

IY NONET: BRIDGING THE GAP

IY NONET:

Bridging the Gap “For the Good of” Indigenous Youth Aging Out of Care

by

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COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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Executive Summary

The partnering organization for this inquiry was NILTUO Child and Family Services Society. NILTUO is a delegated Aboriginal social work agency that serves the seven First Nation communities in the Greater Victoria area, Beecher Bay, Pauquachin, Tsartlip, Songhees, Tsawout, Tseycum, and T'Sou-ke First Nations. They provide recourse and guardianship social work services in place of the Ministry of Child and Family Development, which provides child protection services in each community NILTUO serves.

This inquiry aimed to identify best practices to create an innovative Indigenous youth program for youth 19-24 who are or have aged out of provincial care. The focus of the inquiry was to connect with the organization and community stakeholders, along with Indigenous youth in care to acquire data through interviews and an Indigenous youth talking circle about what would make an effective program for youth. At the end of the inquiry process, the focus shifted to incorporate strategies to support Indigenous youth in care to connect to culture, ceremony, and traditional lands while supporting youth through life-skills programming aimed at educational obtainment and employment. Ultimately, the purpose of this inquiry project steered to connect youth with knowledge keepers and Elders to support their journey of cultural connection while empowering and informing youth to actualize their education and employment goals.

The principal inquiry question for this research topic was, how might the stakeholders for the education and learning needs of Indigenous youth aging out of care co-create an inclusive, adaptive and responsive transition program to meet the changing needs for/with these youth at NILTUO Child and Family Services Society? The sub questions were, (1) What lessons of resilience can stakeholders share that can give insights to developing Indigenous youth programming? (2) What specific program content is needed to empower and support Indigenous

youth considering furthering their education or looking for employment?” (3) What role does culture and cultural knowledge play in creating programming that is relevant to Indigenous youth? (4) Who at NILTUO Child and Family Services Society or in the local First Nation communities and outside could contribute to the design and implementation of a robust, effective and innovative Indigenous youth program?

The literature used to substantiate the findings and recommendations of this inquiry project centered on the importance of ceremony for Indigenous youth mental health, the role Elders play in supporting youth, and how land-based education can support resiliency for Indigenous youth. Works like Toombs, Kowatch, and Mushquash (2016) *Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Youth: A Scoping Review* explores resilience for Indigenous youth. Toombs, et al. concluded the importance of resiliency as a concept that can foster strength and support, including relational approaches that work collaboratively with Indigenous youth and their communities. Browne, et al. (2019) *Partnering with Indigenous Elders in primary care improves mental health outcomes of inner-city Indigenous patients* examine the effects of including Elders as part of routine primary care for Indigenous patients. The study found encounters with Indigenous Elders “were associated with a statistical reduction in depressive symptoms and suicide risk among Indigenous patients” (p.274). Jardine and Lines’ (2019) study, *Connection to the land as a youth identified social determinant of Indigenous Peoples’ health* describes the connection to the land as an “imperative determinant” for Indigenous youths’ health (p.10). This study used a workshop format for youth to express their views using Indigenous Sharing Circle and a community-based participatory approach through an Indigenous research lens. The young people of this study identified “the importance of a relationship to land including

practicing cultural skills, Elders passing on traditional knowledge, and surviving off the land” (p.1).

This inquiry project utilized action-oriented research and Indigenous research methodologies as its overarching research approach. The study design was a mixed-method approach, incorporating semi-structured interviews with organization and community stakeholders and an Indigenous youth talking circle held with Indigenous youth in care. The participants were three social workers, a social worker manager, an executive director of an Indigenous non-profit, and two-family support workers. In addition, there was an Indigenous Elder, a manager of an organization that supports Indigenous youth in care, two Indigenous youth in care, and one former youth in care, 12 participants in all. The data was collected through reflective, semi-structured interviews done over Zoom and recorded and transcribed into text (Saldana & Omasta, 2017, pp. 89-92). Narratives (stories), keywords, and recommendations were gathered into a master document categorized by each participant’s name. Once the pertinent information collected from each participant was gathered and organized, themes were created from the gathered data. The themes that were mentioned most by participants became the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

This inquiry project worked collaboratively with community and organizational stakeholders to ensure the data was representative of the participants' thoughts and views. The data was taken back to NILTUO CFSS, where a “members checking” took place to discuss the finding in terms of their trustworthiness and how the recommendations could be implemented. (Gunawan, J., 2015, p.10). According to Amankwaa (2016), the protocols for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research are prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debrief, case analysis, and members checking. As an employee of NILTUO

CFSS, there was an opportunity to connect with and stay connected to the organizational and community stakeholders, colleagues, and participants. Participants were given informal updates and regularly consulted to build relationships and ensure the data collection and interpretation processes aligned with Indigenous and organizational values.

All participants were over 18 and did sign a consent form to participate in this inquiry. Because the researcher was a delegated social worker, an impartial outside facilitator conducted the Indigenous youth talking circle to mitigate potential power over relationships.

Each recommendation was approved through the members checking session as viable aspects to incorporate into the already existing IY NONET Program for young adults that NILTUO CFSS will offer in 2022. The project title, IY NONET, is in the SÈNCOTÈN language of the Coastal Salish peoples of Vancouver Island, meaning "*for the good of.*" Each recommendation will be a strategy that NILTUO staff will build and begin to source community experts and knowledge keepers to support the youth and young adults they serve and exist as the knowledge mobilization strategy this inquiry was based on.

Each of the recommendations of this inquiry focused on supporting Indigenous youth through life-skills programming held through NILTUO CFSS. The recommendation begins by addressing the need for a community of practice to be established to support youth who are or will age out of provincial care. Each community support member of the community of practice would streamline information and resources to support youth in care. The second recommendation looks to support youth coming out of care who wish to make a living through traditional means (trapping/hunting) by connecting them with community members and leaders who have this knowledge. The third recommendation calls upon Delegated Aboriginal Agencies to hire full-time Elders in residence to support youth through Indigenous cultural perspectives.

Recommendation four focuses on how DAA's can incorporate more ceremony within their programming and agency. Lastly, recommendation five suggests that the IY NONET program could support youth better by incorporating knowledge keepers to introduce cultural teachings and land-based activities within its curriculum.

In terms of the partnering organization's overall implications and next steps, these recommendations further support the need for culture and cultural teachings to play a significant role within DAA's. NILTUO will move forward with the first IY NONET pilot program in January of 2022, with two full-time facilitators and a completed curriculum. For inviting respected knowledge keepers to play a role within the experiential learning portion of the program, NILTUO will have family support workers connect with community and begin to source these individuals. Incorporating an aggressive strategy to utilize the cultural knowledge in the First Nation communities NILTUO serves can help make a positive difference in the lives of youth in care in British Columbia.

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Firstly, I would like to raise my hands to Tsawout First Nation located on southern Vancouver Island where this research was approved. It was a great honour as an outsider to gather this knowledge for the good of the youth in care in BC while working in their community.

Many thanks the British Columbia Aboriginal Network on Disability Society, The Federation of BC Youth in Care Network, and NITUO Child and Family Services Society for allowing this important research to take place within their organizations and giving their precious time for this inquiry. Without their contribution none of these perspectives would be heard and validated.

To each participant of this inquiry, I extend my deepest praise and admiration not only for the work that you do to support our youth in care, but for sharing your life and feelings with me. It is with the deepest appreciation that I hold and cherish that knowledge forever.

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As a Wolostogiyik man, it was a privilege to conduct research in the traditional territory of the Coast Salish peoples. Being from St. Mary's First Nation of the East Coast of Canada, my people revere The West Coast Nations. Words can not express the level of gratitude I have for these peoples and their lands.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the thousands of Indigenous youth in care in British Columbia and to the hope that someday each Indigenous child has a safe home to return to with their families.

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Chapter 1: Focus and Framing

This paper explored the thesis project with the home organization, NILTUO Child and Family Services Society. An action-oriented research and Indigenous methodology was used, using an Indigenous talking circle and semi-structured interviews as the research methods to engage with stakeholders. These methods facilitated an inquiry into specific components that make up effective Indigenous youth programming and created a community of practice to support Indigenous youth aging out of care. A literature review and a breakdown of the overall research approach and accompanying ethical considerations will be presented.

Topic and Purpose

This inquiry project looks to create a program that can support Indigenous youth to gain employment or move toward an education path while promoting health and life skills. The Indigenous youth that participated in the project were nineteen to twenty-four years of age and are coming out of provincial care with the Ministry of Child and Family Development in British Columbia. The project, titled IY NONET, is in the SÈNCOTEN language of the Coastal Salish peoples of Vancouver Island, meaning "*for the good of.*" The IY NONET program will bridge gaps Indigenous youth may experience towards education, employment, health, and life skills. The hope is that this program can be the first step for Indigenous youth to begin their journey to gain employment or enroll in an educational program and develop life skills while promoting healthy life choices. This program exists because NILTUO has identified that Indigenous youth aging out of care face many social and economic factors that impact their mental and physical health, including stress, experiences with trauma, social exclusion, and barriers to employment and education (Ziemann, 2019). The Indigenous youth in this inquiry expressed a passion to gain

the knowledge of their peoples and to overcome these negative events caused by the child welfare system.

Inquiry and sub questions.

The thesis question was, "How might the stakeholders for the education and learning needs of Indigenous youth aging out of care co-create an inclusive, adaptive, and responsive transition program to meet the changing needs for/with these youth at NILTUO Child and Family Services Society?". The sub questions are as follows: (1) what lessons of resilience can stakeholders share that can give insights to developing Indigenous youth programming? (2) What specific program content is needed to empower and support Indigenous youth considering furthering their education or looking for employment?" (3) What role does culture and cultural knowledge play in creating programming that is relevant to Indigenous youth? (4) Who at NILTUO Child and Family Services Society or in the local First Nation communities and outside could contribute to the design and implementation of a robust, effective, and innovative Indigenous youth program?

Context of the project.

This inquiry project focused explicitly on Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders who can offer guidance and knowledge around Indigenous youth program development. Some stakeholders were Indigenous social workers, First Nations representatives, Indigenous program facilitators and developers, and community Elders and youth. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with each stakeholder. The youth coming out of care also played a role in the inquiry process by participating in an Indigenous talking circle, which presented an opportunity to give their perspectives on what constitutes an effective program and take ownership for their contribution to the program.

The partner and point of contact for this project was manager David Eadie and the home organization of NILTUO Child and Family Services Society. Through social work channels, NILTUO allowed access to youth who identified to social work staff that they would like to gain employment or start on a scholarly or technical training program. These youth served as the participants for the talking circle. NILTUO monitored the progress of the inquiry project. NILTUO approved the findings and research before they were sent to Royal Roads University for submission.

Significance of the topic.

At present, within the social work agencies on Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland British Columbia, there are no Indigenous youth programs that address all of the needs of youth coming out of care, needs around education, employment, health, and life skills. This program (IY NONET) could have the potential to support Indigenous youth to empower themselves. Studies that focus on education and employment programming and interventions for youth aging out of care have shown positive results in terms of employment and educational obtainment and completion (Woodgate, et al, 2017). This demonstrates that programming and interventions can further support youth who are overrepresented in the child welfare system in British Columbia.

The Indigenous child welfare system in British Columbia has been compared to the residential school system in terms of removing Indigenous children and youth from their homes, cultures, and communities (Honourable Minister Philpott, 2018). This project could exist as the flagship program on Vancouver Island to understand how programming is created, implemented, and maximized to support Indigenous youth coming out of care in British Columbia. There are many programs that address the needs of youth coming out of care, but the IY NONET programs will follow the youth participants for six months after they complete the content to ensure they

are successful either on their education or employment track. No other youth programs in British Columbia that serve youth have this as a component.

The goal will be to empower youth coming out of care to withstand discrimination and barriers within Western Canadian society through Indigenous informed resilience and reduce their representation in the child welfare system. It is important to note that the current lack of programming for Indigenous youth aging out of care has led to specific outcomes and is thus needed to create positive results in the short and long term (Quinn, 2022).

The benefit to the organization and others.

NILTUO Child and Family Services Society serves seven First Nations communities on Vancouver Island, Beecher Bay, Pauquachin, Tsartlip, Songhees, Tsawout, Tseycum, and T'sou-ke First Nations, conducting social work as an Indigenous run organization in place of the Ministry of Child and Family Development, existing in the spirit of self-determination for these First Nation communities. It should be noted that NILTUO is federally funded. The seven communities NILTUO serves have identified a gap in services for Indigenous youth coming out of care and thus, the researcher's position within NILTUO exists to support Indigenous youth through developing culturally appropriate programming. The program will benefit the home organization and the First Nation communities it serves by supporting and empowering Indigenous youth in education, employment, life skills, and health. It will also help Indigenous youth by allowing them access to potential employers who are already willing to hire an Indigenous youth, which creates a streamlined interaction that can build confidence and develop job skills. There will also be advocacy for Indigenous youth who want to pursue an education by sourcing funding for tuition and living expenses from the federal government and introducing Indigenous youth to educational representatives from educational institutions in the Greater

Victoria area. The IY NONET program was created in 2020 at the request of NILTUO and their board of directors to support youth aging out of care. This inquiry project will contribute culturally focused program components identified through data collected from participants.

Systems Analysis

The systems analysis for this project began with the home organization of NILTUO Child and Family Services Society. From there, the thesis question and complimentary sub questions were identified and stated. The methodology section is described next, highlighting the methodological stance of action-oriented research and Indigenous research followed by the research methods chosen to collect data, which included an Indigenous talking or sharing circle and semi-structured interviews. Finally, the method section gives details about the number of participants included in the talking circle and details about conducting the stakeholder interviews.

The following section describes the participants and details on sourcing and engaging with stakeholders and participants to conduct the inquiry project. Below, the participants section outlines the sequence of short-term goals such as completing the proposal and ethics review. The long-term goals were to connect with the principal partner and begin identifying stakeholders and participants to play a role in the inquiry process. Finally, a breakdown of the timeline and overall goals for the inquiry project from start to finish, covering milestones from the ethical review approval to the thesis external review and course completion, are included in the systems analysis. The overall goals are prioritized as creating an effective Indigenous youth program, connecting to stakeholders to conduct an inquiry, creating relationships with community supports and stakeholders, creating a community of practice for these youth, and supporting youth coming out of care. A detailed diagram of the project's system analysis can be found in Appendix A.

My connection to this project.

