LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN IN CARE WHO
HAVE MULTIPLE SCHOOL CHANGES AS A RESULT OF PLACEMENT DISRUPTION

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ABSTRACT

Crown Wards in Ontario change placements 2.6 to 8.6 times (on average) with the provincial average being four times (Contenta, Monsebraaten, Rankin, Bailey & Ng, 2015, p. 20). This means children in care often change schools. The aim of this study is to learn, directly from Indigenous children in care, their experiences of multiple school changes through exploring the rewards and challenges of starting a new school; ways children prepare for a new school; strategies they use to adjust to a new school; and ways the child welfare and education systems can alleviate the impact of multiple school changes. The methods used for this study include focus groups and participant journals. Four overarching themes were identified within the data: Vulnerability, Relationships, Adaptation, and Excitement. This study adds important new knowledge about Indigenous children in care, specifically about their experiences of disruptive school placements.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the 15 Indigenous youth in care who had the courage to share their private stories of the rewards and challenges of going to a new school. Their commitment to attend the focus groups (for some, travelling up to three hours) to participate in this study is a testament to their strength and dedication to improve the child welfare system in an effort to help other Indigenous children in care who may face similar struggles. For this, I say Chi Meegwetch! (the biggest/greatest thanks in the Ojibway language).

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I would like to acknowledge the Elders who supported this research project. Wanda Whitebird participated in the research focus groups. Wanda's presence, relationships with the youth, spiritual knowledge and prayers kept the youth and the project safe. Alita Sauvé, the Native Child and Family Services of Toronto's Kookum (grandmother in the Cree language), instructed me on the traditional protocols such as: handling of sacred medicines, offering of tobacco, making tobacco ties, and participating in and facilitating talking circles.

I am grateful for my husband, John (aka my counsellor, confidant and soulmate!), for encouraging me to face my fears and, most importantly, for supporting me through the worst time of my life, which coincidently, happened to be the same time that I was a student in graduate studies and writing my thesis. His love, faith and belief in me carried me throughout.

I would like to thank Dr. Susan Dion for the opportunity to be her student, which provided me with the greatest learning of my life. This took place in the York University Graduate Program of Education – Language, Culture and Teaching (Master of Education, Focusing on Urban Aboriginal Education) with an Indigenous cohort. I will always remember the first day of class (September 8, 2014) when Dr. Dion shared that "Disruption is the starting place of learning". That is a lesson that I will carry forever.

I could not have completed this paper without the sage advice from my thesis Supervisors, Dr. Sue Winton and Dr. Celia Haig-Brown. They are two women who inspired, provoked and guided me throughout! Their patience, passion and subject matter expertise shaped my research and ultimately my thesis. A final product that I am immensely proud of and eager to share with the community.

Thank you to Kenn Richard (Executive Director) and David van Overdijk (Director of Child and Family Well Being) at Native Child and Family Services of Toronto for their confidence and support in conducting the first research project for children in care at this agency. Further, thank you to the children's services workers, frontline child protection staff, youth workers, administration staff, and management (Jim Langstaff and Marlon Clarke) for their support in co-creating this study. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the staff who helped during the focus groups; Kelly Hashemi, Greg Flynn, Allan Kennedy, Elsie Petequan, and Mike Auksi. I would like to extend a special note of thanks to Lindsay Seifried for her administrative support during the initial phase of the study.

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I acknowledge a special group of ladies (Lisa, Wynne, Irene, Erin, Alex and Marilyn) who consoled me while I was grieving, and lifted my spirit with their love for me and admiration for my pursuit of higher education.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Research

Having worked in child welfare for thirty-two years, I have witnessed firsthand that children move numerous times while being raised in State care. In Ontario, for example, Crown Wards[1] move an average of four times (Contenta, Monsebraaten, Rankin, Bailey & Ng, 2015, p. 20; *Average Number of Placements Per Child/Youth Since Most Recent Admission, Includes Before Crown Wardship*, appendix A). Each move is associated with a litany of adjustments, such as detaching from placements and communities, leaving friends and pets, navigating grief and loss, moving into a strange home and neighbourhood, and enrolling in a new school. Children in care describe the experience of moving to a new area away from friends, school, and family as "a scary and lonely thing" (Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2012, p. 14). Tellingly, children experience their time in care as "unpredictable" and compare it to a "revolving door" with "frequent changes in people, places and things [that] can both positively and negatively affect a child or youth in care" (Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2012, p. 8 and p. 16).

A move is often associated with a school change and "school changes are a significant problem for children and youth in foster care" (National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2014, p. 3). As such, children in care must repeatedly adjust to a new school and the numerous challenges associated with that disruption. Although there is ample research on

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[1] On April 30, 2018 the term "Crown Ward" was replaced with the term "Extended Society Care" (Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, 101[1]). Since this thesis is predicated on a study involving "Crown Ward" data analysis (Contenta et al., 2015) and the literature reviewed pertains to Crown Wards (or children who are being raised on a long-term basis by the government), the term Crown Ward or State Ward will be used throughout the thesis.

placement disruption and the factors associated with placement stability and instability (e.g., Barber, Delfabbro & Cooper, 2001; Brown & Bednar 2006; Hussey & Guo, 2005; Jokobsen, 2013; Koh, Rolock, Cross, & Eblen-Manning, 2014; Leathers, 2006; Rolock, Koh, Cross & Manning, 2009; Unrau, 2007), there is limited research on the educational experiences of children in care and even less on the educational experiences of Indigenous children in care. Knowing that placement changes are psychologically distressing to children in care (New York City Administration for Children's Services and the New York University School of Medicine [ACS-NYU] Children's Trauma Institute, 2012; Hyde & Kammerer, 2009; Unrau, 2007), the child welfare sector is understandably focused on reducing the number of moves for children in care and on improving the quality of their living situations (Jokobsen, 2013; Unrau, 2007). While the sector's energy is spent on the reduction of placement moves and the quality of the placement, the school experience of a child in care is a secondary consideration.

My research examines the experiences of Indigenous children in care who have had multiple school changes, in an effort to understand their unique needs when adjusting to a new school. Moreover, my research aims to help Indigenous children in care identify strategies that will guide and inform the child welfare and education systems[2] in better supporting a child's adjustment to a new school, ultimately mitigating the adverse effects of placement moves.

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[2]Youth participants will be invited to present the research findings to the following groups: Association of Native Child and Family Service Agencies of Ontario (including Indigenous child welfare agencies in Ontario), Child Welfare Political Action Canada, Foster Parents Society of Ontario, Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario, League of Ontario Foster Families, Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, Ontario Association of Residences Treating Youth, The Children in Limbo Task Force, The Toronto District School Board Urban Indigenous Education Centre & Urban Indigenous Community Advisory Committee, Toronto Region Crown Ward Education Championship Team and YouthCAN (Communication, Advocacy and Networking). Whether the youth choose to participate in disseminating the research findings or not, I will share the research findings with these groups through personal communications, direct consultations, publications, and training sessions.

In my thesis, I will begin by introducing myself, as is customary in many Indigenous cultures. I will then introduce the research topic and discuss the following: the research problem, the significance of the research, Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (the community research partner), children in care in Ontario, voices of youth in and from care, theoretical framework and related research. Next, I discuss the study's methodology, and in Chapter four I present the research findings and discussion. I conclude by discussing the implications of the study and recommendations for policy.

Introduction to the Researcher

Self-Location

In keeping with Indigenous research methodologies, I will properly introduce myself. Known as the process of "self-location" (Kovach, 2009, p. 110). This introduction is a primary consideration when conducting Indigenous research in which "the location is up front, clear and visible" (Absolon, 2011, p. 72). I will place ("self-locate") myself inside the research by reflecting upon how my experiences have shaped my thinking (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009). Doing so will enable readers to "… form their own opinions regarding [my] validity as a researcher in Indigenous territory" (Absolon, 2011, p. 73). In beginning with self-location, I invite the reader to join me in my personal journey discovering my thesis topic. In acknowledging a deity and embracing spirituality as the starting place of this project, and by telling my personal story, I am articulating my personal values and aligning myself with an

approach that reflects the Anishnawbe community's (the community that I am closest to) core values.[3]

About Landy

My name is Landy Rynnae Anderson, and I am of a mixed-heritage of Métis and Chinese. I am a member of the Gaspé Peninsula, Lower St-Lawrence, Magdalen Islands Métis Aboriginal Nation in Quebec. My husband and children are members of Alderville First Nation, an Ojibway reserve in Ontario. My Chinese name translates as "beautiful jade" and was given to me by my maternal uncle. My Indigenous spirit name translates as "one who brings the drum," which means that I bring balance. My traditional name was given to me by a Cree Elder. I walk in two cultural worlds, comfortable in both.

My family and my husband's family have the Indian Residential School System in our bloodline. It shapes our being. Our families transmitted the intergenerational trauma of residential school to varying degrees. The manifestations of this trauma include a lack of parenting skills, low educational outcomes, substance abuse, child welfare involvement, criminal activities, incarceration, and even murder. These detrimental effects of residential schools forge a universal bond amongst Indigenous peoples, connecting us to each other in visible and invisible ways.

My teachings come from Ontario, and they are grounded primarily in Anishinabek and Cree customs and traditions. I have received these various teachings in traditional circles, tipis,

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[3]The core values of the Anishnawbe community (Ojibway, Potawatomi, Chippewas, Odawa, Algonquin and Mississauga) are commonly known as the Seven Grandfather Teachings. These teachings reflect a certain way of life: wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility and truth (Native Women's Centre, 2008). While the Seven Grandfather Teachings are rooted in Anishnawbe culture, their appeal as traditional Indigenous values can be viewed as part of a pan-Indian and inter-tribal movement, where important Indigenous symbols and ceremonies are adapted inter-culturally (Flynn, 2011).

and Sweat Lodge ceremonies from knowledge carriers and Elders including Alita Suavé, Andrew Wesley, Doug Williams, Dr. Duke Redbird, Harry Snowboy, Herb Nabigon, James Carpenter, Jacqui Lavalley, Jimmy Dick, Leona Nahwegahbow, Liz Stone, Marie Gaudet, Nancy Stevens, Pat Green, Pauline Shirt, Pauline Stand-Up, Rose Logan, Shirley Williams, Vera Martin, and Wanda Whitebird. Other Elders and Indigenous community members, such as Cyndy Baskin, Danny Beaton, Douglas Sanderson, Dr. Joanne Dallaire, Dr. Lynn Lavallée , Dr. Michael Hart, Dr. Peter Menzies, Dr. Raven Sinclair, Dr. Susan Dion, Dr. Suzanne Stewart, Estelle Simard, Kenn Richard, Melissa McNeil, Shelley Cardinal, Shirley Gillis-Kendall, Steve Teekins, Terry Swan, and Vern Harper, have shared their Indigenous knowledge with me in private and public forums. In addition, I have had the honour of listening firsthand to some of Canada's best Indigenous orators, having been inspired by the likes of Dr. Cindy Blackstock, Dr. Pam Palmater, National Chief Perry Bellegarde, Ontario Regional Chief Isadore Day, and Wab Kinew**.**

I have participated in a variety of ceremonies—Full Moon, Eagle Staff, Naming, Pipe, Sunrise, and other Honouring ceremonies—where I received women's teachings, water teachings, family teachings, moon teachings, berry teachings, tipi teachings, and Medicine Wheel teachings. I think in terms of the Medicine Wheel,[4] both personally and professionally, compartmentalizing all that I do into groups of four. I often share my "wheels" with my colleagues, scribbling down my theories of healthy and unhealthy wheels and demonstrating that everything we do in life can be conceptualized within the Medicine Wheel.

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[4]"The medicine wheel symbolizes the interconnection of all life, the various cycles of nature, and how life represents a circular journey. The number four is sacred to the many Aboriginal peoples of North America and can represent many things: the four seasons, the four parts of a person (physical, mental, emotional and spiritual), the four kingdoms (animal, mineral, plant and human), and the four sacred medicines (sweet grass, tobacco, cedar and sage). Hence, you may see the medicine wheel presented in several different ways…" (University of Ottawa, n.d., Aboriginal Medicine and Healing Practices section, para. 3).

In my use of the cultural knowledge that was received from the aforementioned Elders and Indigenous community members, I am now responsible for giving back to the community. This giving back represents the Indigenous values of responsibility and reciprocity:

> According to these teachings, important knowledge and wisdom contain power. If one comes to understand and appreciate the power of a particular knowledge, then one must be ready to share and teach it respectfully and responsibly to others in order for this knowledge, and its power, to continue. (Archibald, 2008, p. 3)

My cultural teachings have educated me about the diversity of customs within the Toronto urban Indigenous community as well as how to behave as a member of my Indigenous community within Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST), where I conducted my research with NCFST's children in care and where I worked for 11 years. Most importantly, my teachings have placed me in a "listener and learner" role, where I have learned how to listen to stories that initially seemed irrelevant to the training topic yet offered useful knowledge. While working at NCFST, I have learned to value storytelling as a form of education. I previously had little patience for this type of knowledge-transfer. I attribute this lack of patience to my lack of knowledge and story-telling abilities. I have used the teachings from these stories to inform me personally and to apply them to my work. In fact, some of my most memorable teachings have come through story-telling. My teachings have prepared me to listen to, and to learn from, others.

Personal and Professional Experiences & Knowledge

My husband, a former Crown Ward in Ontario, was an Indigenous child in care who survived Canada's infamous Sixties Scoop.[5] It was important for my husband to keep his brother out of care, and that is how we became "Kinship Foster Parents" to him. Being Kinship Foster Parents was the starting point of our relationship with the child welfare system—as service providers and, later, as Treatment Foster Parents where we fostered over 100 teenagers. While fostering, I worked simultaneously for several mainstream children's aid societies (CASs) and in various child welfare positions before working for Indigenous CASs (NCFST) and later with Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child and Family Services.

I used the knowledge gained from thirty-two years in child welfare experiences, as well as my roles of being a foster parent, a frontline child protection worker, a supervisor of child welfare/foster care, and being a 34-year partner with a man who was a child in care himself to write *The Foster Parent Survival Guide: How to Navigate the Child Welfare Matrix*. While the book was written for foster parents, its true intent is to help raise healthy children with a strong sense of identity and belonging in their communities (as defined by the child).

According to the *Statistics Canada National Household Survey: Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: First Nations People, Métis and Inuit* (2011), a significant portion of Canada's children in care are Indigenous: of the roughly 30,000 children aged 14 and under in Canada who were in foster care, nearly half (48.1%) were Aboriginal children. Further, the same 2011 report revealed

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[5]"The term *Sixties Scoop* was coined by Patrick Johnston, author of the 1983 report *Native Children and the Child Welfare System*. It refers to the mass removal of Aboriginal children from their families into the child welfare system, in most cases without the consent of their families or bands." (University of British Columbia, n.d., Sixties Scoop section, para.1).

that 14,225 or 3.6% of Aboriginal children were foster children, compared with 0.3% of non-Aboriginal children.

Given the large numbers of Indigenous children being raised in the child welfare system, the book has the potential to improve the lives of Indigenous children in care, as its popularity grows across the Canadian fostering community[6]. The reach of my book is connected to my provincial/territorial book tours and networks in child welfare. These are the same networks that I intend to use to disseminate my research findings by reaching thousands of foster parents/child welfare workers across Canada in hopes of improving the lives of Indigenous children in care.

While working at NCFST, a multi-service Indigenous CAS[7], I conducted a number of surveys (on education and employment, coaching, recreation, and voting habits) in the Toronto Indigenous youth community. During my tenure, I designed and/or was responsible for managing the following research projects: *Experiences of Foster Parent Resource Workers* (Western University, 2011), *An Exploration of the Factors Contributing to the Resilience of Crown Wards Raised in Ontario* (University of Toronto, 2011), *Closing the Gap: An Education and Employment Framework for Aboriginal Youth In Scarborough* (Western University, 2014), *Identifying the Ophthalmic Needs of the Homeless and Marginally Housed Populations of Toronto's Central Local Health Integration Network: A Pilot Study* (University of Toronto and St. Michael's Hospital, 2014), and *An Indigenous Physical Literacy Strategy Using the Medicine Wheel Life Cycle* (York University and University of Toronto Scarborough, 2015). Furthermore, I mentored a PhD student as she prepared her dissertation, *Growing up in families that foster:*

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[6]"Foster parents play a vital role in enabling children placed in their care to become mature, responsible, productive adults. Foster Parents make a valuable contribution to our society. There are approximately 35,000 foster families throughout Canada who perform the important task of nurturing children" (Canadian Foster Family Association, n.d., The Role of a Foster Parent section, para. 2).

