all. They wrapped her in a towel and put her in the car. They threatened my mom and dad. My mom was crying standing on the porch. The Indian Agent says, "Don't ever try to find them otherwise you're going to go to jail." That was the last time I saw them. The last time. I never saw them again. It's really hard on the heart.

I had another answer. This story helped me to locate my family's experience within the systems of genocide the state was inflicting on Indian people at the time. Everything contributed to their abductions; the criminalization of attempting to keep your children, the enforcement by Indian Agents, the poverty on our reserves due to the denial of our way of life were the obvious ones. Less obvious, was the motivation for removing Indian children from their homes: severing cultural transmission and breaking down Indian

families to advance state control over lands and resources. Although I was aware of these facts, it was still very helpful for me to hear the actual story of how this system of genocide affected my family. I knew one more piece of my history, our family history, which I could use to empower myself and pass on to my children who would one day ask about their family history. I had always wondered what really happened to my family and where our relatives had been when the children were being stolen. It felt good to know that my family was part of this community, and that their story was intertwined with our community's story. It was a story of the destruction of my family, yet it was a story I needed to hear. It was a story my mother and sister needed to hear too, and it filled up a space in my personal archives that had been sitting empty all these years. This also meant that my family was not alone in our need to recover from this trauma. This experience proved to me that community members held ancestral knowledge I needed to know and were responsible to share those stories and knowledge with displaced people like my family.

Roles and Responsibilities

I have always known the experience of what it was like being an Indigenous person who has been intergenerationally disconnected from my community; however, until this research process began, I had not been aware of how my community perceived this aspect of colonization. In an effort to understand how the community felt about their responsibility to displaced members, I asked the Moricetown members if they would like to be proactive or reactive to clan members who were interested in reconnecting with our community. This question stimulated a discussion around foster care and people's experiences with the foster care system in B.C. This response speaks to the deep impacts that this system has on our community like the number of Wet'suwet'en children who are in care of the MCFD today, and the loss of entire generations of family members who cannot be located. Some participants felt that it was up to the individual to initiate contact

and communication, while others pointed out that because of life changes and the impacts displacement has on identity, the community should have an open door policy and seek out children in foster care. One participant identified the need to keep in contact with children who are in foster care throughout their lives and continue to offer the flow of knowledge. Both of the groups felt as though clan chiefs and membership should be involved in offering knowledge to displaced clan members. Specifically mentioned by the Burns Lake group were matriarchs. Matriarchs were viewed as traditional knowledge holders who held a responsibility to transmit culture to community members. The length and degree to which the Burns Lake group discussed this issue showed me that they were very serious about the displacement of their community members and were serious about finding ways to uphold their responsibility as a clan to pass on our traditional knowledge to all our members. However, the recognition of how displacement affected our clan was clearly a barrier which the clan felt the need to respond to.

The Need for Traditional Healing

The healing required to live a healthy Gitdumden existence and build healthy relationships for the survival of our nation must be done at a communal level. As indicated by displaced people themselves, there exists a variety of emotional and mental impacts which must be addressed such as a fear of rejection and judgment. Although some participants would like to feel emotionally stable in their lives before returning to their communities, true reintegration and healing from displacement must be engaged by both the individual and their respective community. Identifying the impacts displacement has on community is very important for displaced people to understand. It is healing for people to understand their community's perspective and see that their community also shares in their pain and suffering. This can help displaced people feel less alone in their struggles and create a greater awareness of what it takes to collectively heal and build stronger relationships and nations. Hearing what my community was experiencing helped

me to gain a better understanding of the displacement I share with my community, and become better equipped to develop a healing strategy together.

During the focus groups, the Gitdumden identified the impacts that displacement has on the community. A break in the transmission of culture was attributed to the ongoing pain and suffering of community members. Many of the participants from both groups described divisions between communities and families. One of the Burns Lake participants described grief and ongoing suffering as phases of loss and anger that the community is experiencing as a result of colonization and the displacement of not only individual members, but of the entire community. For example, one of my great aunts described the removal of our family from Burns Lake after our community hall was burnt down. Our family was pushed to the outskirts of town, only to move further and further away from our traditional homes. Fighting between families, disrespect, and blaming, used as coping mechanisms, were all identified as impacts of displacement on our community. A Moricetown member described an impact of displacement as losing the ability to love or to show love because parents could no longer access foster children and practice showing love. This group also identified a decrease in membership as a consequence of displacement. Interestingly, one of the Moricetown participants described alcoholism and drug abuse as a consequence of a lack of participation in the feast system, whereas the Burns Lake group went further, identifying a lack of knowledge about the feast system, songs, and dances as a consequence of displacement. Both linked the loss of cultural transmission with the emotional impacts of displacement on their community; thus, there was an emphasis on healing as a requirement of building healthy relationships with clan members and contributing to cultural transmission through traditional healing methods.

As a direct result of colonization and the continuation of the colonial mindset, Indigenous people struggle with healing initiatives. Although the Government of Canada

offered a one time \$350 Million dollar healing fund to be distributed over eleven years for residential school survivors, the individual, familial, and community healing required as a result of colonial trauma makes this monetary “gift” seem inconsequential. This ‘gift’ does nothing to address the intergenerational nature of the trauma that has and continues to be inflicted upon Indigenous families and places the onus on individuals to heal themselves. Elizabeth Fast and Delphine Collin-Vézina, in “Historical Trauma, Race-based Trauma and Resilience of Indigenous Peoples: A Literature Review,” assert that because the healing fund was specifically geared towards residential school survivors who experienced overt physical or sexual abuse, the government of Canada continues the denial of assimilative intent and intergenerational effects.⁴⁷ Clearly, mainstream society fails to fully comprehend the impact displacement has on individuals and entire communities. Governments perpetuate the focus on the individual by appearing to provide individualistic 'solutions,' which are largely unsuccessful, only contribute to the internalization of displacement and alienation from community and does nothing to address the healing required by community.

When I asked the focus group participants what types of relationships they could build with displaced people, the Gitdumden's response focused on communal healing. They recognize that the community suffers from the displacement of their members and is in need of traditional forms of healing. In addition, respect, bonding, forgiveness, and reconciliation between families were all identified as necessary for communal healing to be successful. One participant acknowledged the need for personal healing in terms of repairing our own relationships in relation to trauma. For example, she believes that her education about trauma and the effects of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder have helped her understand some of the issues going on in the community and has helped her with

⁴⁷ Fast, and Collin-Vézina. “Historical Trauma, Race-based Trauma and Resilience of Indigenous Peoples,” 127.

patience. This healing was also identified as correcting behaviour that has led to the pain and suffering of clan members such as a lack of love between family members. For example, a relative of mine expressed communicating feelings of love as a way to counteract feelings of alienation. She said that although she didn't know me she could begin to build that relationship by telling me she loved me. She said that even though she didn't know me, I was a part of her family and community and had a place there. She felt the words "I love you" were part of the healing process for those who may have never experienced love from their community as well as good practice for the community members themselves in an effort to be more open and loving.

Another element of healing was identified as combating exclusion. This impact of displacement was identified by displaced participants and the youth focus group during the interview process, as well as both the Moricetown and Burns Lake groups, as an aspect of relationship building through healing they would like to see in the community. As the displaced participants have identified, inclusion creates feelings of belonging. The Moricetown group identified being inclusive during the process of reconnecting people. Similarly, the Burns Lake group said they would like to see the acceptance of displaced people regardless of what family they belong to and regardless of whether they are living on or off reserve. I felt this was an important aspect of healing the division between families and within clan membership. The inclusion of ceremony was specifically identified by the Burns Lake group.

Traditional healing ceremonies are both central to communal and individual healing. In addition, this type of healing is grassroots and focuses on healing the real impacts of colonization, as opposed to how mainstream society blames the individual, while advancing the community's ability to determine our own strengths and implement our traditional knowledge. Fast and Collin-Vézina state that "when entire communities experience the same traumas for generations, the very mechanism that helped them to

cope become[s] destroyed in the process.”⁴⁸ Today, our families continue to suffer from colonial attacks, leaving many without the traditional healing ceremonies and communal support we would have once had. In other words, since contact, the government of Canada has been using genocidal tactics to kill off Indian people. Most recently, due to the attacks on children and families through the residential schools, sixties scoop, and through to the imposition of the Ministry of Children and Family Development’s abduction of our children, our families suffer severe trauma and are purposefully separated from the very culture and community that would offer the most support and healing. Without these traditional support systems our families are left with individualistic healing methods based on western psychology. This form of healing attempts to deal with the psychological impacts of trauma, but fails to address the spiritual and cultural trauma experienced by displacement. Although community healing has been lacking, the Gitdumden continue to place a great deal of value in ceremony. For example, a relative of mine told us an illuminating story about a cousin whom I had never met.

My cousin didn't know that he was Gitdumden. His mother (my aunty) had been murdered like thousands of other Indigenous women in Canada, and he had grown up in foster care. He didn't know who he was or where he belonged. He felt that because he was given up as a baby he didn't belong anywhere. He was looking for his relatives in Stellaquo, where he was a band member. My relative said she had to have a healing ceremony for him. She went to town to get food and supplies and invited all the elders in the community to come. She asked him to sit down and write down all the hurts he had been telling her. The next day they had a food burning ceremony and she said, “You can tell the family what you're feeling, or write everything down. Whatever your family liked to eat, you put it on the plate.” All the elders and family put their family's favourite things

⁴⁸ Ibid, 131.

to eat on the plate. Everyone was in tears. She said it was hurtful to see how everyone was hurting and crying, and to see some of the elders break down for the first time. They burned the food to let go of the hurt. She said that was the beginning of the time for our cousin to come back to the family. The next morning he got up, thanked her and said he felt a lot better and didn't feel angry anymore. She let him know that he was Gitdumden by inviting the elders in the community, and he let go of the anger he held onto because of his displacement.