As an Indigenous male researcher, there is always conscious support for fellow Indigenous peoples through a personal connection to Indigenous peoples, culture, language, and tradition. However, this project is not an entirely altruistic venture. It should be known that this researcher is working within the home organization as a paid employee throughout the research process. This researcher chose to focus the research project within the professional work and the youth program because of the potential impact this program and the subsequent project could have on the seven First Nations communities it will serve. To address the potential for conflict of interest and power-over potential agency clients, this researcher worked with Third Parties to host the methods with . The researcher would not know who participated, declined, and withdrew from participation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review explores four topics: existing Indigenous youth programs that operate in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand that address youth aging out of care. How Indigenous culture can help youth gain resiliency and how culture can help youth obtain success. Literature focused on Indigenous youth who age out of care and their experience transitioning to life after care, and the role Elders play in the success of Indigenous youth. Sources were collected from the Royal Roads University library online Discover search engine and Google Scholar. These topics were chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the circumstance of youth coming out of care and how other leaders and organizations have intervened to further support Indigenous youth. The literature chosen for this review focuses on incorporating Indigenous youth voices to guide and influence policy. This review also gathered data on existing programs and relevant information from the Ministry of Child and Family Development within BC.

A local and international approach to how Indigenous youth programs is created and implemented yielded interesting perspectives and methods beneficial to the project and its application. The IY NONET program represents the Indigenous population it serves, that being Indigenous youth. This inquiry project built a knowledge base to understand existing Indigenous youth programming, becoming educated about the teachings and best practices to nurture and build resiliency with youth coming out of care.

Indigenous youth programs

Bergstrom, Cleary, and Peacock (2003) use folklore and creation stories to empower youth through what they refer to as the new coming of the warriors in the time of healing. This concept of the new warriors in the time of healing is derived from the events of the colonization

of the Indigenous peoples of Canada and the United States and the resiliency that is needed to overcome systemic barriers to education and employment in the greater community. The authors find a way to use the youth's generation and position as an empowerment tool to build resiliency and support them to succeed.

Using culture and resiliency building to empower Indigenous youth is one method of creating positive outcomes, such as educational achievement or sustained employment, but also having a genuine sense of the past, could be a component of an effective youth program. For example, Hare and Pidgeon (2011) spoke with Indigenous youth about their experiences in Western school systems. The youth in this study spoke about their experience with racism and how that affected their willingness to attend school. Hare and Pidgeon, like Bergstrom, Cleary, and Peacock (2003), use resiliency as the focus of the program and study. This approach is shared among these studies, suggesting the need for Indigenous youth to have adaptive qualities that rely on cultural and community connections to succeed in both Indigenous and Western spheres.

Indigenous youth coming out of care require resilience and empowerment drawn from culture and familial connections to the home community. Ford, Rasmus, and Allen (2012) take Indigenous youth-focused policy further by developing health policies for youth based on their perspectives. Although the previous authors focused on resilience and empowerment, Ford, Rasmus, and Allen (2012) build policy based on testimonials from youth in the community who participate in group discussions and interviews. This study is profound in how the researchers approached youth and how they were able to create and support interest in the project.

Another paper that focuses on doing research with Indigenous youth in a similar fashion to Ford, Rasmus, and Allen (2012) is Toombs, et al. (2016). Toombs, et al. focus on how kinship

relations affect Indigenous youth learning experience and how researchers can understand and navigate working with Indigenous youth in their communities. The authors focus on the kinship roles of Elders, direct and extended family members, and community members in the learning of Indigenous youth. Kinship roles are an essential aspect of consideration when researching in a First Nations community due to the variances from one First Nation culture to another in terms of world views and belief systems.

This variance is another vital reality to consider. Each First Nation community emulates varying cultural attributes and therefore possesses differing world views. Resilience as a concept will also vary depending on the community and their belief system. Resilience seems to be one of the main focus points for Indigenous youth programming and their approach to empowering youth (Toombs. et al, 2016, Wexler, 2009). For instance, Toombs, Kowatch and Mushquash (2016) look at resilience, not from the Western definition, but what it means through an Indigenous context that uses ceremony and cultural perspectives. Using teachings from specific Indigenous world views, the authors take a more in-depth look into how resilience can relate to Indigenous youth through a cultural context. The author concluded that Indigenous youth can develop resilience through connections to community, family, and culture.

Challenges for Urban Indigenous Youth

The youth who will benefit from this project and program will be predominantly urban Indigenous youth from the Greater Victoria area. Therefore, it is necessary to explore literature that reflects this unique experience. Mason et al., (2019) focus on the health consequences of urban Indigenous youth and their access to recreational opportunities and how that affects their overall health. The social determinants of health for Indigenous youth exist as a section of the already existing IY NONET program that has been developed. This piece on the social

determinants of health has been included due to its direct relevance to the life-skills program and the needs of Indigenous youth around health and fitness.

Taking the understanding of the social determinants of health through an Indigenous context further, Hatala et al. (2020) examined the role land and nature initiatives play for urban Indigenous youths' holistic mind, body, spirit and emotional health. The authors explored how urban Indigenous youth can access nature and land-based cultural initiatives in an urban setting provided that municipal policy makers prioritize green space projects because of the current lack of green space in urban settings. The authors spoke about how First Nation communities can connect youth with these activities, making land-based programs a top priority knowing that Indigenous youth and people tie their cultural identity to ceremonies, creation stories, medicines, and subsistent living knowledge. The IY NONET life-skills program will benefit from establishing program components that support land-based cultural practices, which are a core element of the supporting strategy and curriculum for Indigenous youth programming.

Youth Aging Out of Care

Because this program ultimately serves a subsection of Indigenous youth, that being youth aging out of care, content that is age relative was the focus.

Brown, Feduniw and Hubberstey (2007) conducted a three-year longitudinal study that follows and examines the lives of thirty-five youth who aged out of care in British Columbia. Their report found that youth struggled to secure long-term housing and had significantly below-average high school completion rates with a 25% decline compared to youth who are not in care.

Although the youth in this report are not identified as Indigenous, this report could help build context for what life will look like for youth coming out of care in the same community as the youth in this report. It is understood that most of the youth in this report do not identify as

Indigenous, and therefore do not encounter systemic racism and structural inequality. This report served as an initial guide to familiarize and internalize the inner workings of MCFD's youth release protocol, milestones, and programs.

In a study that focuses on Indigenous youth perspectives, Quinn (2022) interviewed seven former Indigenous youth in care who were deemed successful in their adult lives using grounded theory and a constructivist grounded theory framework for data analysis. The study participants identified they had overcome abuses they were subjected to as youth in care, poverty, isolation being Indigenous in a non-Indigenous foster home, and intergenerational trauma. The study asked what factors contributed to these former youth in care finding success after the trauma of care. Elements like connections to Elders as mentors and a deep spiritual practice were strong future success indicators. Quinn (2022) noted that all seven participants work or volunteer in the social service sector.

While relationships with Elders and culture have been shown to improve the overall success of youth in and coming out of care, barriers can exist to limit interaction and exposure. Neveu (2020) completed an environmental scan of service delivery for Indigenous youth aging out of care in Western Canada using an Indigenous research method. The study interviewed eight social workers and looked at the role of culture and current access opportunities to culture support for youth in care. Neveu (2020) found that access and exposure to Elders and culture and to organizations offering aging-out services were attributed to better outcomes overall. However, what was lacking was access to knowledge keepers and aging-out services for youth in care. In addition, Neveu noted a lack of research for what happens to youth once they are out of the child welfare system. This lack of research makes it challenging to measure aging-out interventions, a crucial consideration for this current study.

Although data on youth aged out of care is limited, The Representative for Children and Youth (2020) released a report covering the existing literature on the outcomes for youth aging out of care in BC, covering data on 800 or more youth who have aged out of care. The report is titled *A Parents Duty: Government's Obligation to Youth Transitioning into Adulthood*. This report looks at some of the outdated policies BC holds in child welfare and discusses the over-representation of Indigenous youth in care and the lack of services to support these youth in housing, mental health, criminal justice involvement, and educational achievement. Recommendations included extending and improving transition planning, providing ongoing adult guidance/support, coordinated through dedicated youth transition workers, post majority financial support, and dedicated housing for youth aging out of care. For this current study, these recommendations suggest that additional funding may be necessary to support programs dedicated to the holistic wellbeing of Indigenous youth in care. To be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Indigenous Elders supporting Indigenous Youth

According to the literature, supporting Indigenous youth should be done through a culturally relevant practice, considering the structure of traditional communities and understanding the role Elders play in learning and knowledge keeping for Indigenous youth (Tu, et al, 2019). Tu, et al. (2019) followed Indigenous youth within a primary health setting in Western Canada. What they found through their research was that youth who had encounters with Elders had significantly diminished mental health perceptions and events. The role of Elders can be a significant relationship for Indigenous youth coming out of care in BC.

Elders model the resiliency essential for youth to overcome colonization's detrimental effects and show how persevering towards a successful life is possible. Kahn et al. (2016)

conducted structured interviews with eight American Indian Elders 57 to 83 years of age to gather knowledge about their lessons for youth to build resiliency in the modern world. The main points Elders elaborated on in the paper were culture, youth cultural activities, and education. Elders spoke to the importance of youth taking responsibility for their education, connecting to cultural practices, and encouraging Indigenous youth to be curious and build bridges towards their identities.

The vital role Elders play in Indigenous communities seems to be universal among Indigenous communities globally. Busija et al. (2020) conducted a study to determine the specific roles Elders play in the semi-traditional community in Australia. They found that caring for the community's youth was the most vital job Elders had. Other identified functions were helping to build good relations among youth through accountability, leading by example to promote positive behavior, fostering mutual respect, and communication with the Ancestors and spirituality.

Culture to empower Indigenous youth

Land-based cultural initiatives are vital for Indigenous youth's mind/body/spiritual/emotional development. Lines and Jardine (2019) exemplify the need for cultural interventions working with Indigenous youth from the Yellowknife Dene First Nation. The student participants stressed that connection to the land is an imperative determinate of their holistic perspective on health.

Wagemakers and Moore (2006) attempted to measure the health impacts of an Indigenous cultural ceremony known as the sweat lodge. They were looking to see if the effects of the sweat lodge could be quantified. Many of the participants (75%) were Indigenous and were in good health before the study, so no significant change in physical health was noted.

However, the shift in emotional and spiritual well-being was influential in the finding, which they report is a “fundamental component of healing within an Indigenous paradigm” (p.64). Wexler (2009) builds on the concept of holistic healing for Indigenous youth by presenting an understanding that relies on connections to the past. Wexler supposes that culture can give Indigenous youth perspectives that transcend the individual, incorporate a more significant social dimension of the experiences of the ancestors and the past, and offer youth a collective way forward through culture.

Building on the critical role culture, language, community, and family play for Indigenous youth in care, Bennett (2021) explores how Northwest Inter-Nation Family and Community Services (NIFCS) can use culture to support permanency for youth in care. NIFCS, a delegated Aboriginal agency on the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, looked to build upon their practice to further incorporate these essential cultural components for youth in care. NIFCS worked collaboratively with Gitxaal Nation, Haisla Nation Council, and the Lax Kw’alaams Nation leadership, community, and Elders to prioritize permanency plans for youth to connect with their home community by creating cultural opportunities with direct and extended families. These connections created opportunities for youth to nurture relationships and links to their family and culture, which led to children and youth in care finding permanency within their home community. The role of culture for Indigenous youth is the basis for their identity and self-image. This is illustrated in Cardinal’s (2016) paper *A Framework for Indigenous Adoptee Reconnection* where the author reclaims her identity based on the understanding that the colonial perspective on her lived experience is not a relevant measure of identity for her, and that culture and connection to community create a more meaningful perspective. Cardinal (2016) states “I no longer see myself through colonial narratives: such as

the neglected daughter of a drunken Indian on welfare. That is not my narrative. Now I know I was born nêhiyaw in Northern Treaty 8 territory. I am a nêhiyaw woman” (p.91).

Youth in Care and Engagement

Youth engagement is a crucial component of this research. Affective methods of bringing Indigenous youth together, where they take an interest in this process and have a role in self-designing at least some of the elements of the new program, is essential to make the program theirs and take ownership of the course and curriculum. Without this engagement, the inquiry research could be incomplete or not as robust as if the youth were fully engaged. The youth are an essential stakeholder in the design of this course, as they need to have ownership of the course to begin on the path of success after the potentially negative effects of the child welfare system.

Stageland and Walsh (2013) note that the Alberta child welfare system has removed thousands of children from their homes each year with the promise of protection and a better life, but ultimately youth in care have considerably higher rates of teen pregnancy, criminality, and homelessness. It is also important to mention that Indigenous youth coming out of care have identified the existence of a disconnection from community, where they feel a lack of belonging to family units and cultural practices (Mellor et al, 2021). Bringing youth together in the form of research and program development will further support youth in their journey of resilience building to “reduce the stockpile of problems, success in education or employment, creating a secure base, increasing self-esteem and self-efficacy, developing a sense of belonging (Mann-Fender and Goyette, 2019, p. 236). Mann-Fender and Goyette (2019), along with other contributors, attempt to quantify the aspects former youth in care possessed to navigate their lives within three spheres: long-term housing, relationships, and employment/educational achievement. The series begins with youth 18 years of age and moves to examine emerging

adults in their 30's. Strong peer and mentor relationships, along with support from advocacy groups and compassionate social workers were all factors that were attributed to success as adults. Given the essential nature of these relationships for Indigenous youth coming out of care, it will be necessary for DAA's and other program delivery organizations to gear programming with a mentor component.

Chapter Summary

This chapter covered topics that pertain to supporting Indigenous youth aging out of care through a holistic perspective steeped in Indigenous ways of knowing and seeing. Topics covered include, Indigenous youth programming, and the challenges they might experience in an urban setting. The role Indigenous culture and Elders play in the success of youth coming out of care, was an important topic to explore given what many Indigenous scholars had to say about the crucial function each plays in the lives of Indigenous youth. Lastly, youth engagement was explored to understand the complex needs Indigenous youth coming out of care face once living independently, and how advocates and supports can reach new understandings and employ new methods towards a holistic support model.

Next, Chapter 3 will discuss the participants, ethical considerations, methodology, and methods used to gather data for this inquiry project.

Chapter 3: Proposed Engagement Methods

The project that was embarked on intended to gather perspectives from many groups and organizations to see what aspects of an Indigenous youth program should or should not exist within its content and delivery. This inquiry project will advocate for a community of practice to be created to support youth coming out of care. Because this community of practice will support youth to overcome barriers to employment, education, health, and life skills by working with youth aging out of care, action-oriented research was selected as the methodology due to its nature of long-term relationship building and maintenance.

Action-oriented methodology

Action-oriented researchers adhere to a research philosophy that considers the impacts of research and how the research might benefit the participants. For example, William James, a proponent of pragmatic philosophy, states that: "knowledge is assessed by its practical consequences, and not only by its exemplary power" (Bradbury, et al., 2019, p.5). As an action-oriented researcher, it is imperative to adhere to a similar philosophy, where impact (long and short term), the benefit versus contribution for the community, and the legacy of research would be at the forefront of the approach.

One of the pioneers of action research, Jack Whitehead (2006), discusses how any process that claims to be democratic must exist as a two-way street, where all parties involved agree and adhere to guidelines that address expectation and the outcomes of research. Researchers have a deep respect and responsibility to all participants (Whitehead, 2006).