[7] A "multi-service" CAS provides community-based social services alongside child welfare services.

Exploring the (e)motions of young adult sons and daughters of foster parents (University of Toronto, 2013)*.* As a mentor, my role was to help the researcher locate herself socially (provincially and nationally), address recruitment challenges/offer solutions, recommend an external reviewer, and debrief the dissertation (resultant theory from the research). Thus, I am comfortable with the process of designing, conducting, and supporting research. When beginning this study I felt that I was well-positioned to conduct it with Indigenous children in care, having amassed thirty-two years of child welfare experiences working with children in various capacities such as a one-to-one worker, educator, foster parent, frontline/supervisor in residential services, frontline/supervisor in child welfare, supervisor of case managers, and having accumulated knowledge in children's development. I also teach part-time in the Child and Youth Care program at my local community college, utilizing my extensive knowledge of childhood psychopathology to teach Childhood Disorders (as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, or DSM).

Relationship to Education Systems

On my husband's side of the family, every generation in living memory has been in residential school or the child welfare system, with the exception of our biological children. For the first time in the Anderson bloodline, we have raised a generation of children for whom this is not the case. Breaking away from a misguided, colonial structure, at the core of which was an educational system designed to construct an alternative version of an "Indian" person, has been a momentous feat. My belief that raising children is a sacred and collective responsibility, is also a view echoed by early years child development experts in Ontario:

Aboriginal people believe that children do not belong to us but are gifts sent from the

Creator. It is our job to nurture and guide children throughout their childhood so they will

grow to fulfill their purpose while on this earth. Because children are so sacred it is

everyone's responsibility to nurture them and keep them safe, to provide them with

unconditional love and attention so they will know they are wanted and hold a special

place in the circle. (Best Start: Ontario's Maternal, Newborn and Early Child

Development Resource Centre, 2006, p. 20)

A child's school years are of utmost importance, and the child welfare system cannot

afford to get it wrong. There are no second chances. Having raised my own biological children,

step children, foster children, and adopted children, I have very high standards for parenting.

Those very high standards apply especially to those "parents" in the State system who are paid to

provide a service (i.e., foster parents and group homes) and are responsible for helping children

in care have success at school.

Impetus to the Research

After two years of thinking about and praying for a proper research topic, this is where I

ended up. Looking back, I realize that I was led here through a number of events. I had a dream[8]

on January 17, 2015, went into a Sweat Lodge ceremony[9] (March 12, 2015), consulted with the

York University Program Director (Master of Education, Urban Aboriginal Cohort), Dr. Susan

Dion (June 15, 2015); and read several influential books (*Indigenous Methodologies:*

Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts [Kovach, 2009], *Kaandossiwin: How We Come to*

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[8]"[P]articipating in cultural catalyst activities (dream, ceremony, prayer) are all means for accessing inward knowledge." (Kovach, 2009, p. 50).

[9]"[P]articipating in cultural catalyst activities (dream, ceremony, prayer) are all means for accessing inward knowledge." (Kovach, 2009, p. 50).

Know [Absolon, 2011], and *Qualitative Research In Education: A User's Guide* [Lichtman, (2013)]). Through these experiences, I arrived at the present research topic.

The dream that led me away from my original research topic involved a field of white daisies and a haunting message that I needed to choose a daisy—a daisy that was "just right." To ensure that I made the "right" decision, I was told to focus on "positives" by emphasizing knowledge and strength. None of these characteristics was associated with my original research topic, which I had been crafting for a year prior to my momentous vision. After fretting about the meaning of the dream and the need to have a more upbeat topic and approach, I went into a Sweat Lodge ceremony to seek guidance. Shortly afterwards, I met with Dr. Susan Dion, who advised me to read *Kaandossiwin: How We Come to Know* (Absolon, 2011) "cover to cover" (S. Dion, personal communication, June 15, 2015). I immediately ordered it over the Internet.

When the book arrived, I was stunned upon opening the package to discover a picture of white daisies, growing defiantly out of cracked cement, on the cover. Here were the exact daisies I had dreamt of six months earlier, their white petals and yellow centres peering symbolically at me, conveying a message of resilience as they pushed through concrete. Inspired by the connection between the book and my dream, I knew intuitively that *Kaandossiwin: How We Come to Know* would lead me to my intended research topic.

I read Absolon (2011) and Lichtman (2013) concurrently, as I wanted the experience of juxtaposing Indigenous (Absolon, 2011) and non-Indigenous qualitative (Lichtman, 2013) research methodologies. I was enthralled by how these approaches complemented one other. For example, qualitative research allows for time to understand stories. Knowledge flows from the participants, who make meaning of their experiences. Research is conducted in natural settings (Lichtman, 2013). These principles and approaches are valued in Indigenous culture, as Absolon

(2011) notes in her own Indigenous approach: "In keeping with Aboriginal principles, worldviews and values, each community's reality was respected and each community's ownership of their research process was honoured" (Absolon, 2011, p. 20).

Halfway through my readings, I read a report by *Toronto Star* newspaper reporters and data analysts, entitled *Preliminary Toronto Star Analysis: CAS/Crown Ward Data* (Contenta et al., 2015).[10] I came to the conclusion that I should conduct research on a topic related to Indigenous children in care, specific to their experiences attending new schools, since children in care often face multiple moves (Contenta et al., 2015, p. 21), experiencing by default numerous school changes. The *Toronto Star* analysis is the only report of its kind that presents a cross-comparison of Crown Ward performance measures for 45 CASs in Ontario[11]. The *Toronto Star* article highlighted the discrepancies among CASs in Ontario regarding the number of moves that Crown Wards experience, revealing a range of 2.6 to 8.6 and a provincial average of four moves per Crown Ward (Contenta et al., 2015, p. 20). Prior to the *Toronto Star* report, the only other publicly-available data on children in care in Ontario were the Assessment and Action Record (AAR) outcome data, presented by The University of Ottawa's Centre for Research on Education and Community Services in an annual provincial report. While these annual provincial reports do

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[10]The *Preliminary Toronto Star Analysis: CAS/Crown Ward Data* (Contenta et al., 2015) is a report prepared by Toronto Star reporters and data analysts as part of its ongoing investigation, *Society's Children: A Toronto Star Investigation,* where a series of reports "[E]xamines province-wide gaps in child and family supports, and an antiquated child protection system struggling under budget pressure to modernize and care for *Society's Children*." (The Toronto Star, retrieved on February 27, 2016 from http://www.thestar.com/news/cas.html).

[11] The 2015 Toronto Star report analyzed 45 CASs over a 4-year period, despite the fact that there were up to 53 CASs during that time (Commission to Sustain Child Welfare, 2012). The reason they chose 45 CASs was that the data were impacted by some of the CASs amalgamating during the study period (Contenta et al., 2015). Relatedly, the number of CASs quoted throughout this thesis also varies, depending on the year of the analysis and/or the number of CASs studied at that moment in time. The reason for the varying number of CASs is twofold. First, in 2012, due to budget considerations, the Commission to Sustain Child Welfare recommended that smaller CASs "amalgamate", reducing the number of CASs since 2012 (Commission to Sustain Child Welfare, 2012, p. 29). Second, Indigenous family services are actively working towards becoming CASs. Hence, the decreasing number of mainstream CASs and the increasing number of Indigenous CASs are influencing the overall number of CASs in Ontario.

that my research will help to make moving less disruptive in a school setting and will improve a child's overall school experience.

By self-locating and reflecting on who I am, how I think, and my relationship to the research topic (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009), I decided to conduct research in areas that I value and to which I am intimately connected: Indigenous communities, child welfare, and education.

While I refer to my research as something that I decided upon, in truth, I believe that my decision was influenced by greater esoteric realities. I have come to realize that my most successful "projects" in life begin with prayer and ceremony.

The Research Problem

Statement of the Problem

It is common for children in care to move through multiple placements over the course of their time in care. As previously stated, Crown Wards in Ontario move an average of 2.6 to 8.6 times, with the provincial average being four moves (Contenta et al., 2015, p. 20). The majority of these moves occur during a child's school years which impact their educational experience. While there is abundant research in the general area of placement disruption, the field is lacking in research specific to placement disruption in relation to Indigenous children in care and their educational experiences.

Therefore, I would like to bring much needed attention to this neglected issue, in the hope this research will benefit the Indigenous child welfare community in the following ways:

1. Help Indigenous children in care have their voices heard about the impact of placement disruption on their educational experiences.

2. Minimize the negative aspects of placement disruption on the educational experiences of Indigenous children in care.

3. Provide a framework for supporting children in care to start a new school, as identified by youth research participants.

I wanted to understand directly from Indigenous children in care how they experience multiple school changes and how they define the rewards and challenges of changing schools. Additionally, I was interested in the strategies that the children used to help them to adjust to their new schools and more specifically, whether they developed coping methods on their own or if these methods were provided by the child welfare and education systems (teachers, caregivers, and CAS workers). Ultimately, I hope my research will help children in care to be properly supported so that they may adjust more successfully emotionally and academically to a new school.

Research Questions

The overarching research question that motivates this study is "How can the child welfare and education systems help Indigenous children in care who experience multiple school moves adjust to their new school?" The specific research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the most rewarding and challenging experiences for Indigenous children in care when they start a new school?

2. How do Indigenous children in care prepare themselves to start a new school?

3. How can the child welfare and education systems assist children in care (who experience multiple school moves) adjust to their new schools?

Significance of the Research

The general lack of attention to children in care, their current placement experiences, and the impact of numerous moves on schooling, all urge the need for research. Due to the complexities and vulnerabilities inherent in using children in care as research participants, there is a tendency to avoid research on children in care and to instead rely upon case records and data bases (Unrau, 2007). This method fails to extrapolate important nuanced data related to Indigenous children in care. Thus, relying on records for research (without hearing directly from the source) runs the risk of designing faulty policies (Unrau, 2007, p. 129). The limited research on children in care illustrates the need for more study in this area, particularly in Indigenous communities where there is an overrepresentation of children in care (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Tellingly, of the 40 Canadian documents cited in an *Annotated Bibliography* in *Improving Educational Outcomes for Youth In/From Care: Fostering Success* (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016), only three of the documents listed (8%) were about Indigenous youth and two of the documents (5%) were specific to Indigenous youth in care. Even though this is arguably a recent list of literature relating to children in and from care, by a reputable source (School of Social Work, University of Victoria, Canada), little research about Indigenous children in care was included. With 48.1% of Canadian children in care (under 14 years old) being Indigenous (Statistics Canada, 2011), research needs to reflect the perspectives and realities of Indigenous children in care.

There is a longstanding history of poor relationships between Indigenous students and the schooling systems. Generally, Indigenous students struggle to find a sense of belonging in the current Eurocentric education milieu and they experience a variety of challenges such as: racism, culturally unresponsive curriculum, lack of compassion, poor teacher and student relationships,

and a lack of community involvement (Cajete, 2005; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Dion, Johnston & Rice, 2010; Dion & Salamanca, 2014; Donovan, 2011; Kanu, 2007; van Ingen & Halas, 2006). Thus, the Indigenous student's needs and resultant strategies should not be reflected in the masses.

Researchers capture the essence of child welfare reconciliation in a conference report, *Reconciliation in Child Welfare: Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth and Families* (2006). They define reconciliation by providing an Indigenous child welfare reconciliation framework that guides child welfare staff in how to work authentically with the Indigenous community using an Indigenous child welfare reconciliation lens. The child welfare reconciliation framework identifies the first step towards reconciliation as "Truth Telling" (Blackstock, Cross, George, Brown & Formsa, 2006, p. 9). Truth Telling involves sharing and listening to the "past and current harms experienced by Indigenous children" (Blackstock, et al., 2006, p. 9) in an effort to learn from the past and improve the future. My research is a form of child welfare reconciliation, where Indigenous children in care share their experiences of the direct impact of being in care (as the first step in Blackstock et al. [2006] Indigenous child welfare reconciliation model) in an effort to improve the future experiences of Indigenous children in care. This research offers a unique perspective that can only be provided by Indigenous children in care in the hope of helping educators, caregivers and child welfare workers better prepare and support Indigenous children in care to adjust to a new school.

It is obvious that research on Indigenous children in care is an important and necessary field of study; especially important is researching their educational experiences, considering the fact that doing well in school is viewed as an important aspect of being successful while growing up in care (Happer, McCreadie & Aldgate, 2006). My research addresses various gaps in the

limited understanding of the educational experiences of Indigenous children in care. By conducting research directly focused on the educational experiences of Indigenous children in care, rather than academic achievement, there is potential for deeper and broader understandings of the needs of Indigenous youth in care.

Since our provincial, territorial and federal governments[12] have a fiduciary responsibility to raise a child in care any research on children in care that provides new information is of tremendous value. In Ontario, the local CASs are responsible for the direct care of a child. Some CASs offer culturally specific services and culturally matched foster homes that provide opportunities for children in care to form meaningful relationships and support systems within their own community. Native Child and Family Services of Toronto is an Indigenous child welfare agency that provides such services.

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto:
The Community Research Partner

"Historically, the child welfare system has provided services based on a Euro-centric approach to child welfare. These forms of involvement have not been helpful to many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) people and in many cases have caused harm" (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, 2014, p. 14). In response to this colonial reality, and as

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[12] The Federal Government funds child welfare services for Indigenous children on-reserve and in the Yukon Territory, whereas the Provincial and Territorial Governments fund child welfare services off-reserve. (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017, p. 3)

part of the devolution[13] of child welfare services to Indigenous communities, in 2004, after almost 20 years of negotiating a CAS designation,[14] NCFST became a CAS under the Ontario *Child and Family Services Act*[15] (Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, n.d., Our History section, para. 7). As an Indigenous CAS, NCSFT's mission statement reflects its mandate to serve the Indigenous community of Toronto and to keep children safe by growing them up in healthy families:

> Native Child and Family Services of Toronto strives to provide a life of quality, well-being, caring and healing for our children and families in the Toronto Native Community. We do this by creating a service model that is culture based and respects the values of Native people, the extended family and the right to self-determination. (Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, n.d., Our Mission section)

NCFST is one of 49 CASs in Ontario today (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, n.d., Child Welfare Facts and Figures section). NCFST is a "multi-service" CAS, offering community-based social services alongside child welfare services. Although NCFST has been providing social services to the Toronto Indigenous community since its founding in 1986 (Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, n.d., About Us section), it has only been a CAS for 15 years. It may be considered a young CAS when compared to more tenured CASs who

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[13]"**Devolution:** Subsection 2(2), paragraph 5 of the [Ontario] *Child and Family Services Act* provides that one of the purposes of the *Act,* in addition to the paramount purposes, and so long as it is consistent with the paramount purposes, is to recognize that Aboriginal people should be entitled to provide, wherever possible, their own child and family services and that all services to Aboriginal children and families should be provided in a manner that recognizes their culture, heritage and traditions and the concept of the extended family" (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, 2010, p. 7).

[14]A CAS in Ontario is designated under the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* as having the authority to complete its legislated child welfare work, also known as a "mandated" or "designated" agency. Agencies not yet designated, but taking steps to become a CAS, are known as a "pre-mandated" or "pre-designated" agency.

[15] On April 30, 2018, the Ontario *Child and Family Services Act* was replaced with the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*. Retrieved on September 21, 2018 from: http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/professionals/childwelfare/modern-legislation.aspx

have been in operation for over 100 years (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, 2014, Front Matter section).

Alternatively, when comparing NCFST's tenure to other Indigenous CASs and pre-designated Indigenous agencies, NCFST is a veteran and leader in the provision of culturally-based community social services to urban Indigenous children and families. NCFST, responsible for the province's second-largest population of Indigenous children in care, stands as a significant representation of the inherent right of Indigenous peoples to govern themselves.

NCFST offers programming in five distinct areas: child welfare, youth, early years, clinical, and the Scarborough Child and Family Life Centre, the latter a centre that is considered a "Site of Practice under the Ontario provincial Best Start Child and Family Centre Model focused on culturally responsive programming and Aboriginal outcomes" (Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, Western University & Carroll Consulting, 2015, p. 84). Examples of the community programs offered at NCFST include:

- Camp: summer day camp and overnight camp

- Education: General Equivalency Diploma (GED), Native Learning Centres (alternative high school classrooms), and school board social workers

- Social/Recreation: after school program, boys and girls groups, community lunch and learn, traditional drumming, traditional dancing, Music Not Mischief, gym night, senior's luncheon, community kitchen, and food share

- Clinical Services: addictions/mental health counselling, case management, domestic violence, developmental services, and psychological assessments

- Early Years: Aboriginal Head Start (four pre-school classrooms), Aboriginal Ontario Early Years Centre, licensed child care, family home visitors, and parenting programs

- Youth Services: transition/shelter housing services, 7th Generation Image Makers art program, Native Youth Resource Centre (drop-in), youth council, youth justice, youth outreach, and youth in transition (Native Child and Family Services et al., 2015, p. 84).

