

The Pe kiwewin Project:  
An Examination of Aging Out of Care Services  
For Indigenous Youth

A Research Practicum Report

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## Abstract

This report of the practicum completes an environmental scan of services and models of service delivery for Indigenous youth who are aging out of the foster care system. Questions for this report centered on Indigenous youth aging out of care. There is little information on what happens when Indigenous youth age out of care, the resources involved. A conversational method (Kovach, 2009) framed within Indigenous research methods, included interviews with eight social workers involved within social work and who have worked with Indigenous youth. The data revealed three core themes centered of the tipi teachings: obedience, humility, and respect. This report provides an outline for addressing the gaps within the foster care system to assist with making smoother transitions for indigenous youth aging out of care within an indigenous worldview and pedagogy and can be used for references in this area.

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## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

This research practicum involved completing an environmental scan, under the supervision of Dr. Raven Sinclair, Principal Investigator of the “Pe-kîwewin Project,” of services and models of service delivery for Indigenous youth who are aging out of the foster care system. The Pe-kîwewin project is a five-year SSHRC Insight Grant examining the Indigenous child welfare system between 1950 and 1990. Dr. Sinclair offers the Indigenous child welfare knowledge and expertise to be able to guide my practicum project and will mentor my learning process. She has an archive of resources and a network of child welfare agencies and personnel that I can draw upon to inform my project. In addition, I did have the opportunity to learn about Indigenous research methodology and methods, and participate in Pe-kîwewin project training.

This practicum reflects an Indigenous methodological approach and is based on the Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2009). There is a need to centralize the core structures of the Indigenous axiological, ontological and epistemological framework, otherwise it is western research done by Indigenous people (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2009). Understanding the relationship, one has with his/her truth is more important than trying to uncover a single truth, which significantly differs from western research knowledge (Wilson, 2008). I will be reflecting upon my own *Nehiyaw/Michif* worldview, the beliefs, knowledge, experiences and realities throughout this practicum.

The information was collected through interviews of Indigenous and non-Indigenous social workers who have worked with Indigenous youth in foster care. The data will be analyzed for different themes and within this process, there will be communication with the participants to determine if what they shared is an accurate reflection of what they shared. The participants are the experts due to their experience in practice. It is important for the participants to be involved

at this stage of the research because they can play an important role in determining what conclusions will be drawn from the study (Watters & Comeau, 2010).

An Indigenous approach to this practicum was based on an Indigenous paradigm of ontology, epistemology, and axiology. These ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2009) are the foundation of this Indigenous approach. Kovach (2005) says that Indigenous epistemology is a way of knowing based on traditional teachings and conversations. I am Michif (a person who is of Cree/French and are descendants of First Nations women and fur trader workers), so I am fulfilling the relationship with the world and being accountable to ‘all my relations’ (Wilson, 2001). This practicum followed traditional protocols and practices of the Indigenous culture and at the same time was sensitive to the traditional needs of the Indigenous people involved in the interviews because they were coming from a perspective that aligns with their background.

It is essential to ‘locate self’ prior to beginning any research as personal reflection on one’s background is important in Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous research (Baskin, 2011). Personal reflection is important because it helps researchers situate themselves in the context of their research, as well as shows why research is of personal significance and importance (Baskin, 2011). Locating myself has been a difficult ongoing evolution and search for identity and place. I grew up in a middle class, mixed race family. My father’s racial background is of Cree/Michif/French and my mother is Polish, therefore I am categorized as Métis. Throughout my life, I have struggled with my identity due to my physical appearance because I have the complexion of a Caucasian with blue eyes, however, my connections and ways of knowing are very much that of Cree and Michif as well as a traditional Polish society. I was very close to my father side of the family where culture, oral tradition, ceremony and ways of relating were very

much embedded and intertwined in my life. I learned a lot of my identity as a Michif person through my father's family because they taught me the values and beliefs of the culture on a regular basis. They were proud of their heritage and this ideology was conveyed to me at an early age. They believed that culture and identity is a strong foundation for success and this message has resonated with me since I was a child. I am proud of my heritage and I practice it on a regular basis. On my mother's side, my Baba (Grandmother) was the matriarch of the family. Our family was full of language, tradition and adaptation to the Canadian state. My families on opposite ends, one side indigenous to Canada and the other newcomer both taught me the importance of knowing who you are, where you come from as a foundation for resiliency through life's challenges.

## CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

Imagine telling your child, on their 19th birthday, that they must leave the family home. After they leave, they will receive no financial or emotional support and will have to figure out how to make money or go to school. This is the reality for 700 foster children every year in B.C., raised by the Ministry for Children and Families (Sherlock & Cuthbert, 2015). For some youth, they are required to move out of a foster home or group home, where a family or an agency once provided them with shelter, food, clothing and guidance. For others, it means losing the \$1,000 a month provided by the ministry to pay their own rent and support themselves. In either situation, youth abruptly lose contact with the social workers or transition workers who have been there to give advice, food vouchers and bus tickets. This system is underfunded and unregulated, leaving youth to live in high-risk neighborhoods due to low rental stipends and having to live below the poverty line.

Foster children are the most vulnerable kids in our society. They either have no parents or have been taken from their parents by the child welfare system. They have not been adopted, so are being raised by foster parents or the state. This often results in feelings of abandonment and trauma. They are more likely to end up on welfare and live in precarious housing, abuse alcohol and drugs, get arrested and jailed, drop out of high school, and have fragile social support networks (Sinclair & Grekul, 2012; Sherlock & Cuthbert, 2015).

Looking at the media coverage of youth that are transitioning out of care, there appears to be a lot of concern and advocacy for the system to change the way youth transition out of care. As reported in the Vancouver Sun, a youth who transitioned out of care when she turned 19 lost whatever foster care supports that helped her battle years of mental illness and addiction. Twenty



hours after her birthday, in a moment of despair, she threw herself off the Lion's Gate Bridge. Her body was never found. Her birth mother stated in an interview with Vancouver Sun that Carly's tragic journey through B.C.'s child welfare system was marked by abuse, neglect and confusion (Shaw & Cuthbert, 2015). This is just one of many stories of youth transitioning out of care that are often left feeling alone, abandoned and ill prepared for independent living.

There is increasing evidence that foster care systems, which are ostensibly created to implement "best practices" for children, are failing Indigenous youth in care. Many Indigenous children experience psychological, social, educational, behavioral and emotional problems compared to children who are not in care (Ramsay-Irving, 2015). In addition, the foster care system is failing to prepare the Indigenous youth for independence, making the transition from care very difficult. Transitions are already difficult times for youth and can be especially stressful for foster youth who are aging out of care. Foster care needs to prepare the youth to be ready for independence while providing the support they need (Schofield & Beek, 2009). The Indigenous youth in care are not prepared for adult roles such as: education completion, independent living skills and job preparedness and experience homelessness, victimization and incarceration (Kellar, Cusick, & Courtney, 2007).

Youth aging out of care do not have the parental financial or ancillary support as research states that most youth 18-24 require transition support from their families (Lee & Berrick, 2000). Youth exiting foster care, however, typically, have rigid, policy-driven timelines within which they must exit, and few options to extend their transition timeline, or return to care during their time in need (Lee & Berrick, 2000). The literature suggests that due to policy driven timelines, youth find themselves on their own with few financial or social supports (Brukas, 2008). For example, Simmel's (2007) longitudinal study reports children who "age out of care" tend to have

mental health issues, addictions, criminality and inability to function productively in society resulting in poor living. Lack of education can contribute to problems with finding a good paying job, resulting in more financial hardships which may further fuel criminality. Homelessness and lack of concrete supports leave youth feeling lonely, devastated, and experiencing greater levels of stress. There appears to be a correlation with youth experiencing higher rates of mobility, increased placement moves resulting in disruptions in social connections and social and emotional wellbeing (Brukas, 2008). The literature suggests a need for consistent, ongoing planning for youth transitioning out of care with their workers and caregivers (Lee & Berrick, 2014). Lack of youth voice and ongoing conversations where youth are informed, and part of the transition plan appears to be an ongoing concern and issue preventing a natural flow of services for youth transitioning out of care. Throughout the literature, it suggests that caregivers need to assist youth transitioning out of care; however, if we look at the high mobility rate for youth, we need to consider that caregivers often do not have the relationship or rapport with youth to build a case plan (Schofield & Beek, 2009). Therefore, the worker needs to focus on the youth's needs as the worker is seen as the parent for the government. It is apparent that more consistent support is needed for youth transitioning out of care (Brukas, 2008). Social workers report high turnover in caseloads as well as lack of training for case planning with clients.

There are ways to improve the aging out of care process such as improving the quality of care and placement stability, sense of emotional security and continuity of support beyond care (Reilly, 2015). For many youths, there is an expectation that they take on the responsibilities of adulthood. There is a correlation between those who leave care early and homelessness and those who stay longer in care have a more successful transition into adulthood (Reilly, 2015). There needs to be continued access to aftercare support which includes improved outcomes including

housing, education, employment, health, improved social connections and decrease in long term use of services (Reilly, 2015).

In Canada, Indigenous youth are over-represented in the child welfare system (Trocme, Knoke & Blackstock 2004). Along with the welfare system, the foster care system is also failing Indigenous youth in care (Ramsay-Irving, 2015). There are many challenges Indigenous youth face in care such as loss of identity, loss of culture, broken family structure, attachment disorder, multiple placements which resulted in lack of trust and meaningful relationships. These issues become even more challenging when placed in a non-Indigenous home (Trocme, Knoke & Blackstock, 2004). Sinclair (2016) suggests that the Indigenous child removal system will continue the cultural genocide that Indigenous communities have faced since European contact. Boss (1999) mentions that when people are separated from their original family, the family that exists in their minds is more important than the one they live with. There is a need to find alternate permanency options for youth in permanent care of the child welfare system, and for Indigenous children and youth who are vastly overrepresented in the system. Inaction is leading to another generation of Indigenous children growing up being denied family and community (Manitoba Children's Advocate, 2015).