This story speaks to the complexity of community healing. Our elder had recognized the need for healing in a community setting. Her first reaction was not an individualistic one. She didn't prescribe therapy or imply that perhaps there was something *he* should be doing for his own healing. She immediately recognized the cause of his pain as a loss of identity. Therefore, she moved quickly to address the root cause by planning a ceremony for the next day. By inviting the elders, she was not only following tradition, and thus teaching him tradition, but she was validating his belonging and his pain. She was showing him that she, and the community, loved him enough to take the time to heal together. It was a time for him to let go of his pain, but it also created the opportunity for him to see that the entire community was suffering, and his displacement was not a result of his community's lack of love for him. In Brave Heart's, *The Return to the Sacred Path*, she states that education around historical trauma led to an increased awareness of the impact of grief, while sharing the effects with other Lakota in a traditional context provided cathartic relief. This resolution of grief led to a reduction in grief effects as well as an increase in positive identity and a commitment to healing.⁴⁹ In the case of my cousin, everyone in attendance was letting go of pain because it was important for my cousin to see his clan come together and to recognize he wasn't alone in his suffering or his path toward healing. It reminded me of the first time I felt belonging

⁴⁹ Brave Heart, and DeBruyn. "The American Indian Holocaust: Healing historical unresolved grief," 56-78.

at my first clan meeting. My cousin has since passed, but I take comfort in the fact that he did not die alone in the world; he knew he was Gitdumden and had the opportunity to be hugged by our elders.

Strengthening the Clan System

My involvement with the clan system has been instrumental in the research process, my own healing, and my own process of reintegration. My very presence at the clan meetings and conducting clan focus groups is working towards strengthening the governance system that functioned to permit not only our survival, but our thriving communities for thousands of years. By strengthening our traditional system, the Wet'suwet'en people will be better positioned to resist and overcome colonial institutions attempting to eradicate our culture and maintain control over our lands and resources. Lawrence asserts that urban mixed-blood people represent one half of the history of colonization and could be useful in finding ways to overcome differences and be instrumental in the decolonization process. In addition, by reintegrating displaced people, the total number of people belonging to one particular nation would increase significantly, which could force a change in the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous society.⁵⁰ Through the gathering of clans we are upholding our responsibility to each other and recognizing our belonging to a particular group and *yinta* (land). It is through this system that our sense of community can begin to thrive, thus allowing room and creating the knowledge to support our community members who wish to return to their culture and lands. As previously discussed, colonial trauma to our families and communities impact the way we function as communities. As a result, many of our people are not living as Wet'suwet'en. I asked both Gitdumden groups what a

⁵⁰ Lawrence. *“Real” Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood*, 14.

strong Wet'suwet'en identity looks like. The answer to this question spoke to my vision of what reintegration and reconnection looks like, as well as the need to strengthen our nation through our traditional governance system. In order to know my culture, I must have knowledge, but in order to experience my true identity as Wet'suwet'en and contribute to the liberation of our nation, I must live as Wet'suwet'en.

Just as the interview participants expressed, a strong identity involves cultural knowledge as well as participation. This aspect of identity formation was not considered linear; however, some participants felt they would become more comfortable practicing culture if they had specific knowledge about certain ceremonies or protocols. Similarly, the Gitdumden identified both resources for cultural teachings as well as experiential learning as necessary for building a strong Wet'suwet'en identity. For instance, one of the main concerns for both groups was knowledge of the *Inukn'vaten* (Wet'suwet'en law or feast system). This included knowledge of the clan lineages, with a particular emphasis on last names, houses, and being knowledgeable of one's father clan. This knowledge can be accessed through clan lineages, but must be explained through the transmission of knowledge from an elder or knowledge keeper. This also speaks to the importance of learning Wet'suwet'en or clan history. For example, every clan member can access their clan lineage through either their band, or the Office of the Wet'suwet'en. These clan lineages are often not complete, yet even if they were, they would not hold the history of names needed to fully understand one's lineage. In the Wet'suwet'en system, names can be held by chiefs outside of the house group or clan. If a person from a different clan was adopted into another clan, he/she could be given a chief's name until someone from the original blood line was ready to take on the responsibility of that position. Therefore, attempting to understand clan names requires the history of each name and each person who held that name, which is often not written down anywhere. Similarly, the clans felt that songs, dances, crests, the use of traditional foods, and jurisdiction of land were all

important aspects of a strong Wet'suwet'en identity. These elements of identity and culture are all tied into the knowledge of our feast system. Specific songs belong to one of the five clans, with the exception of some all-clans songs. All nations have specific stories and histories for each of their songs. In addition, our dances act out stories and history. One Gitdumden told me that during each *bahlats* (potlatch) the clan and house chiefs would dance into the hall, acting out what their chief name meant. Much of the cultural knowledge identified as necessary for a strong Wet'suwet'en identity comes from our traditional governance system. A central piece of creating a strong Wet'suwet'en identity is participation in that system.

Involvement in the community was a central aspect of a Wet'suwet'en identity according to the Gitdumden focus group participants. The Moricetown group described involvement in the community and with the family as important, as well as respecting each other regardless of one's status in the community. The Burns Lake group said that knowledge of the territories required being out on the land, just as knowledge about the *bahlats* involved participation in the *bahlats*. The Burns Lake groups also spoke to the necessity of being out on the land as a requirement to practicing jurisdiction over the land. All of these aspects of being Wet'suwet'en are inherent in our traditional clan governance system. Part of learning through experience promotes the decolonization of our knowledge and the way we attain that knowledge. As previously discussed, displaced Wet'suwet'en face great challenges in accessing this knowledge, however, the Gitdumden have worked hard at re-discovering how to be supportive of stolen members.

The Gitdumden focus groups recognize the impact displacement has had on our community, as well as on the individuals who have been stolen from us. During the focus groups, they provided me with knowledge and a community perspective on the experience of being displaced. Just as individual displaced people describe, the community perspective included healing as a necessary forum for reintegration. The clan

recognized that pain and suffering were inhibiting the transmission of culture to displaced peoples and worked to discuss healing strategies which will be presented in the next chapter. It was apparent that what it means to be Wet'suwet'en is tied to our traditional clan system, and that we must include this in our discussion on reconnecting. The goal is to use cultural transmission as a way to create a positive sense of identity and belonging for Gitdumden, thus strengthening our clans and way of life as Wet'suwet'en.

Chapter Four: Returning to the Home Fire-Integrated Strategies for Reconnecting

This chapter integrates the needs of displaced individuals with the Gitdumden's community perspective on how to support reintegration and the advancement of cultural transmission. I have taken these ideas and formatted them into a framework for reconnecting which I hope will be useful to both displaced peoples, in their process of reconnecting, and Indigenous communities looking to support their displaced members in this process while strengthening their ability to organize and transmit culture in the face of colonization. I have included my own vision, as well as displaced people's visions of reconnecting in an attempt to root reconnecting strategies within a grassroots, culturally specific framework. Following this vision I have developed a reconnecting framework based on four central themes: Identifying roles and pathways to reconnection, reconnecting through relationships, identifying critical cultural knowledge, and transmitting culture through land-based practice and participation. My hopes are that the needs identified by displaced people and the corresponding strategies the Gitdumden have provided a model communities might find useful in supporting their displaced members.

Based on the visions of the displaced interview participants, it has become apparent there are specific, realistic strategies that communities can implement to support the reintegration of their displaced members. Surely, every community has its strengths and weaknesses. Some may be beginning from a place where community's ability to organize and resist has been deeply impacted by the state's divide and conquer tactics. However, the research process has given voice to many displaced people, who have

stated their needs and hopes for a future of belonging and involvement with their communities. In response, the Gitdumden have offered their own ideas towards meeting these types of needs in their community. This chapter begins with *vision* because everyone and everything belongs somewhere: I envision that place to be a vibrant, healthy, loving and supporting place where we may return to the ways which have sustained Indigenous Peoples since time began. As Deloria and Wildcat point out, “If you don’t know where you are going, any road will get you there.”⁵¹ Thus, from this point we can identify our community’s roles and resources, learn to reconnect through healthy relationships, transmit cultural knowledge and begin practicing *yinkadini’ha ba a’ten* (the ways of the people of the surface of the earth).

Vision

Belonging in the Community

From a community perspective, cultural knowledge and participation in the community are necessary for a strong identity. Displaced peoples’ visions of their place within their communities echo this theme of learning and belonging through participation. I asked these people what their vision of their perfect community was and I received similar responses. Almost every displaced person I spoke with envisioned living in or near their community. Mel talked about living off the land and getting off the grid in order to learn how Gitanyow assert their jurisdiction over their lands. Similarly, Joey talked about living as Namgis, which would require him to practice culture in his community. In addition to living in or near the community, Trevor, Amanda and Margaret expressed their desire to work in the community as a form of contribution.

⁵¹ Wildcat, and Deloria Jr. *Power and Place: Indian Education in America*, 29.

Amanda specifically says she would like to make her community proud of her and talked about contributing through scholarship. In addition to how they envision themselves participating in their communities, they also spoke about their community's health and reception of them.

For example, Trevor talked about his hopes for healthy and open communication in his community, rooted in Indigenous teachings. Specifically talking about ceremonies and gatherings, he said:

Indigenous people were notorious for coming together in times of crisis. If there's a crisis or something, you can find a lot of Indians out there, but it would be nice to see a community that came together for celebrations: for people getting their names, for people graduating high school and college and university, for girls becoming women and boys becoming men; those types of celebrations.

Trevor's vision of community involvement through traditional practices and ceremonies are similar to the visions we all share for our communities. Margaret envisions herself engulfed in her culture. Alexa also envisions living on the land and would like to see harmony between the generations. She also says she would like for people to work a little harder physically, envisioning a physically fit community. She and Amanda share a vision of acceptance, which was echoed by the youth who would like to see less fighting between families and more cultural teachings so that they can transmit culture to the younger ones. For some people, a vision of returning to live in their territory immersed in their culture seems achievable. In contrast, Meag's vision at this point in the process, is to simply visit her home territory and meet her community, both urban and traditional. As identified by the Gitdumden and these displaced people, there are challenges we must address in finding ways to support reintegration and cultural transmission for displaced people. Among the day-to-day challenges like finding the time and courage, are the ideological ones.

We need to address the ideological barriers we face as a colonized people. We struggle to learn our Indigenous teachings, yet we are constantly bombarded with western influences and encouraged to do well in the western world. Mel says that, as a political person, he struggles in responding to the pressing issues of industrial interests on our homelands that colonization presents and, consequently, has less time to spend with his family. We are told as young people to learn our language and teachings, while also excelling in mainstream education. We are required to do exceptionally well in both worlds simultaneously, yet, like Amanda said, she is comfortable where she is at now in her life. Although she has a strong desire to learn her ancestral roots, this is often in competition with the rewards of mainstream living like academic success and comforts that capitalist society affords. Trevor and Joey also spoke to this sense of giving up a western way of life, which they saw as necessary for cultural growth and learning, yet difficult. Margaret also spoke to this issue and said that a lack of community participation has become the norm. Surely, these challenges are faced by all Indigenous people, yet all of these people envision returning to their communities in one capacity or another. Trevor said, "I think we all want to go back home, we just have to be reminded why." In addition, one Burns Lake focus group participant reminded us to be patient with ourselves during this very urgent time. He says we must carefully evaluate our expectations in light of the fact that our communities often experience great reliance on the colonial government to make the changes we need. As previously discussed, the colonial government is designed to keep us dependent on them through racist laws and practices like the imposed Chief and Council government system. Thus, taking all of the challenges into account, we can realistically explore ways to work towards our visions of

cultural transmission, belonging, identity and the survival of our nations in alignment with our traditional systems.