During NCFST's 15-year tenure as a CAS, no research has been conducted on NCFST's children in care. Hence, this research project is the first of its kind. NCFST began a Child Welfare Reconciliation Process in 2016 with Indigenous children in care and current/former clients, seeking broad information on child welfare experiences. NCFST values direct input from Indigenous children in care. This research project supports their efforts by focusing exclusively on NCFST's Indigenous youth in care who experience multiple school changes. My hope is that the research findings will demonstrate the importance of the experiences of Indigenous youth in care (in Ontario and beyond) who have multiple school moves, informing policies and practices in ways that help children in care better adjust to their new schools and the educational milieu.

Children in Care in Ontario: A Short Introduction

In 2014, there were 23,341 children in care in Ontario being raised by the government as "State wards" (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, 2014, p. 3). The Ontario practice for raising State wards is based on a model of care called "Looking After Children" (LAC). The LAC model originated in the United Kingdom in the 1990s (Child Welfare League of Canada, n.d., Canadian Looking After Children [CanLAC] Project section, para. 1) and was later adapted by Ontario as part of the Ontario Practice Model (Vincent, Moffat, Paquet, Flynn, & Marquis,

2008). Ontario LAC, or "OnLAC," places the responsibility on caregivers and child welfare

workers to raise children in care in accordance with their developmental needs, which are

categorized in dimensions. The OnLAC dimensions are *Health, Education, Identity, Family and*

Social Relationships, Social Presentation, Emotional and Behavioural Development, and Self-

Care Skills (Child Welfare League of Canada, n.d., CanLAC Project section, para.4). OnLAC

dimensions are embedded into the child's Plan of Care[16] as well as into the AAR, which is

similar to the Plan of Care but completed annually and more extensively, with the child,

caregiver, and CAS worker. The AAR is an assessment tool that informs the Plan of Care.

> Children's Aid Societies use the AAR to develop a plan of care for children and youth in
>
> care from the ages of 0 to 21+. The AAR is completed with children and youth who have
>
> been in care for at least 1 year. It relies on a developmental approach in which a child's
>
> progress is examined in a holistic way by examining seven dimensions on a yearly basis.
>
> The tool consists of questions that identify children's strengths with the aim of achieving
>
> better outcomes for them that lead to greater success in adulthood. (Ontario Association
>
> of Children's Aid Societies [OACAS], n.d., OACAS Launches Updated Assessment and
>
> Action Record, A Planning Tool for Children and Youth in Care section, para.2)

> The OnLAC model of care is built on a resiliency framework developed by The Search

Institute.[17] It is normally a parent's responsibility to create a protective and safe environment in

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[16]Plans of Care are legislated recordings that a CAS worker must complete for every child on their caseload. The recordings are required at certain intervals (30, 90 and 180 days thereafter), starting a new recording rhythm at the onset of each placement move. The Plan of Care recordings summarize the child in care team's goals/actions intended to promote and monitor positive developmental outcomes for children in care.

[17]The Search Institute characterizes resiliency in terms of developmental assets. There are 40 developmental external and internal assets that are considered protective factors in healthy child development. "There are 20 external assets, divided into four categories (support, empowerment, boundaries [&] expectations, and constructive use of time), and 20 internal assets, also divided into four categories (commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies and positive identity). External assets, working together with internal assets, promote protection and resilience." (Vincent et al., 2008, p. 2).

order to raise healthy children. For children in care, this is the government's responsibility. Thus, it is incumbent on the child welfare system to help a child develop resiliency by increasing the number of protective factors in their lives.

OnLAC is designed to raise children in care with attention on increasing their protective factors as a pathway towards increasing their resiliency. Therefore, the OnLac model promotes healthy relationships between children and others as a mechanism to build resiliency. This includes forming healthy relationships in the education milieu, which is a critical element in positive school experiences (Merritt & Snyder, 2015).

Voices of Youth In and From Care

In a November 2011 public hearing, youth in care from across Ontario, along with their advocates and child welfare champions, gave deputations at Queen's Park (the Ontario Legislative Building, in Toronto, Ontario) concerning their experiences of being in care and having to leave care. Known as the Youth Leaving Care Hearings,[18] this historical event was led by youth who had been in care, offering hope and a vision for improved child welfare services in Ontario.

During the public hearings there were 183 submissions. The Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, in consultation with a researcher, reviewed the submissions and identified the following themes of youth in and from care: "We are vulnerable. We are

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[18]"The Youth Leaving Care Hearings were held on November 18th and 25th, 2011 at Queen's Park. With the support of the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, youth in and from care organized and ran the two-day event on the issues facing youth leaving care." (Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, n.d., Frequently Asked Questions section, para. 2, retrieved on January 24, 2016 from: http://provincialadvocate.on.ca/main/en/hearings/pages/FAQs.html)

isolated. We are left out of our lives. No one is really there for us. Care is unpredictable. Care ends and we struggle." (Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2012, p. 7).

The direct result of the Youth Leaving Care Hearings was the establishment of the Youth Leaving Care Working Group in July 2012 by the Minister of Children and Youth Services in conjunction with the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (Youth Leaving Care, 2013, p.1). The Youth Leaving Care Working Group was tasked with the responsibility of developing a framework for child welfare reform specific to the recommendations from the Youth Leaving Care Hearings, which are captured in the *Final Report of the Youth Leaving Care Working Group* (2013).

The *Final Report of the Youth Leaving Care Working Group* (2013) recognized the importance of having education professionals trained in the unique needs of youth in and from care and made a compelling recommendation to improve their educational experiences:

> It is essential and urgent that teachers and school staff are knowledgeable about mental health, emotional health, social, cultural and educational challenges that children and youth in and from care may face and are able to connect them to appropriate programs offered in the school and the community. (Youth Leaving Care Working Group, 2013, p. 10)

Additionally, the *Final Report of the Youth Leaving Care Working Group* (2013) highlights the need for caregivers and other professionals within education systems, health systems, youth justice systems, and child welfare systems to work more collaboratively in the best interests of youth in or from care (Youth Leaving Care Working Group, 2013). Ontario's approach of coordinated systems, in which foster parents and caregivers are central to supporting a child's positive school experience, are recognized across countries as a primary consideration

in educational planning for children in care (The Who Cares? Trust, 2015). Further, the need for foster parents/caregivers to be properly trained and supported to manage the special needs of a child in care is recognized in the United Kingdom's *The Who Cares? Trust* report (2015) as a required skill and an important aspect of the system of care:

> Primary carers are crucial to ensuring that education is supported and the children they care for are benefiting from it and are on track to realizing their potential. Yet some foster carers and key workers may be confused by the education system, which may have changed since they, or their own birth children went to school, and feel that they are unable to support young people. They may also feel unable to challenge the school or local authority about aspects of the education of the child in their care. (p. 30)

Children have consistently expressed their vulnerability while being raised by the government (Martin & Jackson, 2002; Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2012; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). Generally, youth who exit care: "have low academic achievement; are more often unemployed or underemployed; often experience homelessness or unstable housing; are frequently involved with the criminal justice system; become parents early; have worsened health outcomes; and experience deep loneliness" (Kovarikova, 2017, p. 6). Further, youth who exit care are known to have higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder than war veterans (Kovarikova, 2017, p. 24). With so many systems involved in raising children in State care, any strategic direction or reform (from the government) needs to be informed by children growing up in these systems in order to properly respond to their social, emotional and educational needs. As these children struggle to achieve academic success and develop meaningful relationships and support systems in their lives, they continue to be challenged by the

number of moves they experience during their time in the child welfare systems (Martin & Jackson, 2002).

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in a well-being model of the Medicine Wheel. I have received various teachings (mostly Ojibway) on the Medicine Wheel from Elders and traditional Knowledge Carriers in tipis, sweat lodge ceremonies, formal training sessions, along with my own personal readings and research on the subject. Traditionally, the Medicine Wheel is a way of life that allows for and advocates maintaining balance in one's life. "You may see the Medicine Wheel is presented in several different ways." (University of Ottawa, n.d., Indigenous Medicine and Healing Practices section, para. 3). Although a common version of the Medicine Wheel is a well-being model that "teaches us to take a holistic view, acknowledging the balance of the physical with mental, emotional and spiritual well-being." (Lavallée, 2007, p. 149). According to the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition (2010), the Medicine Wheel is defined as:

> The Medicine Wheel is a circular symbol representing the wholeness of traditional Native life. It is a perfectly balanced shape without a top or bottom, length or width. It represents constant movement and change. It also represents and symbolizes unity, peace, harmony and courage. It is a testimony of the human being's ability to survive and to maintain balance. The ultimate goal is to strike a harmonious balance in life. The circular form of the Medicine Wheel shows the relationship of all things in a unity, a perfect form, and suggests the cyclical nature of all relationships and interactions. Everything in the universe is part of a single whole. [….] On the surface of the Earth, all is given by the Four Sacred Directions: North, South, East and West. Each of these directions contributes

a vital part to the wholeness of the Earth. Each has physical powers as well as spiritual

powers, as do all things. (pp. 3–4)

The colours of the Medicine Wheel are usually yellow, red, black, and white, believed by

some to represent the colours of humankind (Nabigon, 2006, p. 60). Mostly, you will see yellow

located in the East, red located in the South, black located in the West and white located in the

North. Although, sometimes you may see the blue instead of black in the West, and sometimes

you will see red instead of yellow in the East. Depending on the Elder and the type of Medicine

Wheel teaching (e.g., well-being, sacred plants/medicines, seasons, life-cycle etc.), each colour

represents its dimension and direction. For example, yellow is mostly seen in the East to

represent the rising sun which is perceived as the starting place of our lives; "where we come

from" (Pitawanakwat, 2006, The East – Waabinong section, para. 1). Similar to the common

location of the colours, the well-being dimensions are usually located with the spiritual

dimension in the East, the emotional dimension in the South, the mental dimension in the West

and the physical dimension in the North (Association of Native Child and Family Services

Agencies of Ontario, p. 3)

The Medicine Wheel is how I understand the world around me. Since I think with and

through the Medicine Wheel, this is also how I understand the study. I have internalized the

Medicine Wheel and it is the only way I reflect on life. I did not grow up seeing the world

through the Medicine Wheel: it was not until I was in my 40's. It was actually an odd feeling to

wake up one day and see the world in this light – as if a light had been turned on and it had no

off switch. My use of the Medicine Wheel for this study is not simply about acknowledging an

Indigenous way of knowing, it is a matter of being.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Educational Experiences of Indigenous Children in Care: A Gap

A rigorous search of the extant literature reveals that there is no research that specifically examines how Indigenous children in care experience changing schools as a result of placement disruption. However, in Ontario there is data on the cultural needs of Indigenous children in care and their educational achievements (rather than experiences). The University of Ottawa presents data on all Ontario children in care who have been in the care system for over a year. This data is derived from an analysis of the AAR recordings in an annual OnLac provincial report, *Looking After Children In Ontario: Good Parenting, Good Outcomes Ontario Provincial Report* (University of Ottawa, 2014). Included in this report is a section entitled *Opportunities for First Nations, Métis & Inuit Young People*. The AAR topics relate to Indigenous children in care specific to their cultural experiences (University of Ottawa, 2014, p. 13).While the University of Ottawa's OnLAC provincial report does capture the cultural experiences of Indigenous children in care, it does not capture their educational experiences beyond simple achievement data. It shows how Ontario children in care are doing academically, in reading, mathematics, science, and their overall achievement (University of Ottawa, 2014, p. 16). By measuring and tracking the grades, learning, class arrival times, and timely completion of assignments of children in care (University of Ottawa, 2014, p. 17) the assessment of "success" is based on academic achievement, which does not account for the rich details of a child's educational experiences.

Although there is a gap in knowledge about Indigenous children in care's experiences of changing schools as a result of placement disruption, existing research examines certain aspects related to children in care such as: educational outcomes, impact of placement disruption, special

needs and enhanced academic supports, foster parent support, the importance of having

friendships, and the value of extra-curricular activities. Research on Indigenous youth and

students encompasses their experiences, educational outcomes, increased risk of bullying, and

culture as a protective factor. Additionally, having a sense of belonging at school is an area of

study. These areas of research are discussed briefly below.

<div align="center">**Research Related to Children in Care**</div>

Educational Outcomes of Children in Care

"Only 44 per cent of youth in and from care graduate from high school compared to 82

per cent of Ontario youth" (Youth Leaving Care Working Group, 2013, p. 3). Similarly, in

British Columbia (BC), 47.4 % of youth in care graduate high school compared to 84 % of

students in the general BC student population (British Columbia [BC] Ministry of Children and

Family Development, 2014, p. 89).

While a number of factors contribute to these poor outcomes[19], multiple moves and a

poor systemic response to the educational needs of children in care consistently emerge as

important, highlighting the need for improved coordination between child welfare and education

systems (Driscoll, 2011; Harker, et al., 2004; Pecora, Williams, Kessler, Hiripi, O'Brien,

Emerson, & Torres, 2006). Compounding the pre-existing barriers to academic success for a

child in care is the added problem of numerous disruptive changes in placements (Driscoll, 2011;

Harker, et al., 2004; Pecora et al., 2006). It follows that children involved in the child welfare

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[19]The studies reviewed suggest that the relationship between being in care and low educational outcomes is partly
explained by pre-care experiences, such as maltreatment and neglect (O'Higgins, Sebba & Luke, 2015, p. 5).

system are at higher risk for falling behind (Trocmé, MacLaurin, Fallon, Shlonskyi, Mulcahy, & Esposito, 2009, p. 3). In fact, in a 2002 BC study by Mitic and Rimer, the researchers concluded that 50% of children in care in grades 10 and 12 were behind at least one grade in comparison to children who were not in care (Mitic & Rimer, 2002, p. 400).

In a revealing study by Martin and Jackson (2002), the researchers concluded that having a caring support system was critical for children in care to experience academic success. The 38 former children in care identified that they needed a supportive environment in order to achieve academic success. The research participants defined this to include the types of supports they needed: such as being treated "normally" (like everyone else), having qualified caregivers and child welfare workers, having meaningful relationships with their caregivers and child welfare workers, the provision of resources (like books and a place to do their homework) and encouragement to attend post-secondary school (Martin & Jackson, 2002, pp. 124–127). Interestingly, the Martin and Jackson (2002) study participants noted that the child welfare and education systems had low expectations of them to attend school or to succeed in school. In contrast, they wanted to be held accountable to attend school and more importantly, they wanted to be held to a higher standard to apply themselves and to be expected to do well at school.

Relatedly, research confirms that a teacher's low expectations of their students produces inferior results (Li & Rubie-Davies, 2017; Staton, 2018), which is particularly concerning for children in care who are a group known for their low high school graduation rates (BC Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2014, p. 89). Thus, a teacher's low expectations for a child in care can actually thwart their academic success. For a child who is statistically prone to fall behind in the first place (Mitic & Rimer, 2002, p. 400), having a teacher create a self-defeating prophecy for them simply worsens their academic situation.