This sentiment is echoed by McAteer (2013), who refers to the move away from the theory-dominated hierarchy of positivistic research approaches to a democratic process. The process of action research creates an opportunity to investigate the relationship between theory

and practice and question the relevance of current practices (p.9). These philosophical tenets were adhered to throughout this action-oriented inquiry project. To note, the researcher chose to incorporate Indigenous research methods framed in Western methodology to have a “two eyed seeing” approach that incorporates Western and Indigenous world views and methodologies (Bartlett et al., 2012, Peltier, 2019).

Indigenous talking circle

Gathering data with Indigenous youth using the talking circle method is common in Indigenous research. Historically, within Indigenous communities, the talking circle served to bring people of all ages together to teach, listen and learn. The talking circle was how knowledge, values, and culture were shared (Wolf & Richard, 2003). Knowing that a people's culture, education, and values were transmitted through the circle suggests that this form of inquiry can be a powerful tool for healing, growth, and information gathering. When we look at more modern versions of the circle, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, we can see that this circle can be lifesaving for some. Baldwin (1998) writes about a conference where a participant asked psychologist and author M. Scott Peck what the most significant social change was in the 20th century; Peck replied, "Alcoholics Anonymous because it introduced the idea that people could help themselves" (p.27). The AA members differ from Indigenous youth who are racialized and experience systemic historical colonialism. Although it is important, healing, and empowerment, this will not correct the systemic barriers Indigenous youth coming out of care experience.

The idea that youth could work collaboratively to help themselves is a profound revelation that would apply to the youth participating in this project and the potential students in the new program. The talking circle was a valuable tool utilized for this inquiry. It brought together youth and Elders in a space that adhered to Indigenous methodologies and provided a

safe and comfortable setting to work collaboratively in knowledge collecting. The protocols of the Talking Circle included having an Elder open with a prayer and a song, and closing the circle with a closing prayer.

Research interviews.

This researcher identified and engaged stakeholders from the seven communities NILTUO serves and outside who possess the knowledge and expertise to testify what they believe needed to be included in an Indigenous youth program. These stakeholders also shared success stories in their journey from childhood to adulthood and spoke to resiliency they have cultivated over time. Stakeholders were asked questions regarding supports that might have helped them to succeed when they were youths.

This interaction was conducted by semi-structured interviews done through a teleconferencing application (Saldana & Omasta, 2017, pp. 89 – 92). These individuals have a vested personal interest in the success of the youth from their respective communities and played a critical role in this project's development. The relevant stakeholders were identified, including social workers who work directly with the youth. Social workers see firsthand what needs Indigenous youth require and what content should be implemented into programming to ensure their success. Other professionals such as front-line Indigenous support workers and Indigenous youth workers were also included in the inquiry process.

Other Indigenous youth programs and Indigenous youth support organizations on Vancouver Island or the Greater Vancouver area was another area of interest for research. There was engagement with Elders from the various communities NILTUO, the home organization, serves. The Elders played a pivotal role in grounding the program content/recommendations in culture and ceremony. It was also beneficial to include as participants youth who have aged out

of care in the past five to ten years to see what they would recommend as valuable additions to Indigenous youth programming.

Of the organizational participants, there were two Family Support Workers, three Social Workers, One Social Work Manager, and two current youth in care for the Sharing Circle. The external participants, there was one Indigenous Elder, one executive director of an Indigenous non-profit, one youth in care organization manager, and one former youth in care.

These stakeholders make up the list of interviewees and talking circle participants. When considering the number of stakeholders to be interviewed and the number of research questions to be presented, it was important that the line of questioning not take more than thirty minutes to an hour. If the conversation extends past this mark, the participant was notified in consideration of their time. Twelve participants were the total of the talking circle and the interviews, 10 interviewees and two youth participated in the talking circle. Rowley (2012) suggests that new researchers consider the time participants are willing to commit and the number of willing participants available. It was essential to acquire participants from varying professions and sectors to gather accurate information on how to best support Indigenous youth in care. Internal NILTUO professionals working directly with this youth population were influential but connecting with stakeholders who support indirectly was also vital to incorporate a broad perspective on the topic. Given that each participant is Indigenous and affected by intergenerational trauma (Champine, et al. 2022, Lucero and Bussey, 2012, Menzies, 2022), it should be understood there could be a trauma-informed reason for each participant showing up or not. This colonial influence could have potentially affected how they answered the interview questions. This concept of the impact of trauma will be discussed further in Chapter Four, Scope and Limitations.

Culture and world view were considered when interviewing First Nations participants and Indigenous peoples. Each interaction between two First Nations people who are not familiar with one another always begins with identifying yourself by your people and ancestors. Once your people have been identified, it is customary to speak your given name, your spirit or traditional name first, then your Western name. This researcher has worked extensively across Canada in and around First Nation communities and found that this custom seems to be ubiquitous among Indigenous people in general across Canada. This protocol was included when conducting the interviews to keep this project as aligned with Indigenous and First Nations values as possible. Wilson (2008) spoke to this concept, where Indigenous people use relationality and “shared relationships” to other Indigenous people by either asking where they are from, or if they know people from this community near where they are from, and so on (p.84). These conversations build the relationship and show the connection Indigenous people perceive.

Once the sharing circle and interviews had commenced, participants were encouraged to share stories about personal success they remember happening in their lives. Success could look like learning something new that they enjoyed and continued to practice for a time or anything they consider valuable. Having a personal connection to the discussion created an environment based on trust and openness. Through trust and transparency, the participants feel comfortable in their space which opens space for sharing and learning (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008).

This project adhered to the tenets of an action-oriented research project. Through the integration of theory and practice, this project used action-oriented research theory to guide the inquiry approach and identify effective Indigenous youth programming practices. This project

also focused on collaborative learning within the home organization and beyond, learning and evaluating “liberating action,” and bringing together action and reflection in an ongoing production of knowledge creation (Shani & Coghlan, 2019, p. 3).

The interviews and Indigenous youth talking circle were recorded with the conference program Zoom and then transcribed into text by another program called Otter. Once the interviews and circle conversations were in text, this researcher combed through and pulled out themes, keywords, and stories within the text. This researcher used a color-coding scheme for each of the categories. The next step was to create categories based on the participant conversations. Each participant's statement, comment, story, or keyword was categorized specific to the participant. The data from each participant was pulled out and organized under the participant names, then began identifying overarching themes common among each participant. The use of a coding method was employed which identified 22 codes that were common statements from each participant. Finally, the 22 codes that were identified were broke down into six broader policy findings that were presented to the partner organization.

Implementation Strategy for the capstone project

Project participants.

The thesis question for this project addresses program development to support Indigenous youth nineteen to twenty-four years of age who are coming out of provincial care. The initial thought was to include between six and eight participants for the talking circle portion. This researcher attempted to source information from MCFD to see how many youths in care are between 19 to 24. In 2018, there were 4,252 Indigenous youth in care out of 6,698 minor children in care across B.C, more than 60% Indigenous while the Indigenous population is 5.9%. (Ministry of Child and Family Development, 2018; Stats Canada, 2019). There are detailed

records of the numbers of youth in care, but there is no accurate way to determine the exact number of youths in care 19-24. This data might not have been clearly identified in reports or studies. Therefore, it was necessary to move forward to see if gathering the six to eight participants that fall in this age range was possible.

The inquiry relied on the social workers within the home organization to source participants for this portion of the project. The potential youth participants notified their social worker that they were interested in employment or education. A specific minimum and maximum was set, 6 to 8 participants.

In this project, the potential participants were sent the letter of invitation via email. Once contact was made, prospective participants had an opportunity to help finalize the questions for the methods, with purpose of further informing the IY NONET program. Participant had the choice to respond to the letter of invitation without any pressure on them to participate, something that is in line with the ethical consideration of informed consent. Social work staff sent notification through email once there were potential youths to act as research participants for this project.

At the time of the inquiry, no power over relationship existed with the youth participants. This researcher may facilitate the IY NONET program in the future, but no role would constitute any power over relationships at the time of the inquiry. The services of the inquiry team were needed to conduct the talking circle portion of the inquiry. The third party had no power connection with the participants. Youth participants knew that there was no obligation to participate. If they chose to participate and wanted to exit the project, there was no ramifications for opting out. The researcher contacted the inquiry team and set up times to pilot test the talking circle and interview questions. Pilot testing the interview and talking circle questions consisted

of the researcher and a member of the inquiry team running through mock interviews to ensure the questions were effective and relevant. The youth were sent online invitations and the necessary links to join the circle. The circle took approximately one hour, including the ceremonial protocol and the 11 questions.

Data Analysis

The researcher looked for themes about what the youth and stakeholders identify they need from an education and employment programming. The strategy looked for repetitions, transitions, similarities, differences, and “linguistic connectors” that frequently occur (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p.103). The central processing techniques used in this project's data analysis were cutting and sorting, which involves identifying statements, quotes, or expressions that appear essential and arranging them into piles or categories (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Word lists and Key Words in Context (KWIC) are other techniques to use simple observations to generate a word list. Using this method, researchers identify specific words in a data set and count the number of times each word appears (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). This list of words was simply used transitionally to validate the deeper analysis of the emerging themes, and was not an end in itself.

Once the inquiry information findings and recommendations were identified, there was a clear perspective to use that information to inform the program development. The researcher then engaged with the home organization to review the finding and created a plan of implementation through a revision of the already existing program. There was another meeting (to be discussed in Chapter 5) involving the partner to present the findings and recommendations for the curriculum and to generate an action plan for the new course curriculum.

For the interview portion of the project, the same process was followed. Once the interviews were complete, a meeting was scheduled to validate the findings with the participants

to create a plan of action to implement the findings into the program (details in Chapter 5).

Researcher bias was mitigated through open-ended, non-leading questions and by removing the researcher from the data-gathering phase for the talking circle, but the researcher conducted the interviews since there were no power relations to navigate with stakeholders.

Ethical Implications

Every step was taken to ensure that participants understood their rights while in the research process. This was accomplished by having relevant information available before each participant agreed to participate. This document used plain language void of academic jargon.

The researcher worked closely with the home organization to ensure that the ethical standards and the expectation of the communities and Royal Roads University were observed and adhered to the strictest degree. Any conflicts of interest present throughout the research process were identified through this partnership. Also, this researcher worked closely with the supervisor to ensure that any ethical circumstances were mitigated and addressed.

Because the research was conducted within a First Nations community, this researcher ensured community stakeholders that the inquiry findings would represent an Indigenous worldview. As a result, the data positively benefits the research community while advocating for the "respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice" (TPCS 2: CORE, Module 9: Research Involving First Nations, Inuit & Métis Peoples of Canada). This research project also respects and adheres to Coastal Salish knowledge systems through community leadership and membership involvement in planning and decision-making from the earliest stages of the research process. This ensured that the First Nation communities and their members had a role to play from start to finish, including in the final stages of analysis and dissemination (TPCS 2: CORE, Module 9: Research Involving First Nations, Inuit & Métis Peoples of Canada).

A third party conducted the sharing circle portion of this project. This third party ensured that there was no power over relationships that could inhibit the validity of the findings. Chapter 9 of the TCPS 2 states that serious imbalances of power can be derived from justice being compromised (TCPS 2, Chap 9). Although there was no power over balance present with the youth, this researcher may serve as the program's facilitator in the future.

Proposed Outcomes

Once the inquiry collection phase was completed, the home organization had the perspectives of their clientele and stakeholders on how best to support youth in creating a future for themselves through culturally relevant Indigenous youth programming and the establishment of a community of practice. The inquiry findings and recommendations will be implemented into an Indigenous youth program (IY NONET) that has been created but has not yet been introduced or implemented. This program will be held on Vancouver Island and can dramatically impact the lives of the youth it serves. There are services in the other British Columbia regions that are trying to address the needs of youth aging out of care. One such organization is the Community Housing Transformation Centre., in Kamloops, BC. There, program facilitators and executive staff help Indigenous youth transition with the assistance of community-based Elders into safe and secure housing. (Indigenous youth transition with help from community elders, 2020).

Changes to the already existing IY NONET programming will be added to reflect the recommendations and findings of the talking circle and interviews. Because the inquiry is sensitive and the population it represents is considered vulnerable, a formal debrief or *Help it Happen* around the program development and inquiry collection was the most appropriate action planning event. This meeting will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Contribution and application

The inquiry information that comes from the research projects talking circle and interviews and the ensuing program that follows will be the first step for the home organization of NILTUO CFSS to begin to take strategic action to support Indigenous youth coming out of care who wish to pursue education or employment goals. In addition, the research and program will support the youth from the First Nation communities NILTUO serves. These Indigenous youth will be supported through completion throughout the process of getting into school and gaining employment.

The hope is to establish new and creative ways to reach youth through culture and practice. Others who come after this project, Indigenous scholars or not, can see how we can empower our youth, creating and supporting emerging Indigenous youth leaders.

Conclusion

This research project's implementation plan was guided by data from 2 Indigenous youth coming out of provincial care to inform the creation of programming to support them in gaining employment and education. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with specific stakeholders with expertise and knowledge around Indigenous youth in care and their needs. The methodology drawn from action-oriented research used an Indigenous talking circle and interviews as information collection methods.

Although this is a unique project, this researcher feels confident that this process was successful. With the support of the home organization and the communities this project serves, this inquiry was done in a good way. As an Indigenous researcher, there is pride in abiding by the ethical expectation of the academy and the communities under research.

Setbacks that were anticipated along the research journey could not be foreseen, but this researcher felt comfortable with the RRU support staff and the supervisor. This researcher took

each obstacle as it came and took council with fellow leadership students to gain perspective and had other individuals to discuss relevant topics for the inquiry.

Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter outlines the research findings and conclusions based on the data collected from this inquiry. The principal inquiry question for this research was, *how might the stakeholders for the education and learning needs of Indigenous youth aging out of care co-create an inclusive, adaptive and responsive transition program to meet the changing needs for/with these youth at NILTUO Child and Family Services Society?* The sub questions were, (1) *What lessons of resilience can stakeholders share that can give insights to developing Indigenous youth programming?* (2) *What specific program content is needed to empower and support Indigenous youth considering furthering their education or looking for employment?"* (3) *What role does culture and cultural knowledge play in creating programming that is relevant to Indigenous youth?* (4) *Who at NILTUO Child and Family Services Society or in the local First Nation communities and outside could contribute to the design and implementation of a robust, effective and innovative Indigenous youth program?*

The data gathering methods were semi-structured interviews for the community stakeholders and an Indigenous talking circle with Indigenous youth in care, each with a series of questions as the data gathering tool.

The participants were two Indigenous youth in provincial care, one Indigenous adult who grew up in foster care, one executive director of an Indigenous disability organization, one female Indigenous Elder, three Indigenous social workers who work directly with youth in care, one social work manager, and a youth worker who supports youth in care and who was formally a youth in care. Twelve participants in total.