From this research, a framework for the reintegration of displaced peoples has emerged. The following recommendations were guided by both the concerns and needs of displaced peoples and the strategies developed by the Gitdumden focus groups:

1. Identify existing roles and pathways to reconnection, both internally and externally.
2. Reconnecting through relationships built on communication, welcoming, and healing.
3. Identifying cultural knowledge the community finds necessary for transmission.
4. Discovering how to transmit culture to displaced community members through practice and participation.

1. Identifying Roles and Pathways to Reconnecting

One of the first steps in community responsiveness is to identify existing reconnecting resources and roles that community members can fulfill in the reintegration process. The displaced participants said that reactive and proactive measures are necessary to address different experiences in the lives of displaced peoples. For example, Meag felt that the initial contact with her band and application for her Métis card would have been an opportune time for her community to reach out and offer some form of cultural support or ongoing communication. This indicates the need for reactive measures. In contrast, Amanda says she would feel honoured to receive a phone call from

her band, acknowledging her belonging and importance to the community. This might be deemed a proactive measure. Similarly, when I asked the Gitdumden groups if they would like to be proactive or reactive, they identified both reactive and proactive measures for reintegration into the community. They identified existing roles and resources and focused on community healing and development.

Community's roles and responsibilities are central in the process of reintegration and the strengthening of cultural transmission. Many of our communities suffer from a variety of social ills which inhibit us from working together. However, community involvement is necessary for sustainable reintegration. This might manifest as community members implementing strategies identified here or community leaders-traditional or elected- organizing opportunities for community members to become involved.

Although there are existing services and agencies who specifically work towards supporting displaced peoples to connect with their respective cultures, long lasting relationships strengthening Indigenous identity and belonging cannot be fostered without the culture, history and people being involved. I see outside resources as important links between displaced people and the communities from which they come. Particularly, these external resources can be useful tools in supporting the connection between community resources and displaced people.

Community Roles and Pathways to Reconnection

Gitdumden Roles and Pathways to Reconnection

- Roles: Chiefs and Elders being proactive and reactive
- Pathways: Feast Hall, Yinkadini Power Hour, oral stories and *yinta* (land)

The Gitdumden in Burns Lake focused on more traditional resources such as the house chiefs, elders and oral stories. One of the main resources identified by this group was the feast hall because it includes stories, chiefs, dancing, and singing. The feast hall is a resource that can be easily tapped into and where displaced people can experience every element of their culture. This group also identified our *yinta* (land) as a vital resource for the transmission of culture. For example, Mel talked about the Yinkadini Power Hour in Smithers, British Columbia, in which community members from the entire territory are welcome to once a week to share food together, drum, sing songs, canoe, and share knowledge and stories. This gathering has recently been held closer to Burns Lake, British Columbia in order to accommodate the more eastern members. Each week, Wet'suwet'en gather on the territory to learn about our *yinta*, history and experience our culture. In contrast, the Moricetown group had a more child centered approach, identifying resources that would facilitate experiential cultural transmission to children. Among these were culture camps, which include accessing external resources.

External Resources

External Resources

- Service Providers: Roots Workers, Reconnect Worker, Family Support Workers
- Camps
- Genealogies
- Mainstream School System
- Radio Shows
- Language Websites
- Court Documents
- Books

As examples of external resources, I interviewed two service providers who work towards reconnecting displaced children and youth with their home communities. First I interviewed Peter Morin, who is a Roots worker with Surrounded by Cedar Child and Family Services (SCCFS), a delegated Indigenous child welfare organization servicing urban children and youth who are in care of the Ministry in the Victoria area. His job is to connect displaced children and youth with their cultures. He does this by gathering cultural items and initiating contact with communities. In some cases, his liaising with community is successful and he is able to locate an appropriate cultural teacher. Other times he must rely on items such as books and art work. The goal is to have each child or youth access his/her culture in a meaningful way. Another example of an external resource is the 'Reconnect' worker at the Office of the Wet'suwet'en (OW). I interviewed Diana Vantunen about the work she does to reconnect Wet'suwet'en children and youth with community. Part of her job is to locate family members and initiate contact with them. She also provides Wet'suwet'en specific materials to children and youth and has access to clan genealogies. She helps to prepare families and says that it is up to the individual and family how they would like to proceed. The Moricetown group also identified family support workers as links between displaced people and community. All of these resources get referrals through the MCFD and are possible ways to access children who are in care. However, these resources are dependent on external government funding, and largely rely on the internal resources that communities and families can offer displaced individuals.

The Gitdumden identified a multitude of external resources that were facilitated through Indigenous organizations like the Office of the Wet'suwet'en or other

community agencies. For example, the Moricetown group talked about experiential learning through participation in the cultural camps, run by the Office of the Wet'suwet'en, as well as Rediscovery Camps. The cultural camps are run on Wet'suwet'en territory by Wet'suwet'en people and advance traditional cultural teachings. Rediscovery Camps are an international initiative set up in Indigenous communities as a way to help at risk youth 'rediscover' tradition and culture. There are two rediscovery camps near Wet'suwet'en territory. In addition, both groups identified clan genealogy charts as being an instrumental tool to trace lineage and both identified the mainstream education system as a possible resource for reaching younger children. For example, the Moricetown group would like to see more cultural programming within the schools, while the Burns Lake group identified the use of a Wet'suwet'en history book in their school district. Both felt that more presence in mainstream education was a realistic way to reach displaced members who may be living in their own territories. Trevor also agreed that, the right type of education can be very beneficial to one's identity. In addition to this, the Gitdumden groups talked about how non-Indigenous people were becoming interested in Wet'suwet'en culture which increased a sense of pride in the people. Other resources identified by the community were literature based.

The Burns Lake group was very knowledgeable about scholarly works and other similar resources. For example, there is a radio show in the north which airs a Wet'suwet'en history show. This group also identified online language resources, such as the First Voices website. Other identified resources were documents such as the Delgamuukw court case, which are housed at the Office of the Wet'suwet'en, and books written by non-Wet'suwet'en about Wet'suwet'en culture and history. The elders in the

Burns Lake group took issue with the appropriation of Wet'suwet'en culture for the economic gain of non-Indigenous peoples, yet some members felt that these resources could be useful in learning Wet'suwet'en history. However, everyone agreed that these external resources were not sufficient, and must be used in accordance with Wet'suwet'en values and teachings. This necessarily includes community involvement.

Next, the Gitdumden share what they consider to be successful examples of the responding to their responsibilities to displaced members.

Success Stories

Examples of Success in the Reintegration Process:

- Clan meetings and gatherings
- Welcoming Home Ceremony
- Family Dinner and gifts

My community has utilized at least three successful strategies for reintegration. The first is reflected in my own positive experiences at our clan meetings. I was invited to these meetings by a family member, and after attending the first meeting, was put onto a clan list serve which was meant to keep clan members in communication with each other and the Office of the Wet'suwet'en. It was at the very first

Gitdumden clan meeting where a clan member took the opportunity to recognize my family's displacement. This was not something that was planned ahead of time, but emerged from the discussions we were having about clan membership and clan issues. I am hopeful that other community meetings and gatherings might produce similar opportunities for others who have been displaced from their communities. Other, more organized, events have also been considered success stories by the community.

A few years ago the Office of the Wet'suwet'en's Reconnect worker and the family support worker in Moricetown organized a welcome home feast for children and youth in care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). It was called, *Kwin Tsaniine Das Delh*, which means "returning to the home fire" in Wet'suwet'en. Diana Vantunan, the Reconnect worker at the OW, told me that the Wet'suwet'en have the highest number of children in care in British Columbia, and that many of them are Gitdumden. This was reiterated at the Moricetown focus group, which speaks to the necessity of moving quickly and implementing any and all strategies possible to holistically reconnect with our stolen children. This ceremony was supported by the entire community, and consisted of a feast for the children, as well as a welcoming ceremony in the feast hall. For those children who couldn't make it, another gathering was held at the Vancouver Native Friendship Centre on the lower mainland, where one little girl met her great, great grandmother for the first time. Some of the children had never been to their home community or had any contact with their culture previous to the welcoming ceremony. This ceremony was funded by the MCFD, however, has not been a regular occurrence since. These types of organized events may initiate the establishment of relationships with community members, and then it is up to both the individual and community to strengthen those relationships.

Another success story describes how a seemingly simple gesture can mean the world to someone who has never experienced belonging in their community. One participant described the return of a family of children who had been abducted by the MCFD and ended up in various towns and cities across Canada and the United States. They somehow got into contact with the family in Burns Lake and had to return home

due to a death. When they did, one of the participants had them over for dinner. It was a small gesture, and she didn't have much, but shared some food and invited family to come over and share stories about their family and history in the community. All of the displaced people craved a sense of belonging in the community and were extremely grateful for the stories and food. In addition, the host gave each of them a Wet'suwet'en First Nation jacket, which she had been collecting and saving. The jackets were something community members took for granted, so she was surprised at how the displaced family members adored the jackets and how it gave them a sense of belonging. One of the elders added that this family looks forward to a formal gathering where they might be welcomed back into the community, and sees this as an important step for these displaced clan members. These success stories speak to overcoming the challenges displaced people and communities face. Specifically, these success stories illustrate the development of relationships with community and culture that are necessary for a positive sense of identity and belonging.

2. Reconnecting Through Relationships with Community

Communication

Initial Communication:

- Dispersing information through band offices, community agencies, and family service providers
- Social networking
- Accessing the mainstream school system
- Distribute invitations and posters at community agencies' communication boards
- Advertising on websites
- Making phone calls
- Sending letters (by post or email)

Communication was one of the central themes emerging from the interviews and focus groups. I asked the interview participants what they would like to see their community do to support them in reintegration and asked the focus groups how they could build and maintain healthy relationships with displaced members.

While some participants spoke to the desire for initial contact to come from their community, most said they would feel a greater sense of belonging and acceptance if, once contacted, their communities would reciprocate by continuing communication with them. If a community hopes to be proactive, this can be facilitated in a number of reasonably straight forward ways.