The Impact of Placement Disruption for Children in Care

In child welfare, "placement disruption" refers to a change in a living situation for a child in care. When a child enters care, they usually leave their original school and enroll in a school close to their new "placement" (foster home, group home, etc.). There are a variety of terms used to refer to a placement change for a child in care, as Unrau (2007) discovered in a literature review compiled of 43 studies spanning nine countries and in which 22 terms for "placement disruption" were identified and examined:

> The collection of 43 studies examined produced nearly two dozen concept labels to communicate the idea of a placement move, which included: move, disruption, breakdown, obvious breakdown, successful placement, placement success, placement pattern, transfer, shifts in placement, stability, instability, placement pathways, spell, placement change, change in placement, move event, patterns of movement, number of placements, status of placement, stability-within-placement, quality of placement, and placement failure. (p. 129)

The research confirms that placement moves have a negative impact on a child's psychological and developmental well-being (ACS-NYU Children's Trauma Institute, 2012; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2000; Barber & Delfabbro 2003; Fanshel & Shinn, 1978; Harden, 2004; Jokobsen, 2013; Koh et al., 2014; Newton, Litrownik, & Landsverk, 2000). Research tends to focus on understanding the factors contributing to placement disruption and poor placement outcomes (Brown & Bednar, 2006; Jokobsen, 2013; Unrau, 2007) in order to recognize the risks of placement break downs and to prevent disruption in the first place. For example, a literature review by researchers Brown and Bednar (2006) determined that the following factors were contributors of placement breakdowns: foster child factors (behaviour);

foster parent factors (declining health, age, and burn out and fatigue); relationship factors

(between the child and the foster parent, between the child and the foster parent's biological

children and between the foster parent and the family of origin); and external support (the poor

working relationship between the foster parent and the placing agency and the lack of supports)

was cited as a significant reason for placement breakdown (pp. 1498–1500). By exploring the

factors that contribute to placement breakdown the voice of the child in care however often goes

unheard, as scant research is conducted with the children who are experiencing the "disruption"

(Jokobsen, 2013). "Foster children are a marginalized group when it comes to research and

empirical knowledge building efforts focused on understanding moves from one placement to

another in the system of care" (Unrau, 2007, p. 122). This marginalization is evident in

quantitative studies with large numbers of children in care (Barber et al., 2001; Hussey & Guo,

2005; Koh et al., 2014; Leathers, 2006; Rolock et al., 2009) where research is based on

placement data extracted from child welfare sources rather than learning about the experiences of

placement disruption directly from the children in care.

Unsurprisingly, children with more mental health/behaviour problems change placements

more frequently (Barber et al., 2001; Hussey & Guo, 2005; Jokobsen, 2013; Koh et al., 2014;

Leathers 2006; Rolock et al., 2009), and children who have a strong sense of belonging and

acceptance in their placement move less frequently (Koh et al., 2014; Leathers, 2006). While

studies of this type (about the negative impact of placement disruption) are readily available,

there are few studies that examine children's experiences. My difficulties finding studies

involving children in care and their placement experience is affirmed by a 2007 study by Unrau

(2007) where the researcher concluded that in the majority of cases, the research did not "reliably

represent the viewpoint of any professional or client group within the system of care" (p. 122).

While children's experiences of placement disruption is a less popular research item than the predictors of placement disruption (Unrau, 2007), the negative experiences of children in care who experience multiple moves are consistently recorded in this literature. These experiences include a tremendous sense of loss and helplessness, trauma and fear, imposed changes in communities and schools, and de-stabilized relationships necessitating the need to form new relationships with various child welfare staff, mental health staff, peers, adults, and caregivers (ACS-NYU Children's Trauma Institute, 2012; Hyde & Kammerer, 2009; Unrau, 2007).

Where placement instability contributes to a range of negative outcomes, in contrast, placement stability can produce positive outcomes, especially in the education systems. For example, placement stability contributes to a positive school experience, as evidenced in Harker et al. (2004): "Placement stability was the sole explanation given to explain shifts in perceived impact by the seven young people who changed from recording a positive impact [school experience] to no effect" (Harker et al., 2004, p. 279). Youth in care emphatically stress the importance of placement stability in educational success: "One of the key things is [placement] stability, it's not to move kids unless it's absolutely necessary, and if you are going to move them don't move them from their school" (Martin & Jackson, 2002, p. 25). The disruption in placements, and the subsequent detachment from schools and communities after each move, impact a child's ability to form and maintain friendships (Hyde & Kammerer, 2009).

The school experience of children who move while in care is swept up as part of the aftermath of placement disruption, rather than being treated as a single phenomenon.

Special Needs & Enhanced Academic Supports for Children in Care

Children in care are likely to need enhanced academic supports (Brownell, Roos, MacWilliam, Leclair, Ekuma & Fransoo, 2010, p. 806; Mantilla, 2012, p. 24). "Although there is substantial evidence that youths in foster care fall further behind their peers academically as they progress through school, intervening on their behalf is a challenge." (Tyre, 2012, p. 1). As previously stated, there are complex reasons why children in care have poor academic outcomes, starting with the obvious reason that they have not done well since their start. "The research literature suggests that some young people in care begin to lag behind children in the general population even as infants or toddlers in their motor, social, and cognitive development (Flynn, Côté & Cheung, 2016).", (as cited in Weegar, Hickey, Shewchuk, Fall & Flynn, 2016, p. 54). While early intervention is a compelling approach, for children in care who have missed these early years developmental opportunities, the first order of business is to respond to the current problem at hand by helping them to "catch up" to their developmental and academic grade level.

Thus, the child welfare and education systems are faced with the challenge of improving the academic outcomes for children in care with limited research and experience in this area. Until the last decade, little research yielded ways to improve the academic outcomes of children in care:

> Before about 2006, little controlled research on effective educational interventions for young people in care took place. [... Studies] also found that tutoring had been the most frequently evaluated intervention and that 4 out of 5 tutoring evaluations had yielded positive results. Overall, 9 of the 11 studies reported positive outcomes, suggesting that the educational success of children in care can be improved. (Weegar et al., 2016, p. 63)

While the efficacy of the types of academic supports have not been properly researched, (given their recent emergence) most efforts are yielding positive results. "Although strong evidence of their effectiveness is not available, these advocacy programs [Crown Ward Education Championship Teams across Ontario] have been associated with promising findings, such as less school absenteeism, fewer unplanned school changes, or better high school graduation rates" (Weegar et al., 2016, p. 6).

Regardless of the limited research on the benefits of academic supports or the types of supportive programs that should be offered (Weegar et al., 2016, p. 63), it is clear that academic supports are necessary to improve the educational outcomes and experiences for children in care. As well, support systems need to include all levels of government, community partners and caregivers (Weegar et al., 2016, pp. 30–31). For example, in 2015 the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ontario Ministry of Education created a *Joint Protocol for Student Achievement* "JPSA" that provides a framework for school boards and CASs to work together to "improve the educational achievement and well-being of both children and youth in the care of, and those receiving services from a CAS" (Joint Protocol for Student Achievement [JPSA] Template, 2015, p. 7). There are five key elements of the JPSA (2015): *Information Sharing Processes* (between CASs and school boards)*; Administrative Processes* (school transfers); *Planning for Student Achievement*; *The Service Resolution Process*; and, *Monitoring and Evaluation of the Protocol* (p. 3). As part of the JPSA (2015), school boards are required to have "REACH" Teams (Realizing Educational Achievement for Children/Youth Teams) whose primary task is to "support and promote the educational achievement of students and the development of Education Success Plans" (p. 6). The JPSA and its specialized services (for children involved in the child welfare system) serves as an example of how the child welfare and

education systems can work more effectively to support children in care to have improved academic outcomes.

Despite the fact that Ontario implemented the JPSA in 2015 (Memorandum from the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015), the 15 research participants (during the 2016 focus groups) did not describe any experiences of receiving specialized educational services as per the JPSA.

Foster Parent Support for Children in Care

With poor educational outcomes related to children in care (BC Ministry of Child and Family Development, 2014; Harker et al., 2004; Hayden, 2005; Martin & Jackson, 2002; Tyre, 2012; Youth Leaving Care Working Group, 2013), finding children in care who express positive sentiments about their experiences in school is hard to do. However, despite overwhelming odds, some positive themes can be plucked out of the literature which offer advice and hope to a system inundated with bad news and alarming statistics. For example, "Young people's respect for and gratitude to people who were supportive of their education and aspirations were cited as motivation for them to improve themselves, or 'give something back'" (Driscoll, 2013, p. 145). Likewise, in a study in the United Kingdom, 38 former children in care deemed "high achievers" by attaining a grade level of "A" or equivalent (Martin & Jackson, 2002, p. 123) offered insights into how supportive home environments were influential in their educational success:

> The most frequent advice given by our sample was to emphasize the necessity for a child to receive positive encouragement from significant others. "Seventy-four per cent of participants stressed the vital importance of residential carers, foster carers or parents

showing an active interest in their education and giving them support and encouragement

to do well." (Martin & Jackson, 2002, p. 124)

The Martin and Jackson (2002) study is an important contribution to the field, as it offers

insights into what children in care need to be successful in school. Notably, the majority of study

participants who deemed "positive encouragement from significant others" an important factor in

their educational success also had achieved post-secondary degrees (Martin & Jackson, 2002, p.

124). The theme of children in care needing supportive adults to help them do well (in school) is

consistent in the literature. For example, in a study by Happer, McCreadie, and Aldgate (2006),

the researchers interviewed 32 former children in care. The study concluded that that there were

5 factors that helped children in care to be successful[20]: *having people who care, experiencing*

stability, being given high expectations, receiving encouragement and support, and being able to

participate and achieve. (p. 3). As for "people who care", foster parents and residential staff

were identified as the primary source of support:

> Twenty-three of the 32 participants, when asked what helped them to be successful,
>
> immediately identified a person who cared about them: "My foster carers trust me, and
>
> they love me like I was their own daughter." (Tanya). [....] Participants described adults
>
> who provided them with positive parenting and meaningful childhood experiences: "We
>
> were always involved … going along with my foster mother to dances and stuff like that
>
> which was actually great fun and a big treat … and there were holidays … it was a family
>
> situation" (Shona). (Happer et al., 2006, p.10)

In contrast to having a supportive foster parent, children in care attribute their lack of

school success to a "Lack of guidance or support from a caring adult" (Rutman & Hubberstey,

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[20] Happer et al., (2006) defined success as: "[P]articipants are demonstrably able to make and sustain meaningful relationships [and] participants are engaged in some kind of work, education, training or meaningful activity." (p. 2).

2016, p. ix). Following this line of reasoning, several studies point to the benefits of a child's academic success when foster parents create positive home learning environments, and even go as far as tutoring their children (Flynn, Marquis, Paquet & Peeke, 2011; Flynn, Marquis, Paquet, Peeke, & Aubry, 2012).

Aside from the benefits of having a supportive caregiver contribute to a child's academic success, foster parents play a critical role in forming meaningful relationships with children in care, and without this, children are more vulnerable to placement instability (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016, p. 32). Frequent placement moves disrupts the child's ability to form a meaningful relationship with their caregivers. The vulnerability of children in care is mitigated by "positive encouragement from significant others" (Martin & Jackson, 2002, p. 124). The goal of child welfare services (after a child is brought into care) is to place them in caring homes. Thus, foster parents represent significant support systems for children in care.

The Importance of Friendships for Children in Care

Vaquera (2009) stresses the importance of having friendships in school and their impact on a student's school experience: "Because adolescents spend the majority of their time with friends and not family members (Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000), it is reasonable to expect that friends exert a considerable influence on a student's academic experience" (Vaquera, 2009, p. 493). Similarly, Merritt and Snyder (2015) look at the quality/importance of school friendships for children in care as they correlate to "positive behaviour" (p. 483) by demonstrating a relationship between peer connectedness and meaningful covariates (related to non-problematic behaviours). The researchers analyzed the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being II (NSCAW II) dataset and measured perceived peer connectedness alongside meaningful

covariates such as "increased social skills; fewer deviant peer affiliations; and those who take

responsibility in part-time jobs and chores" (Merritt & Snyder, 2015, p. 483). They found that

levels of peer connectedness related to levels of positive or problematic behaviour:

> Results demonstrated stronger school friend connectedness is a protective factor in that,
>
> children who perceive strong peer connections at school are more likely to classify below
>
> the problem behavior threshold than those with weaker peer connections. [….] Research
>
> often fails to consider the importance of assessing children's experiential sense of
>
> belonging and peer connectedness in school settings as possible mitigating factors of
>
> positive behavior. (Merritt & Snyder, 2015, p. 483)

Merritt and Snyder (2015) conclude that peer connectedness is "highly protective" for

children in care, which in turn buffers them from non-problematic behaviours[21] (Merritt &

Snyder, 2015, p. 492). Given that children in care are prone to a "host of adverse socio-

behavioural outcomes, such as delinquency, fewer social competencies, substance abuse, poor

academic trajectories, aggressive behaviour, and mental health issues" (Merritt & Snyder, 2015,

p. 484), there is a crucial need to ensure that they have a positive school experience, a sense of

belonging, and opportunities to form friendships during their time in care. "The key for some

students to stay in school is that they have a sense of belonging and that they feel safe in their

school environment" (Hamer, 2012. p.11). The effect of placement disruption and its impact on

children's ability to form meaningful relationships were identified as "major barrier[s]" in a

British Columbia study with 20 former youth in care:

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[21]The Merritt and Snyder research (2015) "focuses on non-problematic (e.g., optimal/normative) behaviors as a measure of well-being among child welfare-involved youths, which are characterized as 'normal', according to the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 2001) behavior scale" (Merritt & Snyder, 2015, p. 484).

Multiple changes in CYICs' [Children and youth in care] lives — related to their

placement, school or social worker — were seen as a major barrier when it came to

forming stable and lasting connections with schools, teachers, foster parents, friends, and

so forth. Without these relationships, children and youth potentially were without a

supportive and healthy social network and thus were more vulnerable. (Rutman &

Hubberstey, 2016, p. 32)

The Value of Extra-Curricular Activities for Children in Care

"Looked-after[22] children are arguably one of the most disadvantaged groups in society

and constitute a 'hidden group' in relation to sport and physical activity research, policy and

practice." (Quarmby, 2014, p. 944). Youth understand firsthand the benefits of participating in

extra-curricular activities, for example, in a University of Victoria study, *Improving Education*

Outcomes For Youth In/From Care: Fostering Success (2016), where 20 youth from care were

interviewed, one of the key themes of "what helps" to be successful at school was "Fostering

participation in extra-curricular activities" (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016, p. x).

As research builds on the educational components of success, the social and recreational

components that contribute to a positive educational experience deserve their own special

attention too. Sports and extra-curricular activities form meaningful childhood memories, and for

children under duress, those activities offer them respite from their distressing life circumstances.

For example, residential school survivors had positive memories of recreational activities during

their school years:

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[22] The term "looked-after" is equivalent to a "child in care".

At the Lestock school, Geraldine Shingoose took refuge in extracurricular activities:

"One of the good things that I would do to try and get out of just the abuse was try to, I

would join track-meet, try and be, and I was quite athletic in boarding school. And I also

joined the band, and I played a trombone. And, and that was something that took me

away from the school, and just to, it was a relief." (Truth and Reconciliation Commission

of Canada, 2015, What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation, p. 80)

Although the residential school experience and the child in care experience are quite

different, the lessons learned from Indigenous children's memories and experiences during their

residential school years show an affinity for sports and recreation (Truth and Reconciliation

Commission of Canada, 2015, What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation,

pp. 80–83), as they offered glimmers of light during periods of darkness. This illustrates the need

to pay more attention to offering extra-curricular activities for Indigenous children in care, who

are most often under a heightened degree of stress from coming into care and changing

placements and schools. After moving a child in care, the focus is to stabilize the child into the

new placement and settle them into their new school, which responds to their immediate needs.

While a positive academic outcome is a primary consideration of the child's service plan, the

social and recreational outcomes deserve equal attention as part of a child's educational success:

Changes in placements and consequently schools mean that for the majority of looked-

after children [aka children in care], school attendance is problematic (Murray, 2012). As

such, looked-after children often miss out on school-based sporting activities and are

more dependent on out-of-school activities than other children. What is apparent in this

study is that changes in placement may also impact on engagement with sport and

physical activity outside of school. (Quarmby, 2014, p. 951)

Multiple school transitions and their impact on extra-curricular activities are experienced

similarly by military children who move frequently. For example, they may miss trying out for

certain teams because they started school late, or their new school does not offer the same sports

as their previous school (Ruff & Keim, 2014, p. 105).

It becomes clear through these studies that changing schools has a ripple effect on certain

areas of a child's development. There is mounting evidence of the benefits of sports and the

impact of physical activity on ones' psychosocial well-being, especially for children in care:

> It is thought that enabling looked-after children to engage in sport and physical activity
>
> 'equal to their peers' may provide fruitful opportunities to enhance their physical and
>
> psychological well-being (DfES [Department for Education and Skills], 2007, p. 10).
>
> This belief that sport and physical activity can aid young people's social and moral
>
> development through its inherent 'character building' capacities has led to their use as
>
> tools for re-engaging disaffected youth (Sandford & Duncombe, 2011). A growing body
>
> of international research suggests that sport can help strengthen relationships and
>
> promote 'active citizenship', build resilience and address social problems of disadvantage
>
> and exclusion through the generation of social capital (Bailey, 2005). (Quarmby, 2014, p.
>
> 945)

There is no doubt of the health benefits for children who actively participate in sports.