The profession of social work has its challenges as it pertains to Indigenous people because they are often clients of the social service agencies (Baskin, 2011). When exploring the overrepresentation of Indigenous people as social services recipients, there is a focus on an individual deficit discourse, rather than a lens of racism and colonization (Allan & Smylie, 2015; Mohatt, Thompson, Thai, & Tebes, 2014; Yee, 2015). There is also an ongoing conflict on the sets of values whereby mainstream child welfare sees the "best interests" of the child as the most important with little regard to the extended family and community. Whereas in Indigenous

worldviews, the emphasis is on the collective, meaning that the wellbeing of everyone, is the focus (Baskin, 2011; Blackstock, 2009; Blackstock et al., 2006; Carriere, 2007; Goodwill & McCormick, 2012). Western social work tends to focus on the nuclear family and the parent or parents as the sole participants, often neglecting other possible caregivers and players in a child's life. Often, children are taken out of the home and not placed with their siblings. The parents must jump through systematic hoops in order to get their children home. Some of these hoops include mental treatment, separation of spouse, anger management, and safe housing. These cases may miss any exploration of historical trauma and other contributing factors to the current state of the family. There is an emphasis on the symptoms and issues within the family and not the root cause. Healing is manifested through the interconnectedness between persons and the world around them, which contributes to a greater sense of belonging within, and relationship to, one's world and is often in an Indigenous approach (Baskin, 2011). When social workers are working within an Indigenous approach and according to Indigenous principles, the social workers created a respectful process with the foster family and children (Baskin, 2011; Baines, 2007). Due to relationality in Indigenous communities, Indigenous social work tends to avoid hierarchal power structures. It emphasizes the client/helper relationship that connects services, support and advocacy. The relationships can also be viewed as reciprocal as both client and worker are learning from one another to build a case plan. The client and the worker have their roles and responsibilities to self, each other and the community.

## CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

As a nehiyaw/michif/polish woman who is grounded in cultural teachings, I framed my study with the combination of Indigenous methodology and grounded theory methods. The conceptual research framework is the metaphor nehiyaw practice of the tipi teachings which outlines my research preparation, methods and procedure. I compare the practice of the tipi set up and teachings to the practice undertaking research that focuses on the care of children and youth, as well as academic research with and for Indigenous peoples. Setting up a tipi involves many steps of preparation, gathering, sorting, combining, storing, and the use of the structure for the well-being of others much like the process of research. As an Indigenous person and social worker, I have extensive experience both professionally and personally. I find that grounded theory is a methodology that seeks to construct theory about issues of importance in people(s) lives (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This approach works for me. The research seeks answers to the following research questions asked of professional social workers: What is your role in social work? What do you see as some of the gaps in services for Indigenous youth aging out of care? What are some the strengths in services for Indigenous youth aging out of care? What suggestions can you offer for smooth transitions for Indigenous youth aging out of care? Are there any services that should be or are in existence for Indigenous youth that would differ from non-Indigenous youth? Grounded theory methods are compatible with Indigenous methodology as each story/interview was available for “interpretative analysis by others and allows for story and self in relation interpretations and integrated thematic groups” (Kovach, 2009, p.132).

### **3.1 Epistemology (Ways of Knowing)**

Epistemology refers to how people come to know, or think about the world (Wilson, 2008). Indigenous ways of knowing can be acquired through various means, which includes relating to others, whether they are human, animals or spiritual beings, observation and experiences through one's life. It also involves learning the Indigenous way of life, language and kinship. "Knowledge about ontology and entities is learned and reproduced through processes of listening, sensing, viewing, reviewing, reading, watching, waiting, observing, exchanging, sharing, conceptualizing, assessing, modelling, engaging, applying" (Martin, 2003, p. 9). The literature suggests that "Indigenous knowledge is both empirical (that is based on experience) and normative (that is based on social values). It embraces both circumstances people find themselves in and their beliefs about those circumstances" (Battiste, 2002, p.19). When researching subject areas, it is important to reflect on where one sits in the research and their beliefs about the research to unpack any potential bias. Indigenous methodology acknowledges that the researcher is subjective.

### **3.2 Ontology (Ways of Being)**

Ontology refers to one's understanding of the nature of existence, or the nature of reality (Wilson, 2008). Ontology, in relation to Indigenous research knowledge, suggests that reality may be different for an individual based on the relationship he/she has with the truth (Wilson, 2008). Essentially, understanding the relationship one has with his/her truth is more important than trying to uncover a single truth, which significantly differs from western research knowledge (Wilson, 2008). Indigenous ontology (relating) is reflective in the ways of being for Indigenous people. It is how Indigenous people conceptualize their reality. It is the who, what,

when, where and why of community and family and how one is related to others and their environment. Indigenous peoples, practices and customs are interconnected, and in that connectedness, there are many layers. Ontology is inclusive in the way Indigenous peoples relate to each other. For example, when an Indigenous person meets up with another Indigenous person, the question of where you are from is often asked. This signifies your relations and signifies which community you are from.

One way of utilizing an Indigenous ontological approach would be using talking circles. Talking circles allow for everyone to get to know each other on a deeper level as well as interact, co-constructing knowledge and learn holistically. (Kitchen & Raynor, 2013). When one enters a talking circle, it is a non-judgmental place, where one can feel safe. The intent is to share and be open to what others are sharing, therefore, creating relationships between the participants. Sharing circles are both helping techniques and processes which set the stage for people's ongoing healing, growth and self-development (Antone & Hill, 1990). This method of sharing is reflective of the ways of being, because it is the traditional means of learning, gaining knowledge and establishing relationships. This approach has proved successful in Indigenous ways for generations.

### **3.3 Axiology (Relationality)**

Axiology refers to the ethics or morals that guide people's search for knowledge (Wilson, 2008). The action of bringing Indigenous values, the depths of relationships and knowing into research. An Indigenous axiology is built upon the concept of relational accountability. The researcher is a part of his or her research and inseparable from the subject of the research (Wilson 2008). What is important and meaningful is fulfilling a role and obligations in the research relationship - that is, being accountable to your relations (Wilson 2008). Throughout

this research project Indigenous ethics and morals were at the forefront. Having been a caseworker I was cognizant of the realities of foster care and case management therefore always searching for the best interest of Indigenous youth and families and in search of best practices. Thereby treating the literature and interviewees with respect and humility that is necessary.

### 3.4 Methodology

Relationality is the key component in Indigenous research and in working with Indigenous peoples. When working with participants, a researcher should seek relationship and comfortability with the participant. Just as the components of this paradigm (picture below) are related, the component themselves have to do with relationships. The ontology and epistemology are based upon a process of relationships that form a mutual reality. The axiology and methodology are based upon maintaining accountability to these relationships. (Wilson 2009). Upon securing the interview ongoing conversation and locating of self with the interviewer and interviewee creating a relational environment build on mutual respect and development of rapport.



Figure 1. Wilson 2009



### **3.5 Data collection methods**

In the study, I used a conversational style approach to the interviews, along with self-reflection notes written after the interviews and throughout the research journey. The interviews embodied an Indigenous methodology with the intention to be able to hear the personal stories of participants. Kovach (2009) stated that using a conversational method as a data collection method is congruent with the fluidity and regulation of the storyteller's role in the oral traditions of Indigenous peoples. The conversational method "involves an open-ended structure that is flexible enough to accommodate principles of native oral traditions and is thus differentiated for a more traditional interview process" (Kovach, 2009, p. 124). This kind of research process has the power held by the storyteller, who is the research participant. (Kovach, 2009). Through the interviews, I sought to hear participants' stories and experiences with the strengths and gaps of services for Indigenous youth aging out of care. The conversational method used one-to-one conversations on the phone between the participants and the researcher. This was a chance for me to reflect on the nehiyaw wholistic knowledge that informed my research (Kovach, 2009).

### **3.6 Participants**

There were eight social workers interviewed, all female working in the area of child welfare. The interviews took place between February 2020 and April 2020. Participants were both Indigenous and non-Indigenous social workers, working in Indigenous communities and in urban settings. There were five Indigenous social workers and three non- Indigenous. All social workers had five years or more experience, the majority having fifteen years or more. All of the participants were in supervisory or managerial positions. The participants were recruited through phoning Indigenous agencies and urban agencies that work with Indigenous youth and

were given contact information. The participants were given pseudo names Ro, Dawn, Sissy, Chelsea, Nan, Marguerite, Annie and Jo to maintain confidentiality.

My *Nehiyaw/Michif* epistemological position ensured that my research methods “flow(ed) from tribal epistemologies” (Kovach, 2009, p.39) and that I centered my methods on the traditional knowledge of the nehiyaw people. In doing so, I avoided the pan-Indigenous approach that would arise from assuming that all tribal groups share the same practices and beliefs (Kovach, 2009, p. 46). I handled the diversity within specific tribal groups by revealing my *Nehiyaw* epistemic positioning to participants who belong to other tribal groups prior to the interviews. I acknowledged that some of my beliefs may be different and similar in some ways from other tribal groups. As my study included participants who were Nuu-chah-nulth, Indigenous people of the Pacific Northwest Coast of Canada, I was mindful of the concepts that bridge most Indigenous people including respect for each other and an understanding of community, the oral storytelling practices of Indigenous groups, and the needs for these stories to be told (Redwing Saunders, 2007).

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

It is my hope that the research practicum report will contribute to an examination of the strengths and gaps in services for Indigenous youth aging out of care. This research practicum report synthesizes practices and provides relevant recommendations for improvement in ageing out service delivery for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous child welfare agencies. Being a researcher and having pre-existing experiences with the research topic presented an ethical dilemma. I discussed this concern with the members of my research practicum committee, and we decided that it would be important for me to acknowledge these experiences and utilize a

methodology that acknowledged the researcher being subjective. The participants had access to the consent form before agreeing to participate in the study. They signed the consent form before the interview took place, and I informed them of their right to withdraw from participating in the study. (please see Appendix B). The study was submitted to the Ethics Review Board at the University of Regina for approval before implementation. A letter was provided from the Ethics Board, stating approval for the study (see Appendix E).