For example, displaced community members could be accessed through band offices and other community agencies. In the north, the Reconnect worker at the OW gets referrals from the MCFD. Although these referrals do not include all Wet'suwet'en who have been displaced intergenerationally and is likely based on status identification, referrals are one way to access Wet'suwet'en children who are in care of the MCFD. Another way is to contact family service providers in the area. Although the MCFD is unlikely to 'disclose' information about our own family and community members, they may pass on information to children or youth should it be presented by a community family service provider. In addition, the Moricetown group identified the need to keep communication open with the band and mainstream schools to identify displaced Wet'suwet'en children who may live in the urban areas. These initiatives do not take a significant amount of time and do not require funding. In addition, the Moricetown group identified social networking as a timeless way to contact displaced members. Although finding initial contact information may be challenging in an institutional setting, creating opportunities for contact can be simple.

Both groups identified clan leaders and membership's involvement in the communication process; however, organizations such as band offices and Friendship Centres could be useful in distributing invitations or information. Contact information for

various bands and contact persons could be posted on websites and communication boards at Friendship Centres. For example, based on our clan system, each clan could have a clan representative who would liaise with the Indigenous organizations in accessing information and acting as a resource for the community. This is one way that Indigenous communities can, and must, begin to change our reliance on external resources and Indian Act organizations and take responsibility for our own nations and families. Making initial contact can be easy, and could be life changing to a displaced individual.

Ongoing Communication

- Websites
- Newsletters
- Phone Calls
- Emails

The interview participants and the Gitdumden focus groups also identified practical tools for ongoing communication. Two of the forums identified were websites and newsletters. The Wet'suwet'en First Nation has a weekly newsletter

that is sent out to on-reserve members and includes news about events in the community. One member said that this newsletter could be sent to our urban, displaced members and could include important community information such as dates of *bahlats* and instructions of what to bring. These newsletters can also be posted on websites like the OW website and sent to Friendship Centres in the province or territory. One of the main challenges faced by displaced people was the physical distance between themselves and their communities; however, the Moricetown group met this challenge with the use of email and phone calls. For example, I am now on a clan list serve and receive updates about clan events and information. I can also contact clan members through this list serve.

Thus, although I reside hundreds of kilometres away from my community, I continue to be included in at least a portion of what is happening back home. These communication resources can easily supplement ongoing communication by family members. As the displaced participants have stated, communication is the initial step in building and maintaining a healthy relationship.

Welcoming

Welcoming and Invitations:

- Potlatches and feasts
- Holiday and family functions
- Clan meetings
- Family reunions
- Welcoming/healing ceremonies

When I asked the Gitdumden focus groups how they could build and maintain healthy relationships with displaced members, they identified extending invitations to displaced members as a way to help them feel acceptance and belonging in the community. This included invitations to *bahlats*

(potlatches), holiday functions in the community, clan meetings, family reunions, welcoming ceremonies, and healing ceremonies. For example, the Reconnect Program, through the Office of the Wet'suwet'en, held a welcoming home ceremony in the summer of 2008 in Moricetown, British Columbia. This event welcomed back youth in care of the MCFD and provided a basis for connecting with culture and accessing cultural knowledge. Welcome home feasts can be held every year as well as naming ceremonies for displaced members who are returning to the community. Ultimately it is up to each individual whether or not they feel they are ready to come back into the community but creating space for each person will increase the likelihood of reintegration. In addition, as demonstrated through my own involvement in clan planning and meetings, invitations

and involvement with clan meetings helps me to feel accepted and needed within the community. This is also a strategic move to get more Wet'suwet'en involved in our traditional governance system. As I described in the previous chapter, the Burns Lake group focused on healing ceremonies as a forum to build healthy relationships with displaced members.

Healing

Healing Values

- Respect
- Inclusivity
- Acceptance

Healing Strategies

- Listening to stories
- Letting go ceremonies
- Traditional and non-traditional healing

This realm of relationship building must include values such as respect, inclusivity and acceptance.

A Burns Lake participant said that one must practice self-respect in order to treat others in a respectful manner. In addition, both the interview participants and the focus groups identified the need for inclusivity. At this time in our history of colonization, violence against each other is rampant in our communities. The state has pitted us against one another and we often lay the blame on each

other when our families are torn apart through genocidal government policies like Bill C-31 and legitimizing the theft of our children and placing them in non-Wet'suwet'en foster homes. Thus, we must work diligently to remain aware of the actual perpetrators while healing and reconnecting our families and strengthening our communities. This means that family feuds must be resolved to allow all our community members a place within our culture and history. Again, this will take great effort and may not always be

successful; however, every community member can do their part to regain unity and overcome dysfunction.

Inclusivity also includes acceptance. By acceptance, the interviewees were not referring to only creating a sense of welcoming and belonging but also the need for communities to maintain an absence of judgement. The youth in particular felt that there was not enough acceptance within their communities and, consequently, feared judgement. The Burns Lake group addressed this issue by identifying the need to become more knowledgeable about the types of trauma our people have experienced as well as the effects of those types of trauma. They also said that work needed to be done to remove stigmas around FASD and eliminate confusion around identity. The ways to build and maintain healthy relationships while enabling all of these values were identified by both the Gitdumden and the interview participants.

If we think about the ways we build relationships and support one another, the challenge of reconnecting with displaced people becomes more realistic and far less of a challenge. Although it will likely take years for our communities to foster healthy relationships, and although some individuals or groups may never decolonize, for those of us who are willing and capable of change, strategies for establishing and building healthy relationships through healing need not be elaborate. For example, the Gitdumden said that listening to people's stories was a good way to begin healing from the trauma inflicted on our families. They identified listening to everyone's story, including elders and other family members as a forum for healing. As I described in the previous chapter, traditional or non-traditional healing and letting go ceremonies are useful in addressing trauma which has led to lateral violence, or confusion.

The focus groups were also asked how the community members could support one another during this process. The Moricetown group identified regular meetings and the strengthening of communication as a vital part of this process, whereas the Burns Lake group talked about having regular healing circles, learning coping mechanisms, and having a Wet'suwet'en centre on the mainland for urban Wet'suwet'en away from home. Weekly circles were also a tool identified by the displaced youth focus group, as something they would like to see in their communities. All of these healing and relationship building techniques include sharing information, which is critical in the reintegration process and the transmission of culture for the survival of our nations.

Strategies to Support One Another

- Hold regular meetings
- Strengthen communication
- Participate in healing circles
- Learn and practice coping mechanisms
- Establish urban centres

3. Identifying Critical Cultural Knowledge

Wet'suwet'en Cultural Teachings

- Language
- Territories and legends
- Community and family ties
- *Kungax* Clan History

The relationships we build with communities must be rooted in cultural teachings and knowledge. Cultural knowledge is what our identities are based on as Indigenous peoples and, traditionally, is intrinsically intertwined in our relationships and our way of being in the world. As

described in chapter two, displaced participants felt that specific cultural teachings were instrumental in their development of a positive identity. They also identified resources that would be useful to them, but focused on face-to-face interaction as a necessary requirement of learning and experiencing culture. I presented these ideas to the Gitdumden focus groups and asked them what cultural knowledge the clan could offer displaced members.

The Gitdumden focus groups responded similarly to the question of what a strong Wet'suwet'en identity looked like. The Moricetown group said they could educate people in their culture and ways of Wet'suwet'en people and talked about providing language materials like language C.D's and the words to songs through the Moricetown Band office. They also said they could teach people about our territories and legends. In addition, the clans have genealogies, which can begin to teach people about the history of where they come from. Other members talked about offering knowledge about communities and family ties that could supplement clan genealogies. They felt it was important to learn about the elders and perhaps have students work on books about the elders. As the interview participants requested, the Gitdumden felt they could offer knowledge about *Kungax*, which is clan history. This would include many of the protocols that displaced participants were interested in knowing such as various roles and responsibilities, initiations into womanhood or manhood, protocols around death, and birth, and the governance of our families and territories. There was a wealth of knowledge in both rooms during the focus groups; the challenge was to harness it and make it accessible to displaced people.

4. Transmitting Culture through Practice and Participation

Practicing Culture Through:

- Feasts and feast preparation
- Gathering of food on the territory
- Contribution in a variety of settings (political, physical, spiritual etc.)

The practice of culture and participation in community is central to the recovery of a positive sense of identity as well as the cultural survival of Indigenous nations. Through the interview process I learned that displaced people viewed face-to-face interactions as necessary to building relationships and learning culture. When I asked the Gitdumden focus groups how they envisioned the transmission of Wet'suwet'en culture, they identified practice and

participation. Traditionally, an Indigenous person would grow up learning his or her culture from birth; however, the government of Canada has been committing acts of genocide on our people for generations, which has severed the natural transmission of culture within many of our families and communities. We are now faced with finding new and creative ways to holistically transmit culture to our people. Many of the ideas identified by the focus groups and the interview participants are similar to the ways community would transmit culture to any community member. Like most Indigenous communities who are experiencing cultural loss and social dysfunction because of colonization, the Gitdumden struggle to regain a way of life which is not always functional even within the community. However, by bringing awareness to the willingness and needs of displaced peoples, the Gitdumden were able to take inventory of

their resources, and regain a foothold in cultural transmission. This solidifies the fact that communities have the tools to support reintegration and cultural transmission, and need only the initiative and planning to carry through with it.

One of the main themes arising from the Gitdumden focus groups was how to get people to live and breathe culture. For example, the Burns Lake group discussed how participation in the feasts teaches cultural protocol and tells stories about names and the histories of those names. If someone attends feasts, they will see the chiefs' dance into the hall acting out their names. This helps people to know what their house chief's names are. By watching where chiefs sit in the *bahlats* people will become familiar with where they belong in the feast hall and will always know where they are supposed to sit. Similarly, participants talk about the revival of traditional foods at *bahlats*, and how gathering and providing for feasts teaches young people about our traditional foods and can be used to normalize the use and consumption of these foods.