Along with the health benefits derived from participating in sports, children also create positive

childhood experiences. In fact, positive childhood experiences can outweigh the negative

experiences in one's life. For example, in Haig-Brown's (1988) research on residential school

survivors where some students held negative memories of their school experience, one former

student recalled his residential school experiences in a positive light as he "spoke highly of the school largely as a result of his association with team sports" (p.75).

There is a psychoanalytic school of thought (Bowlby, 1982) where childhood experiences predict a person's future behaviour and outlook on life. This is known as a person's "internal working model" (Bowlby, 1982, p. 12). A person's internal working model informs them how to interpret and interact with the world around them (Bowlby, 1982, p. 12) stressing the importance of childhood memories. "[M]emory plays a huge part in how we make sense of the world – how we organize our past experiences and how we judge how we should act in the future" (American Psychological Association, 2018, para. 1). Positive memories are proven to contribute to good health in "that good memories seem to have a positive effect on health and well-being, possibly through the ways that they reduce stress or help us maintain healthy choices in life"(American Psychological Association, 2018, para. 1). Thus, the memories in a child's life sets the stage for their adult behaviour and influences their overall health. Notably, some childhood memories last a life time as researchers point to the enduring effect of one's childhood memories:

> The most surprising finding was that we thought the effects would fade over time because participants were trying to recall things that happened sometimes over 50 years ago. One might expect childhood memories to matter less and less over time, but these memories still predicted better physical and mental health when people were in middle age and older adulthood[.] (American Psychological Association, 2018, para. 7)

The research findings above (American Psychological Association, 2018; Bowlby, 1982; Haig-Brown, 1988) underline the vital need to create positive childhood memories and experiences for Indigenous children in care as the foundation for their well-being. Further, that offering Indigenous children in care opportunities to participate in sports and extra-curricular

activities is a good way to promote these types of positive experiences that contribute to their well-being.

Research Related to Indigenous Children and Youth

Experiences of Indigenous Children and Youth

Historically, Indigenous children in care have been overrepresented in Canada's child welfare system. They are more likely to be brought into care than non-Indigenous children (Blackstock & Trocmé, 2005). "In Ontario, 3% of the child population under age 15 is Aboriginal, and 21% of the children in care are Aboriginal children living off-reserve" (Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group, 2015, p. 7). The overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care is an important factor in child welfare, as the significant number of Indigenous children in care compels the child welfare system to consider their distinct needs.

Indigenous youth face a variety of pre-existing social-risk factors simply by being Indigenous. Indigenous youth are predisposed to high rates of suicide, substance abuse, poverty, poor mental health outcomes, poor physical health outcomes, poor educational outcomes, overrepresentation in the child welfare and criminal justice systems, and multi-generational loss and trauma (Alfred, 2009; Canadian Council of Provincial Child and Youth Advocates, 2010; Holmes, 2006; Kirmayer, Brass & Tait, 2000; McIvor, Napoleon & Dickie, 2009; Mussell, Cardiff & White, 2004; Verniest, 2006). Similarly, in a 2008 report *Aboriginal Youth in Canada: Emerging Issues, Research Priorities, and Policy Implications*, it was noted that Indigenous youth who were "growing up in disadvantaged communities face higher risks of violence, fewer family resources, increasing rates of alcohol and drug addiction, and, most tragically, alarming

suicide rates" (Kroes, 2008, p. 7). The literature proves that achieving a high school diploma is predictive of well-being for Indigenous peoples later in life (BC Ministry of Child and Youth Development, 2014; Kroes, 2008). Thus, it is critically important to help Indigenous youths graduate from high school as a protective factor from their pre-existing social-risk factors identified above.

Educational Outcomes for Indigenous Students

Although there are limitations to gathering and analyzing data in the Canadian education system (Friesen & Krauth, 2012), when it is available, the evidence suggests that education outcomes for Indigenous students are always poorer in comparison with non-Indigenous students (BC Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2014, p. 89; Canadian Council of Provincial Child and Youth Advocates, 2010, p. 9). The drop-out rates amongst Indigenous youth continue to remain alarmingly high, according to Statistics Canada (Labour Force Survey, 2007/2010). For First Nations people aged 20–24, this rate is 22.6%, while the rate for non-Indigenous people in this age bracket is 8.5% (as cited in Goss Gilroy Inc., 2017, p. 6) . Indigenous high school students also have consistently lower attendance and graduation rates (Richards & Vining, 2004; van Ingen & Halas, 2006). Similarly distressing statistics are evident among Indigenous youth attending university: "Youth of Aboriginal ancestry are dramatically underrepresented in university in Ontario, with an overall participation rate 28 percentage points lower than that of non-Aboriginal respondents (46.2 per cent versus 17.8 per cent)" (Finnie, Childs & Wismer, 2011, p. 21).

Moreover, Indigenous students (in elementary, middle and secondary school) consistently speak of feeling isolated, segregated, and displaced within the education system (Dion et al.,

2010). As one Indigenous student suggests, the root cause is that "[Non-Indigenous administrators and teachers] don't know how to establish a relationship with the Aboriginal students because their worlds are so completely different" (van Ingen & Halas, 2006, p. 386). The root cause of poor outcomes (a lack of compassion in teacher and student relationships and an absence of culturally responsive educational systems) for Indigenous students must be addressed in order to authentically engage Indigenous students in our education systems. According to Franchetto, Pritchard and Bristow (2014), honouring the identities and relationships of Indigenous youths in the education systems will counter typical stereotypes and minimize poor outcomes.

If the purpose of schooling is to prepare students to live in the world and to function in society, then the system is failing the Indigenous student, as Indigenous students are less likely to graduate high school in comparison to their non-Indigenous counterparts (BC Ministry of Child and Family Development, 2014, p. 89). In a study by Richards and Vining, 2004, the researchers correlate low graduation rates and high unemployment rates (Richards & Vining, 2004) demonstrating that graduating high school improves a person's chance to gain employment – an obvious fact. Since Indigenous people are less likely to graduate, they are straddled with chronic unemployment and poverty rates (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, p. 145).

Increased Risk of Bullying for Indigenous Students

According to the Ontario Ministry of Education, bullying is defined as:

[A] form of repeated, persistent and aggressive behaviour directed at an individual or individuals that is intended to cause (or should be known to cause) fear and distress and/or harm to another person's body, feelings, self-esteem or reputation. Bullying occurs in a context where there is a real or perceived power imbalance. (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d., ℙ 3)

While bullying is a common school-age phenomenon (Jan & Husain, 2015) for Indigenous children, bullying has greater implications. A case in point is the 2016 study of 280 "high-ability" students in grades 5 through 12. It found that most students worry about their "feelings and emotions, future aspirations and relationships" whereas Indigenous students worry about "personal issues and bullying" (Jen, Wu & Gentry, 2016, p. 39). Generally, Indigenous peoples, especially youths between 15 to 24 years old are more likely to be subjected to violence (Perreault, 2011, p. 5) across multiple contexts, and unfortunately not only in school settings. Further, Indigenous people are "seven times more likely to be victims of homicide than non-Aboriginal people" (Do, 2012, p. 4).

Indigenous students often face racism (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 950; Hare & Pidgeon, 2011, p. 96). For example, Donovan cites a youth who was called a "wagon burner" (2011, p. 131). van Ingen and Halas (2006) refer to an Indigenous youth's experience of segregation at school, where Indigenous students only congregated and smoked in certain areas (p. 388). The separation of Indigenous students and the mainstream population is a classic example of racism. As "Stuart Hall (1998) reminds us, racism typically operates through a binary system of representation which clearly marks, fixes, and naturalizes the difference between belongingness and otherness" (as cited in van Ingen & Halas, 2006, p. 393). With these types of negative experiences at school, it comes as no surprise that Indigenous students who are victims

of discrimination and bullying are more likely to skip school regularly (Tsuruda, Hoogeveen, Smith, Poon, Saewyc & The McCreary Centre Society, 2012, p. 29).

Since racism, bullying and violence are intertwined, Indigenous youths face greater challenges than their non-Indigenous counterparts, which places them at a higher risk of violence and suicide. Studies point to the correlation between victims of bullying and suicide (Bell, Arnold, Golden, Langdon, Anderson & Bryant, 2014; Klomek, Sourander & Gould, 2010). In the *Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: People to People, Nation to Nation*, the Commissioners noted that "Children and youth were most at risk" (Government of Canada, Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, People to People, Nation to Nation, n.d., A Word From Commissioners section, para. 3).

Culture: A Protective Factor for Indigenous Youth

Masten (2006) identifies "community quality" as a component of a resiliency framework, relying on a Eurocentric medical model of assessment; whereas Indigenous people view cultural continuity as the core of community resilience, and not merely as a component of it (Alfred, 2009; Assembly of First Nations, The National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation & Health Canada, 2011; Flynn, 2011; Kirmayer et al., 2000; McIvor et al., 2009; Simpson, 2011). If Indigenous culture is not intact, and an Indigenous community does not habitually practice their culture, there is a likelihood of poor outcomes (Assembly of First Nations et al., 2011; Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; McIvor et al., 2009). "Cultural discontinuity and oppression has been linked to high rates of depression, alcoholism, suicide, and violence in many communities, with the greatest impact on youth" (Kirmayer et al, 2000, p. 607).

Cultural discontinuity increases the risk of suicide, especially for youth, who are particularly vulnerable during adolescence. Youth, "more than any other age group, are quickest to take steps to end their own lives" (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998, p. 197). Chandler and Lalonde (1998) conducted a study of suicides in 196 First Nations communities over a five-year period. They concluded that in over half of the communities studied (111 of 196) there were no suicides, whereas in other communities the youth suicide rate was 500–800 times the national average (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998, pp. 206–207). The researchers concluded that "Markers of Cultural Continuity" acted as protective factors (or "hedge") against suicide. These markers are: *Self-Government, Land Claims, Education, Health Services, Cultural Facilities, and Police and Fire Services* (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998, pp. 209–210). The researchers demonstrated that First Nations communities without any Cultural Markers had the highest rates of suicides, concluding that more Cultural Markers in a community will reduce the rate of suicide. Furthermore Chandler and Lalonde (1998) identify self-continuity (identity-formation) as the primary developmental task of adolescence and stress the need for Cultural Markers to support this.

The needs of Indigenous students in school have been well documented and researched (Cajete, 2005; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Dion & Salamanca, 2014; Dion et al., 2010; Donovan, 2011; Kanu, 2007; van Ingen & Halas, 2006). Researchers conclude that the education systems need to foster a sense of belonging for Indigenous learners by indigenizing the curriculum, improving Indigenous student-teacher relationships, demonstrating compassion/consideration for a student's life situation, and engaging the local Indigenous community. "A key point is the valuing of Indigenous knowledge. Aboriginal students need to see their knowledge as legitimate and valued knowledge." (S. Dion, personal communication, December 13, 2014). Similarly, Kroes (2008) suggests that "Language and culture cannot be

separated from education. For youth to succeed, traditional languages need to be included in daily instruction and the provincial curriculum needs to provide room for traditional teaching." (p. 6).

Research Related to a Sense of Belonging at School

Students with a positive sense of belonging at school have fewer psychological, health and social problems and are more likely to have academic success and participate in extra-curricular activities (Chiu, Chow, McBride & Mol, 2016, pp. 175–176). Having a sense of belonging at school actually supports a child's chances of staying in school (Hamer, 2012, p. 12). In a study by Rutman and Hubberstey (2016), the researchers found that a sense of belonging for children in care was fostered through supportive relationships with teachers and counsellors (p. 22). Whereas for many Indigenous students, a sense of belonging is created through decolonizing the school systems and providing culturally responsive curriculum (Dion et al., 2010, p. viii).

While the literature identifies different ways to create a sense of belonging in the education systems (culturally responsive curriculum, social inclusion, school environment and relationships with school staff), for the research participants, their sense of belonging meant having friends first and foremost, discussed further in *Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion.*

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Methodological Approach

Introduction

I used a generic qualitative research design (Kahlke, 2014) in combination with elements of Indigenous research methodologies (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009), and Participatory Action Research "PAR" (MacDonald, 2012) to answer the study's research questions, discussed further in the chapter below.

Generic Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative research is a methodology used for the study of humans (to answer a question) where there is a "systematic investigation of social phenomena and human behaviour and interaction" (Lichtman, 2013, p. 4). In comparison, quantitative research relies on numerical data; utilizing "experiments, numbers and statistics to answer questions" (Lichtman, 2013, p. 4).

Qualitative research usually involves gathering data through in-depth discussions with research participants, observations of participants in their everyday settings, and making meaning from these discussions and actions: a dynamic process. Where quantitative research gathers data by measuring behaviours, qualitative research gathers data by listening to and watching participants to make sense of their behaviours.

Within a qualitative research framework, there are several popular research designs such as case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative and phenomenology (Lichtman, 2013, p.69). According to Kahlke (2014), "Generic qualitative research studies are those that refuse to

claim allegiance to a single established methodology" (p. 37), which is the case for this study, where I adopt specific aspects of Indigenous methodologies and PAR.

The Indigenous research methodologies I used included self-locating (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009), approaching the research participants (Indigenous youth in care) in a traditional way e.g., offering participants tobacco ties[23], focusing on relationships and trust, opening the focus groups with a smudging ceremony, having an Elder open/close the focus group sessions, and using a talking circle (with the sacred feather) as part of the approach. Additionally, the Medicine Wheel was used as a framework to organize the themes. The application of the Indigenous methodologies are discussed further below in the *Focus Groups* section of this chapter.

Thinking about Indigenous approaches to education and the need for leadership from within the community, Fitzgerald (2003) considers ways to employ Indigenous knowledge as a touchstone: "One of the ways this might be achieved is the adoption of a framework that positions Indigenous ways of knowing and leading at the centre of practice and theory" (p. 23). With this framework in mind, and guided by other Indigenous scholars (Absolon, 2011; Alfred, 2009; Kovach, 2009), I also use Indigenous ways of knowing as the "centre" of my practice and theory. For example, I have an intimate understanding of colonial oppression and subsequent

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[23]"Offering Sacred Tobacco is a way of giving thanks in advance of a request. Whenever there is a request for guidance, advice […], Sacred Tobacco is always offered first" (Aboriginal Tobacco Program: Prevention and Cancer Control, n.d. Some Traditional Methods of Using Sacred Tobacco section, para. 5, retrieved on February 7, 2016 from: http://www.tobaccowise.com/cms/One.aspx?portalId=44644&pageId=46570). In essence, the exchange of tobacco acts as a contract. For this project, 1–2 grams of tobacco were placed in a small piece of square red cloth (15 cm. x 15 cm.), and then rolled and tied into a knot, constituting a "tobacco tie." Once the tobacco is placed in the cloth, tied, and prayed over, it is transformed into a ceremonial item. During the focus groups, the youth were offered a tobacco tie and given instructions on what to do with the tobacco (inside the tie), if they accepted it. They were provided with the following suggestions: to place their tobacco at the base of a tree as an offering to the Creator/Spirit World; or to burn the tobacco as part of a traditional Smudging Ceremony; or to burn the tobacco in a Sacred Fire; or to place their tobacco in a natural body of water. While it is assumed that these traditional protocols are known to all Indigenous peoples, the youths were reminded about what to do with their tobacco ties.

damage on the Indigenous community through my lived experience and academic studies. I know that many Indigenous youth are mistrusting of institutions and what they represent. Dion, Johnston and Rice (2010) confirm that Indigenous students feel alienated and marginalized in formal school settings (p.1). Although this research project did not take place in a school setting, it was still being conducted by a representative of an academic institution (York University), with a potentially negative association. With the need to have a culturally safe place for the research in mind, I made plans to have the participants interviewed (in a traditional talking circle) in neutral space, and with staff members with whom the youth had prior relationships (to create safety). These strategies are discussed further below in the *Focus Groups* section of this chapter.

Notwithstanding the challenges of conducting research within Indigenous communities (along with the added complexity of conducting research with Indigenous children in care), it is essential to conduct research directly with Indigenous children in care to learn about their experiences of placement moves and school disruptions. Child welfare and education systems must consult with and heed the advice of Indigenous children in care about what helps to alleviate the impact of these changes. As previously stated, without doing so they runs the risk of designing faulty policies (Unrau, 2007, p. 129).

Any research conducted within Indigenous communities on or off reserve should follow the First Nations Principles of OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access and Possession) (First Nations Information Governance Centre, n.d.) and also be conducted by Indigenous people with Indigenous research methodologies (Absolon, 2011; Hart 2009; Kovach, 2009; Restoule, 2006), in partnership with the Indigenous community where the research is being conducted. It is

assumed that non-Indigenous researchers who conduct research within Indigenous communities cannot do so without the endorsement and support of that particular community.