### **3.8 Methods of analysis**

Managing, organizing, and interpreting the data using grounded theory methods is consistent with a *Nehiyaw* methodology. Using this method allowed me to retain my initial perspectives as an Indigenous researcher and integrate these perspectives with the information that emerged from data analysis. Comparable to the practice of sorting and binding tipi poles, grounded theory methods served to cut and analyze the data. It is an analytical tool that disseminates and organizes fragmented data with the goal of making sense of the information given from the literature review and participants. In this case, combining the interpretation of the results along with my self-reflections were comparable to binding of the poles of tipi into sections that fit well together. I used the grounded theory method of NVivo, a qualitative analysis software, to sort interview data into codes. As the researcher, my task was to identify categories and their properties. This was comparable to sorting each pole for the tipi into piles based on where the pole would fit right to assist the whole tipi in erecting. Coding with NVivo made visible some of the components of similarities and differences of the data. The information I was coding was valuable to the outcome of the research study and I carried this with great care, similar to distributing the poles for the tipi with great care. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) describe coding as “as process that enables the researcher to identify meaningful data and set the stage for

interpreting and drawing conclusions” (p. 27). Coding allowed me to identify patterns, events, and actions that were of interest and functioned to organize data sets or categories (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Using NVivo allowed me to more easily code the data and manage, shape and make sense of structured information, develop a much denser set of themes and categories, use such categorizations to build systematic comparisons and contrasts with the views expressed by other students, and provided a workspace and tools that allowed me to work through the information (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). This process involved sorting and re-sorting the data into codes and once these codes were established, creating from those codes. Meanwhile, I continued to journal in parallel with data collection, note-taking, and coding (Dick, 2005). I wrote down my personal reflections in response to what the participants shared in the interviews and how it related to themes I could see emerging. Just as sorting of tipi poles in a line sometimes needs to occur to ensure poles are properly placed in order to properly erect a tipi; I repeated the categorization of data three times before some noticeable themes started to emerge.

## CHAPTER 4 - WAHKOTOWIN/TIPI TEACHINGS

*Wahkotowin* is a way of being and living *Nehiyawiwin*, along with a way of sustaining Cree culture and way of life. “*Wahkohtowin*,” is a Cree word meaning kinship or the state of being related. It is a fundamental concept for understanding Indigenous culture and traditional beliefs because it highlights the importance of community (Flamino 2013). Flamino (2013) shares the concept of *wahkotowin* through the words of Maria Campbell, a Cree-Métis cultural teacher and author, when she states:

There is a word in my language that speaks to these issues: “*wahkotowin*.” Today it is translated to mean kinship, relationship, and family as in human family. But at one time, from our place it meant the whole of creation. And our teachings taught us that all of creation is related and inter-connected to all things within it. *Wahkotowin* meant honouring and respecting those relationships. [It was] our stories, songs, ceremonies, and dances that taught us from birth to death our responsibilities and reciprocal obligations to each other. Human to human, human to plants, human to animals, to the water and especially to the earth. And in turn all of creation had responsibilities and reciprocal obligations to us. (p. 6)

This teaching helps us to better understand the honour and respect given to children and reminds us of the importance of our daily interactions with them, our responsibility to them and the importance of each of the related circle teachings (Flamino 2013; Campbell 2007). The tipi teachings are also utilized as a framework under the theory of *wahkotowin* to ensure more successful outcomes and case plans for Indigenous youth.

#### 4.1 Tipi teachings

Elder Mary Lee shares her knowledge on the tipi teachings when she states:

Years ago we used the term Nôhtikwew, meaning an old lady covers herself with a shawl. A tipi cover is like that old woman with a shawl. As it comes around the tipi, it embraces all those teachings, the values of community that the women hold. No matter how many children and great grandchildren come into that circle of hers, she always still has room. And if you put it up right, the poles never show on the bottom, and that tipi stands with dignity, just as, years ago, women always covered their legs with the skirt, which also represents the sacred circle of life. And when you put the flaps up, it teaches you how we embrace life itself. It's like a woman standing there with her arms out, saying 'Thank you' to everything. That is what the tipi is - it is the spirit and body of woman, because she represents the foundation of family and community. It is through her that we learn the values that bring balance into our lives. (Lee, 2014, paras 14)

The tipi is an important part of prairie Indigenous culture, with each pole having a specific meaning, but the first three poles are the foundation and represent obedience, respect and humility. These three poles reinforce each other and represent a teaching such as to make a family as there is a need for two parents and child, which represents the three poles. So, these three poles are important and metaphorically represent the foundation for this study. I strongly believe in these teachings and practice them on a regular basis. They are the foundation for which I practice my traditional life. Although there are fifteen poles within the tipi and each represent a teaching, I am relying on the first three, obedience, respect and humility, as they are the foundational teachings, they have been part of my personal and professional journey for

many years. This is not to say that the other twelve teachings/poles are not part of my life, rather they are scattered and mixed within the first three.

The three poles represent obedience, respect and humility:

#### 4.1.1 Obedience

“We learn by listening to traditional stories, by listening to our parents or guardians, our fellow students and our teachers. We learn by their behavior and their reminders, so that we know what is right and what is wrong” (Windtalker, 2014, para. 4).

#### 4.1.2 Respect

“We must give honor to our elders and fellow students and the strangers that come to visit our community. We must honor other peoples’ basic rights” (Windtalker, 2014, para. 6).

#### 4.1.3 Humility

“We are not above or below others in the circle of life. We feel humbled when we understand our relationship with creation. We are so small compared to the majestic expanse of creation. ‘We are just a strand in a web of life,’ and we respect and value life” (Windtalker, 2014, para. 8).

These three poles relate the traditional aspect of Indigenous culture and provide a teaching for Indigenous people. According to David (2017), women oversee the tipis construction as it is a symbol of a woman, the spirit and body, family and community. I strongly believe in the teachings of the tipi, I will often wear a skirt because the bottom of the tipi represents the skirt and all female nurturers come from the Mother Earth and everything inside the tipi is protected and given shelter (Campiou, 2016). I have relied on the three tipis poles throughout my study, for guidance, direction and understanding. They have provided valuable lessons in my graduate

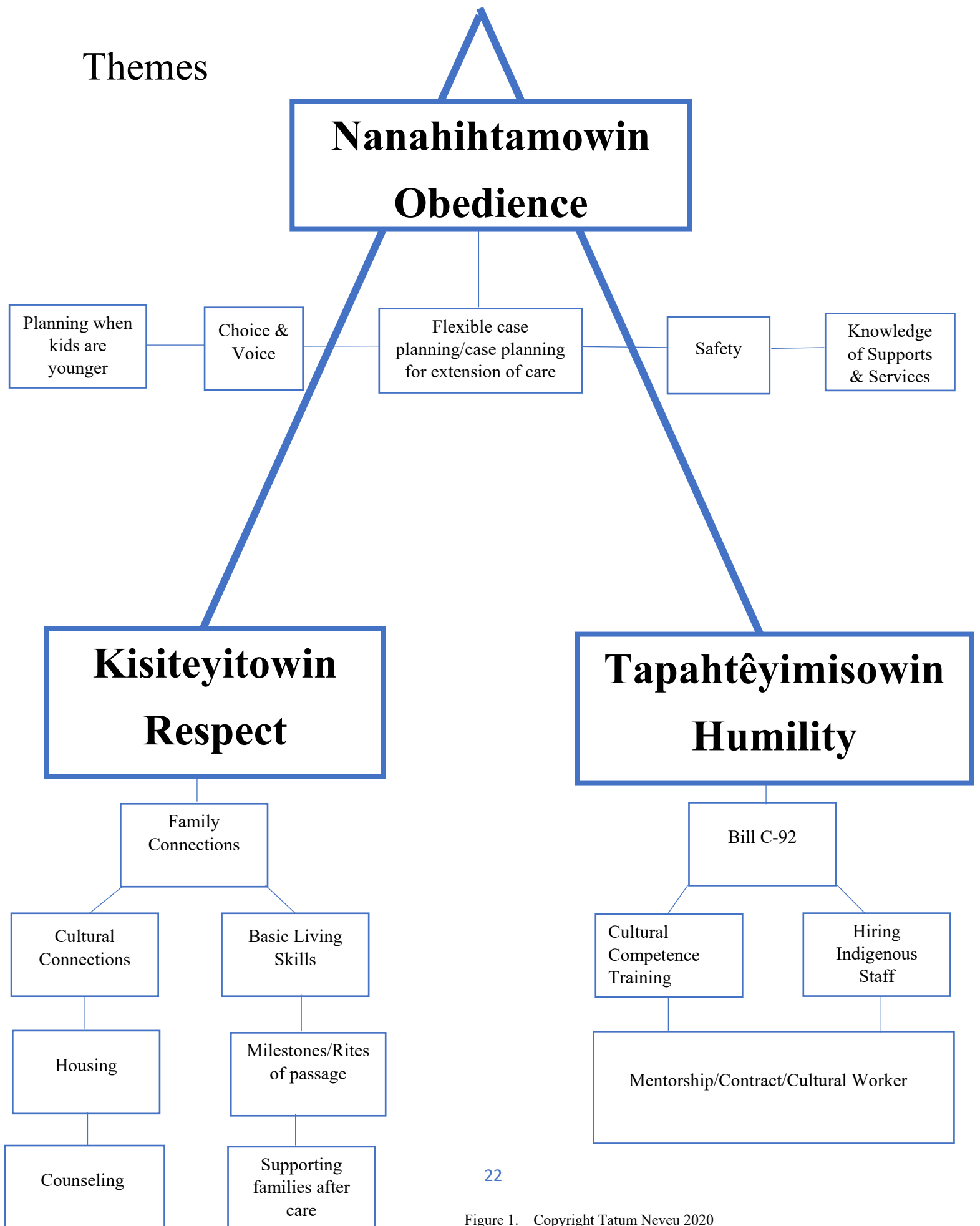
studies journey. They have also been integral part of this study, from the methodology to the interviews of the participants. The foundation poles also provide the three themes for this study Respect, Obedience and Humility that emerged from the interviews. Chapter 5 discusses the themes and recommendation arising from the data.



## CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION

This chapter provides the themes that were generated from the data collection. The tipi is a metaphor for the thematic structure in this chapter. The first theme, *nahitamowin*, - *obedience* centers on the process of social influence and compliance of the rules. The participants shared their thought on planning when kids are younger, choice & voice, flexible case planning for extension of care, safety and knowledge of supports and services. The second them is *kisiteyitowin – respect* describes the basic rights of people and respecting the process. It consisted of family connections, cultural connections, basic living skills, housing, counseling, milestones/rites of passage and supporting families after care. The final theme is *tapahâyimisowin – humility*, which includes a togetherness and relationship with the creator. This section included the federal Bill C-92, that supports cultural competence training, hiring Indigenous staff and mentorship/contract/cultural worker.

# Themes



## 5.1 Nahitamowin

The Cree word *nahitamowin*, which in English, means the act of obedience. Obedience means accepting guidance and wisdom from outside of ourselves, using our ears before our mouth. This section has five core aspects of the examination of strengths and gaps in services for indigenous youth transitioning out of foster care: a) planning when youth are younger; b) choice & voice; c) flexibility in case planning; d) safety; e) knowing supports and services.

### 5.1.1 Planning when kids are younger

Participants felt it was important to have ongoing conversations with the youth regarding their long-term case plan. These conversations should be ongoing but should start as kids become more mature and can speak about their wants and needs. For example, Annie remembers working for the Ministry of Social Services on a pilot project where the goal was to transition youth out of high cost facilities to family members. In case planning, many questions were asked and involved in building a plan such as: involvement in the community, examining community school and ability to attend. The goal was to have youth be a part of the larger community to assist in transitioning youth with the goal of more successful outcomes.

Dawn stated that as a worker she witnessed many youths being disconnected from the system and the workers. Annie states as a supervisor, she encourages her workers to have ongoing crucial conversations with their youth as an ongoing part of case planning. Dawn believes:

the gaps in services start when kids are young and by the time, they are making their own decisions even before they are legally aged out. They are often not connected to their workers necessarily anymore; they are not connected to their

caregivers necessarily to have any direct influence anymore. I feel that the gaps occur when kids are young and impressionable by not having the formal means to access their culture and their family. There is a lot of focus when kids are older, teenagers, to get them connected to family and supports in the community but for many of them they don't even want to come in and have those conversations with their workers because they are already making their own decisions, lots are making decisions that are not positive for their lives and getting in negative groups in the community. I feel that the focus needs to be on the front end and ongoing not when they are leaving foster care.

Participants felt that continuous, ongoing case planning should always include possible family connection that may or may not result in placement and conversations to continue to keep youth connected to the larger community.

#### 5.1.2 Choice & Voice

Most of the participants interviewed expressed that case planning should involve youth and get input from them on their case planning. Participants felt that by having open dialogue and conversations around planning and what is realistic and why assists with building relationship and rapport. This will lead to effective case management. Annie states that youth “should have as much power as they possibly can in decisions made for them. I think that kids in foster care are the most vulnerable people in society because they have no rights. Legally they have no rights, they have no parents and they have no one to protect them.” Throughout the interviews, youth input and inclusion in case planning was an ongoing concern. Sissy who works with youth throughout the province states that she often hears stories from youth that they don't

know why they cannot live with family members and why. No one has had that conversation with them, and they feel helpless. Sissy believes that “we are not socializing our youth growing up in care to have a voice. They are only being told what to do and who they will live with.” Often youth will have questions about their case planning and possible future placements that go unanswered or discussed in a vague manner that still leaves youth with questions. When Sissy was involved in a case, she advocated for youth to know their case plan and why this was important and encourages workers to be as forthcoming as possible, especially as youth get older. Understanding family circumstances or dysfunctions also allows them the ability to learn how to navigate within their own family systems. Many participants felt that when we ask youth to be active participants in their case planning, we learn a lot about whom they have connections with, feel safe and who or what they are engaged with in the community. By engaging youth at a younger age, many felt that by 14/15 years of age you could build a basic exiting care plan. Things may change over the years, but they know what it could look like. Many participants felt that active case planning supports youth to feel heard and valued as well as engaged in the exiting out of care in a positive way.

### 5.1.3 Flexibility in Case Planning

Many participants felt that the current guidelines in place for youth to access services after the age of 16 were often unrealistic, thereby under servicing the youth that need to access programming. Throughout Canada, an extension of care programming is called different terms. In Saskatchewan, it is Section 56; in Manitoba, it is called extension of services, and in B.C., it is called Adult Youth Agreements. Although the name is different in each province, the criteria are very similar. Youth must be residing in a ministry approved residence, must be attending school or working, and need to follow a case plan. For many youths, foster care has been a traumatizing

experience, and many begin to make their own plan, not wanting to reside with their approved home. Participants identified that most youth return to their original family. Because they usually cannot be approved due to family services history, these youth are often left unsupported financially. Jo states, “the government doesn’t understand trauma”. Jo feels that the government needs to give youth time to heal and get their lives in order. A lot of kids have relocated, and they are not able to focus on school and working. Once youth become independent and they know they have power and control over their circumstances, it is then that they can begin to deal with their trauma.

Jo felt that the criteria is way too strict and that there needs to have some flexibility to help people develop confidence and finish schooling or work through trauma. Jo states, “there should be funding in place even before you are aged out for counseling services but not main stream counseling services you know. I’ve had kids that have gone. We’ve paid for it through counseling but I have kids that have gone, you know, they wanted to spend time with the elder.” She believed that this kind of planning should be considered as part of a case plan and working towards independence and stability. Many participants felt that not everyone is ready to finish high school or go to work but often needed to deal with issues such as addiction, treatment and counseling. Their new Adult Youth Agreements (AYA) can now extend to the age of 26. Ro stated that her Indigenous Child & Family Society agency recently was able to offer the AYA agreements through the agency instead of being referred to the ministry. She recognizes that this shift in practice has increased engagement and return for youth that fit into the AYA program. She believes that due to ongoing programming with youth and families throughout their childhood, they know their workers well. Their relationships assist both client and caseworker during the transition phase. Ro explains that the AYA in British Columbia is for youth age 19-26

and the recent changes to policy and practice was the criteria for being approved for services. Ro states that a youth can be in a “rehabilitation program, work and/or school. What we see sometimes with some of our kids is that they will maybe attending a treatment program half time and then taking some classes in schooling but ultimately if its half time, 15 hours a month and we can get them on there.” Most of the participants felt that the criteria for being able to remain on assistance was difficult and had a lot of barriers for youth that often needed to deal with life and making smooth transitions into adulthood. Many felt the need for more flexible case plans, as well as involvement and co-construction of planned case plans with youth and worker. Several participants found that case plans and criteria were subject to caseworker’s discretion which can make the process slow. However, making case plans with options such as school, work and counselling allows for healing, growth and better outcomes.

#### 5.1.4 Safety

Most of participants stated that the role of caseworker is to ensure a child’s safety. There were many discussions on what safety looks like for youth as they get older and the need for case plans to revisit safety plans. For example, Nan explains “my role is to keep children safe wherever they are living whether it’s with families or in foster care. I try to help families do what they need to do however, just because they are not living with them, doesn’t mean they can’t have a relationship with them.” This notion of family visits and keeping the youth safe was repeatedly raised by the participants. It is important to still have ongoing contact with family members even if they are struggling. Many of the participants felt that as youth age, they get tired of not being able to have power and control over their life and start to disengage from placements and workers. It was also mentioned that ongoing conversations should be occurring with youth about who are they connected with or want to be and what could that relationship

look like and still be safe. Jo is a strong advocate for teaching youth to navigate the dynamics of their families and sees it as a life skill as growing up in foster care can also be challenging and youth can have ongoing risks of safety as well. Jo states in case planning we must be asking youth and ourselves, what does it need to look like to be safe? “Nobody is 100% healthy. I think that sometimes where we get stuck. Is it ideal? Probably not, but mom has this or that and dad has this. What’s a safe way to keep this relationship going? Is it a coffee? Is it spending time in the community? Addiction is 24/7 for most people or domestic violence isn’t 24/7. Everyone has health and moments of health and good functioning and you can build on that”. Safety planning can allow for visits to occur but if something changes, there needs to be a safety plan to leave and try again when things change. It teaches the youth boundaries; it shows respect for family connections. In the end, it is inevitable that the youth will make contact and will likely transition to their natural family; therefore, case planning should assist youth with navigating relationships with family, boundaries, and an exploration of what is safe. Also knowing that even if family members mess up, it is a work in progress and visits will happen again leading to transparent conversations and case plans. Most participants felt that workers need to have case plans that reflect youth age as what is considered safe. At aged 4 years, the conversation is very different than what is safe at 14 years of age.

#### 5.1.5 Supports and Services

There was a common theme among the participants. Most felt that there was an abundance of services in their community and there was difficulty in navigating who does what. In more remote communities, there is a lack of services and workers feel that they have to provide everything feeling that they wear many “hats.” Chelsea states, “youth don’t know what’s available in the community. Some people know these places by name but knowing what they



offer and navigating what they offer is very different. Having support to do that is crucial". Jo spoke about a service in a larger center in Alberta called 'high fidelity workers'. "The high-fidelity worker had a checklist and that was one of them ok are you registered for treaty status? Do you have connection to your band, have you met with your band, do you have connection to your family, what family can come to the table? Who can support you doing what, where are you going to live, do we need to put you on a waitlist for housing? What other supports do you need emotionally do you need connection to mental health, do you need counseling?" Jo felt that because these workers are community-based, they had an excellent pulse on what services were offered in the community. They would connect the youth to the needed programming and ensure it was in place before transition. She felt this approach was helpful in fully transitioned youth. Unfortunately, she noted that the program had been cut and there is a real lack of transition to support services. Being in a larger center, navigating all the services and who qualifies for them was very difficult and time consuming. Nan shared that at times they feel overwhelmed with the lack of services in northern Manitoba and experienced many barriers for services for youth on the reserve. She describes some of the barriers, for "kids that qualify for community living, there is a lot of barriers for people to access that in Manitoba it's probably the same for everywhere else in Canada. Also, mental health services, they are not always accessible and certainly not when there is crisis like in the city. There is probably more of an ability to respond to a crisis more than there is here". Many of the participants felt there should be someone to assist youth and connect them directly with services. The participants felt overwhelmed. With large caseloads in most regions, it was difficult to adequately serve youth in transition.