A critical part of this is addressing the challenge of a western way of life. One of the Burns Lake participants talked about the need to assert jurisdiction over our traditional territories as a function of gathering traditional foods and challenging a colonial mindset. For instance, our clan may continue to wait for the government of the day to recognize our inherent rights to our lands, or we could assert our rights to our lands, traditional foods, and way of life by spending time together on our territories, learning the history of our lands, collecting food, and using these things to develop a renewed strength in our feast halls. Living and breathing culture means that we experience our laws in action, which includes our *Kungax*- our roles and responsibilities within the clan. Every clan not only has roles and responsibilities within the territory, but

we have responsibilities to each other. Our governance system places that responsibility on our clan and house chiefs to work towards securing the health of our families, yet in the face of an imposed band council system, capitalism, the reserve system, and the many other attacks on our governance system, we all must work towards breathing life into our culture again. As previously discussed, most Indigenous peoples feel displaced to some degree, which can be combated by illuminating and providing people with roles within the community

One way to reconnect with community is to find ways to contribute to the community. As noted from the interview participants, they had a desire to contribute to the community in a number of different ways. For example, displaced people can assist family members or clan members with their feast preparation to learn about feast processes. Similarly, a participant from the Burns Lake Gitumden focus group shared a success story about six homeless men in Smithers, British Columbia. These men participated in a men's Wet'suwet'en culture camp. One of the ways they experienced culture was to go out hunting moose. After they got a moose the participant was having trouble butchering it. One of the men watching saw that his brother was having trouble and offered to finish the job. He had remembered what he was taught as a child and finished the job with ease. His actions and knowledge were viewed by the other men at camp as useful, whereas in town he was treated very badly by mainstream society. Mainstream society does not reward Indigenous people for their knowledge or use of traditional practices, whereas in this case, providing a homeless man a useful role within the group helped everyone realize his worth and contribution as Wet'suwet'en. The participant emphasized that it's these people who need the most attention; the ones who

have been hurt the most and treated the worst need to be seen as useful, which helps them see themselves as worthy and knowledgeable. He says we really need to move further away from institutionalizing our language and culture and return to practicing and participating in culture within our homelands. Those homeless men were living their culture for five days, away from their addictions and suffering. When they returned to town, two of them found homes right away while one found a home later on. They saw a better way to live their lives and began realizing their worth as Wet'suwet'en.

Likewise, creating or providing roles for displaced community members is a way to not only strengthen their sense of belonging in the community and transmit culture, but also to strengthen the entire community. Youth also identified the desire to have their voices heard in this arena by including youth input and direction. There are many avenues in which to get displaced members involved. The political arena is just one way of making displaced members feel not only accepted, but also that they have an opportunity to contribute. In my own experience, my background in the Indigenous Governance program provided me with the tools to contribute to our clan meetings in meaningful ways. Community members saw this as an important asset and began including me in more decision making and communication. This made me feel as if I not only belonged in my community, but that I was also appreciated. However, since I am not entirely familiar with many of the protocols and history in our territory, and do not speak the language, I am still lacking an important part of my learning: mentors.

Mentors

Mentoring Might Include:

- Elders teaching children
- A network of mentors
- Commitment
- Grooming through potlatches
- Repetition of teachings

Part of living and breathing the culture is recognizing various roles within community and the need to keep communication and practice open with more than one individual. This means that although it may be more realistic to build and maintain a relationship with one mentor, the nature of Indigenous knowledge requires engagement with a number of different mentors. For example, Joey told us that certain community members hold

certain knowledge about Namgis history and culture, thus requiring a network of relationships to access all of this knowledge. In addition, culture needs to be transmitted in a more holistic way. If lasting relationships are established displaced people will feel more welcome and supported to engage in events in our communities. A network of support people carrying with them a wealth of cultural knowledge will create more opportunities for a displaced person to access information and to be comfortable furthering their learning. However, displacement has made mentoring geographically challenging. This does not mean that mentorship is not possible or necessary. Rather, mentorship needs to be taken up by a number of community members. The Gitdumden identified the need to groom young people by teaching them protocol through the *bahlats* system. Similarly, the displaced youth focus group identified the need for elders to train children, and specifically mentioned the need for a commitment from teachers and mentors. They believe that the teachings must be repetitive, so they become second

nature to displaced people. Although a mentor may not have all of the knowledge a displaced person would like to know, he or she would likely be knowledgeable about who to contact to access particular information or practices. Mentors should be knowledgeable people in the community who practice the identified values of acceptance, respect, and inclusivity. I found an example of this mentorship role within the community of Cheam, in southern British Columbia.

Their community initiative is called “Family Roots and Ties” and was founded by a small handful of elders in the community. I spoke with Eleanor Stephenson, one of the founders and organizers. They managed to secure a small funding grant for one year and are looking to secure additional funding to continue the program. This initiative brings children in foster care together with their community and families once a month. The group has a small budget for food, which is prepared by the elders and community members. They spend an afternoon together eating, sharing culture, and doing cultural activities the children and youth are interested in like storytelling and making art. The children range from age three to fifteen. They contact them through social workers, although it is mostly the Roots workers who attend. Elders and community members are modelling the type of care we must take with our young ones, and exposing them to cultural practices like drumming, singing and dancing. Imagine how different life could have been for any of the displaced participants in my study had their communities helped them feel a sense of belonging and importance at such a young age.

Funding

Our communities do not require money to care for one another. For example, although the program in Cheam received a small funding grant, communities could come

together each month to donate and prepare food for such events. Further, displaced individuals can be invited to harvest and collect the food for such events, thus providing useful roles for these people within the territory as well as passing on critical food gathering skills. These events can take place on smaller scales, which can be absorbed by all of the community members coming together. Before the imposition of the reserve system, in 1859 in B.C, and before the state systematically destroyed our way of life, Indigenous people thrived communally. As I have discussed, our traditional governance systems held clan chiefs responsible for the survival of the food sources and the wealth of the people. Wealth was distributed through the *bahlats* system and everyone contributed. Today, because of individualistic, capitalist ideologies, many of our people do not uphold their responsibilities to one another. In order to overcome our dependence on the state and this destructive way of life we must return to thinking and living communally. Those who are able, can alleviate some of the burden for families who are not able to contribute as much.

It is my vision that because this framework is grassroots in nature that there will not be a need for core funding. Meetings and circles can take place in people homes, as well as within space provided by allied organizations. Each family member would have a responsibility to support each other as much as they could financially. If they were unable to do so other community members from that clan would be asked for assistance. For example, in our clan system everyone has a father clan. Were something to happen to me in my community and I needed assistance of some kind, it would be the responsibility of my father clan to meet my needs and the needs of my family. I would then pay back my father clan when I was able through the *bahlats* system. Since my father is non-

indigenous, my father clan would then be my grandfather's clan. I also see extra support coming from allied groups in the form of travel monies for children in care of the MCFD and funding for "Reconnect" events and ceremonies. Groups within other jurisdictions could also choose to partner with community organizations to fund community awareness and education projects around healthy families and grassroots initiatives. Our people were creative and lived without money for thousands of years. Although I realize this cannot happen, at this time, to the extent that it did historically, I see that our dependence on money must begin to diminish and our dependence on each other must begin to increase if *yinkadini'ha ba a'ten* (the ways of the people of the surface of the earth) is to become a reality.

I strongly believe that Indigenous people have the ability to strengthen our way of life through cultural transmission to our families. The research process has strengthened this belief, as I have witnessed the simplicity of belonging and relationship building in the eyes of displaced people. Throughout the interview process, these displaced participants have voiced a strong desire to learn their cultures and contribute to strengthening their cultures and nations. They have identified the need for establishing and building healthy relationships as necessary in the transmission of culture through face-to-face interactions, and have provided realistic ways in which their communities can support them in this process. In response, the Gitdumden have vocalized their vision of a strong Wet'suwet'en identity based in community, through communication, cultural teachings, and participation in our traditional systems. They have responded to many of the themes identified by displaced participants and have strategized ways to support this process. My contribution has been to integrate these ideas into a framework for

reconnecting, which can possibly be used as a model for the work we have ahead of us as colonized peoples.

Chapter Five: Stoking the Fire

This research process has been an emotional one filled with realizations and learning. For instance, I just recently celebrated a birthday, and as a gift, my mother gave me my baby book, as I too am expecting to start a family soon. As I was looking through it, I noticed that I didn't know any of the people who were present at the time of my birth. None of my family was there. It made me angry to think that my mother was denied her family at this important time in her life. Yet, almost thirty years later my experience is much different; my child has heard Wet'suwet'en songs from within the womb and will always be surrounded by family and culture. My child will have more exposure and access to relatives and Wet'suwet'en culture because of the work my family and community has done to rebuild the relationships between us. Indigenous families and communities have been working diligently to restore our connections to culture and each other. However, we continue to live in a colonized state, which means that every aspect of our lives as Indigenous people is still controlled by a foreign government: how we raise our children, how we interact with our homelands, and how we govern ourselves are all ways the state continues its domination over our nations.

As I've illustrated through my own experience, and as I've discussed throughout this work, Indigenous peoples must find new and creative ways to resist the destruction of our families and the alienation of our community members through displacement. By including my community's perspective I have emerged from this process with a different vision. Not only do I personally feel more connection with my community, but I also have a better understanding of the broader impacts of displacement. I believe that in understanding community's perspective, displaced people will also feel more solidarity

with their communities and will be able to work towards reintegration together. The discussions that took place provide direction to both me and my community on how to proceed in this process of reintegration and strengthening. More importantly, they provide a potential model for other Indigenous communities struggling with the issue of displacement.

Throughout this work, I have used the interview participants' words to illuminate the experiences of displacement on an individual level, and have also argued that displacement severs cultural transmission and furthers the aims of colonization through the cultural annihilation of our families. Yet, this work is not only about Indigenous identity and how our identities have been impacted by displacement. I also attempt to contextualize this site of identity loss, alienation, and cultural loss within a larger colonial context. In doing this, I am attempting to include the communities, from which individuals are displaced. It is important to understand that communities are also suffering the loss of displaced members and that a shift from thinking about displacement as an individualistic phenomenon must occur on a broader level. By shifting our thinking about displacement, and contextualizing it within a broader colonial framework, we can see that our relationships with each other must continue to strengthen for reintegration to be successful.

Summary and Reflections

In the first chapter I talk about the context of colonization. This chapter is entitled, "Awakening from the Den." I use this phrase as a metaphor for not only my own realization of how displacement, as a consequence of colonization, awoke me from a self-destructive slumber, but also in hopes that this work will have a similar affect for the

research participants. I begin with a story of the impacts displacement has had on my family. I do this to share a little of my own experiences and place in the research, but also in an attempt to personalize the sometimes abstract concept of colonization. I also discuss how colonization has affected our identities, communities, and severed cultural transmission. By understanding the processes of colonization, displacement becomes less about the individual and more about the impacts our communities face, which better equips us to resist. I believe it is necessary for displaced people to understand *why* they've experienced displacement in order to have a better understanding of how to repair the damage caused by it. Finally, I described my own interaction with our traditional clan governance system, the difference that made in my research and how it became a process of my own reintegration and personal learning.