There were six categories of findings:

Finding 1: Mind/Cognitive Wellbeing and Development

Finding 2: Indigenous Youth Program Development

Finding 3: Emotional Stability and Maintenance

Finding 4: Policy and Practice

Finding 5: Spiritual Connection

Finding 6: Physical Health

The findings come from excerpts of the interviews with each of the research participants. To protect the identities of participants, they have been assigned pseudonyms to provide citations for each quotation. Each alias consists of an abbreviation marker that will identify each participant while respecting their anonymity. The abbreviations take the first letter of the participant's first name and combine the letter P to determine them as a participant.

The two categories of the findings address Policy and Practice and Indigenous Youth Program Development for the project partner NILTUO Child and Family Services Society. The other four categories incorporate an Indigenous worldview of holism and oneness with creation. This categorization approach hopes to allow for the findings to be practically applied to Indigenous youth programming and policy practices through an Indigenous context to create tangible change in the lives of youth in terms of mind, body, spirit, and emotions. The categories incorporate these four directions but also describe the participant data. They are Mind/Cognitive Wellbeing and Development, Physical Health, Spiritual Connections, and Emotional Stability and Maintenance. The sequence of the findings is presented in no particular order related to the data. Instead, the sequence comes from the order in which Indigenous methodology tracks the

four directions: which in some Indigenous ways of thinking reflects the concepts of mind, body, spirit and emotions.

Finding 1: Mind/Cognitive Wellbeing and Development

The findings for this section focus on empowering Indigenous youth to step outside their comfort zone of family and community, to venture into the world to gain an education, and to reach their goals. The participant data focuses on how Indigenous youth programming can frame this expectation in ways that will resonate with youth.

There was a consensus among participants around the barriers and challenges experienced by Indigenous youth in care when accessing service, education, or otherwise from colonial institutions. Topics like racism, shyness, learning challenges, trauma, and substance abuse were addressed by each participant. All participants identified the need for a strategic effort from community stakeholders to address these challenges to support youth in their specific search for success.

The subcategories below go into further detail about each specific finding and what areas of focus the participants identified.

Sub-theme 1.a Education through an Indigenous lens

Participants identified that for Indigenous youth coming out of care, education would play a role in their success. All participants acknowledged that education, be it formal or otherwise, would be needed to gain credentials and necessary experience to support themselves in any given field. Each of the participants spoke about the old ways of life for Indigenous people and the knowledge and skills it took to survive and thrive. Participants PB and PG talked about individuals and teachings that exemplify living a traditional lifestyle and having skills that the ancestors possessed:

I had a good friend from Fort Nelson Indian band, who his idea of success was that he was going to move back into the bush and live a more traditional life. And he did that, you know, and he came out and, you know, worked on the rigs, and, you know, work fired season as a, as a supervisor and a leader, because he knew all the natural ways to be in the bush and understand how fire worked, and where, you know, what was safe and what wasn't safe. And so, he moved even away from, from the band land themselves, and, you know, went up 15 miles up the fort Nelson River and built himself a home. And had his grandchildren come out and stay with him. In the summers, in the winters, he ran a drop line and winters. (PB)

Below, PG, a former youth in care, talks about their experience while in care and how to support youth to take an interest in the ways of the ancestors to connect with the land and learn valuable, sustainable traditional skills:

That anyone can teach different levels. You know, it can be through one, it can be through music, to you know, you can just simply go take them on a trip somewhere, like an outing, they go to the beach, or teach them how to hunt or fish. You know, like, just the basic things that our aunts and uncles and elders before us learn way before any of the technology was even thought or, but the only way that anyone I feel that youth would learn. (PG)

There exists a stark contrast between the man in this narrative and a person educated in Western institutions. Much of this man's education was learned in nature, learning by doing versus instruction or referencing literature. The abilities learned to live a semi-traditional life are learned informally, learned as one goes. Education/life skills programming should incorporate

experiential, land-based subsistence living within its curriculum for Indigenous youth coming out of care.

Sub-theme 1.b Finding ways to support Indigenous youth learning and independence

The life circumstance of youth in care varies in terms of their exposure to education of any kind. Sometimes, youth coming out of care do not have the support of family to attend a school or strive towards goals. Indigenous youth programming focuses on motivating and inspiring youth to succeed, but youth may hesitate to adopt Western education concepts that deal with achievement. PB illustrates this phenomenon. To note, the participant references children in place of youth. The participant is an Elder and a senior-level executive who has worked in the social work field for 33 years.

Unfortunately, with some of the children that we have in care that's aging out that's getting ready for employment or furthering their education, that their families aren't necessarily as supportive as it should be. And that's from lack of their education or their own trauma.

This participant affirms the need for a strategy to connect with and support youth through their particular needs. Understanding that each youth in care or who has recently come out of care may need extra assistance to navigate Western society sets youth up for success through a conscious effort by all support agencies. These youth may not have any support in their community or otherwise. Identifying youth who need this assistance will be the first step toward an even playing field compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts in the job market and educational institutions.

Finding 2: Indigenous Youth Program Development

This finding explores what it is to be Indigenous and how stakeholders such as Delegated Aboriginal Agencies who conduct social work services in First Nations communities can indigenize programming to empower youth. Taking from the teachings of the ancestors and current cultural practices, program developers and facilitators can bring elements of culture into programming to support youth through their world view while delivering content and curriculum that will empower through knowledge and the experience of Indigenous cultures that focus on land-based initiative, language, creation stories, and medicine teachings. This finding is grouped into sub-themes labeled 2.a and 2.b. These were the two most mentioned points participants identified. Each of the ten adult participants identified both sub-themes.

Sub-theme 2.a Supporting program participants through Elder connections

Many ideas around what elements make a solid and innovative Indigenous youth program coming from participants CrP and CP are curriculum-based, using life skills modules to walk youth through the necessary steps to live a successful life. This study has recognized that youth participants can be apprehensive about the exposure to Western ideas of success and education. CrP suggests that Elders can play a significant role in the evolution of Indigenous youth's understanding of Indigenous ways of living and act as supports around new concepts:

Elders are awesome when it comes to teaching in a non-teaching way, like in today's society, teaching versus an Elders teaching. And I think if we had an elder guiding us, and guiding that youth, when planning for them aging out that even if the youth isn't willing, or wanting, to connect with their culture at that time, we've at least connected them to somebody in their future that they can call back on.

Currently, the University of Victoria and Camosun College in Victoria have Elders in residence as a full-time paid employee to work with students, faculty, and staff, to support intercultural communication and adjustments, mentor students in cultural ways and build relationships.

These positions have existed for some time and are in line with Indigenous methodologies.

Sub-theme 2.b Incorporating ceremony into Indigenous youth programs

Having Elders working with Indigenous youth has been identified as an innovative strategy to support youth transitioning to the greater community from care. Taking this a step further, MP speaks about incorporating ceremony as a way to further empower Indigenous youth program participants:

[I] have a friend that grew up in care. And I'm not too sure how old he was coming back home. But he was introduced to culture, and they had a ceremony for him. And I think that that may have had a big impact on him. And he's quite knowledgeable, he remembers stuff when he was young. I guess them (youth) learning about it is important to and because it all came back to him and he is quite knowledgeable and knows a lot about the culture and participates thoughts. I think it's very important that there's something there for them that they can either have someone help them through it or it depends on what they want to do. Like there's so much when it comes to our culture. MP

MP is suggesting that youth can gain strength through ceremony. Ceremony may act as a mechanism that can empower youth. These ceremonies could be guided by the Elders-in-residence to provide deeper understandings, add to knowledge about protocols, and add further legitimacy to the ceremony.

Ceremonies conducted by Elders would add deep meaning to Indigenous youth programming that has Western and Indigenous elements.

Finding 3: Emotional Stability and Maintenance: Supporting youth beyond programming through mental health and assessment support

All participants talked about Indigenous youth and the effects of colonization on their communities, and the unfavorable social circumstances resulting from it. Mental health was one of the main concerns for participants when talking about what youth in care experience. Mental health concerns manifest as substance abuse, self-harm or suicide, depression, and anxiety. Participants also focused on cognitive challenges youth may experience, such as FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder), ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), cranial trauma, and other disorders that affect information processing. These circumstances would have to be accounted for within youth life-skills programming to create individualized content for each learner that focuses on learning objectives around basic life skills, health, and pursuing education and employment goals.

Sub-theme 3.a Considering the impact of trauma for Indigenous youth in care

Participants identified the need to consider the life circumstances of Indigenous youth who are about to age out of care. Intergenerational trauma stemming from three hundred years of colonization, residential schools, and the adverse social events accompanying this have resulted in a profound disconnection from family, community, ceremony, and culture. This leaves many Indigenous youths with complex mental health concerns stemming from the trauma of these events. Creating a dynamic Indigenous youth program to support their success and goals is only one aspect of supporting Indigenous youth holistically. AP speaks to this,

I suppose that could bleed into counseling and assessments and potentially more awareness of mental health. For myself and my family. someone who sat down and cared about me as an individual. And my care or in a wholesome way.

Delegated Aboriginal Agencies must consider the mental health issues of youth, as they prepare for the world. Youth who participate in programming will have varying experiences in care, some better than others, but all will have the need for mental health support.

Assessments will be another aspect to support youth to get extra support in the greater community after aging out of care. Identifying and designating disorders such as ADHD, FASD, and other disorders qualify youth for help in the community. For some youth, a focus on mental health and cognitive assessments will be an essential aspect of support beyond programming, determining their ability to live independently. Supports like housing subsidies, support workers, financial assistance will all be determined based upon the needs of youth. Assessments create a blanket of community support that the youth would not qualify for otherwise. Given the complexities, program facilitators can work with Social Workers to advocate for program participants with assessment organizations located within provincial healthcare facilities.

There must be a clear understanding of all youth in care and their mental health from a trauma-informed approach, taking into consideration the experience of being in care. Indigenous youth in care have been taken from families and communities into a world that can be harsh. CrP speaks to this by stating, *“And I’m not implying that all of our youth have special needs, but they really do: any child that’s in care is traumatized.”* This statement, made by a social worker, is significant because it highlights the magnitude of the challenge of supporting and educating youth in care in the context of their long-term traumatization by having lost their birth family and

loving relationships that are typically part of child-rearing - in addition to the loss of their culture when they are removed from the Indigenous community of their birth.

Finding 4: Policy and Practice

Finding 4 was about policy and practices that could further support youth transitioning from care to the greater community. All participants identified areas where youth could struggle to attend a life-skills program due to remote locations or lack of resources. The current policy within DAA's around transportation is bus tickets to support youth in care to travel within the Greater Victoria area. This policy could present challenges for disabled youth and other youth with other disadvantages.

Participants identified mechanisms for support once youth and young adults did attend programming, as well as strategies to engage youth through the content of the curriculum. Eliminating barriers for youth to attend programming and ensuring they can attend school or work were the focus of the subthemes in this finding.

Sub-theme 4.a Transportation as a barrier for Indigenous youth in care to access services and programs

Indigenous delegated agencies support the transportation needs of the youth they serve by issuing bus passes and tickets. These passes give youth a means to independently get around the Greater Victoria region. Without these tickets and passes, most youth in care would struggle to find their way to school, appointments, and other services. For some youth, their home community is outside the current bus routes, and they have to walk 5 to 10 kilometers to get to the nearest bus stop. Beecher Bay First Nation on Southern Vancouver Island is one of the communities that struggles to have reliable transportation due to the bus stop being a 45-minute

walk from the community. ScP talks about their experience growing up in a First Nation community and transportation, *“probably the one thing, transportation, was an issue at times, but we managed to get where we had to go.”*

In terms of Indigenous youth programming, transportation is a crucial element of success for youth. The youth could live outside the bus route without anyone in the home or a support circle who drives or could commit to scheduled transportation. Another aspect to consider is the learning level, or the comfortability of youth finding their way to and from the program by bus. Having secure and reliable on-call transportation services for youth would help create an even playing field for youth to access programming, school, potential employment opportunities, appointments, and family visits.

DAA’s could create a shuttle program to support youth who live in remote areas or youth with challenges to attend programming and other important meetings and appointments. Addressing a potentially new approach towards Indigenous youth in terms of transportation support could significantly impact the chances of youth in care having more personal success without transportation as a barrier.

Sub-theme 4.b The importance of mentors

Indigenous people, in general, have few champions to emulate as youth. With this lack of champions and mentors, Indigenous youth look to family and community members to mirror, but some Indigenous youth lack mentors or family members that serve as protectors.

Within this research project, the mention of mentors was ubiquitous among every participant without exception. Mentors are those individuals in our life that set a positive example, who are knowledgeable and caring. Mentors act not only as an example to model, but they also serve to protect and nurture. Considering the importance of the concept of mentors to

each participant in this research project, the strategic and deliberate effort to develop mentor relationships and programs for youth in care could not come soon enough. CaP gives their perspective on the concept, *“I believe that mentorship and safety would have helped me as a youth. I was with family, I was in my home community. But there wasn’t a lot of positive mentors, and at times, there wasn’t safety for me.”* This statement is a snapshot of the life of a youth whose family and community had no one who served as a mentor or a protector, thus exposing the child to times of significant vulnerability. Trauma does affect youth coming out of care today, either in the present or in the past or both. Connecting youth with individuals from their communities and culture who are safe individuals to connect with like Elders and leaders with knowledge and compassion could make a difference through support for youth coming out of care.

Finding 5: Spiritual Connection

For Indigenous on groups, spiritual connections come from community, ceremony, culture, and family. Indigenous youth in care often are not connected to their home community because they are in foster care off-reserve or are in care in another First Nations community that is of not their specific culture. NP speaks about what is needed to create these connections,

There has to be some significant investment in time. And there has to be some significant investment in resources when necessary to facilitate that first and ongoing connection back to the community back to the understanding and awareness of who you are as a person.

Although this statement focuses on accessing resources to support youth to connect to spiritual activities in their communities, it shows that it will take funding to support these

connections for youth to connect to family and community. Some youth in care are away from their communities in terms of geographic location. Many communities are rural, and youth will need support to travel there and professional support from social workers and support workers to accompany the youth. Connecting to spiritual activities will take funding support from DAA's to cover the cost of traveling to rural First Nation communities.

Connections to the home community of youth in care was another topic that was iterated multiple times by each research participant. MP gives an alternate perspective,

A lot of indigenous youth that are aging out of care, because the law only just changed last year, the Bill C 92. So a lot of them have been raised in white foster homes, Indigenous culture might be a little bit foreign to them. You kind of have to be careful about how you introduce/reintroduce someone back in if they left that culture a long time ago. These family's Indigenous families were unsupported and fell apart and resulted in children going into care.

Considering the social location of family members is another aspect to consider when connecting youth back with relatives and home community. Connecting youth back to their community is the start of forming their identity and an understanding of who they are and building on the history of their people. Colonization has created a circumstance where youth in care are not necessarily aware of their Indigenous heritage. Since Indigenous people tie their identity to culture and community these connections are crucial.