## 5.2 Respect (Kisiteyitowin)

The word kisiteyitowin means giving honor to our Elders and fellow students, to the strangers that come to visit our community and to all of life. We must honor the basic rights of all others. The word implies that we show humans and all life forms respect. By respecting each other we respect each other's life walk, other's perspective, other's lived experience and the way they interact. We might not always agree with others but if we are mindful of the act of respect, we listen to what is important to the person with whom we are working and how they make meaning of their world and their interactions within it. By respecting our clients, we think of them as relatives and ask ourselves if this was our life circumstances what would we want and how can we make that happen in safe way. It is difficult at times to be respectful and we could be misguided by our own bias or stories we hear about others. Being respectful requires a lot of listening, observing and checking to see if we understand correctly.

### 5.2.1 Family Connections

All the participants mentioned the importance of family in their interviews. They felt that children growing up in care outside of their family are disconnected with their relatives. Disconnection to family increases the likelihood of disconnection to self and identity. Participants felt that almost all child welfare systems could be doing better work in this area and many shared stories of visits being ceased, no connections to siblings and little connection to extended family. Participants shared that this is very common and detrimental to children in care and their feelings of love and belonging in this world. Dawn focuses on changing this narrative. Dawn wants

to ensure that they are still working within the mandate but working towards better outcomes for kids. I really heavily focus on that kids are connected with their families even though they might not be living with family members but really focus on kids having connections with their siblings who are probably also in care throughout the province or maybe the same city and really establishing and building those relationships. It looks easy on paper but is problematic when you have different caregivers, or different worker in different cities that don't share that same goal. To really focus on the importance of identity or culture which is difficult as many of the people I work with don't even understand the importance of that themselves so they directly influence that the way they work with their kids and caregivers.

There was a lack of understanding and relationship impedes the client/ worker relationship as a result, making it difficult to execute family focused case management. It appears a lot of work and support in this area is needed. Family and its role in the youth's life were common themes amongst the participants. Family often becomes part of the conversation when youth are transitioning out of care. Unfortunately, the youth are often disconnected to family, and they do not know how to navigate the family dynamics and create healthy boundaries. The absence of having family in their life throughout their childhood is often detrimental to the sense of identity, security and being able to have functional relationships with family members in often dysfunctional family systems and complicated life circumstances. Many felt that families should be involved in ongoing case planning even if the child is a long term or permanent ward of the government. Some participants had worked in provinces where family conferencing occurred with family, band, elders and agency to ensure all parties had voice and knowledge of the case plan.

### 5.2.2 Cultural Connections

Participants found cultural planning a crucial part of case planning with Indigenous youth and families. However, many noted that due to knowledge of cultural peoples and connections within their workplaces, many youths growing up in foster care do not have access to culture. Sissy insists nurturing cultural identity must be a part of case planning. She reflects on her own childhood stating,

I had no choice I had to go. I had to go to our ceremonies, I had to go to family events even though I didn't want to. I felt like I was being dragged to the Sundance and having to sit there and going to visit with all the aunties and all our extended family. At that time, I didn't realize how important that was. I am able to carry that on I know that cultural system, I know that now that kinship system.

Sissy states that cultural programming is often introduced later in a child's life and in group home settings. When youth are in adolescent, it becomes very difficult to have youth feel like they want to participate:

I might be fearful; I don't know what a round-dance is, so I say no. I am given the opportunity to say no. Even for church a lot of people I grew up with had to go to church; I went to ceremony. I guess what I am getting at is a connection to a higher power. Faith for me is very important cause life is tough it's going to throw ugly things at you and for me it has been my faith and prayer and going to ceremony that has gotten me through the tough times. So, if you can say me growing up in a group home system, no one really cares about me, my family doesn't even want me. I don't even have a faith to believe no one taught me or made me go to church or no one made me go to ceremonies. I am

already a deficit not having something to believe in, but you know what there this gang and they are partying with me, giving me what I want, and you know I've got a relationship with someone from the gang.

Sissy shares that everyone has a need to feel a part of something larger than themselves and to feel like they belong somewhere. This leaves them feeling very vulnerable to gangs as they will accept anyone for their own purposes but for the youth it looks like acceptance and belonging something they been longing for their entire lives. Ro works for an indigenous agency where all the foster homes and youth residing in the homes are Indigenous. She believes that all children have the right to grow up connected to their culture. Surrounded by Cedar Child and Family services offers programming throughout the year that nurtures cultural identity development and provides a culturally safe space for this learning to take place. She believes that the main tenet of leadership has always been a focus on life-long learning to deepen one's self-identity, sense of stewardship and responsibility for one's own growth. The ability to support our youth has been the driving force behind our desire to understand and reclaim our identity as Indigenous peoples. The youth leadership builds and supports healthy culturally relevant youth programming focused on Indigenous ways of being and healthy youth development practice. They also offer, Xe'Xu T'uluts'thut which is a comprehensive, culturally based youth leadership development program in British Columbia. It has evolved in response to youth voice, ongoing community conversations, student internships and participatory action research in social work and child and youth care. Xe'Xu T'uluts'thut provides the necessary preventative steppingstones that will give youth a foundation to build lifelong skills that will enrich their own lives and support the changing tide of Indigenous achievement. They also have other camps such as the role of Earth Walkers Spring & Summer Break Cultural Camps, Pro-D Day Cultural Programming, Winter

Feast, Nest to Wings Ceremony (for Indigenous youth leaving care), Youth and Elder Dinners (monthly during the school year) and other family friendly events. All the foster families and youth are expected to participate in cultural programming as it is embedded in every aspect of the program. They also have cultural continuity workers that are assigned to each child to build their cultural program and support and mentor one to one. There were stark contrasts between the level of cultural programming that was a part of this agency and the programming that was being offered through the agencies where the participants had worked. If culture is not embedded into the everyday thread of how the agency runs, culture fails to the waste side. Although all participants agreed that cultural programming was vital to the mental well-being of Indigenous youth, it became apparent that Ro's agency had full cultural programming and was something that other participants strived for but admitted that most agencies had a desire to have programming but most often the money and cultural people were not in place on a regular basis to have full programming. Therefore, Ro's agency is mentioned quite often regarding cultural programming. Sadly, cultural programming in most agencies is underdeveloped.

The importance of elders was raised by Ro. She stated that Elders in all Indigenous communities are vital. Our Elders fulfill the role of historians, librarians, coaches, mentors, and guides. Our Elder in Residence provides a wide range of cultural support to all program areas and is available to provide support, guidance, advice and encouragement to all agency staff, children and youth in care, caregivers and birth family members. To assist in fulfilling the Ro's agency's vision, the Elder in Residence works to facilitate a positive, respectful and culturally appropriate environment, while breaking down stigmas and systemic barriers. Staff are supported by the Elder in Residence to perform their duties in a way that incorporates services rooted in strong cultural values. In the past Jo had also worked for an agency that utilized an Elder and she

found the Elder particularly helpful family conferencing and case planning. Most participants felt that cultural programming was important but needed workers to facilitate and bring full programming to the agencies that serve youth.

### 5.2.3 Basic Living Skills

As youth begin to get older and the transition to adulthood begins, they become more independent and the participants felt it is crucial to have supports as to navigating life as an adult. Most participants felt that the teaching of basic living skills often fell to the foster parents or group home staff. Their ability to teach these skills varied. Jo recalls while working in British Columbia that agencies were concentrated on ensuring youth left care with basic living skills. She states that,

they are teaching kids, say if you are in care, living with family, kinship. There is check-ins to see what life skills has that youth learned? I've had kids in Alberta and are aging out and they don't know how to make a pop tart. The life skills and people don't learn unless someone is teaching you. BC was a high focus on foster homes or wherever they lived. What have you taught them? Do they know how to do laundry? Do they know how to do basic banking, do they know how income tax works? So, there is always a teaching component.

Participants mentioned that basic living skills are needed to be part of the case planning and that check-in's occur to ensure youth are prepared to navigate adult systems and live independently.

### 5.2.4 Housing

The topic of safe and affordable housing was an ongoing area of discussion for participants. Most felt that even when youth were active participants in case planning and

following the agencies guidelines, the agencies never adequately set up youth properly for independent living. Nan mentions that there is a positive program offered in her area of Manitoba but that,

safe and affordable housing which is a big problem all over there is a program here run through McDonald's services. They have an apartment and they put them when I'm talking about extension of care, over that's 18-21 it's usually a permanent ward that doesn't have a family that they can live with, so they put this this in this apartment and when that kids turns 21 and they are out of the program. They must go into town and find an apartment and they won't have the money they need to find one and they must get a roommate. This leaves youth vulnerable and living with others that may not be in their best interest or those kids are just drifting after a while because they don't have a place to call home.

In urban settings, participants expressed the dismay with the housing situation. People are often exposed to violence, alcohol and drug issues, with little to no remedy on how to secure safe housing for low income individuals. Many felt that the youth transitioning out of care had been doing well until independent living happened and in some of the most high-risk areas, youth fell victim to their surroundings.

#### 5.2.5 Milestones/Rites of passage

A theme that continually came up throughout the interviews was that youth in care are not celebrated enough because of moves, lack of relationships and lack of stability. Youth in care often miss out on people actively celebrating them and their accomplishments. They also often do not have anyone guiding them through any cultural rites of passage that often teach



responsibility and role within a family or community. Sissy believes that there is a huge gap for celebrating youth in care milestones. Often families are disconnected or have to arrange visits to be involved in the youth's life event, resulting in delays or absence. She begins speaking of her cousin who is often what she refers to as the

defacto parent." She "takes them out for a meal on their birthday, buys them a gift, make sure she knows what they need and really she is that defacto parent and I know she is not the only one, but in her work I know some youth they depend on that stable worker they can depend on. Because their family hasn't been stable so when it comes time for their graduation, they are asking my cousin to come in place of their parent..