The second chapter is dedicated to portraying the experiences and needs of the displaced participants. Displaced people felt alienated from their communities and stuck in between two worlds. In response, they identified the need to establish and build relationships with community members as a forum for belonging and cultural transmission. They described how they stayed connected to culture through urban initiatives yet still felt their own communities' cultural teachings were missing from their lives and were necessary for a complete Indigenous identity. The main tools they identified for establishing and building healthy relationships with community were communication, acceptance, support, and welcoming. They also emphasized the need for cultural transmission through face-to-face interactions. This chapter is of particular importance because it spoke to the experiences and needs of displaced people. Although I believe that some alienation and displacement is experienced by all Indigenous people,

displaced peoples have specific needs due to the impacts displacement has had on their identities and belonging. In addition, although youth, who live in or near their communities, have identified a sense of displacement, most of the participants felt that their lack of relationships with community members and their geographical locations severely impacted their access to cultural transmission. The experiences and impacts they shared were critical in understanding their needs in the reintegration process. The inclusion of their voices will allow their communities insight into the range of experiences their members are living as well as ways to meet the needs of their displaced members.

Similarly, it was important for me to present what displaced people experience to my community. In chapter three: “Gitdumden Response,” I give voice to the Gitdumden focus groups, the responses they had to the information presented to them about displaced peoples’ experiences and needs, and the themes emerging from their work. Just as I had not fully understood my community’s perspective, I thought it was important for my community to consider a perspective with which they may have not been familiar. Therefore, in chapter three I discussed the Gitdumden’s vision of community’s role and responsibilities as well as the overwhelming need for healing work to be an integral part of the process. This healing was emphasized as not only a necessary response to the impacts of colonization like the theft of children and Bill C-31, but also as a forum for which displaced peoples can reintegrate based on healthy relationships. Finally, in this chapter I discussed the purpose of this work to the community and how the Gitdumden aim to strengthen our traditional systems of clan governance through the reclamation of our culture and the strengthening of our nation through our families.

Finally, chapter four, “Returning to the Home Fire-Integrated Strategies for Reconnecting” provides a model for reconnecting based on the ideas and strategies identified by both displaced participants and the Gitdumden focus groups. This model may be useful to communities who are struggling to reconnect with their displaced members, or may help to bring awareness to the issue of displacement from both a displaced person’s perspective and community perspective. It begins by identifying the need for a vision of belonging in the community, and then works through the following process of:

1. Identifying Roles and Pathways to Reconnection

This section discusses the roles that community can play in the reintegration process as well as the responsibilities that our traditional governance systems place on community members in cultural transmission. This section also includes “success stories,” which illustrate the ability of communities to initiate healing and relationship building with displaced members while strengthening cultural transmission.

2. Reconnecting through Relationships

The interview participants were instrumental in identifying ways in which community members could initiate, establish, and build healthy relationships as sites of face-to-face cultural transmission. The Gitdumden responded with strategies to meet these identified needs through strengthening communication, welcoming people into the community, and healing initiatives.

3. Identifying Critical Cultural Knowledge

The interview participants identified the types of knowledge they felt would increase a sense of identity and belonging in them, while the Gitdumden focused on similar cultural practices, emphasizing our traditional clan governance system as our way of living Wet'suwet'en culture.

4. Transmitting Culture through Practice and Participation

The displaced interview participants all recognized the need for cultural transmission to occur through practice and participation. Although they recognized that other resources, like books and language CD's, would be helpful in this process, they ultimately desired cultural transmission through face-to-face interaction with community members. The Gitdumden agreed that the transmission of Wet'suwet'en culture must take place through practice and participation on our homelands with our elders, chiefs, and through the strengthening of our traditional feast system.

This model of reconnecting and reintegration is based on the experiences of displaced people as well as a community perspective on how to resist colonization and strengthen our nations in the face of continued colonial domination. The strategies developed here are meant to be realistic ways that Indigenous communities can take charge of the health of their families despite the many challenges we face as a colonized people.

Finally, I briefly discussed our reliance on external funding and encourage communities to counter our colonized reliance on the colonial state. Throughout this chapter I illuminate the ways that communities can strengthen our roles and responsibilities to all of our community members. This chapter attempts to broaden the

scope of reintegration, from a governmental policy approach, which emerges from much of the identity work, to a grassroots initiative that we are all capable of fulfilling.

The purpose of my work was to research the experiences and needs of displaced Indigenous people in an effort to support their reintegration. The example of my community provides an example of my reintegration into my community as well as a community perspective on displacement and reintegration strategies. My research focused on finding meaningful engagement between displaced people and community, specifically, the Wet'suwet'en community. I believe the research process has been successful in my own reintegration as well as identifying the needs of displaced individuals and raising awareness and community organization within the Gitdumden community. I am confident that the displaced participants were able to voice their needs, while expanding their thinking about displacement and contextualizing their experiences. In the future, I would like to work specifically with displaced Wet'suwet'en, although in this case, I was attempting to capture a broad range of experiences. One of the most obvious themes emerging from the research was the need for healing.

The Healing Work Ahead of Us

The stories shared with me are ones of sadness and disconnect, genocide and imprisonment; all the regular consequences of colonization. Yet, these stories are necessary and empowering precisely because they are the manifestation of a strong people who have and continue to struggle to regain a way of life that was shared with us by the Creator. These are the experiences of Indigenous people and communities who share a strong desire to decolonize and who are brave enough to begin down that path. These stories are relayed here so that we become aware of the strength and effort it takes

to heal and reconnect, and the necessity of doing this. In reconnecting with one another we also achieve a sense of fulfillment, empowerment, and cultural continuity as individuals and communities. These experiences are a testament to our ability to struggle and to do the healing work we have ahead of us. Originally, I had contemplated using my thesis to have a headstone feast for my aunties and uncles who have passed, and did not receive a proper Wet'suwet'en burial or ceremony. However, after engaging this topic of displacement with my community, it has become apparent that the healing between those of us who are still alive must be done first. Otherwise, the hurt feelings and displaced anger will continue to get in the way of building relationships and returning to our Wet'suwet'en ways of being in the world.

Next Steps and Future Research

Originally, I decided to stay with this topic because I wanted to engage a research project that addresses a major problem in Indigenous communities with the hope that some concrete grassroots suggestions for reintegration might also emerge. The work that has been done in this area has been geared towards policy changes within the child welfare system. For example, Sinclair focuses on the transracial adoption of Aboriginal children and calls for policy changes within the adoption process, saying, "It would be naive to place the blame for current child welfare involvement solely on government and child welfare authorities."⁵² Research on the effects on displaced Indigenous peoples' identity is rising, yet the communities they are displaced from continue to be excluded from the analysis. By excluding community perspectives and focusing on governmental policies, researchers perpetuate the ideology of our inferiority and blatantly disregard

⁵² Sinclair. "Identity lost and found: Lessons from the sixties scoop," 65-82.

ongoing colonization. Most of the recommendations take for granted the imposition of foreign child welfare agencies and the impacts of colonization, and work within the colonial framework, making recommendations of policy reform. While I understand the necessity of working with professionals in this field, as these people are the ones who make decisions about how, when, and where we access our very own children, this is not the answer. My rationale for taking this stance is clearly outlined in Chapter One in my discussion about colonization and the colonial relationship. As long as we continue to place the power and decision making process in the hands of the colonizer, we will continue to rely on them to “fix” our families and communities. I hope that by doing this work, others can share in the vision of the repatriation of our families, by our families, communities, and traditional systems of governance.

Future research might build on the model provided here by focusing on community organization and healing around issues of displacement framed within a decolonization project. Diana Vantunen, the Reconnect worker at the Office of the Wet’suwet’en asserts, “I don’t think any reconnecting is disastrous. There are always some strong people in the family.” Surely, communities and the displaced people themselves are the experts on how to reconnect and advance cultural transmission within families. I believe that future grassroots research can assist in developing the ideas and strengths we have within our nations.

My own research will build upon the idea of strengthening our families and traditional governance as a decolonization project in order to eliminate the theft of Wet’suwet’en children. In response to the need for healing, my first initiative will be to take the necessary steps in organizing a healing ceremony for our family. My hope is to

use this healing ceremony as the family reunion my cousin, sister and I have envisioned for years. From there, I envision continued healing, steeped in culture, for all of us. By doing this we will also be strengthening our clan in an effort to stand up for our lands, families, and nations once again.

I hope to have provided insight into the lives and needs of a number of displaced people. I am hopeful that the research has acted as a tool for sharing ideas and strategies that can be useful to communities who are struggling to find ways to reconnect with displaced people or who envision cultural strengthening for all their people. I recognize the breadth of experiences of displaced people and the richness and diversity of communities' culture, which therefore necessitates a unique approach which can only be designed and implemented by each community. I think about the thousands of children who are currently experiencing the trauma of displacement through the ongoing colonization of our families and the future generations of those people and the nations where they come from. This wakes me up to the realities of devastation that continue to wreak havoc on our families, like the incarceration of our youth and the ongoing theft of our children. It reminds me of something I read back in my undergraduate years, which has always stuck with me:

“We carry the children inside of us because the Creator gave us that right, and with that right comes the responsibility to protect them.”⁵³

When the burden feels too heavy, I remember this simple, yet profound message which I believe to be true, and I realize that I also carry the strength to uphold my responsibility to my ancestors, the children, and the unborn. I hope that this work might reawaken

⁵³ Shelly, E Bressette. “The Truth About Us: Living in the Aftermath of the Ipperwash Crisis.” In Anderson, Kim., and Bonita Lawrence, ed., *Strong Women Stories: Native Vision and Community Survival*. Toronto: Sumach Press, 2003), 239.

Indigenous people to the strength we have to support one another, and continue to work diligently towards the strengthening of cultural transmission and belonging for all of our people; especially those who have never experienced the strength of their community behind them, and are unaware of their place in the world. I hope this work can bring an awareness of the necessity to move in the direction of our ancestors together.

Kwin Tsaniine Das Delh means returning to the home fire. After a cold and lonesome time away, there is nothing like coming home to the warmth of the fire and the good food and friends who wait there. Just as in days gone by, our communities must continue to keep our fires stoked awaiting the return of our family members.