Knowing the importance of constructing Indigenous research from within the community, I feel a tremendous sense of responsibility to accurately represent and honour the voices of Indigenous children in care who entrusted me with their stories. Historically, control of Indigenous perspectives, representations, and stories has resided outside the community. Dion and Salamanca (2014) stated that "Well into the middle of the last century, representations of Indigenous people were bound up in colonial domination, a practice in which dominant cultures seek to control the telling of Indigenous stories" (p. 165).

Thus, it is a sacred honour and responsibility to listen authentically to Indigenous children in care. My goal is to truly listen and learn from the voices of Indigenous children in care. I must ensure that their stories and perspectives are properly presented (in writing and otherwise) in a way to which others can connect, ultimately effecting positive change. Archibald (2008) refers to the power of storytelling as "effectively educating the heart, mind, body and spirit" (p. 10). My hope in telling the stories of youth in care who experience multiple school changes as a result of placement moves is to do the same.

In addition to drawing on Indigenous methodologies, I adopted elements of PAR. These elements included conducting the research with a vulnerable group and using the findings in hopes of making positive changes in policies and practice to improve the study participants' situation (MacDonald, 2012). My aim is that recommendations of policies and practices for those closest to Indigenous children in care will be co-constructed with the youth participants. After the study, I plan to continue my advocacy for change within the child welfare system and invite

the youth to participate in any future initiatives from the study. These approaches are grounded

in the principles and parameters laid out by MacDonald (2012) below:

> Using PAR, qualitative features of an individual's feelings, views, and patterns are
>
> revealed without control or manipulation from the researcher. The participant is active in
>
> making informed decisions throughout all aspects of the research process for the primary
>
> purpose of imparting social change; a specific action (or actions) is the ultimate goal.
>
> (MacDonald, 2012, p. 34)

In keeping with the principles of PAR, the youth were asked how involved they would

like to be in the research project. They were also consulted during the data interpretation and

analysis phase. Further, the youth were asked how they would like to be informed of the

outcome, with whom I need to share the outcomes with, and if/how, the youth would like to be

involved in sharing the research outcomes with those they identify.

Securing Consent and Assent

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST) has legal authority to give

consent for all children in care to participate in a research study (D. van Overdijk, personal

communication, March 15, 2016). At NCFST, the responsibility to sign permission for a child in

care to participate in research belongs to the CSW (D. van Overdijk, personal communication,

March 15, 2016). Before recruiting participants and securing consent (from their legal guardians)

and assent (from the research participants under 18 years old), I provided a research orientation

for CSWs.

The first research orientation for NCSFT staff was held on April 29, 2016 (see *Research*

Orientation Flyer, April 29, 2016, appendix B). The second research orientation for NCSFT staff

was held on August 9, 2016. During the research orientation sessions, workers were provided

with an overview of the research project. The overview included information about myself, the

reasons I was conducting research in this area, the administrative process to conduct research,

what the youth could expect during the focus group, a description of the journals, how the youth

will be included in the research process, risks of participating, reimbursements (journal/art

supplies), what I will do with the research findings, anonymity, confidentiality, data storage, who

will benefit from the research, the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate and to

whom the youth can direct questions. During the research orientation, I supplied the following

documents: Parental Information Letter (appendix C), Parental Permission Letter - Informed

Consent (appendix D), Letter of Assent - Youth Consent (appendix E), Caregiver Information

Letter (appendix F), Band Representative Information Letter (appendix G), and Participant

Instructions to Complete the Journal (appendix H).

Recruiting Participants

For the first research focus group, I contacted (by telephone) 15 NCFST youth in care

who planned to attend Camp Kawartha on May 14, 2016. I provided an individual research

orientation over the telephone to the youth and their caregiver by reviewing the same information

the workers received during the NCFST staff research orientation (as described above). I invited

the youth to participate in the research on May 14, 2016 at Camp Kawartha, and I sent (by

Canada Post and e-mail, where available) copies of the same documentation that their CSWs

received during the research orientation session (as listed above). I reviewed the Letter of Assent

(consent form for children/youth) and I answered their questions about the research project. I

explained that they could call their CSW, me, or York University (Office of Research Ethics) if they had further questions about the research. During each call, I stressed the importance of their right to refuse to participate in the research at any time.

After speaking with the caregivers, workers and children (for those children who were members of a First Nation), I called the children's First Nation Band Representative "Band" to let them know that a member of their Band was invited to participate in a research project. Just like the phone calls to the children in care, I provided a research orientation (over the telephone) to the Band Representatives, and I sent them the same documents that the children and workers received.

The same recruitment and orientation protocols were followed for the second research focus group (with revised dates on the research orientation documents). For the second focus group, I asked the children if they were interested in attending , and if so, I sent them a flyer with the date and location of the focus group (see *Focus Group Flyer; August 24, 2016*, appendix I) as part of their orientation package.

Children who participated in the research had authorized consents from their CSWs. Thus, all consents for children to participate in the research study were signed by the CSWs and the children signed their own Letters of Assent.

Overview of Participants

In total, 15 Indigenous youth in care participated in the study. Five youth participated in the first focus group and 10 youth participated in the second focus group. Eight participants were females (53%) and seven participants were males (47%). Their ages ranged from: 17 (two

children); 16 (one child); 15 (one child); 14 (five children); 13 (three children); and 12 (three children).

Data Collection

Data was collected in two ways, through focus groups and participant journals. Below, I discuss each data source and collection method.

Focus Groups

From a qualitative research standpoint, listening to the stories of the participants allows the researcher an opportunity to make meaning from what they hear, and answer the research questions. In an Indigenous community, one way to approach important decisions and conversations is to hold a talking circle. This means that community members gather to share information in an open forum for all to hear and consider.

In many Indigenous cultures, a talking circle is used to build consensus prior to an important decision, as well as to promote healing (Picou, 2000). Talking circles "are widely used among the First Nation people of Canada" (Umbreit, 2003, p. 1) to bring the community together in a respectful and non-judgmental way and to share "knowledge, values and culture" (Running Wolf & Rickard, 2003, p. 39). In a talking circle, people's experiences are valued as an important form of knowledge for others to listen to and learn from (Running Wolf & Rickard, 2003). A talking circle is a place of "complete acceptance" offering a safe place to speak freely (Wilbur, Wilbur, Garrett & Yuhas, 2001, p. 372).

The social discourse which emerges from a Talking Circle does not include "debate or argument." Rather a social context for "sharing oneself, one's experiences, feelings and thoughts with the rest of the village" is created (Napoleon, 1991, p. 25). This social activity is available to all village members and Talking Circles can be tailored to a variety of audiences and social situations. There are different types of Talking Circles, including Healing Circles, Elder Circles, and Community Circles. (Picou, 2000, p. 83)

When conducting a talking circle, it is important to actually sit in a circle. The circle is a symbolic representation of the interconnectedness of people, the earth, and the spirit world. "Circles represent important principles in the Aboriginal worldview and belief systems, namely, interconnectedness, equality, and continuity" (Government of Ontario, 2009). The talking circle starts with a traditional smudging ceremony. The smudging ceremony is also known as a cleansing ceremony, whereby one or more of the four sacred medicines[24] are burned. In Ontario, it is common to burn the medicines in an abalone shell or cast iron pan. Participants wash the smoke over their hands, head, and body to purify (cleanse) the "mind, body and spirit" (Ennis, 2002, p. 114). The smudging ceremony can be conducted by anyone who is comfortable doing so, but often it is led by an Elder or by an individual recognized as well-versed in traditional knowledge and ceremony. After the smudging ceremony, a talking stick, feather, or another sacred object is passed to each talking circle member, starting to the left of the conductor (clockwise for Anishinabek people who follow the Sun) or to the right of the conductor (counter-clockwise for Haudenosaunee people who follow the Moon) (H. Clermont, personal communication, August 7, 2018). The person that holds the sacred object is allowed to speak uninterrupted. Participants can "pass," which means they can decline to speak. The sacred object

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[24]See footnote 3.

is passed, one by one, to each member of the circle until the "round" is finished. In some instances, there is more than one round, and in some regions, it is customary to have four rounds (Anishinaabemdaa, n.d.). The number four[25] is significant in many Indigenous cultures, as it represents the four sacred medicines, the four seasons, the four directions, and the four stages of life.

In keeping with NCFST's focus on gathering, using a research focus group seemed like the best way to proceed. Not only is gathering in this way appropriate for this particular group, it is consistent with Indigenous worldviews that focus on the collective rather than on the individual. The NCFST Special Projects Coordinator (who plans the children in care events) thought that the best place to conduct the first research group was at Camp Kawartha[26] (where the children attend weekend camping sessions) and for the second research group to be held close to where a number of NCFST children in care live in the Peel Region.

Camp Kawartha is a NCFST children in care camp that runs throughout the school year. The ages of the children in care, who normally attend Camp Kawartha range from 12 to 17 years old and also former youth in care[27] who are 18 and 19 years old.

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[25]"The Number 4: This cultural concept is based on the Aboriginal belief that natural occurrences happen in fours and four is a sacred number. Often, giving thanks to the Creator mentions the four elements, earth, air, wind and fire, the 4 seasons, 4 directions, 4 human races, 4 chambers of the heart, 4 quadrants of the body, and 4 sections of the brain. Four puffs are taken when the ceremonial pipe is smoked, water is poured four times over the hot rocks in the sweat lodge, etc." (Government of Manitoba, n.d., Aboriginal Education section, retrieved on March 12, 2016 from: http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/abedu/perspectives/concepts.html).

[26]Camp Kawartha is a community day and overnight camp located at 2505 Pioneer Road, Peterborough, Ontario, K9L 0E4. NCFST rents the campsite for their children in care monthly/weekend overnight camping sessions.

[27]The former youth in care have a unique relationship with NCFST through a Continued Care and Support for Youth (CCSY) agreement, which means that NCFST has a contractual obligation to provide continued support to these youth until they reach the age of 21. "Through CCSY, youth ages 18, 19, and 20 can receive financial and other supports from a Children's Aid Society (CAS). This support is intended to help youth build on their strengths and meet their goals during their transition into adulthood." (YouthCAN, n.d., Advocacy: What's New? section, retrieved on March 19, 2016 from: http://ontarioyouthcan.org/latest-post/ccsy-continued-care-and-support-for-youth-fact-sheet/). CCSY is only available for former wards (or children in the extended care) of a CAS, and only if the former youth/CAS choose to enter this agreement.

The final camping session serves as a closing session where youth "rap," in a talking circle format, about their experiences in care/at camp. According to the NCFST Special Projects Coordinator, themes of not feeling "listened to" or "understood" often emerge, hence, the invitation to conduct my research during this last session—an opportunity to "validate" the experiences of youth in care and to raise awareness of this important issue (K. Hashemi, personal communication, November 11, 2015). I thought it was a good idea to maintain the customary talking circle—to respect their ways, as directed by Indigenous research methodologies (Restoule, 2006).

The NCFST camp staff have nicknamed the camp talking circle "the serious circle." The camp talking circle has a culture of its own, with themes specific to these groups of children. Here, they talk about growing up in the child welfare system, issues related to adolescence, and Camp Kawartha experiences. They also problem-solve with other group members. In short, this group is quite comfortable participating in a talking circle at Camp Kawartha.

The camp talking circle is run by the NCFST camp staff and they believed that the children in care would speak freely in the research focus group (talking circle) because the research topic is an issue specific to children in care. The NCFST camp staff wanted to ensure that the following conditions were in place for the research: the agenda allows the children to move around (after the talking circle), NCFST staff are allowed to choose the groups (they know which children work well together), and the three-hour research period remains structured. According to NCFST camp staff, this group performs better with structure. Therefore, the focus group agenda was designed with these recommendations and the Camp Kawartha children in mind. The same agenda was used for both focus groups.

The plan to conduct research at Camp Kawartha was reviewed and approved by the Children's Services Supervisor (who acts as the "CAS parent" to youth in care), who agreed that this was an ideal place to conduct research (J. Langstaff, personal communication, November 12, 2015). Therefore, plans were formalized for a research focus group to be held at Camp Kawartha on Saturday May 14, 2016.

It was an expectation of NCFST that I visit the camp during the month prior to the research (April 8–10, 2016), to familiarize myself with the youth and to build relationships with them. Thus, I visited Camp Kawartha on Saturday, April 9, 2016 as a volunteer. At the time the decision was made to have a focus group at Camp Kawartha (in April 2016), there were 29 youth in care registered for the camp.

The first focus group was conducted at Camp Kawartha (Peterborough, Ontario) on Saturday May 14, 2016, where five children (four females and one male) participated in the research.

The second focus group was held at Grace Place Community Resource Centre (Brampton, Ontario) and 10 children (four females and six males) participated in the research. It was organized with the intent to include any NCFST children in care who were interested in participating in the research, not just Camp Kawartha participants. According to the Special Projects Coordinator (K. Hashemi, personal communication May 16, 2016), a significant number of the children in NCFST care live in foster homes in Peel Region (mostly in Brampton) and it was recommended that the second focus group take place close to where the children live, for easy access. The plan to conduct a second research focus group was approved by NCFST's Director of Child and Family Well-Being (D. van Overdijk, personal communication, May 16, 2016).

On the day of each focus group, before the group started, the youth participants were offered a tobacco tie, hereinafter referred to as "tobacco." This is a traditional custom in many Indigenous cultures: prior to seeking important guidance/advice, a person is presented with tobacco. The tobacco signifies an agreement (or contract) between the person offering and receiving it. After the youth were presented with the tobacco, they were reminded that they could still choose to leave the project at any time regardless of whether they accepted the tobacco or not. The Elder, myself, and the NCFST staff all instructed the youth on what to do with their tobacco after they accepted it.

The focus group (in both instances) started with a traditional opening (a smudging ceremony) and a prayer by Elder Wanda Whitebird, who remained throughout the focus group. Having an Elder participate in this process was critically important, as it is culturally required that an Elder open and close a significant event with Prayer/Ceremony. According to Nabigon (2006), an Elder has a "close" relationship to the Creator and Spirit World:

> An Elder is an Aboriginal person who is close to the Creator and the Spirit World. Elders conduct healing ceremonies, such as sweat lodge and pipe ceremonies, fasts, and other healing ceremonies from other Aboriginal nations. An Elder is also an individual who has a good balance and is not affected by the five rascals – inferiority, envy, resentment, not caring, and jealousy. An Elder is a complete, kind, and gentle person who has the capacity to fix and heal illnesses. (Nabigon, 2006, p. 115)

Having an Elder participate in the focus group satisfied cultural protocols and ensured that the youth and the project were approached in a "good way".[28] The Elder is a significant

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[28]Sometimes, around other Indigenous people, it is common to hear the phrase "in a good way." An Indigenous person can approach someone/something in a "good way" or walk/live in a "good way." It references a philosophy of life.

representation of cultural safety and sets the tone for the event. During the development of the study, the NCFST Kookum (Elder) also advised me on traditional protocols such as: handling of sacred medicines, offering of tobacco, making tobacco ties, and participating in and facilitating talking circles.

NCFST staff were to be present during the focus groups and were asked to remain neutral and refrain from contributing their opinion/remarks to the focus group's discussion. The role for the NCFST staff was to escort children from the room (should any child become upset and wish to leave the focus group) and offer emotional support to the child (away from the focus group). During the first focus group, all the children remained for the duration of the group. In the second focus group, one child said he was "bored" and left the focus group to spend time with his worker (in another room), who happened to be on site. Although this boy (age 13) left the room for a brief period, he re-joined shortly afterwards.

As previously stated, there were 15 different children who participated in two separate focus groups. To help preserve anonymity, at the start of the focus group participants chose an animal name and wrote their animal names on a name tent, some of which they decorated. While two children chose the same animal names (as Bears), to be clear they are not the same person. When speaking during the focus group discussion, the participants introduced themselves by their animal name, and at times, I announced the "animal" that was speaking, which was very helpful during the transcription process. Participants chose the following animal names: Bear (Focus Group #1), Bear (Focus Group #2), Cat, Eagle 77, Garden Snake, Honey Badger, Horse, Lion, Monkey, Polar Bear, Turtle, Unicorn, Wolf, Wyvern, and Yellow Ring-Neck Snake. Later, one youth was asked to create a poster for the research project including the title of the project

along with the 15 animal names representing the participants (see *Research Poster Designed by Participant*, appendix J).