Finding 6: Physical Health

Finding safe and secure housing for Indigenous youth coming out of care in the Greater Victoria area can be challenging. Three organizations exist in the Victoria area that supports youth with transitional housing, but there are long waiting lists for suitable living spaces. This scarcity is expressed by CrP,

I think a lot of the youth that age out of care are lacking in housing and in Victoria, housing is lacking for sure. If there was more Indigenous supported housing that would be great. Because rent is too high for youth to go out and get their own apartment.

In addition to MP, participant CrP also described the need for housing support for Indigenous youth. Having safe and secure housing for Indigenous youth is necessary for youth who do not have family to support them, lack the skills to help themselves outside of provincial care, or experience discrimination in housing and rentals.

For Indigenous youth to be successful, they will also require a stable living environment that allows them to succeed in employment or learning programs. Indigenous youth coming out of care might not have the necessary skills to have a job to pay for independent housing. Having more housing programs with professionals to support semi-independent and independent living will give youth more time to develop the skills to live independently and be supported to overcome barriers like discrimination.

Study Conclusions

These conclusions identified here are just the beginning to understanding the critical aspects of the current situation for Indigenous youth coming out of care in British Columbia.

Understanding the state of affairs for youth is necessary to create a direction for stakeholders and other advocates to identify specific strategies to support youth on their journey.

The following conclusions sum up what participants felt towards specific elements of support they require. Each conclusion is complemented with the original thesis question and sub questions and the literature covered in chapter two. This section compares and contrasts key concepts identified in the inquiry findings with the literature.

Each conclusion is listed below:

Conclusion 1: Traditional ways of living are a legitimate life goal and education for Indigenous youth needs to support this choice

Conclusion 2: There is a need to build on the resiliency of youth

Conclusion 3: Elders and Indigenous culture are essential for learning

Conclusion 4: Ceremony is a core part of identity

Conclusion 5: A Community of Practice for stakeholders is necessary to support the needs of Indigenous Youth aging out of care

During the conversations in the interviews and talking circle, participants identified barriers Indigenous youth coming out of care experience. Each participant brought a unique perspective from their professional and personal experience with the child welfare system in British Columbia. Each conclusion was a product of participants' ideas around addressing these barriers for Indigenous youth. The conclusions complement the findings. While each participant was able to identify barriers, they were also able to give insight on how community stakeholders and supports can help youth navigate life out of care. While identifying the findings, separate

categories were kept for conclusions and recommendations to present independently from the findings.

Conclusion 1: Traditional ways of living are a legitimate life goal and education for Indigenous youth needs to support this choice

Indigenous youth interact with a complex network of services and providers who can support them within the greater community, which can be understood as a community of practice. With the current youth in care crisis in British Columbia (and to an extent, Canada), stakeholders and service providers must create communication networks to support these youth through a community of practice. 65% of youth and children in provincial care in British Columbia are Indigenous, while Indigenous children make up less than 2% of the total youth population (MCFD, CYIC, 2019). Participants MP and CrP have, in Findings 2 and 6, pointed to services that youth coming out of care will need to move forward, including assistance with transportation and housing. Identification and collaboration with support in the community will provide youth with these and many other services, but youth must have information on how to access these services. A community of practice could be established formally through a memorandum of understanding among involved agencies and community stakeholders. Once this is established, the community of practice and its stakeholders can connect with Delegated Aboriginal Agencies and coordinate services to best serve these youth.

Youth coming out of care might not have had all the support they needed to move forward with their life independently after care for many reasons, regardless of whether or not the youth had adequate care while in a foster family or group home. Some of these youth will require specialized services to varying degrees. Creating a community of practice will streamline services with medical practitioners, housing organizations, mental health clinicians, spiritual

mentors, Indigenous communities, and so on. Having partnership and communication with these sectors and services is the first step to an infrastructure of support for Indigenous youth coming out of care that supports the needs of youth through a Western and Indigenous method. In order for support organizations to come together to work collaboratively to support youth, DAA leadership with need to create a strategic engagement plan to build a network bringing all relevant partners to the table to discuss the creation of an information sharing structure.

Conclusion 2: There is a need to build on the resiliency of youth

The idea of a university degree or other technical education might not be the goal for some of these Indigenous youth. However, a more traditional life should still be possible for some of these youth, if that is their choice. Within their home communities, there will be men and women who live by the teachings of their ancestors, hunting, trapping and fishing the same waters their people have since time immemorial.

For these youth, entering Western colonial institutions might present obstacles or challenges with racism and apprehension toward Western ideas and thoughts. Hare & Pidgeon (2011), in their studies with Anishinaabe youth, talk about reliance on familial and community members as a means to navigate life, stating,

Like many other Indigenous youth, the Anishinaabe youth who took part in the present study exercised strategies of agency and resistance drawing on their families and communities for sources of strength to confront the ethnocentrism and anti-Indigenous hostilities that existed in their interactions with peers and teachers and within the curriculum and pedagogies of schooling. (p.8)

Although many youths coming out of care will not be connected to family and community, a section of the youth population in care will be placed with family or an Indigenous family from their home community or another. For youth who are not connected to community, it is crucial to understand the necessity of community connections. Each youth in care will have a home community to connect to; this might look different for each youth given the circumstances. It would be advantageous for program facilitators to communicate with each band or community of the youth program participants to see how the community could support their cultural and historical learning.

Indigenous programming for youth in care can connect Indigenous youth with family, community, or other Indigenous leaders to assist them in navigating their education and employment wants and needs. Relationships with family and leaders can support youth to understand what tradition, culture, and ceremony can offer them in terms of life and life satisfaction. For example, if we look at the individual in PB's story who lived a semi-traditional life on a trap line, it would have taken leaders from his community to show him traditional ways of being and living. Through these lessons and forged relationships with family and community, Indigenous youth can continue their learning journey incorporating Western and Indigenous world views to build on an educational foundation.

This conclusion answers what participants spoke to within the inquiry process. The need for a new way of approaching how education is applied with Indigenous youth coming out of care has to go further than the Western education expectations of striving towards university or trades. An Indigenous lens must incorporate Indigenous youth's specific values and wants.

Conclusion 3: Elders and Indigenous culture are essential for learning

Within First Nation groups, Elders play a pivotal role in learning for youth, passing on lessons, knowledge, and skills. This description of the role of Elders was spoken by the late Elder Frank Chee Willette, former chairman of the Navajo and a Navajo code talker during World War 2,

We are the First People of this land. Our young people are looking to us with questions about the future. They want to know how to protect our lands, how to treat each other, and how to deal with change. Let us come together with good thoughts and provide the next generation with a message they can use. Let us confer some of the strength that has brought us this far to them in our messages. Let this message be a legacy that can live beyond the bounds of time and have meaning for generations of our people long into the future (Bergstrom, Cleary, & Peacock, 2003, p.36).

We can see through this statement the historic mission Elders have to support Indigenous youth. Hare & Pidgeon (2011) conducted a research study with Anishinaabe youth, addressing experiences of racism in colonial education (as mentioned in Chapter 2). One youth spoke about the role Elders played in their lives in terms of the emphasis on trusted advice.

My grandparents, they're always there. Always there to help me. And they'll talk to me if I need to talk to them about anything, like if I'm in trouble or something, I'll talk to them and they'll help me resolve it or if . . . I need something, they'll be there to help me (p. 102).

An Indigenous youth program that looks to build upon education and life skills could have Elders in residence to support youth learning. Having Elders as part of the facilitation team that would deliver this program for aging-out youth will model an Indigenous learning system where Elders support, nurture and share cultural knowledge with learners. These statements of the role and impact of Elder teaching align with Participant CrP's message about learning with Elders and how it differs from traditional Western instruction: "Elders are awesome when it comes to teaching in a non-teaching way, where culture is the foundation of teachings passed from generation to generation."

Conclusion 4: Ceremony is a core part of identity

Indigenous youth coming out of care will have varying exposure to their cultural teachings. Some youth will know their culture because they are placed with family or extended family or live with an Indigenous family in an Indigenous community. Others will be raised off-reserve and could have some connection to their family or community or none. Many of these youth will have little knowledge of their culture, and in turn, have a lack of understanding of their identity. Participant MP told a story of his friend in provincial care who was able to find strength through an introduction to culture, showing the benefit of culture for youth to reclaim their knowledge of themselves and their culture.

Culture is essential to assist Indigenous youth in developing into successful individuals by identifying with larger values. This allows youth to do better, meaning that they are more likely to gain success if they relate to those values that go past family and self, have a historical perspective, and have a deep respect for those that have come before them (Wexler, 2009). Stakeholders and supports for Indigenous youth coming out of care will be tasked with developing relationships with the specific Indigenous community of the youth they serve.

Programming should incorporate information within it that reflects the particular culture of its participant, not in a pan-Indigenous way. This information can only come from the home communities, which will only be gathered through a significant investment of time and a strategic engagement effort. These efforts will help youth develop their identity, connecting them to their family, community, and culture through ceremony. Identity development for Indigenous youth transcends individualism and focuses on connecting to all creation, which builds a strong sense of self (Bergstrom, Cleary & Peacock, 2003).

The goal is to connect to the blood memory of Indigenous youth through culture and use that culture to empower and build resiliency, ultimately leading to personal success. The challenge will be connecting each youth to their specific culture. In many parts of Canada, there are a small number of Indigenous nations in one territory. However, on Vancouver Island, there are multiple linguistic groups, all with their practices and beliefs. The strategic coordination of various organizations and stakeholders and their ability to work cohesively will further support the prosperity of Indigenous youth in care and youth who come from multiple Indigenous nations.

Conclusion 5: A Community of Practice for stakeholders is necessary to support the needs of Indigenous Youth aging out of care

Resilience is another vital aspect of Indigenous youth that supports them in moving past their care experience and access educational resources. Youth coming out of care will have had varying degrees of experiences, some positive, some negative. Youth in care have been removed from a living situation where their biological parents could not take care of their needs. Because of that, they have suffered significant intergenerational trauma in their lives.

Kowatch, Toombs & Mushquash (2016) look at the effect of resilience on Indigenous youth and how resilience combats feelings of fear and despair. They state that,

higher levels of optimism and self-esteem were associated with lower depressive symptoms. Resilience was also found to moderate re-experiencing symptoms after exposure to violence (physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; exposure to domestic violence), with lower levels of overall resilience being associated with increasing re-experiencing symptoms as the frequency of violence exposure increased. These findings reinforce and extend the existing research, positioning resilience as an important feature for successful coping, into Canadian Indigenous samples (p.20).

Through connections to family and community mentors and leaders, Indigenous youth coming out of care can gain experience on what constitutes education through an Indigenous context which will build confidence and resiliency through cultural identity (Bennett, 2021). Once youth have lessons and ongoing support from community leaders, they can then decide on a path to individual goals. They can learn these lessons from someone with an Indigenous worldview and show them how to navigate the Western world. An individual who possesses the skills to bridge the Indigenous/First Nation world with Western perspectives and tools. Community members can help these youth aging out of care build their resilience by modeling how they deal with the ongoing racism and colonialism heaped upon Indigenous people. Combining the teaching within the program that addresses racism and colonialism with community youth mentors and leaders can further support youth in building resiliency.

The next chapter (Chapter 5) will move from conclusions to recommendations based on the participant data, the literature, and the researcher's experience. As participants identified

various aspects of supporting youth coming out of care within this inquiry process, the recommendations will follow the conclusions in their attempt to create action towards helping youth in care.

Scope and Limitations

This inquiry project includes a comprehensive analysis of the issues Indigenous youth in care experience at a specific location and context. Because of the scope and size of the overall topic, this inquiry project could not capture all aspects of continuing education for Indigenous youth aging out of care that deserved to be addressed. Unfortunately, an inquiry project of this size cannot meaningfully address all of the concerns in the lives of Indigenous youth in care. Youth in care need more intervention from multiple disciplines in addition to institutional support and sustained government funding to address concerns and the state of circumstances. This project will serve as a small step of many steps towards making a better situation for youth.

Conducting an inquiry project during a pandemic was also a challenging undertaking. Under normal circumstances, the researcher and participants could meet casually in a more formal in-person setting, where participants could engage in a more meaningful and personal way. This may have had an impact in reducing the numbers of potential participants who might otherwise have participated in this inquiry; the pandemic also made it much more difficult for Elders to participate in this inquiry, and the number of participants was lower than what had been hoped. This inquiry project could have used more substantial input from Elders in the communities NILTUO CFSS serves.

The major challenge for this project was the engagement of youth. It could be that the circle is only as effective as the individuals who want to take part in it. There may have been apprehension on the part of the youth that caused a lack of willingness to engage, there could

have been less engagement and, therefore, an ineffective means of inquiry. There may have been a perceived power-over issue, as the researcher may serve as the facilitator of this program and wanted to ensure no present or anticipated power over relationships existed to promote maximum engagement from youth. This potential issue was partially addressed by having an inquiry team member act as the facilitator of the talking circle. This created a degree of separation between the researcher and the research participants. To note, each participant was offered a gift card for their participation.

Summary

The participants in this inquiry gave testimony to their deep knowledge and understanding of the current situation of Indigenous youth in care in British Columbia. Each participant spoke from experience, living and existing in the child welfare system themselves. Examples throughout the findings are powerful, and we can see the profoundly troubling circumstance these young people find themselves in today. What was echoed by each participant was the nature of the child welfare system, where Indigenous ways of knowing and seeing are not taken into consideration when policies are made at the highest levels. We see a revolving door phenomenon of the Western understanding of so-called care and not taking into consideration spiritual and emotional wellbeing, and even taking only a cursory interest in physical well-being. Many Indigenous families continue to struggle, and children have been being taken into care for generations, with the consequences of intergenerational trauma and disconnection from culture. Indigenous youth do not fall into this Western paradigm of care, nor do they benefit from it. Indigenous youth require specialized and culturally safe services that bridge the present to the teachings of the past. These teaching and ways of knowing and being are essential for the wellness of many Indigenous youth. Without these teachings and connection

to community Indigenous youth require, they risk further alienated from their cultures and ultimately themselves. Indigenous youth are entitled to have the fundamental right to connect to family, community, ceremony, creation stories, and medicines. Although the research is limited in scope, each participant identified these elements as necessary for youth in care to find their path and to gain and achieve their goals.

Chapter 5: Inquiry Implications and Recommendations

Study Recommendations

This chapter will present recommendations collected in this inquiry project, in relation to current literature and the experience of the researcher in the inquiry process. These recommendations address policy and practice, physical health, spiritual connections, mind/cognitive wellbeing and development, emotional stability and maintenance, and Indigenous youth programming. Each finding and conclusion category is listed in chapter 4. These categories represent a holistic approach to supporting Indigenous youth coming out of care. For example, the current foster care system for Indigenous youth, supported by the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development, focuses on physical care for Indigenous youth, but only until they reach the age of majority of 19 years old. While the Ministry has already begun to diversify its thinking on this topic and has made special grants available to youth aging out of care (see: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/youth-and-family-services/teens-in-foster-care/agreements-with-young-adults>), this is only a beginning step. The child welfare system could use a holistic approach modeled after Indigenous ways of knowing and seeing. A fully integrated holistic approach would create a wraparound support network that focuses on the necessities of life, which the current system provides, and focuses on community connections that encompass culture, ceremony, creation stories, medicines, and language. Each of the following recommendations represents the participants' insight who have a unique perspective on the complex issue of Indigenous youth in care in British Columbia. These recommendations are based on the findings, conclusions, and literature mentioned in chapter 4 and presented in

chronological order in terms of priority as determined by the participants of this inquiry. The thesis question and sub-questions are reiterated below.