Annie shared that,

there should be some sort of celebration for kids as they exit care. So it's like when you graduate like in families you have these little rites of passage that you go through you know, where you are recognized in reality if you are raised in foster care in this province everybody in this province is your parent. Everybody is your parent. First of all, I think we should be really proud of these kids they are wonderful people. And if feel I wish I could give them something to be proud of, because it's like I mean foster care is one of these shameful things that they have to carry around with like in addition to racism, poverty and everything else that they've faced.

Ro mentions that they have "nest to wings" ceremonies which usually focuses on high school graduation but could be used for transitioning out of foster care as well. Chelsea felt that although she has always worked places where there has been cultural programming, it still lacks to develop "youth the sense of identity and like where do they originate from, like where is their

band and what are beliefs that are specific to that First Nation. A are their certain teachings at certain ages that they completely miss out on?” Most of the participants felt that youth would be more engaged if it was part of programming or where they lived. There should be a worker or program that provides these services for Indigenous youth in care.

#### 5.2.6 Counseling

All the participants felt that youth in care should have ongoing counseling. Some noted that youth often feel “programmed out” as they get older; However, most felt that workers should explore various forms of counselling. Jo states,

I can't speak enough about having that transition time. I think the criteria is way too high and I think there needs to be some space to help people develop confidence and finish schooling or work through trauma. I think there should be funding in place even before you are aged out for counseling services but not main stream counseling services We've paid for it through counseling but I have kids that have gone you know they wanted to spend time with the elder and we needed to gift properly for protocols but it was really for to be in long house and learn about traditions and learn about what it means to be indigenous. I think that was powerful and it helped build that cultural self-identity.

Jo felt that this form of counseling can be a lifeline for Indigenous youth. Ro's agency offers counseling for youth aging out of care and many youths are wanting to participate. “We are finding with our AYA's we do have two internal counselors here right now we are getting a lot of referrals for a lot of our AYA's for our counseling program to work with them”. As part of the Adult Youth Agreements (AYA), youth must be participating in building life skills such as: going to school, working, rehabilitation or counseling which may have resulted in the long

waiting list. However, she does feel that counseling has a positive impact on the youth and their journey.

### 5.2.7 Supporting Families After-Care

As youth get older, many begin to make their own decisions about where they will live and do not follow the case plan resulting in discontinuation of services. Youth often initially go live with family and this may turn out to be long term. Unfortunately, due to grief and unhealthy coping mechanisms, these living arrangements breakdown resulting in youth couch surfing and attempting to get back into care. There seems to be a power struggle between the worker and the youth as they often want the choice about where they are staying. Most participants felt that is important to include the entire family in case conferencing and important to develop relationships with the family with reunification in mind. Chelsea states:

we often have outlines from the family service worker and the ministry stating you know what this family needs and what we should be doing but way more importantly what the families say that they need. What we see is a lot of mistrust between the families and the ministry. Parents are very skeptical of us at first because they don't know what we are doing at first and they have said, they are going to report everything back to the ministry. There is lots of mistrust, there is lots of families that don't want to reach out cause you might report us. That's not the point of this, this is to get kids living back home and we want to support the family any way whether that's parenting strategies, doing things like transportation or making appts for them to referring them to other resources. Making up a booklet on a child's diagnosis', family programming, we do youth outreach to give the parents a break, we have done looking for housing and we also do emergency services for families. If a kid is having a complete meltdown at home, we can come into the home if

they allow us to but that's up to them, they have the option to call us if they want to. If they want to bypass us, they can sometimes we can do over the phone, sometimes it's just about validated the parent's frustrations and having someone for them to talk to.

The family is relearning how to live together with past trauma and missed time together. Sometimes it is like they are strangers and need to get to know one another and learn to navigate the family dynamics. Most participants felt that when youth run and go back to family, the ministry often does not work on making safety plans and reassessing certain family members to parent. So often the youth are described as "runaways," "unworkable" or staying in unapproved resource; therefore, little to no support is occurring. Sadly, it is as if the worker is washing her hands of the case.

### 5.3 Humility: *Tapahtêyimisowin*

We are not above or below others in the circle of life as we feel humbled when we understand our relationship with Creation. We are so small compared to the majestic expanse of Creation, just a "strand in the web of life." Understanding this helps us to respect and value life. Teachings of humility often requiring more listening than talking. Elder teachings tell us that we have two eyes and ears and one mouth for a reason. We are to do more listening and observing in order to know what we need to say. This is a difficult task for many because when people are talking, we are often thinking about what we are going to say next. It takes discipline to listen. It takes humility to realize that things might not be working and to adjust so that it serves the needs of those you are serving. In the area of child welfare, the statistics show high rates of Indigenous children in care, families stating that their children are being stolen and that they come back broken to families and communities. What is clear is that major change needs to be made to reduce the number of Indigenous youth in care.

### 5.3.1 Bill C-92

The Government of Canada has co-developed, with Indigenous peoples, provinces and territories, new legislation to reduce the number of Indigenous children and youth in care and improve child and family services.

The Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families came into effect on January 1, 2020 as well as a more recent development of Memorandum of Understanding signed on July 7, 2020. In the MOU the agreement key aspects were establishment of joint table to discuss funding, establishment of joint national working group, commitment to regular bilateral meetings, and creating tools at the federal level to implement the bill designed to reduce the number of First Nations children in care.

BILL C92:

Co-developed with Indigenous, provincial and territorial partners, the Act:

- affirms the rights of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples to exercise jurisdiction over child and family services;
- establishes national principles such as the best interests of the child, cultural continuity and substantive equality;
- contributes to the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and
- provides an opportunity for Indigenous peoples to choose their own solutions for their children and families(<https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/>)

Nan felt that this federal Act would allow First Nations bands to restore traditional ways of doing things” and avoid formal in care status. Nan states that “Bill C 92 is going to be very interesting and I hope that makes some changes for the better and that kids are connected to their family when they first come in the system but I hope that there is less kids in the system in the future”.

Dawn felt that the new bill highlights some of the work that has already been occurring “recently, a lot of kids are actually living with their families; their legal status hasn’t changed but

the flexibility in allowing that to occur has become greater and greater. I would see that as a positive.” Most participants felt that a case plan should always be in a place when working with the family. Reunification can happen at any time and especially should be explored as the youth get older. Participants felt that the new bill could elevate the family and cultural connections. The youth know their family and kinship systems and that the band could ensure through community/agency programming that youth grow up knowing what it means to be Indigenous. Indigenous peoples are the experts on themselves and should be leading the work with their people. The First Nations communities have many qualified social workers that can and have been doing the work of protecting children and supporting culture.

### 5.3.2 Training

One worker felt that professional training and education in social work was essential. Several workers stated that understanding theories of change and good practice are important. Workers need on-going professional development to keep “fresh” and informed. Chelsea describes a conversation she had with a coworker who was “saying that we are all the same that we are all Canadian and I’m like no, there are Canadians and there are people from different cultures and backgrounds. Indigenous people and white people are totally different and totally different backgrounds. Trauma training is very watered down and unless we have a trauma approach, we are never going to get the services we need. Our government who does not understand trauma makes the policies that don’t make sense, put the criteria in, so it’s not up to a worker’s bias and discretion. You have to go to school this many hours, but it should be about where’s your balance. How do we connect you first spiritually and culturally, how do we then connect you then to the resources financial, housing and then how do we manage some of the feelings in trauma of being bounced through these systems? I think it’s encompassing, it’s

like a medicine wheel; we need to look at all aspects. You can't have people be successful, so you are setting them up to fail. I think strength based and I just don't see that happening. I think like the fidelity workers, wrap around that would be a really good way to help coordinate instead of throwing them out and saying here you go and now you're going to meet with your worker every month for your cheque." Jo believed that systems need to change in order to have a direct impact on clients because otherwise workers will continue to do case work based out of bias and fear. Jo felt an examination of rearranging policy to reflect children's rights and training for staff will reinforce the purpose of social work profession of serving client.

### 5.3.3 Hiring Indigenous Staff

Most of the participants were Indigenous, and they discussed the importance of having representative workforce in social work. Indigenous people make up most of the cases in most Canadian provinces: therefore, it only makes sense that your work force be representative.

Marguerite states,

I was raised traditionally, and it is important foundation for me and for our youth. I'm just proud and happy to be part of that program cause in being the manager I get to build that program. Making sure that First Nations culture and being aware of first nations issues, my staff are very culturally aware and sensitive. I do have one First Nations staff working on the day and night rotation just to ensure that people feel supported and people are familiar. In meeting families, I think meeting me and seeing is a comfort. I am First Nation I do understand where they are coming from and that is a big one that lots of parents feel like there is a lot of hoops to jump through and working through and being misunderstood. Working with this program I can see they are misunderstood, if you can

listen through the yelling and all that stuff you can see that they are coming from a good place and they are misunderstood.

Marguerite states that a whole program can change by hiring Indigenous staff,; they have the lived experience, the common history and values thereby informing programming to reflect the culture of the children and families.

#### 5.3.4 Mentorship/Cultural Continuity Worker/Cultural Support Worker

All the participants felt that workers should be able to provide Indigenous children, youth and families cultural support. One participant voiced that this was an area of concern and that is supposed to be in case planning and practice. However, there are many gaps and a total misunderstanding on what it even means to offer Indigenous youth a chance to grow up with a cultural identity. Many participants felt that some workers think that just taking the youth to a powwow or cultural event will create their Indigenous identity. Many felt that agencies did not currently have the capacity or understanding of Indigenous worldviews to be able to offer cultural programming. However, participants spoke about workplaces where this had occurred, bringing a lived experience of what programming could entail to nurture a cultural identity.