The focus group was designed to be 3 hours in length consisting of a smudging ceremony, opening prayer, introductions, selecting animal names, creating name tents using the animal names, a traditional talking circle where youth were asked about their experiences going to new schools (see *Research Focus Group Questions*, appendix K), small group work and a closing prayer.

The themes that emerged during the talking circle were summarized on a flip chart where participants were asked to prioritize the themes by placing check marks on the themes that they felt were the most important to them. The flip charts were later transcribed.

The final portion of the focus group was spent in small groups where the youths were asked to answer questions related to the research and to present their responses to the large group.

During the first focus group, the small groups were offered suggestions on how to creatively present their work by: role playing, drawing a picture, creating a rap song, writing a poem, or whatever other creative manner the youth saw fit. The second focus group was not offered the option of presenting their small group work in this way, due to the larger size of the group and the time constraints.

Participant Journals

After the focus group, the youth were asked to bring home a journal as part of the research. Accompanying each journal were art supplies (pencil case, colouring pencils, pens,

pencils, a pencil sharpener, stickers, an eraser, and a glue stick). The value of the journal and art supplies per participant was approximately $20.00.

The journal was intended to enable the youth: to share personal reflections from the focus group, to offer new information; to provide additional feelings and thoughts; to reveal information that they did not feel comfortable sharing in a group setting; and to share memories/stories from previous experiences moving schools.

It was thought that this technique (journaling) would allow the youths more time to digest and reflect on the research subject and to continue the conversation about what it is like to experience multiple school moves while in care. The journals were intended to be an extension of the focus group discussion, with the added benefits to the participants of privacy and additional time for reflection. The journals were expected to capture thoughts and comments left unsaid in the focus group.

The focus group questions were included in the journal package in the event that the participants wanted to expand on their answers previously provided in the focus group.

A self-addressed stamped envelope was given to the participants with instructions to seal their journal in the envelope and post it in a Canada Post mailbox. The children were assured that the researcher was the only person who would see their journals, and they were given the choice to have their journals returned or destroyed.

Two of the five journals were returned from the first focus group participants. No journals from the second focus group were returned. Perhaps the timing of the second group (in the last week of August, shortly before starting school) influenced the participants' motivation to complete the journal portion of the research.

Data Analysis

Preliminary Analysis with Participants

During the first portion of each focus group, the children's answers to the questions were placed on a flip-chart. The flip charts were used as a process of preliminary analysis. This process involved identifying and prioritizing themes that emerged from the focus group. Asking the children to review the flip charts and prioritize their comments helped ensure accuracy and acted as a way to "member-check"[29] when they were organized on the flip-chart. I used the flip chart priorities as a guide to ensure that each priority that the children identified was reflected in the themes identified in the data analysis (discussed further below).

Additionally, the youths were asked how involved they would like to be in the subsequent data analysis. I offered them the following suggestions for sharing the preliminary findings[30]:

1. Sharing emerging themes at a meeting with study participants;

2. Disseminating the emerging themes by e-mail; or

3. Posting the emerging themes on a password-protected (secure) section of my web-site[31].

While it was my preference to actively engage the youths during the data analysis phase and in particular to meet with them after my initial analysis of the focus group and journal themes, I needed to respect the degree in which they were willing to participate. In the end, all of the youths wanted to be kept informed of the research results by e-mail and one youth asked if she could be an "Ambassador" for the project when I started the speaking tour on the results.

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[29] Member-checking is how a researcher "can verify their interpretations by having others look at the data and go through the same process" (Lichtman, 2013, p. 22). In this case, the children verified their own data.
[30] All data was stripped of identifying information before dissemination.
[31] All data was stripped of identifying information before dissemination.

Preparing the Data for Analysis

Data from journals were reproduced by the researcher word for word and the recordings from the focus groups were transcribed verbatim. All identifying information was removed during the transcription process.

After the data from the transcribed focus group discussion was stripped of all identifying information, it was archived on my home computer, which is password protected. The focus group and journal transcripts were later imported into Dedoose, a web-based application for research data management and analysis (a qualitative research software program http://www.dedoose.com/userguide/researchbasics) to facilitate data analysis.

Steps in Data Analysis

Firstly, I used a variety of manual techniques such as note-taking, journaling, post it notes, and Medicine Wheel (theme) depictions to record my initial impressions of the data.

Next, I analyzed the data collected from the focus groups and participant journals using thematic analysis. "Thematic analysis in its simplest form is a categorizing strategy for qualitative data. Researchers review their data, make notes and begin to sort it into categories. Styled as a data analytic strategy, it helps researchers move their analysis from a broad reading of the data towards discovering patterns and developing themes" (Harvard Graduate School of Education, n.d., About Thematic Analysis section, para.1).

According to The University of Auckland (n.d.), there are six sequential phases to Thematic Analysis: "Familiarisation with the data, Coding, Searching for themes, Reviewing themes, Defining and naming themes and Writing up" (Our Approach to Thematic Analysis section). During the research, I maintained a journal, where I grouped the research themes using

Thematic Networks in the Medicine Wheel (discussed further below in *Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion*). The process for using Thematic Networks is described as follows:

> Thematic Networks systematize the extraction of: (i) lowest-order premises evident in the text (Basic Themes); (ii) categories of basic themes grouped together to summarize more abstract principles (Organizing Themes); and (iii) super-ordinate themes encapsulating the principal metaphors in the text as a whole (Global Themes). These are then represented as web-like maps depicting the salient themes at each of the three levels, and illustrating the relationships between them. (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 388)

I used an inductive approach, where the "coding and theme development are directed by the content of the data" (University of Auckland, n.d., Ways to Approach Thematic Analysis section). This approach helped ensure that Indigenous youth voices emerged in an unadulterated way.

At this point, I used a chart with three columns to "write-up" the analysis by code, category and theme and then I organized the themes in visual ways, grouping codes into clusters and using the Medicine Wheel as an Indigenous conceptual map upon which to plot the themes.

After the themes were identified from this process, a one-page summary of the themes was shared with the youth participants, NCFST staff (management, CSWs and youth workers) and Elder (see *Analysis Shared With Youth Participants*, appendix L). The youth participants, workers and Elder were asked to review the themes and provide feedback.

Analysis & The Medicine Wheel

The center of the Medicine Wheel is the "fire within" and about your "own life's journey and its gifts" (Pitawanakwat, 2006, Center section, para. 1 and 4). This is the central concept of the

Medicine Wheel, where the four Medicine Wheel dimensions (sacred directions) surround the central concept. The directions are interconnected to the core of the Medicine Wheel (the study's central theme) and are positively or negatively influenced by the directions (the study's overarching themes). Thus, I placed *Experiencing a New School* concept in the center of the Medicine Wheel. This is where the children's journey is. As Indigenous children in care, they have lived experiences of starting a new school as a result of being in care. Similarly, I placed the overarching themes that emerged (Vulnerability, Relationships, Adaptation, and Excitement) in the Medicine Wheel directions surrounding the central concept, demonstrating how they embody the central theme. Each overarching theme is placed in the Medicine Wheel direction[32] to which it most relates. The themes are explored further in *Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion.*

Limitations

As previously stated, in 2014 there were 23,341 children in care in Ontario. (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, 2014, p. 3). This study is comprised of 15 youth Indigenous youth participants, a tiny fraction of the population of youth in care. For the purposes of this study, the children's experiences were gathered in real time while being in care. Whereas, using former youths in care offers a more reflective approach.

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[32] Each Medicine Wheel direction (East, South, West and North) holds a special meaning and teaching (Nabigon, 2010, p.60).

According to the 2015 *Preliminary Toronto Star Analysis: CAS/Crown Ward Data* report, NCFST averages three moves per child, and ranks the fourth lowest of the 45 CASs (Contenta et al., 2015, p. 21) for placement moves per child, with some CASs moving their children 8.6 times in comparison. The fact that NCFST children in care move less frequently, means that they may have a different experience compared to other Indigenous children in care.

Exploring the number of school moves that each participant experienced was not a part of this research study or analysis. Therefore, there is no way of knowing how many moves each child experienced or how the number of moves shaped their overall school experience.

NCFST is an urban Indigenous child welfare agency in Southern Ontario. There are 11 Indigenous CASs in Ontario (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, n.d., Child Welfare Facts and Figures section) and NCFST is the only urban one. Therefore, this study is limited to the experiences of urban Indigenous children in care. Whereas conducting this study in other parts of Ontario may produce different results given the differences between urban and remote cultures, coupled with the increased numbers of moves that other Indigenous children in care (outside of NCFST) experience.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Overall, there was a sense of sadness when the children spoke of their experiences and the pervasive loneliness associated with changing schools as a result of coming into care or changing placements. The same feelings of loneliness have been expressed by children in care elsewhere (Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2012, p.12 and p. 14). One youth explained: "It's lonely as well when children and youth in care are always having to move or have many different workers" (Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2012, p.12).

The children expressed similar responses to their experiences across focus groups and journals about the rewards, challenges, and negative experiences of moving to a new school. Interestingly, with the two journals that were returned, both journals resembled a school assignment, where each participant numbered their answers and responded to the focus group questions in sequential order. With focus group and journal data, despite any differences in age, gender and geography, the children consistently spoke about the impacts resulting from school and placement disruptions.

Analysis of the data produced four overarching themes related to the youth's experiences: Vulnerability, Relationships, Adaptation, and Excitement. These themes are explained below in relationship to the Medicine Wheel directions (see Figure 1: *Findings Conceptualized Within the Medicine Wheel*)

Figure 1: Findings Conceptualized Within the Medicine Wheel

Vulnerability in the East

I placed *Vulnerability* in the East (Waabinong in the Ojibway language) because the East is

about new beginnings. The East is where we were born and "where we come from"

(Pitawanakwat, 2006, The East – Waabinong section, para. 1).   The East is the start of the day,

where the sun rises, and the East is the colour yellow, after the sun. The theme of *Vulnerability*

was the starting place of the research. This is where the children opened the focus group

discussions by talking about their shared experiences of being bullied and the worries and the

fears that are associated with going to a new school. The children's vulnerability was the starting

place of their experience, informing and influencing the other dimensions. Therefore, the theme of *Vulnerability* fit appropriately in the East as the beginning of their story.

The following subthemes will be discussed further below: victims of racism, discrimination and bullying, re-telling your story, new schools are frightening, falling behind – a real concern and participant representation of the experience of starting a new school**.**

Victims of Racism, Discrimination & Bullying

This study confirms that Indigenous children in care feel more vulnerable when they change schools. They are at heightened risk of being subjected to racism, discrimination and bullying. Understandably, the research participants' previous negative school experiences combined with an impending school change triggered a variety of worries and fears each time they started a new school.

One research participant summarized the experience of going to a new school as follows: "[T]he most difficult part of going to a new school, is all we worried about is being bullied and the unknown". While some youths in the study worried about being bullied other youths confirmed that they were actually bullied. Another participant stated that they were discriminated against based on their race. When asked to prioritize what issue was the most important aspect of starting a new school, one youth ranked racism as the most important issue. Even though the participants did not provide specific examples where they experienced racism, the literature confirms that Indigenous students often face racism (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 950; Hare & Pidgeon, 2011, p. 96) which supports the finding for this study.

As a strategy to protect themselves from being bullied, one research participant spoke about fending off bullies by acting "tough", and another youth agreed by saying "That's right".

The youth were angry that other children would make fun of them for being in care because their parents abandoned them. One youth said, "I have no time to reason with you, if you make fun of my mother, I will destroy you." and further added, "Just don't talk about my family or I will hurt you, seriously." While another youth echoed their agreement by saying, "I agree with that".

The research participants' fears of being bullied at school is a common worry for all Indigenous students (Jen et al., 2016). Where Indigenous students tend to worry about being bullied, their non –Indigenous counterparts tend to worry about their future aspirations (Jen et al., 2016, p. 39).

Re-Telling Your Story

According to the participants, in order to make new friends, they are expected to share their personal stories (social history) to satisfy other peoples' curiosity. One youth was worried about how their life story would be accepted by their peers and described this process as "annoying" and "complicated" and further added:

> So, it's your life story, gets annoying. When I first came into care, a lot would ask, like, like they'd probably see my [foster] parents, and they're like 'Oh, what's up with the racial difference?' They're like 'Oh, you're foster care, oh, you're adopted right?' Someone who assumes you're adopted, you have to explain yourself a lot and stuff, like some of my friends now, they're like 'Wait, you're not adopted?' (Wyvern, 2016)

These findings (of needing to re-tell your story) are the same experiences of other children in care. For example, in a joint Children's Aid Foundation and Ontario Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Report (2015), the author found that children in care need to explain themselves and that they are stereotyped for being in care. One youth from the 2015 report stated

"everywhere we go we have to explain ourselves" and "it makes it difficult to move on from the 'foster kid' identity" (Mickleborough, Children's Aid Foundation & [Ontario] Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2015, p. 29).

For most students, their personal problems are managed privately and yet for children in care their life story becomes public matter. Each time they change schools, in order to establish themselves with a new social network they are expected to share their life story. The re-telling of their life story is a constant reminder of the stigma of being in care.

New Schools are Frightening

Participants categorized moving schools as "frightening" because of their anticipation of the unknown, especially, not knowing whether their new peers would accept or reject them. Fearing the unknown caused anxiety and heightened feelings of loneliness due to the awkwardness of going to a new school. Youths described the experience as "scary" and "anxiety" provoking. Some children spoke about how they could not sleep the night before going to a new school. One participant spoke about how "The most difficult thing about going to a new school is the awkwardness when you don't know anyone". Not knowing anyone in a new school may be a difficult position to be for all students who are in the same situation. For example, an Indigenous student from the Toronto District School Board described the experience as follows: "It was kinda like a new city. Like I didn't… like it was a new city, I felt isolated, I didn't know anybody" (Dion et al., 2010, p. 24). Knowing the worries associated with starting a new school (discrimination, bullying and not knowing anyone) it is really no wonder that research participants were anxious and frightened each time they had to start a new school.

Falling Behind – A Real Concern

The children were worried also about falling behind in their school work because of the school change. For some participants, falling behind was even more worrisome if they had a disability or needed any kind of special help.

Firstly, children's worries about doing well is a standard high school student concern. The 2011 Student Census, conducted by the Toronto District School Board, found 70% of high school students in grades 9 to 12 are worried about doing well in school (p. 47). However, the children's worries about falling behind are a real concern, given that children in care are more likely to fall behind (with lower scores in comparison to students not in care) and they are more likely to repeat a grade (Brownell, et al., 2010, pp. 806–807; Trocmé et al. 2009, p. 3). Finally, children in care are a population known to need extra help in school (Mantilla, 2012, p. 24), which was a theme identified by the research participants.

Although the children never spoke about graduating high school, their goal was implicit through their fears of falling behind and their desire to maintain their academic progress. Having a high school diploma contributes to one's well-being. In fact, education is the "strongest predictor of good health" (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007, p. 1). Those with a high school diploma tend to have higher paying jobs, live in better neighbourhoods, have improved health habits and better social systems (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007, p. 1) than those without. It follows that those without a high school diploma have increased health, financial and social troubles. To worsen matters, they also have trouble finding jobs (Jackson & Cameron, 2012, p. 1108) and if a person manages to find a job without a high school diploma, they will receive substantially less pay (National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2014, p. 5). Thus, academic achievement is linked to one's future success. Whether the children's desire to do well at school

was rooted in the present or the future, they understood that changing schools could jeopardize their academic progress.

Participant Representation of the Experience of Starting a New School

In the first focus group, one small group decided to represent their experience of going to a new school by drawing a picture of an Asian Yin and Yang [33]symbol. The group explained how the symbol represented the "balance between good and bad" describing how "there are certain parts of your life that you're going to have good experiences and certain parts of your life that you're going to have bad experiences". Just as other youth in care viewed their time in care as having both positive and negative components (Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2012, p. 9) the research participants were able to do the same.

Another small group (in the first focus group) used a song to describe the process of adjusting to a new school. The group played the song *Me, Myself & I*, by G-Eazy, Bebe Rexha, where the chorus for the song was "Oh, it's just me, myself and I. Solo ride until I die" (G-Eazy, Bebe Rexha, n.d.). For details on the complete song lyrics see *Me, Myself & I, Song Lyrics by G-Eazy, Bebe Rexha*, appendix M. The group participants felt that they could not "count on" anyone other than themselves, and they explained that this particular song was chosen "Because we like, do it on our own." and how this song accurately reflects their experience.