The thesis question is: *how might the stakeholders for the education and learning needs of Indigenous youth aging out of care co-create an inclusive, adaptive, and responsive transition program to meet the changing needs for/with these youth at NILTUO Child and Family Services Society?* The sub-questions were, (1) *What lessons of resilience can stakeholders share that can give insights to developing Indigenous youth programming?* (2) *What specific program content is needed to empower and support Indigenous youth considering furthering their education or looking for employment?"* (3) *What role does culture and cultural knowledge play in creating programming that is relevant to Indigenous youth?* (4) *Who at NILTUO Child and Family Services Society or in the local First Nation communities and outside could contribute to the design and implementation of a robust, effective, and innovative Indigenous youth program?*

The recommendations are:

Recommendation 1: A community of practice for community and professional partners and Elders serving the youth aging out of care should be established to streamline supports for Indigenous youth who have or will come out of care

Recommendation 2: Traditional lifestyle or a blend of modern and traditional lifestyles should be considered an option for employment support to connect youth to land and culture, to develop real-world skills that will broaden their educational, employment, and life options

Recommendation 3: Elders can play an active role within Delegated Aboriginal Agencies to support youth in programming and generally

Recommendation 4: Delegated Aboriginal Agencies can partner with local knowledge keepers to incorporate ceremony within Indigenous youth programming

Recommendation 5: Indigenous youth programming development can identify community leaders who possess traditional skills to act as mentors and teachers for youth to learn traditional living methods and nurture resiliency and pride in youth

Recommendation 1: A community of practice for community and professional partners and Elders serving the youth aging out of care should be established to streamline supports for Indigenous youth who have or will come out of care

The support services providers for Indigenous youth in care consist of a complex web of practitioners and organizations that currently exist independently in a community. They often cross paths where services and clients meet and come together to support but usually do not create relationships past the immediate service need. There continue to be concerns about the mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional health needs of Indigenous youth coming out of care expressed by individuals who provide the current services these youth are accessing. For example, Mann-Feder and Goyette (2019) found that continued support for youth that focuses on accommodations, finances, and relationships created stability and allowed youth to focus on personal development after spending considerable time focused on survival.

Having lines of communication between support organizations to more comprehensively address the needs of youth coming out of care could be a step towards closing many gaps for Indigenous youth to access services. In addition, this network will allow for sharing information where stakeholders collaborate to support Indigenous youth coming out of care.

Looking at how Indigenous families and communities operate, we see a network of immediate and extended kinship relations within one community. Often, these close and extended family members contribute to youth's education and cultural identity where cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents assist with the developmental goals of children and youth (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). A community of practice could resemble the orchestration of community members and family where organizations and institutions commit to a focus of collaboration around Indigenous youth coming out of care with a mandate to serve one of the many needs of

these youth. The organizations that serve this youth population could take their mandate one step further and open regular communication lines to inform and cooperate to help youth better. The onus will be on Delegated Aboriginal Agencies to create these relationships within the greater community of Indigenous youth in care and the support organizations through a strategic engagement effort. One of the many benefits of this community of practice besides better support for youth will be sharing information and resources. A formal means of communication should be established where regular meetings and information email will need to occur regularly adhering to organizational protocols around confidentiality when discussing specific cases.

Topics of interest to support Indigenous youth coming out of care could be an affordable housing strategy, employment support, training, financial support, and navigation for youth with delays or challenges. Each agency's issues and the need for coordination would come to the forefront. An official memorandum of understanding signed by each support organization could serve to solidify the commitment to support youth coming out of care.

Recommendation 2: Traditional lifestyle or a blend of modern and traditional lifestyles should be considered an option and encouraged to connect youth to land and culture, developing real-world skills that will broaden their educational and life options

The fallout from the colonization of Indigenous peoples' traditional lands in Canada has separated them from cultural identities and ways of life that existed before European contact. As a result, Indigenous youth in care have greater separation from traditional lifestyles. They not only have to navigate a colonial nation but many have been removed from family and community. The goal of Indigenous youth programming and support is to empower youth to achieve their goals in education and employment through exposing youth to a variety of approaches to adult life to build their sense of possibility. Through a connection to the land and

the past ways of life, Indigenous youth would have an opportunity to find pride in the collective identity of their people and draw strength from their ancestors. Indigenous youth need to feel good about who they are and take pride in the perspectives of their specific nation(s). A crucial aspect of academic achievement for Indigenous students is to be “culturally connected” where youth have a good self-concept, a strong sense of direction, and tenacity where they find the strength to persevere through adversity (Bergstrom, Clearly & Peacock, 2003). In terms of research on resiliency, factors such as connection to land and sense of place, collective identity, nurturance and support, and ecological and social interconnectedness have all been found to strengthen Indigenous youth’s ability to persevere (Toombs, Kowatch, & Mushquash, 2016).

Implementation of youth life-skills programs that incorporate traditional ways of living on the land, either as an avocation or as a means of employment, will serve as a legitimate means of connecting to traditional methods by incorporating language, subsistent living, ceremony, traditional cuisine, and medicines. Delegated Aboriginal Agencies can coordinate with local communities to identify appropriate persons with this specialized knowledge and incorporate them in the program process in some paid capacity to inform and empower youth who have aged out or will age out of care. These connections to individuals who live close to a subsistence lifestyle will further affirm this way of life and show youth that there are multiple ways to live in a modern world. As a further measure, it would be beneficial to connect with young adults who are continuing training or educational programs or living using traditional skills with the life skills program participants. These young adults could act as mentors to further give insight into multiple career and lifestyle paths being in line with a two-eyed seeing paradigm.

Recommendation 3: Elders can play an active role within Delegated Aboriginal Agencies to support youth in programming and generally

Indigenous Elders play a unique role within Indigenous communities as knowledge keepers and advisors to leadership around complex community issues. Elders pass on knowledge and community/cultural values to younger generations and give guidance and support passed on through language, ceremony, knowledge of the land, skills for hunting, fishing, gathering and stories (Callahan, et al, 2019). Indigenous Elders are an essential aspect of the development for youth who are coming out of care. Elders can pass along that cultural knowledge so many youths lack due to the child welfare system and the effects of colonization. Elders have the potential to bridge the cultural gap for youth who struggle with identity, self-image, and self-esteem.

Browne, et al (2019) conducted a study in primary care facilities where Indigenous Elders supported Indigenous youth with mental health outcomes. The study found that the involvement and support of Indigenous Elders statistically significantly reduced depressive symptoms and suicidality and contributed to the elimination of mental health concerns for Indigenous youth and people. Thus, the potential impact of Indigenous Elders towards positive outcomes for Indigenous youth cannot be overstated.

Delegated Aboriginal Agencies have a unique opportunity and responsibility to create formal paid positions within their agencies for Elders to play a pivotal role in the lives of Indigenous youth, including those who are aging out of care. Having Elders sit in and carry a facilitator role in Indigenous youth life skills programming can help create an inclusive environment where an Indigenous lens can be applied to the curriculum based on the lessons and teachings of Elders. Delegated Aboriginal Agencies serve Indigenous communities where they have access to knowledgeable Elders and can empower staff to create an engagement process to

connect and invite Elders to support youth in programming and beyond. Historically, Elders are commissioned on an honorarium basis, paid for services rendered, and are rarely given permanent paid positions with organizations. This practice needs to shift to show the need and appreciation for Elders knowledgeable in culture and community and the long-term role as support staff for Indigenous youth.

Recommendation 4: Delegated Aboriginal Agencies can partner with local knowledge keepers to incorporate ceremony within Indigenous youth programming

As a result of the child welfare system and the effects of colonization in Canada, Indigenous youth suffer from trauma and mental health events at a disproportionate rate compared with non-Indigenous youth (Blackstock, et al, 2007). Although there has been intervention by Western mental health models and practitioners, there is still a pervasive existence and progression of mental health concerns for Indigenous youth. For example, Eadie et al (2022) study with urban Indigenous youth in Australia concluded that Indigenous youth in care represent one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged populations within all Western societies, and confirmed that Indigenous youth in care are at significant risk for developing physical, social, and mental health challenges across all aspects of their lives due to their experience before care and during care.

The experience of trauma and mental health concerns for Indigenous youth coming out of care are distinct from their colonial experience. Traditionally, Indigenous cultures provide ceremony for life events, including births, coming of age, marriage, death, and many other milestones that mark the progression through life (see, for example, events such as births, coming of age, marriage, death, and many other) milestones mark the progression through life. The connection to these ceremonies for Indigenous people can serve as a healing tool to address

adverse life events and outcomes. Existing literature shows that when Indigenous people connect to the ceremony of their nation, there are measurable changes to spiritual and emotional wellbeing, where such developments exist as fundamental components of wellness through an Indigenous paradigm (Moore & Wagemakers, 2006).

Delegated Aboriginal Agencies can seek out and partner with knowledge keepers of ceremonial traditions in the communities they serve. These individuals can further incorporate ceremony in Indigenous youth programming to foster and nurture knowledge for youth to build resilience and pride and heal from events of the past.

Recommendation 5: Indigenous youth programming development can identify community leaders who possess traditional land skills to act as mentors and teachers for youth to learn traditional living methods and nurture resiliency and pride in youth

For many Indigenous peoples, land plays an essential role in day-to-day life where sustenance, shelter, art, and the adoration of all earthly objects is understood. The effects of colonialism and the modernization of Western society have created a circumstance for Indigenous people where more than 40% live in urban areas (Statistic Canada, 2021). This situation directly results from the great land theft and the placement of Indigenous peoples on reservations, disconnected from the land and its wealth (Fast, et al, 2021). Implementing life skills programming that reconnects Indigenous youth in care back to the land is a strategy that will further contribute to their overall wellness. Programming can inform youth around creation stories, medicines, and oral histories shared and passed down by their nations.

The connection between wellness and traditional lands for Indigenous people has been documented. Jardine and Lines (2019) and their work with Yellowknife Dene First Nation using a strength- and community-based participatory approach through an Indigenous research lens

illustrates how necessary the connection to the land is for Indigenous peoples. This project was conducted through a land-based workshop, PhotoVoice, mural art, and surveys. The youth research participants identified the need for their connection to the land to be nurtured. Jardine and Lines (2019) state, “This research illustrates the relationship between structural context and Indigenous Peoples’ health and the need to incorporate this determinant into future health solutions. In line with other research on Indigenous Peoples’ connection with the land” (p.11). This research exemplifies the role Indigenous youth can play in strengthening their communities through an Indigenous worldview on health and wellness and its connection to land-based initiatives. The importance of land-based training and initiatives cannot be overstated. Still, it will be necessary to offer youth in life skills programming multiple options for potential life paths to maximize the livelihood of youth finding a path that speaks to them. The next section will address how the partner organization will adapt and include the inquiry findings within the agency and the IY NONET program.

Organizational Implications

At the beginning of this inquiry process, interview and youth participants were made aware of individual emails and teleconference invitations sent to gain feedback and acknowledgment for the material to be submitted for academic evaluation. Each participant had the time and space to speak openly through email or online conference about their thoughts and feelings about the findings and recommendations. Each participant was encouraged to be as honest as possible when considering the findings and recommendations.

NILTUO CFSS incorporates many cultural components in its care for youth. One could certainly argue that NILTUO serves the Indigenous youth population in a more Indigenized manner that includes culture than the provincial child welfare bodies with similar mandates.

Although Delegated Aboriginal Agencies have come leaps and bounds in incorporating culture in care, there is still a long road before the epidemic of youth in care is remedied. One of the largest barriers to supporting youth in care is funding. The next section will discuss this topic further.

Funding for Initiatives

Funding from the federal government will be one of the most significant hurdles, being that NILTUO sources its funding for operational requirements through federal government grants and programs. There is an opportunity to implement the CoP (Community of Practice) recommendation without sourcing resources from funders. There would need to be some detective work on the part of NILTUO and DAA staff, but it could be done and created with minimal costs. Once the CoP was established, information could be shared in order to streamline services for youth in care.

For leadership to begin implementing the finding and recommendations of this inquiry project, they will have to petition government representatives to further expand their employee and contractor capacity, especially to hire Elders and knowledge keepers to support youth.

Staffing

Suppose leadership within NILTUO CFSS can implement the inquiry recommendations. In that case, there will have to be a strategic effort to connect with those who can fill the roles mentioned in the recommendations. This initiative will need a coordinated effort by NILTUO staff and stakeholders. The recommendations of this inquiry are no easy feat in terms of implementation. Connecting with skilled and knowledgeable individuals to further support Indigenous youth will take a concerted effort supported by the home community of knowledge keepers and DAA's.

Challenges if Recommendations Not Implemented

The findings and the literature have demonstrated the need for culturally-based interventions for Indigenous youth in care. The hesitation to not support these recommendations will further delay Indigenous youth connecting to their identity and culture. If Delegated Aboriginal Agencies and government funding agencies could consider the recommendations on a pilot trial basis and gauge the success of the initiatives, they could gather empirical data to guide policy.

Elders in Residence

Delegated Aboriginal Agencies support Indigenous youth in care through social workers and family support workers who connect youth to supports in the greater community. Creating space to incorporate Elders, knowledge keepers, and staff hours to form a community of practice as new support within DAA's shifts the service paradigm and uses an Indigenous approach operating as Indigenous persons would support their family and community members. This strategy could further support the already established staff within DAA's, adding a holistic approach through engagement with culture, ceremony, language, creation stories, and medicines. Family support workers and social workers have specific skill sets that support youth's physical, mental, and emotional health. Incorporating knowledge keepers, Elders and building a community of practice for youth in and out of care can further support them spiritually while on their healing journeys.

Assuming that NILTUO CFSS acquires the resources to implement some or all of these recommendations, this would change DAA's and how they serve youth. Currently, no DAA's have Elders and knowledge keepers as employees to support youth through cultural knowledge.

That is not to say that DAA's do not have knowledgeable Indigenous people as employees. They certainly have culturally knowledgeable people who hold language and ceremony within DAA's; what does not exist are specific positions for knowledge keepers and Elders to serve in those roles through their capacity. Those within DAA's who hold cultural knowledge are often either family support workers or social workers who have a particular role in the DAA. In terms of the system impact, these recommendations would serve as a flagship initiative for the DAA's on Vancouver Island and abroad, giving a new understanding of the approach to addressing the cultural separation for Indigenous youth in care.