Chelsea speaks about the cultural person working in her group home,

it's kind of a blanket programming. In places where I have worked sweats youth, adult and family and staff sweats. Sharing circles at group home houses start with smudging and story or teaching. Our youth also go hunting, our cultural person comes from way up north and her family lived on the land her whole life and even often used canoeing as a form of transportation. She has lots of great stories to tell completely living off the land and hunting. It's neat listening to her stories. So, she takes kids hunting, teaches them the



teachings around the care for animal and skinning. She has done snaring so many different things, things are very natural to her, she is the whole cultural programming piece.

Ro spoke in detail about all the programming they have for their youth. She stated that both the youth and foster parents were expected to participate in these programs. Having a cultural continuity worker attached to their case plan ensures that the child's view of culture is being nourished. Dawn spoke about,

trying to engage kids with adult mentors that have an invested interest in culture and family as well. This might not be their actual first line of aunts and uncles but just to their community, their namesake to where they belong and building it from there. There is a focus for kids to understand their last names and where they come from and who their relations are. Building from to establish an interest and building on the importance, with the hope that as that grows and continues that when these kids are 15, 16, 17.

Dawn has had some success with a mentorship program, but she believes that this system makes culture connections look good on paper but is “problematic when you have different caregivers, or different worker in different cities that don't share that same goal. It is evident that all the participants felt that cultural connections are important but that policy and practice look very different. If you do not have cultural programs established in the agency, then it is left to the worker. Falling on the worker is no way to guarantee the youth experience Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

## Discussion Summary

A transition plan needs to be in place for Indigenous youth aging out of care. This transition phase should begin at around age 15 and continue until they are 25 years of age. This transition needs to be flexible, based on the level of maturity and skill development of young people rather than just age. There needs to be regular monitoring of the youth's progress, regular reviews and updates of the plan. There is also a need to maintain ongoing support throughout child's life as this may help enhance resilience into adulthood (Nowacki & Schoelmerich, 2010). Brukas (2008) suggests that placement instability results in low education achievement, decreased self-esteem, increased school dropout, identity confusion, drug use, young offender involvement, mental care needs and social network disruptions. It is apparent upon reviewing the literature that planning is critical for successful transition. Those youth that are not experiencing successful outcomes in school or employment or those that have begun to struggle with addictions or mental wellness find transition difficult and unsuccessful. In care, many youth experience loss, trauma, instability, multiple placements and grief; yet, little of the literature discusses the plan around dealing with deeper issues that many of Indigenous kid's experience.

The data suggests a need for the use of alumni or peer support in transitioning out of care. The alumni or peers could share their knowledge on their time in care and the importance of living a positive lifestyle. There needs to be an emphasis on ensuring that youth complete their high school before ending the care. As well as completing high school there is the need for sex education and pregnancy prevention (White et al., 2011).

The literature review was focused on Indigenous youth transitioning out of care; however, I found no mention of community reunification or cultural planning. It should be noted that several agencies invite youth in care for annual round dances in their honour, however, some

are not consistent. It appears to be “just checking off the box” on being culturally responsive. This approach lacks the depth and knowledge of ongoing, lifelong ways of knowing that translates into traditional teachings, rites of passage, ceremony and culture that permeates Indigenous epistemology. Martin (2003) suggests that there are varying types of knowledge, having different levels for group function. This keeps the members in the community known to and in a network of relationships. A lifetime of learning Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing is absent from everyday life for youth in care. These ways are learned through observation, teachings, ceremony and everyday life. Programming geared towards mentorship with Elders and knowledge keepers is imperative to learn Indigenous knowledge. Through mentorship programs youth can acquire ongoing community connections that are essential to knowing what it is to be Indigenous. We draw upon what we know and have been taught from our Elders and family members (Martin, 2003); thereby, laying the foundation and security of love, belonging and acceptance through community.

### 5.3.6 Social Work Implications

This section discusses the social work implications of this study’s contribution to social work practice when working with Indigenous youth. The purpose of the practicum was to complete an environmental scan of services and models of service delivery for Indigenous youth who are aging out of the care system. The research practicum report synthesizes recommendations and best/promising practices for Indigenous youth ageing out of the child welfare system. I refer to the metaphor of *mikiwahp kisikinwahamakewin* (teachings of *wahkotowin* is *nehiyaw* cultural tradition that embodies *nehiyaw* knowledge systems and worldview) in concluding my research. When one carries out the practice of *wahkotowin*, we reflect on how the tipi teaching embody the meaning of *wahkotowin*, how we treat each other, all

our relations which includes the two legged, four legged, winged and scaled animals as well as the earth. Wahkotowin is a kinship term that manifests living life in a sacred way, as our time on this earth is borrowed. When we examine this term, it embodies the way every living thing on this earth should experience and, in relation to children in care, the kind of treatment and care that should be present in casework and the execution of that plan. If we treat each other as relatives, instead of caseworker/client and live by the teachings of *wahkotowin*: research, casework, relationships and life, are thought of in a sacred way and to be treated as such.

When setting up a tipi the first three poles are tied and set up together and provide the foundation and stability. The tipi is erected with due diligence and care much like casework and case planning with youth and families. The teachings embody that life is not always easy and that there will be challenges, many of the youth and families have negative experience which prevent them from living together. However, the continuous removal of children from their families has not resulted in better outcomes for children. The need for children to be safe is clear and the ongoing disconnection from family, language, culture and teachings appears unnecessary. Families do not need to live in the same house to have relationship and connection. Children in care can access services from community members, knowledge keepers and programming that some agencies offer. However, many youths grow up with little to no access to the key aspects that shape their culture. It is clear in policy, in the literature and through the interviews that access to family, culture and language is essential but sadly practice proves otherwise. It has become clear that there is a serious lack of cultural services. The reasons include the lack of cultural worker positions and financial resources. The planning often falls on the worker who may or may not understand the importance of culture and a cultural plan. Allocation of money and service will alleviate this issue as well as concrete cultural competency

training to create cultural case plans for children and their families. The importance of accessing cultural knowledge during adolescence was emphasized in a landmark study emphasizing that measures of cultural continuity, like the passing of intergenerational teachings, are protective against Indigenous youth suicides (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998). These protective factors buffer risks associated with intergenerational and colonial trauma and can be facilitated through activities including land-based learning, language programming, traditional arts and crafts, and specific to this project, coming-of-age teachings (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Claxton, 2015; Flicker et al., 2014; McIvor, Napoleon, & Dickie, 2009).

As a past worker for the Ministry of Social Services working in the area of childcare, I have reflected on my own case plans. It has reminded me that most social workers are well-intentioned but the system is flawed. The cases are overwhelming and the care and attention each child requires to become a whole person is not given. Policy does not even allow for it. Social workers, supervisors and managers need to reflect to advocate and plan for youth in care. It is apparent in the data that the government is not a good parent. Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) first call to action is to reduce the number of Indigenous children in care, including keeping children in culturally appropriate environments (TRC, 2015). While we work to achieve the goal of keeping children and youth in their home communities with the services that they need, there is a requirement to support strong families. Culturally appropriate resources are needed to support children and youth through their transition towards adulthood. Evidence shows that when youth have the autonomy to share their voices, they have higher self-esteem and a greater commitment to friends, family, community, and themselves, reducing senses of social isolation and stigma (e.g. Blanchet-Cohen, McMillan, & Greenwood, 2011; Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Suleiman, Soleimanpour, & London, 2006; SCCFS, personal

communication, March 2019). Practice and policy shifts need to occur to do holistic planning not just at the time of transition. This planning should be throughout the child's entire time in care, thereby, laying the foundation for mental wellness and resiliency. Reflecting on the metaphor of tipi and the teachings of *wahkotowin*, every Indigenous child should have the teachings embedded in their way of life, due to the breakdown of extended family and severance of the connection to all of our relations through colonization that has disrupted this ideology. The tipi is used by *Nehiyaw* people due to its strength sturdy foundation. If set up correctly, it can withstand hurricane type winds, as well as, rain and snowstorms with the fire (heart) in the middle to ensure warmth. As a metaphor we could create programming that is rock solid for youth. It is naturally trauma informed and a wrap-around approach. The tipi is also used for its versatility and mobilization as this is also reflective of the Indigenous spirit that is resilient and adaptable.

*Wahkotowin* represents a worldview in which governance, the values of our people, the taboos, the laws, the responsibilities, the obligations, and the protocols are embedded. Within our governance structures, our lives were stable and balanced. We knew who we were and we knew how to live a good life—*miyo pimatisiwin*. Young people were guided to the good life by the elders, the old ones, and were helped to realize their gifts and purpose on earth. Everything in our world was, and still is, interconnected and mutually dependent according to the teachings of the old ones. We upheld the law of reciprocity between humans and all of creation. Indigenous children were treated with love and gentleness by their relatives. There was discipline, but it was taught in a different way—through the laws, responsibilities, and reciprocal obligations of *wahkotowin*. (Flamino, 2013)

Although many of the traditional way and teachings have been forgotten they are not lost, we are told that the teachings are in the stars and we can always gather them to be taught again. These teachings improving successful life outcomes and mental well-being as indigenous youth will know who they are and the community and ancestors that surround them. The tipi is a metaphor but also how smooth transitions for youth are created.

## CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSION

When I began my research practicum with the Pe-kīwēwin project, I had very little understanding of the current strengths and gaps in services for Indigenous youth aging out of care. I focused on coming from a place of respect, obedience and humility in order to understand current social work policies and practices. I located myself as an Indigenous person with some historical, familial ties with child and family services but also as a past case worker for the Ministry of Social Services. Through reflecting on the literature, my story, and personal location, I came to important realizations. I believe I have an ethical and moral responsibility to use my education and experience to challenge oppressive policies that have affected Indigenous people since colonization. Furthermore, I must actively work to let go of some of my privilege in order to attempt to make change for Indigenous youth in care by sitting on boards and committees that can assist with the change needed. My theoretical approach of Indigenous methodology as well utilizing the tools of grounded theory became very helpful in this process. My first learning objective was to review published and grey literature (unpublished), which could include agency reports, unpublished discussion pieces, any existing unpublished models or frameworks of ageing out. I analyzed the strengths and the gaps that exist regarding services for youth ageing out of the child welfare system. I learned how to search for agency reports, published and grey literature using finding aids. I examined many agencies' reports as well documentation and stories of youth's experiences of aging out of care. My second learning objective was to gather data through interviews and discussions with a small sample of 8 Indigenous and mainstream social workers and supervisors who work with Indigenous children in order to determine what services and policies currently exist regarding ageing out of care. This was a lengthy process as it



took three months to get ethics approval and many attempts to get social workers to agree to be interviewed. Many reported being busy with supervision of case work and demands of the field work that made it very difficult to secure interviews. However, after two months of requests and vigorous searching, I was able to interview 8 social workers. This gave me a fuller understanding of what current policy and practice looked like in child and family services. I spoke with social workers across Canada, learning about their experiences. It seems that little had changed since I was a case worker. Family access was continually being limited under the guise of safety. Furthermore, little to no safety planning was made as youth remained in care or ageing out. However, there were many conversations about current work and past work that made me hopeful that things could change and that there were many workers that wanted to make these changes. I interviewed a few workers that worked for agencies where family and cultural connections was an integrated part of policy and practice and this was very hopeful. However, there was obvious need for change and improvement.

My third learning objective was to complete a literature review of current models that exist as well as best practices for youth aging out of care. Through analysis, my research found deeper meanings. My fourth learning objective to experience the research process and it started with an application for ethics approval. This ethics process was time consuming and would have been beneficial to have been done at the very beginning. However, throughout this process, I was able to focus the research. Once I had my focus, the ethics application progressed and was approved February 6, 2020.

My fifth learning objective was to learn about the research process from an Indigenous perspective. I journaled the process and analyzed it as to how it has affected me as an Indigenous person, social worker, researcher, and scholar. It was a continuing process and I gained

knowledge in Indigenous research. I appreciated the insights and guiding values behind the Pe-kīwēwin project. For example, I studied works by Kovach (2009), Wilson, (2008) in order to gain further insight into Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. I was able to examine and reflect on the implications of Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous research for social work theory and practice. Also, through the Pe-kīwēwin project, I explored articles from the British Columbia Child and Family services and saw how policy was changing and informing practice. This information added to my literature review. Also, I was able to reflect on how Indigenous research knowledge can be applied to my own work and advocacy for and with Indigenous peoples. Important values consistent with Indigenous knowledge, such as reciprocity and relationality, have important implications for social work practice. They challenge the kind of relationships that social workers have with their clients, not as expert but as helper. The practice of *wahkotowin* (*Nehiyaw* kinship system) in social work practice further ensures that social workers are open and transparent about their own biases, values, and beliefs with clients and always work towards best practices with children and families. Indigenous research knowledge has significant implications for social work theory and practice. I referred to Wilson (2001) and his three R's being respectful, reciprocal and relational of Indigenous research and learning. The three R's imply that the researcher must be accountable to the relationships. As a researcher with experience in the subject area, I am inseparable from the research subject, respectfully interpreting knowledge and to help build relationships that have been established through this research process. As an Indigenous person and social worker I have extensive experience. I come to the research as this person; however, "grounded theory is a methodology that seeks construct theory about issues of importance in people lives (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory fits the Indigenous

approach to research. Through the exploration into Indigenous methodology and coupling with grounded theory, it became apparent that I need to constantly reflect on my own practice, being aware of my bias, values and beliefs in order to offer best practices to the people I serve. Social work can be an overwhelming career choice. We often have people's lives in our hands and it is important to continually reflect on best practices and ensuring better outcomes for youth, with continual reflection on practice and policy lead to best practices. In this journey, I continue to grow. Ekosi.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Guide



**Project Title:** An Examination of Aging out of Care Services for Indigenous Youth

**Researcher:** Tatum Neveu  
MSW Student  
Faculty of Social Work  
University of Regina

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1. Please tell me about yourself
  - a. Where are you from? (First Nations, community etc.).
  - b. Tell me about your professional background
  - c. What is your current occupation? (Manager, Leader, Academic)
2. What is your role within social work?
3. What do you see as some of the gaps in services for Indigenous youth aging out of care?
4. What are some the strengths in services for Indigenous youth aging out of care?
5. What are some suggestions for making smooth transitions for Indigenous youth aging out of care?
6. Are there any services that should be or are in existence for Indigenous youth that would differ from non-Indigenous youth?
7. Is there anything you would like to add?

**Thank you very much for your time and your thoughts!**

APPENDIX B  
**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**  
**(Interviews)**



**TITLE:** An examination of Ageing Out of Care Best Practices for Indigenous Youth  
**RESEARCHER:** Tatum Neveu, student of the University of Regina at the School of Social Work

**What is the purpose of this study and why are you being asked to participate?**

This research practicum study is being conducted as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Work. The purpose of the research study is to complete an environmental scan of services and models of service delivery, provincially and nationally, for Indigenous youth who are aging out of the foster care system. The research practicum report will synthesize recommendations and best/promising practices for Indigenous youth ageing out of the child welfare system. The study may lead to a journal article and public presentations.

**How will the study be done?**

I am requesting an interview with you due to your experience in working with children and youth in care and youth ageing out of care, or because of your past experience as a youth who aged out of care.

An interview with you will take place in the winter/spring 2020. Our interview has been scheduled for \_\_\_\_\_ If you agree to participate you will have an opportunity to share your thoughts and experiences on the topic. I will send you the question guide in advance so that you can reflect upon the questions.

Before starting the interview, I will review this form with you and answer any questions you may have. I will ask for your agreement to participate. Once you have agreed, I will offer you tobacco as cultural protocol and explain its significance. Then I will review the consent form with you and we will begin. The interview will be recorded and eventually transcribed. Transcripts will be anonymous via coding. The only individuals who will have access to the transcript, will be me, my supervisor, and my professional associate.

**Are there any risks involved in participating?**

This project is minimal risk. If you choose to participate in the interview, there is a minimal risk of emotional discomfort if you share difficult experiences and memories, but there are no other risks beyond ordinary challenging memories.

**What are the benefits of participating in the interview?**

Participating in the interview will give you an opportunity to share your thoughts, opinions, ideas, and expertise. Your contribution may positively influence social work practice with youth who are ageing out of care.

**Will your identity be protected and how will your privacy be maintained?**

Your identity and words will be kept confidential. You will not be identifiable in any articles or reports arising from this study. Interview will be recorded and transcribed and shared with my immediate supervisor and professional associate but names will not be used. All data, transcripts, analysis, and notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the research office at the Saskatoon Campus of the University of Regina for five years, after which time all data will be shredded and/or electronically destroyed. If you make a statement which is profound and should be used as a quotation in the final practicum report, I will request your permission to use the quotation and offer you the option of remaining anonymous or having the quotation attributed to you.

**Will you be paid for taking part in the interview?**

There is no remuneration for taking part in the interview although you will be offered a gift card as a small token of appreciation for your time.

**Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?**

If you have any questions about this study you can contact me -Tatum Neveu. My telephone number is listed at the top of the first page of this form.

**Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?**

This project has been approved on ethical grounds by the UofR Research Ethics Board on (insert date). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the committee at (306-585-4775 or [research.ethics@uregina.ca](mailto:research.ethics@uregina.ca)). Out of town participants may call collect. OR

This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the UofR Research Ethics Board on (insert date). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office (Toll Free: 866-966-2975).

**Right to Withdraw at any time**

Participating in this interview is entirely up to you and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time up to the point of data aggregation. Once I have compiled the anonymous data for analysis, which will take place in Spring 2020, I will not be able to separate your data. Therefore, you can request removal of your data prior to March 15, 2020. You have the right to refuse to participate without giving a reason and without any negative response from me or negative impact on your work as a social worker. Your right of refusal is treated confidentially and anonymously.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

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Participant Signature      Date

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Printed Name of the Participant signing above



### Letter of Initial Contact

My name is Tatum Neveu. I am Cree/Michif from the Muskeg Lake, SK and Red River Settlement in the Winnipeg area. I am currently working on my MSW in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Regina. I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Raven Sinclair, Faculty of Social Work, University of Regina.

As part of my MSW studies, I am conducting a qualitative study exploring *Indigenous youth aging out of care*. **The general purpose of this study is to identify, analyze and synthesize through a qualitative inquiry the praxis (theory and method) that underpins services provided for an Indigenous approach to aging out of care.** Indigenous people need an approach to administration in social work that is relevant to their ontological and epistemological frameworks because they include ethics, values, and principles that are consistent with Indigenous culture.

As a participant, you will be asked to share your knowledge and perspective about Indigenous youth and aging out of care services provide to Indigenous. You will also be asked to share your views on the praxis of an Indigenous approach to social work administration.

Your participation would involve one interview. The interview will take place either face-to-face, Skype or telephone in Spring 2020 and will be approximately 30-1 hrs. in length.

To qualify for participation in this study, participants must:

- be of Indigenous decent (First Nations, Métis or Inuit) or have extensive experience working with indigenous populations.
- Currently working or have worked for an extensive period of time as front-line worker within social work organization in Canada or have been in a leadership position.
- Currently working or have worked for an extensive period of time as front-line worker within an Indigenous community in Canada or have been in a leadership position.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary, anonymous and confidential. Any information that is shared will be strictly confidential and in the event that a participant decides to withdraw from the study, all the information that was gathered would be destroyed.

I plan to use information from the interviews as the basis for my MSW Research Practicum Report, as well as in publications and presentations. In order to maintain anonymity, participants will be categorized in non-identifying classifications; for example, Person A, Person B, Person C and so on. There will no identifying characteristics attributed to any of the participants.

If you are interested in participating in this study, you can contact me at 1-306-280-5820 or [tatumnevz@gmail.com](mailto:tatumnevz@gmail.com) I look forward to hearing from you.

Tatum Neveu, MSW Student  
Faculty of Social Work  
University of Regina

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with the University of Regina ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Academic supervisor Oba Funke at (306) 664-7385, or my research supervisor Raven Sinclair at (306) 664-7372