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Appendix A: Service Provider Interview Guide

1. Introduce myself and where I come from.
2. What type of services do you provide to Wet'suwet'en people?
3. Are these services specific to displaced peoples? (explain displaced as being disconnected from community for a variety of reasons)
4. If not, what elements of services you provide support the reintegration or reconnection of Wet'suwet'en people to their culture, community or homelands?
5. Have you experienced or know of cases where people have successfully reintegrated into their communities/families?
 - Do you have any thoughts about why this particular situation was successful?
6. Have you experienced or know of cases where people have not successfully reintegrated into their communities/families?
 - Do you have any thoughts about specific barriers that prevented someone from reintegrating into their community/family?
7. Is there anything that community has done to support people who are trying to reintegrate into their culture/community/family?
8. What types of things do you think community could do to support reintegration in collaboration with the services you provide?
9. Is there anything you would like to see happen within your organization to support the reintegration of displaced peoples?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B: Research Proposal

Kwin tsaniine das delh (I Am Returning to the Home Fire) : An Indigenous Reclamation

Objectives

My research objectives are to analyze the needs of displaced Indigenous peoples in reconnecting with their Indigenous communities. I plan to engage the Gitdumden clan of the Wet'suwet'en people, as a case study, to create a grassroots framework to re-claim authority over the cultural survival of displaced community members. Data will be collected through interviews with displaced Indigenous peoples as well as through focus groups within the Gitdumden territories with Gitdumden members. The research questions guiding the research are: What do displaced Indigenous peoples need to reconnect with their communities in a meaningful way? How can the Wet'suwet'en community re-connect displaced peoples that are suffering the effects of colonialism like cultural identity loss through a grassroots framework based on the clan system? And, can re-connecting displaced peoples to their community contribute to cultural survival? These questions are necessary in the face of colonial domination over our families and communities through institutions such as the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD).

Context

Indigenous families have suffered immense intergenerational cultural loss through colonial practices such as residential schools, the 'sixties scoop,' Bill-C31 and other colonial assaults on Indigenous identity and cultural continuity. Currently, the MCFD continues the theft of Indigenous children at rates consistent with the number of children in residential schools at the height of the residential school era and during the 'sixties scoop.' Conditions are not improving, resulting in a loss of cultural transmission in Indigenous communities as well as urbanization and a loss of cultural identity. Once Indigenous young people become part of this process of colonization it becomes increasingly difficult to return to their communities and live healthy lifestyles. The theft of our children, a loss of an Indigenous identity and cultural values, and assaults on our families result in drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, incarceration, and internalized oppression among other negative effects. Indigenous communities are strategizing to keep families intact; however, communities must also facilitate the cultural transmission of displaced families for cultural survival and the health of Indigenous nationhood. While my research focuses on displaced Indigenous peoples, using Gitdumden clan as a case study to develop a grassroots framework will support the authority of our traditional clan governance system over our families while strengthening community organization and relationships.

My Role

I am a member of the Gitdumden clan through my mother, June Wickham, my grandmother Emily Isaac, and my great grandparents Julie and Paddy Isaac. My role in the research is to gather information from displaced peoples as well as facilitate discussions on how Gitdumden clan can reconnect their displaced members to community. As a displaced individual through my mother's apprehension during the 'sixties scoop' I will use my own experiences of displacement and reintegration as examples in my research. Throughout the preparation for my thesis I have furthered my learning of Wet'suwet'en culture and tradition while integrating back into the community through my family and clan ties. I am recognized as a member of the Gitdumden clan that has been displaced and have been welcomed home by clan members, chiefs and relatives. Since one of my goals is to strengthen the hereditary clan system of governance, I will be seeking permission to carry out interviews and focus groups from three hereditary clan chiefs as well as the matriarchs within my house group- total of three subgroups of families within each clan. I have presented ideas from my thesis at our clan gatherings within the past year which have all been well received by clan members and clan chiefs.

Ethical Considerations

My research ethics are grounded within an Indigenous worldview. First and foremost I am accountable to Wet'suwet'en people, particularly the Gitdumden clan. Accountability comes from my belief that every action one takes affects others. Along with accountability, I have a responsibility to strengthen Wet'suwet'en self determination, which necessarily includes strengthening our families. In light of my connection to the Gitdumden clan I am not an outsider in the research, but am also not well known within all Wet'suwet'en communities. Therefore, I will be critical of my own power as a researcher and academic while facilitating the group as a member of the clan. During interviews with displaced participants and focus groups I will clearly communicate to each participant that he/she may withdraw at any time without consequences. I will also allow enough time for the participants to debrief the interview/focus group before we depart and will provide referrals to Indigenous councillors in the area. In addition, I will offer access to spiritual cleansing ceremonies to each participant such as smudging, or sweat lodge ceremonies (depending on preference and tradition). Throughout the research process I will abide by the protocols set out by the Indigenous Governance Program at the University of Victoria (Protocols & Principles for Conducting Research in an Indigenous Context 2003) as well as the traditional protocols of the Wet'suwet'en people and Coast Salish Peoples. If these protocols should clash I will consult the community as well as my advisor on how to proceed.

Methodology

To ground my research, I will analyze existing services for displaced people. I will examine programs or initiatives that facilitate grassroots connections between displaced peoples and their home communities. I will do this by accessing research on child welfare at the Indigenous Child Welfare Research Network Conference in Victoria,

B.C and by networking with the participants there. I will also review services offered by Carrier Sekani Child and Family Services (CSCFS) and the Office of the Wet'suwet'en (OW) as service providers in the Wet'suwet'en area. Through this process I will interview a representative from each service provider to discuss how these organizations facilitate and strengthen repatriation and cultural transmission for displaced peoples.

Secondly, I will interview 12 people (6 adults: 3 male, 3 female and 6 youth: 3male, 3 female) who have been displaced through direct or intergenerational colonial practices such as the sixties scoop, foster care, adoption, or Bill C-31. These people will be contacted through recruitment posters (Appendix A) at the Victoria Native Friendship Center and the Smithers Friendship Center as well as through colleagues, friends and acquaintances. Interviews will be conducted in a location convenient for the participant. The interview will be audio recorded with the permission of the participant and will be guided by open ended interview questions (Appendix B) about the needs of the displaced individual to reconnect with his/her community. At this time, information on existing services will be described to participants providing time for the participant to provide feedback on existing services. Each participant will be gifted with a small gift of food (canned salmon or berries) as a sign of a respectful relationship. I will clearly communicate to each participant that should he/she decide to end the interview the gift need not be returned. Each interview will be transcribed and provided to the participant to examine and omit or clarify any of the data. I will then analyze the data to initiate discussion within the focus groups.

Thirdly, I will facilitate focus groups with Gitdumden clan members in two communities (Wet'suwet'en First Nation and Moricetown). Each focus group will consist of Gitdumden clan members (up to 15 members per session) and will be communicated through email (clan gathering mailing list accessed through the OW) as well as by posting an invitation at the Wet'suwet'en First Nation band office, the Office of the Wet'suwet'en, the Proud and Strong Wet'suwet'en Facebook group and the Smithers Friendship Center (Appendix C). To strengthen the clan system of governance I will invite another clan member to witness the clan business. Consistent with Wet'suwet'en tradition I will gift outside clan members for witnessing the meeting. The Wet'suwet'en First Nation area focus group will be held within the community at an accessible location. I will provide food (lunch or dinner) to the focus group participants as is customary for any gathering. The Moricetown focus group will be held either in Moricetown at the multiplex or at the Smithers Friendship Center in their interview room. Food will also be provided. Each focus group will be audio recorded with the permission of the participants and will be guided by the needs of displaced peoples taking into account the services provided by family service agencies in the area. Each group will be presented with themes and statements from displaced participants as well as the analysis of service agencies in order for the clan to identify how organizing through the clan system can succeed in supporting and initiating the reintegration of displaced clan members while strengthening families and communities to ensure cultural survival. I will analyze the data and send the results to the group via email and mail as well as create a presentation at both the Office of the Wet'suwet'en and the Wet'suwet'en First Nation band office for review by participants. I will allow time for follow up focus groups and changes to the analysis presented.

Framework for Analysis

I will analyze the knowledge of service providers and organizational initiatives, focusing on how services can be utilized by the clan system. In my analysis I will identify power relations within child welfare services, and supports for the decolonization project. By gathering information on particular services, such as services provided by CSFS and the Office of the Wet'suwet'en, I can assess their role in the decolonization process, and will then present these ideas to displaced peoples and community. Through this process, displaced people and community can determine how these services can support their reintegration. Although I will offer my thoughts and ideas on services, I will leave the determination of their place and usefulness up to the displaced individuals and community members.

I will analyze the interviews using themes that will be useful for communities to facilitate discussion on fulfilling the needs of displaced people. I will present these themes to the participants after I have concluded that their transcripts are accurate and before I present these themes to the focus groups. I will use statements and phrases from participants to represent these themes in the focus groups so the focus group participants have the opportunity to hear exact thoughts that displaced peoples have experienced.

Each community focus group will be asked to identify realistic community initiatives (based on the clan governance system) that can be worked into a framework for other communities attempting to reintegrate displaced family members. Each focus group will be documented on the flip charts for all participants to view. At the end of each session I will compile the information into themes and present them to the participants for verification. If a participant disagrees with any of the themes I will include the comment(s) in my final report.

Benefits: Decolonization

Within a broader decolonization project, the community will have an opportunity to work together to resist a critical issue facing Indigenous communities- the continued loss of Indigenous young people and thus an attack on Indigenous nationhood and cultural survival. The research process itself will provide opportunities for relationship building among community members, while creating spaces for displaced Indigenous youth to repatriate their cultural identity. By bringing awareness to the issue of displacement, and by discussing issues as a community, people will feel empowered over their own affairs. In addition, displaced peoples will have the opportunity to express their needs. For Wet'suwet'en, participating in re-claiming other community members provides an opportunity to take control over future generations and cultural survival. More and more Nations are working towards re-claiming their own laws and justice systems. Building an Indigenous, anti-colonial framework for re-claiming displaced peoples will push the boundaries and authority of colonial institutions and support self-determination through strengthening our cultures and our families.

Appendix C: Interview Invitation

Kwin Tsaniine Das Delh (I Am Returning to the Home Fire): An Indigenous Reclamation

You are invited to participate in a study called “Kwin Tsaniine Das Delh (I Am Returning to the Home Fire): An Indigenous Reclamation” that is being conducted by Molly Wickham, a candidate for a Masters of Arts in Indigenous Governance at the University of Victoria and a member of the Gitdumden clan (bear/wolf) from the Wet’suwet’en Nation (Located in the northern interior of B.C).