The interview and talking circle participants live the issues Indigenous youth in care face. The Indigenous youth who participated are currently in care. The interviewed professionals have worked in the sector for multiple years; some were former youth in care, but all were Indigenous. The knowledge that came out during this inquiry project had existed within their minds for a long time. The project generated new ideas that can redefine NILTUO CFSS and how people work within themselves. (Torbert & Trullen, 2018). What has emerged are ideas and perspectives to support Indigenous youth further culturally and spiritually. The partner organization of NILTUO CFSS and its employees were able to be vulnerable in sharing their own stories and experiences. They got to the heart of the issues through the anonymous medium of the semi-structured interviews, and the talking circle, where they could come together in a safe and meaningful way to enact change through action.

Contributions Made by This Thesis

The circumstance for Indigenous youth in care in British Columbia is dire, where 60% of youth in care in BC are of Indigenous ancestry (CYIC-Children and Youth in Care, MCFD, 2019). The implications of this thesis are minute compared to the current situation for youth in

care, previously mentioned. This thesis's contributions aligns with scholarly works that emphasize the need for culture and a community of practice to support Indigenous youth. This thesis will contribute to the existing literature and scholarship as a perspective that takes the need for culture in the lives of Indigenous youth and shines a light on the current situation in British Columbia and the current state of the child welfare system. The stories captured in this thesis could echo other conditions around the world where colonialism has negatively impacted Indigenous youth and could serve to inform and educate on the need for youth to connect to community, culture, and identity. Indigenous scholars worldwide must share their plight and adverse social circumstances resulting from colonialism and climate change, celebrating successes and sharing information.

This researcher had the privilege of working where the thesis research was conducted and engaged executive staff throughout the process. Unfortunately, the recommendations and findings presented in this thesis require financial support from funders for implementation, excluding the creation of the CoP, which could be implemented at a minimal cost. For too long, Elders and knowledge keepers have operated on an honorarium basis, given financial stipends instead of having a long-term role in DAA's and other support organizations. The hope will be that policy makers and executive staff see that value in the perspectives of community stakeholders and petition funders for a re-evaluation of the current support model.

Implications for Future Inquiry

There are a variety of approaches that emerge from this inquiry, both in terms of broader actions and future action-oriented inquiry. In terms of my role post-thesis, this researcher plans to create a non-profit organization that supports Indigenous youth in care or who have aged out through life skills programming, the IY NONET program. This researcher hopes to serve the

Indigenous communities outside of the NILTUO catchment. Creating a non-profit that will partner with NILTUO and support their facilitators in training and establishing a partnership between organizations with similar mandates will further support youth in care. The incorporation of the non-profit and its timeline is unknown at this time. The organization will serve youth throughout BC and partner with First Nations communities and DAA's to support youth through life skills programming.

We have an opportunity to empower researchers to act as active learners and to be stewards of participants' stories, versus existing strictly as experts (Killeen, & O'Day, 2002). Future inquiries and research models that intend to create a more equitable circumstance for Indigenous youth might inquire about what front-line staff and stakeholders say about the importance of culture and communication among support organizations. Additional action inquiry could also be taken to more formally build a community of practice to determine key areas for mutual support and resource sharing.

The inquiry information gathered in this thesis document serves as a preliminary examination of a far-reaching issue. It has various implications for Indigenous youth in care ranging from health to education and employment, spiritual wellbeing, and beyond. The level of community engagement these recommendations will require will be no easy task. Creating a community of practice for Indigenous youth in care alone will require a full-time worker to establish. Future research on how organizations can support Indigenous youth could make this community of practice to better connect to stakeholders. The research could focus on connecting with community supports and gathering their perspectives on how a community of practice can be created. Other areas around establishing a forum for stakeholders to communicate and share

information could yield a strategy for other organizations to follow who wish to further support Indigenous youth in care through a community of practice.

Another potentially fascinating future project could be gathering qualitative data from knowledge keepers and Elders to gain insight into their thoughts and feelings around supporting Indigenous youth in care. This project could strictly focus on the perspectives of Elders versus this project's broader approach. This topic affects each Indigenous person in British Columbia personally. It could serve well to gather these perspectives that are steeped in Indigenous methodologies and world views.

Action Planning Meeting with Partner

With the advent of UNDRIP and the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Actions, we, as Canadians, see a resurgence of addressing current social justice issues for Canada's Indigenous population. This thesis is in line with acting to support and address the current situation for Indigenous youth and children in care in British Columbia and bring attention to this topic.

The conversation initiated in this inquiry has been discussed within Indigenous support agencies for some time, attempting to connect Indigenous youth with cultural experiences. Now, with NILTUO CFSS and their willingness to consider these findings and recommendations, they can be a leader in incorporating culture in a more directed and precise way to support their youth.

As we have seen through this inquiry process, culture is the connection to identity for Indigenous peoples. Through culture, Indigenous youth can begin to see the strength they can acquire to overcome adversity in their lives.

The final knowledge-sharing meeting between NILTUO CFSS and the researcher was held on December 17, 2021. Present was the researcher, and the designated partner contact D. Eadie. Each recommendation was presented and examined to gauge its viability and

transferability within NILTUO and the IY NONET program. The recommendations were sent previously through email for the executive team to review. Mr. Eadie was their representative.

Recommendation 1: A community of practice should be established to streamline supports for Indigenous youth who have or age out of care (partner discussion) - A

community of practice should be established to streamline supports for Indigenous youth who have or will come out of care.

This recommendation was well received by NILTUO executive and management staff but did present some logistical barriers for implementation. At present, NILTUO does not have any staff who could commit time to establish a CoP. However, Mr. Eadie stated that this could be put aside until a future date when NILTUO expands and could have this as a task for a family support worker. NILTUO is planning to expand staff in the near future.

Recommendation 2: Traditional lifestyle or a blend of modern and traditional lifestyles should be considered an option and encouraged to connect youth to land and culture, developing real-world skills that will broaden their educational and life options

(partner discussion) - Traditional lifestyle or a blend of modern and traditional lifestyles should be considered an option for employment support to connect youth to land and culture, to develop real-world skills that will broaden their educational, employment, and life options

NILTUO is committed to incorporating cultural ways of life for youth to help build positive identities. Unfortunately, due to the urban nature of the communities NILTUO serves, Mr. Eadie stated that it could be challenging to find individuals who live traditional or semi-traditional lifestyles. What was suggested was to connect youth with anglers and hunters as an experiential program component for youth in the IY NONET program. Teachings around

hunting and fishing could be connected to the cultural protocols associated with these events. That could look like ceremonial protocols for taking down big game or creation stories about how fish came to traditional lands. NILTUO will apply recommendation two within the IY NONET program once individuals who have these teaching can be identified and vetted.

Recommendation 3: Elders can play an active role within Delegated Aboriginal Agencies to support youth in programming and generally (partner discussion) - Elders can play an active role within Delegated Aboriginal Agencies to support youth in programming and generally.

This recommendation has been on the radar for NILTUO for the past two years. NILTUO is currently seeking eligible candidates to serve as a part-time Elder in residence to work with NILTUO youth and families. When asked about the potential to have a full-time Elder in residence at NILTUO, Mr. Eadie stated that this pilot project would depend on the role and its impact in serving the clientele, which will determine full-time employment work and if the role will continue to exist.

Recommendation 4: Delegated Aboriginal Agencies can partner with local knowledge keepers to incorporate ceremony within Indigenous youth programming (partner discussion) - Delegated Aboriginal Agencies can partner with local knowledge keepers to incorporate ceremony within Indigenous youth programming.

Currently, NILTUO has an Honouring the Baby ceremony where community Elders do a naming ceremony for all the new babies within the NILTUO catchment who were born within the last year. When presented with recommendation four, Mr. Eadie asked if the inquiry participants suggested specific ceremonies. One participant suggested that a ceremony could be performed when each youth graduates from the IY NONET program. This graduation ceremony

could incorporate being brushed off, a Coastal Salish ceremony. Mr. Eadie started that there is presently a family support worker employed with NILTUO who could serve as the guide for a graduation ceremony.

Recommendation 5: Indigenous youth programming development can identify community leaders who possess traditional land skills to act as mentors and teachers for youth to learn traditional living methods and nurture resiliency and pride in youth (partner discussion) NILTUO will be holding medicine walks for youth and families who wish to learn these teachings. NILTUO is partnering with Songhees First Nation in Victoria to facilitate these outings. Although these medicine walks will not be incorporated within the IYNONET program, youth can sign up for these lessons any time quarterly when they are held. The reason why this would not be in the IY NONET program is due to NILTUO wanting to incorporate caregivers and community members.

The IY NONET program, which will begin its first cohort in January 2022, will be facilitated by a two-person team of family support workers at NILTUO CFSS. Each of the recommendations will be brought forward and implemented by Mr. Eadie. In addition, he will re-write the already existing curriculum for the IY NONET program and have the recommendations represented in the program.

Thesis Summary

The journey through the thesis creation process began as an idea that seemed impossible. From writing the proposal to receiving ethical approval to beginning to source participants for the inquiry project, the project seemed intimidating. Everything before the participant engagement portion was typical. The research was conducted with Indigenous youth and stakeholders who support youth directly or indirectly. An Indigenous talking circle combined

with semi-structured interviews was used to record conversations about questions that were formed previously and was delivered as Chapters 1 through 3, which outlined the plan of action for conducting the inquiry. The population size of the participants was two Indigenous youth currently in care, and ten community stakeholders, where six were connected to NILTUO and four were from the greater community. It took considerable time and effort to organize interviews and the talking circle during a pandemic. Attempting to interview professionals who have demanding schedules took patience and persistence. Equally challenging was gathering youth to participate in a talking circle. To their credit, Indigenous youth coming out of care experience various concerns that eclipse participating in research.

Once the inquiry portion was complete, the process of breaking the data down into deliverable themes began. What was surprising about this process was the number of themes that existed towards the beginning. Each of the 40 plus themes in the initial phase had validity, and all deserved incorporation in the thesis. Unfortunately, due to the limited content capacity of a thesis document, the themes and findings had to be prioritized and broken down into overarching themes. Once the themes were identified, the process of writing the finding and recommendation chapters began. The main focus of chapters 4 and 5 was capturing the ideas and thoughts of the participants to express a message in line with their perspectives. It can be challenging balancing the stories of multiple individuals who all feel passionate about the thesis topic. There would also be conflicting concepts where participants disagree on an appropriate strategy to address concerns. Ultimately the responsibility falls on the researcher to capture the voices and stories of the participants.

This chapter serves as the first step for decision-makers to utilize the recommendations and findings and begin incorporating the stakeholder's recommendations into the organization.

The issue of Indigenous youth in care deserves the attention of academia and policymakers on the federal and provincial levels. Considering the national movement towards peace and reconciliation with the Indigenous peoples of this land, the over-representation of Indigenous youth in care in British Columbia calls to question the national understanding of the issue. There needs to be strategic action on the part of leaders in all sectors to begin to address and bring this issue to light. We as a nation now understand the impact of the Indian residential school system and denounce its creation while simultaneously ignoring the modern-day residential system, the child welfare system. Hopefully, movements such as Orange Shirt Day can bring to light the issue of the current child welfare system and rally the nation's support to support Indigenous youth in care.

The experience as the researcher for this inquiry project was an honor. To connect with Elders and accomplished and celebrated individuals was an enlightening process. So many people in our community are fighting for the rights of Indigenous youth in care, and it was a privilege and an honor to bring their words to light.

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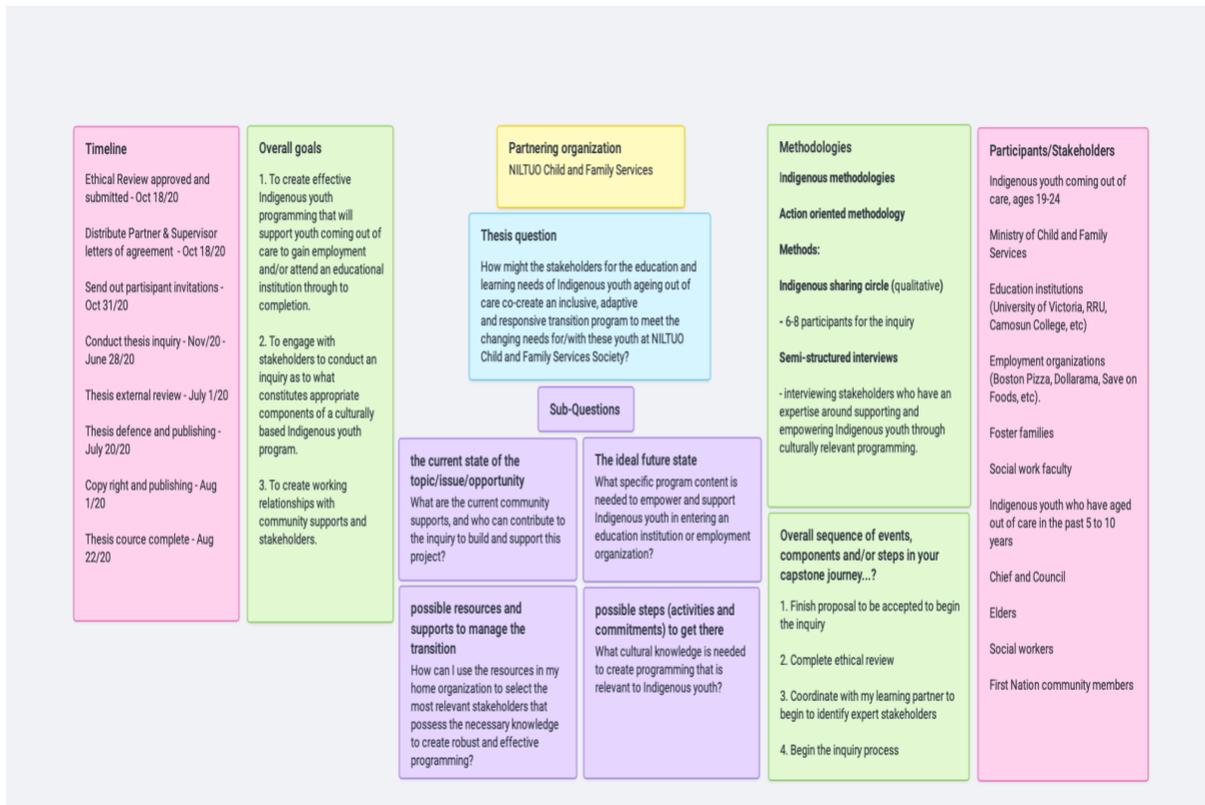
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Appendix A: Systems Diagram

This chart is a systems analysis of my home organization and the relevant stakeholders within this research project. Included are aspects that will weigh on the success of the research and program delivery and research



Appendix B:**Working Draft Questions for the Youth Sharing Circle****Draft questions for Indigenous youth sharing circle**

1. What is one thing you are good at doing? Whether it's a sport, music, whatever?
2. Could you tell story about how you learned about this activity and what you learned?
3. What do you want to do as a job?
4. If you could study anything, what is it that you want to study further, and why?
5. When you were a kid, what job did you think you wanted to do?
6. What excites you about having a job or going to school?
7. Who did you look up to when you were growing up?
8. What do you think you still need to learn before you compete at university or jump into the job market?
9. What do you think needs to be in a program that will support Indigenous youth aging out of care?
10. Who is your hero and why?
11. Is there anything else you would like to say about aging out of care or the kind of program you would like to have as a transition that I have not asked?