Molly Wickham currently resides in Victoria, B.C and is conducting a portion of her research on Coast and Straights Salish territory. She can be reached by telephone at 250-516-8018 or by email at mwickham@uvic.ca at any time.

Study Objectives:

The objective of this study is to create a grassroots (community based) framework to support the reintegration and cultural survival of displaced (disconnected) peoples within their home communities. To support this process the study will include information from service providers who support reintegration and reconnection to community/family. Critical to this study is information from displaced people on what their needs are to make reintegration or a reconnection to their home nation possible. The Gitdumden clan will be used as a case study, using the above mentioned information as a basis for creating a framework to facilitate and support the reconnection of displaced clan members.

The Importance of the Study:

Indigenous families have suffered immense intergenerational cultural loss through colonial practices such as residential schools, the ‘sixties scoop,’ Bill-C31 and other negative effects on identity and culture. Currently, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) continues the theft of Indigenous children at rates higher than the number of children in residential schools at the height of the residential school era and during the ‘sixties scoop.’ Conditions are not improving, resulting in a loss of cultural transmission in Indigenous communities as well as the loss of cultural identity and an increase in people living away from their home communities. Using the Wet’suwet’en as a case study to develop a grassroots frame-work will strengthen the authority of the traditional clan governance system over families while strengthening community organization and relationships. This study will also allow for the voices of displaced peoples to be heard and used to provide a tool for other communities experiencing the same effects of colonization.

Participation

This study requires 12 participants (6 adults (25 years and older): 3 male/3 female and 6 youth (Ages 13-24): 3 male/3 female) who have been displaced (disconnected) from their territory or Indigenous community. The participants are asked to engage in an in-depth interview which would take place at a comfortable and convenient location for approximately one-two hours. The interview questions will be open ended allowing participants to discuss issues they see as relevant and important to the research topic. The interviews will be audio recorded with the permission of the participants to allow for an engaging conversation.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time without explanation or consequence. If participation is withdrawn, information will not be used in the study. A transcription of the interview will be provided to each participant to review and I will allot time for possible omissions and/or edits. The final report will also be provided to each participant and their respective nation.

If you feel your experiences or insight as a displaced Indigenous person could contribute to this study, please contact Molly Wickham at 250-516-8018 or at mwickham@uvic.ca.

Massih Cho (Thank you very much)

Appendix D: Youth Focus Group Invitation

Kwin Tsaniine Das Delh (I Am
Returning to the Home Fire):

An Indigenous Reclamation

Focus Groups and interviews for displaced Native Youth (ages 18-24) who want to be heard and support other young people in their cultural journeys!!

Displacement means that you feel disconnected from your culture or community. If this has been your experience, and you would like to voice your needs as a displaced person, come and share in a focus group or personal interview.

What are the *benefits*?

You can voice your needs.

Your knowledge will help begin discussions on how to support displaced people.

Displacement means that you feel disconnected from your culture or community. If this has been your experience, and you would like to voice your needs as a displaced person, come and share in a focus group or personal interview.

What are the *benefits*?

You can voice your needs.

Your knowledge will help begin discussions on how to support displaced people.

If you would like to contribute in a focus group or interview or would like more information please contact Molly at mwickham@uvic.ca or at 250-516-8018.

Appendix E: Interview Questions

1. Would you like to introduce yourself and share with me where your nation comes from?
2. Do you normally identify as being from your particular nation when you introduce yourself? Explain
3. How would you describe your relationship with your nation?
4. Are there any particular reasons that you have this type of relationship?
5. What type of relationship do you want with your community?
6. Do you have any connections to other Indigenous communities?
7. How have these relationships/ or lack thereof impacted your sense of belonging/identity?
8. Do you feel that a sense of belonging is important? Why?
9. Are there any people or services that have nurtured a sense of belonging for you?
10. Can you please explain what this person or service agency did to support you?
11. Did it involve specific teachings and cultural knowledge from your territory?
12. Do you think that specific cultural knowledge from your territory contributes to your sense of belonging and identity?
- 13. Here I will provide a brief overview of the types of services that are currently offered.**
14. Do you feel that any of these services would help you re-connect with your culture and/or nation?
15. Is there anything these services are lacking that you would need to meaningfully engage with your community?

16. What circumstances would allow you to visit your community and engage with your family/community there?
17. Is there something specific that your community could say or do to make you feel welcome and provide you with a sense of belonging?
18. What would you like to see your community do to support the reintegration of displaced people?
 - What types of relationships do you want with your community?
 - What types of activities/cultural or otherwise would you like to participate in with your community?
 - What would a support network in your community look like?
19. Do you know of any barriers that your community is facing in terms of supporting the reintegration of displaced members?
20. Does this impact the way you feel about your community?
21. If you could magically create the perfect Indigenous community (with yourself included), what would it look like?
22. Is there anything else you would like to share that could assist communities in creating ways for displaced people to re-connect?
23. Is there anything else you would like to add?
24. I would just like to remind you that what you have shared will be used to guide communities in finding a way to help support the reintegration of displaced people like yourself.
25. Massih (Thank you) for sharing your experience and knowledge.

Appendix F: Youth Focus Group Questions

- Consent Forms and Questions
 - Terms (displaced/community)
 - Introductions
1. How would you describe your relationship with your home community?
 - Eg. Would you say you know a lot about your culture and community?
 2. Why do you have this type of relationship?
 3. What kind of connection/relationship would you like with your community?
 4. Do you think that specific cultural teachings and connection with your community affects how much you belong to that community?
 5. Do you have any connections with other Native communities?
 6. How have these relationships impacted your sense of who you are or your belonging to a community?
 7. Are there any people or services that provided a sense of belonging for you?
 8. Explain what this person/agency did to support you?
 9. Did this involve specific teachings from your territory?
 - **Services**
1. Do you think any of these services would help you to re-connect with your culture and/or nation?
 2. Is there anything else that you would need to engage with your community or learn about your culture?

3. Is there something specific that your community could say or do to make you feel more welcome and provide you with a sense of belonging?
 4. What would you like to see your community do to support the reintegration of displaced people?
 - What types of cultural activities would you like to participate in with your community?
 - What would a support network look like?
-
1. Do you know of any **barriers** that you or your community are facing that would get in the way of getting to know each other?
 2. Does this impact the way you feel about your community?
 3. If you would magically create the perfect community with yourself included, what would that look like?
-
- Analysis will be displayed in the youth department within two weeks and youth can give feedback.
 - Youth can decide to withdraw participation at any time.
 - If anyone would like to do a follow up interview just let me know.
 - The Friendship Centre has counselling services available.
 - Check out.

Appendix G: Focus Group Invitation Poster

Kwin Tsaniine Das Delh (I Am Returning to the Home Fire): An Indigenous Reclamation

You are invited to participate in a study called “Kwin Tsaniine Das Delh (I Am Returning to the Home Fire): An Indigenous Reclamation” that is being conducted by Molly Wickham, a candidate for a Masters of Arts in Indigenous Governance at the University of Victoria and a member of the Gitdumden clan (bear/wolf) from the Wet’suwet’en Nation.

Molly Wickham currently resides in Victoria, B.C and is conducting this portion of her research within her clan territory. She can be reached by telephone at 250-516-8018 (insert alternate local number) or by email at mwickham@uvic.ca at any time.

Study Objectives:

The objective of this study is to create a grassroots (community based) framework to support the reintegration and cultural survival of displaced (disconnected) peoples within their home communities. To support this process the study will include information from service providers who support reintegration and reconnection to community/family. Critical to this study is information from displaced people on what their needs are to make reintegration or a reconnection to their home nation possible. The Gitdumden clan will be used as a case study, using the above mentioned information as a basis for creating a framework to facilitate and support the reconnection of displaced clan members.

The Importance of the Study:

Indigenous families have suffered immense intergenerational cultural loss through colonial practices such as residential schools, the ‘sixties scoop,’ Bill-C31 and other negative effects on identity and culture. Currently, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) continues the theft of Indigenous children at rates higher than the number of children in residential schools at the height of the residential school era and during the ‘sixties scoop.’ Conditions are not improving, resulting in a loss of cultural transmission in Indigenous communities as well as a loss of cultural identity and an increase in people living away from their home communities. Using the Wet’suwet’en as a case study to develop a grassroots framework will strengthen the authority of the traditional clan governance system over our families while strengthening community organization and relationships. This study will also allow for the voices of displaced peoples to be heard and used to provide a tool for other communities experiencing the same effects of colonization.

Participation

This study requires two focus groups consisting of 15 Gitdumden clan members each (including adults, elders and youth); one focus group will be held in the Duncan Lake area, and the other in the Moricetown/Smithers area. Each focus group will proceed for approximately two to three hours, will include a meal with refreshments, and will focus on realistic initiatives that the Gitdumden can engage to create a framework for the reintegration of displaced clan members while strengthening clan authority over our families. During this time, participants will be presented with ideas gathered from displaced individuals on how communities could facilitate their reintegration, as well as their views on existing services. All of the knowledge shared within these groups will be recorded on flip charts for all participants to view. Every participant is invited to omit or edit any of their information given and will be presented with the final analysis before any information is used in the final report. The final analysis will be presented at the Wet'suwet'en First Nation Band Office as well as at the Office of the Wet'suwet'en and the Smithers Friendship Center for review and edits by focus group participants. Each participant will be able to access the final results through any of the above organizations. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time without consequence.

If you feel you would like to contribute to this study and support Wet'suwet'en families, please contact Molly Wickham at 250-516-8018 (local contact person and number) or at mwickham@uvic.ca.

Massih Cho (Thank you very much)

Appendix H: Gitdumden Focus Group Questions

Gitdumden Focus Group Questions:

Introduction

1. Do we want to be reactive or proactive? Why?
2. What resources does our clan already have or have access to?
3. What success stories do we have?

Impacts on Identity and Belonging:

1. How does displacement impact the community and cultural survival?
2. What does a strong Wet'suwet'en identity look like?

Process of Reconnecting:

1. What types of relationship can our clan build with displaced people?
2. How can our clan build and maintain healthy relationships?

Cultural Knowledge:

1. What knowledge can the clan offer displaced members?
2. How can we do this?
3. Who should be involved?
4. How do we support each other in this process?

Challenges and Continued Displacement:

1. What challenges do we face?
2. How can we meet these challenges?
3. How can we utilize existing services while strengthening our clan?
4. What can each member commit to doing to support our lost members?