Appendix C:

Research Information Letter – Indigenous Youth Sharing Circle

IY NONET: Bridging the Gap for Indigenous Youth Aging Out of Care “For the Good of”

My name is Justin Brooks, and this research project is part of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership Studies: Catherine.etmanski@RoyalRoads.ca or 250-391-2600 ext. 4162.

Purpose of the study and sponsoring organization

The purpose of my research project is to conduct an inquiry with stakeholders who have an expertise around Indigenous youth coming out of care in British Columbia. I hope to gather information to guide the completion of an Indigenous youth program that is being created at my home organization, NILTUO Child and Family Services. I will use semi-structured interviews and an Indigenous sharing circle to conduct the inquiry, gathering insight from participants about their recommendations of content that would create a strong and impactful Indigenous youth program.

Your participation and how information will be collected

The research will consist of semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, followed by a youth Indigenous sharing circle. The interviews will take place one to one with stakeholders, either over the phone or through Skype/Zoom. I will have a number of pre-prepared questions to initiate the conversation. The purpose of semi-structured interviews is to allow for a natural dialogue to take place. The interviews will be recorded so that the information coming out can be transcribed, presented, and implemented into the Indigenous youth program.

The Indigenous youth sharing circle will also take place through Skype/Zoom. Due to COVID-19 Royal Roads University is following the recommendations of Health Canada and following social distancing protocols. Because gathering isn't feasible, this is the only other means to conduct a circle of this nature. Indigenous youth coming out of care will give their perspective and be included in the creation of this program. The hope is to form the program to fit their needs and wants. Both inquiries are anticipated to last 1 to 2 hours each. The anticipated questions include:

Draft questions

1. What is one thing you are good at doing? Whether it's a sport, music, whatever?
2. Could you tell story about how you learned about this activity and what you learned?
3. What do you want to do as a job?
4. If you could study anything, what is it that you want to study further, and why?
5. When you were a kid, what job did you think you wanted to do?
6. What excites you about having a job or going to school?
7. Who did you look up to when you were growing up?

8. What do you think you still need to learn before you compete at university or jump into the job market?
9. What do you think needs to be in a program that will support Indigenous youth aging out of care?
10. Who is your hero and why?
11. Is there anything else you would like to say about aging out of care or the kind of program you would like to have as a transition that I have not asked?

Benefits and risks to participation

The risks of participating in this inquiry project are first, identity breaches. Although names of participants will be known by the researcher and the inquiry team, all identity information will exist on one lap top, that is double encrypted with a fire wall and VPN. This information will be kept until the research process has finished and been accepted by Royal Roads University. Once that has taken place, I will then delete all personal information from said lap top.

There could be some topics that come up in the sharing circle or interview that could be very emotional. The researcher will not explore any topic the participants feel comfortable with. This will be set in the research project protocol's done at the beginning of the circle or the interviews.

The benefit of this project is the contribution these recommendations will make in creating the Indigenous youth program. The program will support youth coming out of care to explore their passions and interests, to be successful on their terms. The program will also follow the youth through to completion of whatever they choose to explore.

Inquiry team

My inquiry team will consist of two fellow Royal Roads University Leadership students. We are working as a group to support one another in our research projects. I will have one of my team members conduct the sharing circle to avoid any ethical or power over situations.

Real or Perceived Conflict of Interest

It should be understood that I am a full time NILTUO CFSS employee, and I will be receiving a salary while in the process of conducting this inquiry project. While I have a vested interest in the success of this program, I am open to all potential positive outcomes in this inquiry.

I disclose this information here so that you can make a fully informed decision on whether or not to participate in this study.

Confidentiality, security of data, and retention period

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information I collect will be maintained in confidence with hard copies (e.g., consent forms) stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Electronic data (such as transcripts or audio files) will be stored on a password protected computer on my personal lap top computer. Information will be recorded in

hand-written format or audio recorded, etc. and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential.

Due to the nature of the sharing circle, your face can be displayed if you so choose. If you do choose, then I will assure that each participant understands the sharing circle protocol of confidentiality, and that the topics, content, and identities of the participants are kept private. That will also go for the inquiry team and the researcher also.

Sharing results

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master's of Arts degree, I will also be sharing my research findings with NILTUO Child and Family Services Society. The findings that come out of the inquiry will be implemented in an Indigenous youth program within NILTUO that will begin when the COVID restrictions lift. All participants will receive a report on the findings once the project has been accepted by Royal Roads.

Procedure for withdrawing from the study

All participants can choose to withdraw from the study at any time. All that is needed is to get in touch with your contact for the project and notify them. No reason is required to be expressed by the participant for withdrawing from the project. If you should withdraw, your data will be used at the discretion of the withdrawn participant.

You are not required to participate in this research project. By replying directly to the e-mail request for participation you indicate that you have read and understand the information above and give your free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.

Appendix D:**Research Consent Form – Sharing Circle**

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 19 and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project and have data I contribute used in the final report and any other knowledge outputs (articles, conference presentations, newsletters, etc.). I understand this session may be recorded, for the purpose of creating a transcript of the actual words spoken in the circle.

I consent to quotations and excerpts expressed by me through the interviews/sharing circle be included in this study, provided that my identity is not disclosed

I consent to the material I have contributed to and/or generated (e.g. notes and recordings) through my participation in an interview/sharing circle be used in this study

I commit to respect the confidential nature of the semi-structured interviews/sharing circle by not sharing identifying information about the other participants

Name: (Please Print): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E:**Draft Questions for Interview Participants**

1. Name something that was positive and effective when you were a young adult that help you be successful?
2. When you were a youth, what would have helped you succeed that maybe you didn't receive?
3. How would you like to see culture play a role in the success of Indigenous youth aging out of care?
4. What supports need to be in place to break down barriers for Indigenous youth to education and employment?
5. What content or information should be contained in a youth program to set up the youth for success?
6. How do you define success for Indigenous youth?
7. What motivated you to succeed?
8. Who is your hero and why?
9. Is there anything else you would like to say about aging out of care or the kind of program you would like to have as a transition that I have not asked?

Appendix F:

Research information Letter – Interview Participants

IY NONET: Bridging the Gap for Indigenous Youth Aging Out of Care “For the Good of”

My name is Justin Brooks, and this research project is part of the requirement for a Master’s of Arts in Leadership at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership Studies: Catherine.etmanski@RoyalRoads.ca or 250-391-2600 ext. 4162.

Purpose of the study and sponsoring organization

The purpose of my research project is to conduct an inquiry with stakeholders who have an expertise around Indigenous youth coming out of care in British Columbia. I hope to gather information to guide the completion of an Indigenous youth program that is being created at my home organization, NILTUO Child and Family Services. I will use semi-structured interviews and an Indigenous sharing circle to conduct the inquiry, gathering insight from participants about their recommendations of content that would create a strong and impactful Indigenous youth program.

Your participation and how information will be collected

The research will consist of semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, followed by a youth Indigenous sharing circle. The interviews will take place one to one with stakeholders, either over the phone or through Skype/Zoom. I will have a number of pre-prepared question to initiate the conversation. The purpose of semi-structured interviews is to allow for a natural dialogue to take place. The interviews will be recorded so that the information coming out can be transcribed, presented, and implemented into the Indigenous youth program.

The Indigenous youth sharing circle will also take place through Zoom. Due to COVID-19 Royal Roads University is following the recommendations of Health Canada and following social distancing protocols. Because gathering isn’t feasible, this is the only other means to conduct a circle of this nature. Indigenous youth coming out of care will give their perspective and be included in the creation of this program. The hope is to form the program to fit their needs and wants. Both inquiries are anticipated to last 1 to 2 hours each. The anticipated questions include:

Draft questions for interview participants

1. When you were a youth, what would have helped you succeed that maybe you didn’t receive?
2. How would you like to see culture play a role in the success of Indigenous youth aging out of care?
3. What supports need to be in place to break down barriers for Indigenous youth to education and employment?

4. What content or information should be contained in a youth program to set up the youth for success?

How do you define success for Indigenous youth?

5. What motivated you to succeed?
6. Who is your hero and why?
7. Is there anything else you would like to say about aging out of care or the kind of program you would like to have as a transition that I have not asked?

Benefits and risks to participation

The risks of participating in this inquiry project are first, identity breaches. Although names of participants will be known by the researcher and the inquiry team, all identity information will exist on one lap top, that is double encrypted with a fire wall and VPN. This information will be kept until the research process has finished and been accepted by Royal Roads University. Once that has taken place, I will then delete all personal information from said lap top.

There could be some topics that come up in the sharing circle or interview that could be very emotional. The researcher will not explore any topic the participants feel comfortable with. This will be set in the research project protocol's done at the beginning of the circle or the interviews.

The benefit of this project is the contribution these recommendations will make in creating the Indigenous youth program. The program will support youth coming out of care to explore their passions and interests, to be successful on their terms. The program will also follow the youth through to completion of whatever they choose to explore.

Inquiry team

My inquiry team will consist of two fellow Royal Roads University Leadership students. We are working as a group to support one another in our research projects. I will have one of my team members conduct the sharing circle to avoid any ethical or power over situations.

Real or Perceived Conflict of Interest

It should be understood that I am a full time NILTUO CFSS employee, and I will be receiving a salary while in the process of conducting this inquiry project.

I disclose this information here so that you can make a fully informed decision on whether or not to participate in this study.

Confidentiality, security of data, and retention period

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information I collect will be maintained in confidence with hard copies (e.g., consent forms) stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Electronic data (such as transcripts or audio files) will be stored on a password protected computer on my personal lap top computer. Information will be recorded in hand-written format or audio recorded, etc. and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any

individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential.

Due to the nature of the sharing circle, your face can be displayed if you so choose. If you do choose, then I will assure that each participant understands the sharing circle protocol of confidentiality, and that the topics, content, and identities of the participants are kept private. That will also go for the inquiry team and the researcher also.

Sharing results

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master's of Arts degree, I will also be sharing my research findings with NILTUO Child and Family Services Society. The findings that come out of the inquiry will be implemented in an Indigenous youth program within NILTUO that will begin when the COVID restrictions lift. All participants will receive a report on the findings once the project has been accepted by Royal Roads.

Procedure for withdrawing from the study

All participants can choose to withdraw from the study at any time. All that is needed is to get in touch with your contact for the project and notify them. No reason is required to be expressed by the participant for withdrawing from the project. If you should withdraw, your data will be used at the discretion of the withdrawn participant.

You are not required to participate in this research project. By replying directly to the e-mail request for] you indicate that you have read and understand the information above and give your free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.

Appendix G:
RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 19 and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project and have data I contribute used in the final report and any other knowledge outputs (articles, conference presentations, newsletters, etc.). As part of participation in this inquiry, I accept that this will be audio-recorded for the purpose of creating an anonymous transcript that I can then work with.

I consent to quotations and excerpts expressed by me through the interviews/sharing circle be included in this study, provided that my identity is not disclosed

I commit to respect the confidential nature of the semi-structured interviews/sharing circle by not sharing identifying information about the other participants

Name: (Please Print): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix H: INQUIRY TEAM LETTER OF AGREEMENT

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership Degree at Royal Roads University, *C. Justin Brooks* (the Student) will be conducting an inquiry study at *NILTUO Child and Family Service* to “how might the stakeholders for the education and learning needs of Indigenous youth ageing out of care co-create an inclusive, adaptive and responsive transition program to meet the changing needs for/with these youth at NILTUO Child and Family Services Society?”. The Student’s credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership, at (250) 391-2600 x4162 or email Catherine.etmanski@RoyalRoads.ca

Inquiry Team Member Role Description

As a volunteer Inquiry Team Member assisting the Student with this project, your role may include one or more of the following: providing advice on the relevance and wording of questions and letters of invitation, supporting the logistics of the data-gathering methods, including observing, assisting, or facilitating an interview or focus group, taking notes, transcribing, reviewing analysis of data, and/or reviewing associated knowledge products to assist the Student and the *[Partner organization name]*’s change process. In the course of this activity, you may be privy to confidential inquiry data.

Confidentiality of Inquiry Data

In compliance with the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Policy, under which this inquiry project is being conducted, all personal identifiers and any other confidential information generated or accessed by the inquiry team advisor will only be used in the performance of the functions of this project, and must not be disclosed to anyone other than persons authorized to receive it, both during the inquiry period and beyond it. Recorded information in all formats is covered by this agreement. Personal identifiers include participant names, contact information, personally identifying turns of phrase or comments, and any other personally identifying information.

Bridging Student’s Potential or Actual Ethical Conflict

In situations where potential participants in a work setting report directly to the Student, you, as a neutral third party with no supervisory relationship with either the Student or potential participants, may be asked to work closely with the Student to bridge this potential or actual conflict of interest in this study. Such requests may include asking the Inquiry Team Advisor to: send out the letter of invitation to potential participants, receive letters/emails of interest in participation from potential participants, independently make a selection of received participant requests based on criteria you and the Student will have worked out previously, formalize the logistics for the data-gathering method, including contacting the participants about the time and location of the interview or focus group, conduct the interviews (usually 3-5 maximum) or focus group (usually no more than one) with the selected participants (without the Student’s presence or knowledge of which participants were chosen) using the protocol and questions worked out previously with the Student, and producing written transcripts of the interviews or focus groups with all personal identifiers removed before the transcripts are brought back to the Student for the data analysis phase of the study.

This strategy means that potential participants with a direct reporting relationship will be assured they can confidentially turn down the participation request from their supervisor (the Student), as this process conceals from the Student which potential participants chose not to participate or simply were not selected by you, the third party, because they were out of the selection criteria range (they might have been a participant request coming after the number of participants sought, for example, interview request number 6 when only 5 participants are sought, or focus group request number 10 when up to 9 participants would be selected for a focus group). Inquiry Team members asked to take on such 3rd party duties in this study will be under the direction of the Student and will be fully briefed by the Student as to how this process will work, including specific expectations, and the methods to be employed in conducting the elements of the inquiry with the Student’s direct reports, and will be given every support possible by the Student, except where such support would reveal the identities of the actual participants.

Personal information will be collected, recorded, corrected, accessed, altered, used, disclosed, retained, secured and destroyed as directed by the Student, under direction of the Royal Roads Academic Supervisor.

Inquiry Team Members who are uncertain whether any information they may wish to share about the project they are working on is personal or confidential will verify this with [Your name here], the Student.

Statement of Informed Consent:

I have read and understand this agreement.

Name (Please Print)

Signature

Date