The exact same sentiments of being alone in their lives was expressed by other children in care during the 2011 Youth Leaving Care Hearings (Office of the Provincial Advocate for

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[33] "In Chinese philosophy, yin and yang (陰陽 *yīnyáng*, lit. "dark-bright", "negative-positive") describe how seemingly opposite or contrary forces may actually be complementary, interconnected, and interdependent in the natural world, and how they may give rise to each other as they interrelate to one another." (Wikipedia, n.d., retrieved on December 2, 2017 from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yin_and_yang).

Children and Youth, 2012). In fact, this was one of the major themes. Children in care described their experience as "No one is really there for us" (Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2012, p. 14).

<div align="center">**Relationships in the South**</div>

I placed *Relationships* in the South (Shaawnong in the Ojibway language). The South in traditional Medicine Wheel teachings is usually about "relationships" or the social side of life. The South is the colour red. For me, the colour red represents love – an aspect of relationships. The children spoke of how difficult it was to lose friends and make new friends after changing schools. They stressed the importance of belonging to a peer group, which was in fact their first order of business when arriving at their new school. Overall, the children recognized the need to have stability and supportive relationships in their lives and that changing placements and schools had a significant impact on their ability to form and maintain these relationships. Thus, the *Relationships* theme was placed in the South, for obvious reasons where it clearly belongs.

The following subthemes will be discussed further below: loss of friends, making new friends, navigating the social landscape, student-teacher relationships, and sibling relationships.

Loss of Friends

The children spoke consistently about the loss of friends whenever they changed schools and how moving had a significant impact on relationships in the school, foster home, and community. The spoke about how difficult it was to maintain relationships with friends from previous schools. One participant described that "Going to new schools is like when you have to

ditch your friends or something". They focused on making new friends at their new school and they reconciled leaving former relationships behind. A participant described "Over time, you stop being friends, and then, you can make new friends". Starting over was explained by one youth as "It's like hitting the re-set button on your life, on your social life anyways".

Understandably, having friends "helps foster a sense of belonging" (Kids Matter, n.d., Managing Changes in Friendships section, para. 1) and the children's yearning to find new friendships is a likely response to support their need to belong, just like other children (in the same situation) entering a new school.

Making New Friends

There was consensus from the research participants that the first order of business when arriving at their new school was to make friends in order to "fit in". The same concept of needing to fit in, and coincidently, the same term ("fitting in") is used by a 17 year old Indigenous student from the Toronto District School Board to describe this process as: "Fitting in to a new high school is never easy. Being singled out as the only Native kid didn't help." (Dion et al., 2010, p. 17). While the research participants spoke about the need to fit in and the challenges associated with this (not knowing anyone in their new school) they did not identify that being Indigenous made fitting in any harder for them.

While the youth did not elaborate on the benefits of having friends or the context of their friendships, they understood intuitively that they needed friends. The benefits of having friends is confirmed in the literature. Having friends at school fosters a sense of belonging (Knudsen, 2017), influences positive behaviour (Merritt & Snyder 2015), increases participation in activities (Simpkins, Eccles & Becnel, 2008), and improves academic outcomes (Mihaly, 2009).

Students who have a "best friend" in school versus out of school have a greater sense of belonging, as evidenced in a 2009 study where "Students who reported having their best friend out of their school displayed lower levels of school belonging compared with students whose best friend attended their same school" (Vaquera, 2009, p. 502).

The children highlighted the challenges in making new friends and stressed how difficult this was for them. Sometimes, children were isolated without friends, "I didn't talk to anybody for a year and it was hard for me". Some of the children identified that their behaviour or disability was a barrier to making friends. One youth said, "It was just hard to make new friends, because of my behaviour" and another youth said that it was hard, "making new friends because you have a disability".

Research on Indigenous children in care confirms the importance of having friends (while in care) for support. In a 2012 British Columbia study based on consultations across the province, 79% of Indigenous youth in care had approached a friend for help in the last year and 83% of the youths found this experience helpful (Tsuruda et al., 2012, p. 52).

It was worrisome to learn that the research participants were struggling to make friends. We know that "Constructive peer relationships in the school context are positively associated with better well-being outcomes." (Merritt and Snyder, 2015, p. 486) and that "Social interactions and relationships with classmates typically form a core component of one's schooling experience" (Rossetti & Keenan, 2017, p.1). Overall, children who have friends are happier and more cooperative (Overton & Rausch, 2002, p. 13). Thus, learning that the research participants feel isolated and distressed over their lack of friends highlights the need for children in care to have emotional support and supportive environments to help them manage their stress. It was very revealing that a youth participant identified, "The amount of friends you bring home"

as an indicator of how well they were adjusting to their new home and school. Other participants agreed that having friends was a good indicator of their adjustment.

With one in five Ontario students having a mental health problem (Toronto District School Board, 2014, p. 2) and 38 % of Grade 9 to 12 students admittedly being "under a lot of stress" (Toronto District School Board, 2014, p. 8), the mental health of Indigenous children in care is particularly concerning, given their social isolation and the stress and negative effects of placement and school changes.

Navigating the Social Landscape

While they desired new friendships the children were very cautious about how they approached their peers. There was wisdom here, as the children instinctively knew to be wary of their new surroundings and the value to, "Know your enemy" and, "Who would you like to be your friends, like pick wisely". Befriending other Indigenous students was considered reassuring and conversely, "Not knowing people from your culture" in the new school was a concern. Not only is it comforting for the participants to have other Indigenous students at school, being with peers from one's own community is comforting for Indigenous youths who recognize the culturally safe space within their own cultural group (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011, p. 101).

The social hierarchy of the new school is an important consideration, as the children have to navigate their new social landscape and learn their place. Described by one participant as learning their "Role as a student, like as a new student there". Another participant explained the process as, "Learning your place where you fit into, like in your status quo". The children cited a variety of ways to go about this, such as observing the sub-groups, identifying potential risks and figuring out where they belonged, being wary and proceeding cautiously. One child said, "I don't

try to make friends, I just let them come to me". Another participant explained their strategy to navigate their new social situation as follows:

Like your, like the cliques, the students there and the teachers, like you need to learn like what they are, like you don't sit and observe, like listen and observe as to who's the popular kids who's the athletics, and like who are, like all that kind of stuff. (Unicorn, 2016)

The participant did not explain why it was important to know who the "popular kids" were. Research suggests that having friends in high school increases popularity because having friends means that you are being socially endorsed and approved by your peers (Conti, Galeotti, Mueller & Pudney, 2009, p. 2). Thus, it is beneficial to know who the popular students are in order to gain their acceptance or, alternatively, to be wary of them.

Student-Teacher Relationships

Not only were the children worried about making new friends, because "kids are mean," they also worried that the teacher would not like them, and worse, that the teacher would not be "nice" to them. In their experience, some teachers were "nicer" than others. They understood what it feels like to be treated respectfully by teachers. Similarly, in Prater's (1995) study of 148 Indigenous students in Grades 3 to 12, children were asked questions about the types of teachers from whom they learned the most. The children described how the best teachers (i.e., the most effective) were the ones that were respectful, patient, honest, and did not yell or make fun of their culture. In essence, the Indigenous children in Prater's (1995) study described what it meant for teachers to be nice, no different from my study, where Indigenous participants also wanted nice teachers. A student's desire for a "nice teacher" confirms the need for a supportive student-

teacher relationship. When Indigenous students believe that the teacher cares about them they are more likely to have a positive school experience and feel safe at school (Tsuruda et al., 2012, p. 52).

Sibling Relationships

Finally, the children spoke about how moving affected their relationship with their siblings, and caused "tension". For some, when they left their placements, they were also leaving their siblings behind. Although the children did not elaborate on the impacts of being separated from their siblings, the literature confirms the importance of sibling relationships for children in care. For example, Kernan (n.d.), confirms "[T]he research that is available overwhelmingly indicates that maintenance of the sibling bond is crucial to child development and adjustment" (The Sibling Bond and Placement Outcomes section, para. 1). Along with the fears and worries associated with a school change, after children in care are separated from their siblings, they also worry about the "loss of contact with siblings" (McKay, 2016, p. 91).

Adaptation in the West

I placed *Adaptation* in the West (Epangishmok in the Ojibway language). The West in traditional Medicine Wheel teachings is normally about "knowledge" or the cognitive aspect in life. The West is the colour black. "The colour black is a symbol of respect." (Nabigon, 2006, p. 66). For me, knowledge can be difficult because it challenges established beliefs. It can be difficult to learn new things and adapt to new ways for an average person, let alone a child in care who has more challenges than other children their own age. When the children spoke about

how they developed their own coping strategies to adjust to new schools, and how they overcame various barriers, I knew that this was their learned knowledge and that the theme of *Adaptation* had its proper place, respectfully in the West.

The following subthemes will be discussed further below: getting comfortable, school safety, know the curriculum, supportive adults, and adjusting – a learnt skill.

Getting Comfortable

The children shared practical advice based on their own experiences of how to adjust to a new school. The variety of advice offered included how to adapt to the new school curriculum, how to navigate the physical plant and how to choose new friends. Along with the practical tips, the children offered cautionary tales on choosing friends and being wary of teachers who may not like them.

After starting a new school, the research participants wanted to quickly adapt to it. They spoke about how, "To get comfortable with it" and how to, "Find ways to make yourself comfortable" in their new surroundings. One participant summarized the adjustment as, "For me, to adjust to a new school is just getting used to the schedule and finding your way around". Participants explained that it was important to "Know your surroundings" and the location of: the library, fire alarms, exits, security cameras, principal's office and most importantly, the bathrooms. Sometimes the children did not know where the bathroom was, and one child told a story of how they waited until they got home at the end of the school day before going to the bathroom.

Along with adjusting to the building, the children stressed the importance of having new routines as part of their adjustment. One participant said, "Oh, and like create a new routine."

Another participant said, "Find a routine" and how having new routines was a way, "To get used to it". The children understood that implementing a new routine was an essential step towards acclimatizing to their new school environment.

The need to adjust to a new school and overcome the fright of the first day jitters is a common phenomenon addressed by parenting experts and book publishers alike. With scores of books to support children in overcoming these challenges, there is an industry focus on school adjustment for young children under 10 years old. For example, web sites such as: *Amazon, Barnes & Noble, CBC Parents* and *PBS Parents* promote books dedicated to supporting children in a variety of school adjustments such as: their first day of class, transitioning schools, fitting into a new school and being the new child at school. The book industry is focused on publishing books that support younger students rather than older students. With younger children, emphasis is placed on the parents to prepare the child for their new school. Parents use a variety of strategies to help their child prepare for a new school. Some examples are: reading books about starting a new school, taking the child for a tour of the new school, having conversations with the child about what it will be like to start a new school and most importantly, guiding them on how to behave at their new school (Parent Info, 2018, Five Tips For Starting a New School, n.d.).

In contrast, the research participants did not identify anything of importance that occurred before the actual start of a new school (other than needing the proper school supplies). They did not speak about any preparatory conversations or actions that took place with their caregivers, biological parents or workers before starting a new school.

School Safety

The research participants identified school safety as an important part of adjusting to a new school. They explained that the primary strategy to feel safe in their new school was to familiarize themselves with the physical plant and surroundings. Not only was this helpful for their safety, it also served a practical purpose. For example, the children wanted to know where the principal's office was to get help, but also, because they needed to know how to get to the principal's office when they were sent there for misbehaving. Similarly, participants wanted to know where the security cameras were for their own protection, as well as how to avoid them, in the event they were doing something wrong (to ensure there was no evidence of their wrong-doing caught on camera).

The research participants' experience of school safety reflects the experiences of other Indigenous students who also feel safer in common space, and less safe in unsupervised areas, as evidenced in the *2008 British Columbia Adolescent Health Survey*, where Indigenous students in Grades 7 to 12 described their feeling of safety inside schools as follows :

> Most students usually or always felt safe in the library (80%), classroom (77%) and in the cafeteria (67%). Students were less likely to feel safe in unsupervised areas, such as the hallways (62%) and washrooms (60%). (Tsuruda et al., 2012, p. 33)

The Indigenous students from the 2012 Tsuruda study did not explain why they felt unsafe in unsupervised areas. One can assume that being in an unsupervised area (at school) limits a student's ability to access help, which diminishes their sense of safety

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The universal theme of needing to feel safe at school is equally important for all students (regardless of their heritage or child welfare status) as evidenced in research that canvassed

students and parents about school safety such as the study noted above. For example, the 2011

Toronto District School Board's Parent and Student Census asks high school students about their

safety, and determined that 81% of students in grade 9 to 12 feel safe inside the school (p. 14).

Know the Curriculum

Another component of adapting to their new school was to know the "due dates" of their

new assignments and to know what the curriculum differences were. The children were worried

about the curriculum differences between their old and new schools. They spoke about the

challenges of adapting to the different academic requirements between schools. They found the

experience of adjusting to a new school varied depending on the work assigned and how it was

taught. For example, sometimes when they started a new school the curriculum was easier for

them, especially when they had studied the same material (books and textbooks) in their previous

school, whereas other times, the curriculum was more difficult for them. They attributed their

differing academic experiences to the differences in the curriculum along with the differences in

teaching styles. In speaking about the different teaching styles, they stated that this was a factor

in their ability to succeed. One participant described the change as follows:

> [It] is definitely different, like depending on what school you go to and how the
>
> teachers are teaching it, so it could be hard or easy depending on your teacher, that
>
> school you're going to, and how you work as well. (Unicorn, 2016)

As a result, their approach was to anticipate the changes as part of starting a new school,

hoping it would work in their favour. The recognition of academic changes and the anticipation

of these changes was an actual strategy for the youths. Their understanding and anticipation of

the academic differences at their new school helped them reconcile this aspect of the school change.

Understandably, the children were worried about how the school change would affect their academic progress. Their concerns are supported in the literature. Research confirms that for every school change, "children are estimated to lose four to six months of academic progress per move" (American Bar Association and Casey Family Programs, 2008, Why are Youth in Out-Of-Home Care More Than Twice as Likely to Drop out of High School as Their Peers? section) and that children who experience frequent school moves are "more likely to repeat a grade" (Kariuki & Nash, 1999, p. 4). Further, research confirms that "teens who experience a move are half as likely as those who do not move during their early adolescence period, to have received a high school diploma by early adulthood" (Lindsay & Anderson, 2015, Moving Hurts section, para. 2).

Supportive Adults

While the children in care spoke about a variety of support systems, they were clear that they needed to have supportive adults in their lives. The children spoke about the need to have supportive adults to help them adjust to their new school. They identified their caregivers (foster parents), biological parents, teachers, and child welfare workers as the adults who could support them during the difficult and stressful transition period while adapting to a new school. Overall, they expected the adults to seek them out to provide support and offer guidance. The types of support identified were provided through structured systems (Plan of Care meetings and progress reports) and relational systems where the adults were available to comfort them in their time of need but more so to provide authentic and meaningful care for them.

Similarly, in a 2011 report by the Office of the Provincial Advocate, the authors concluded that "Studies on child and youth development point to the importance of stable, positive adult relationships" (Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2011, p. 13). Further, without supportive relationships for children and youth in care they become more vulnerable (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016, p. 32). As previously stated, "Seventy-four percent of participants stressed the vital importance of residential carers, foster carers or parents showing an active interest in their education and giving them support and encouragement to do well." (Martin & Jackson, 2002, p. 124). Likewise, the same study found that 76 % of participants would "like to see more support from teachers" (Martin & Jackson, 2002, p. 127).

The participants acknowledged that the teachers could be helpful (or not) by welcoming them in and offering help. The children offered the following advice on the first day of school, that teachers need to, "Be helpful" and generally, if children needed help to, "Offer to give us extra support". Participants acknowledged that some teachers went out of their way to support them, described by one participant as follows: "So, the teacher is always checking on you, seeing if you're okay, if you have any problems". Similarly, another participant put it this way:

I noticed sometimes, like if the teachers are aware of like your living situation, they'll come up to you, seeing if you need more help, usually, they'll come to you more, seeing if you're okay, like trying to make you more comfortable. (Wyvern, 2016)

Although, teachers were described as going out of their way to "check in" on them, the children believed that the teachers were being more compassionate because they were in care. The children sensed that they were being treated differently. They described how it felt: "Sometimes it's annoying though, because you know it's like for that reason." and "Sometimes they do treat you differently, like with sympathy".

Though it may be tempting to treat children in care with kid gloves (given their heightened vulnerability) children in care want to be treated like any other child their own age. For example, in a 2002 study, when 38 former children in care were asked what would help improve their chances of success at school, "Nearly everyone [in the study] stressed the importance of 'normalization' in children's day-to-day lives." (Martin & Jackson, 2002, p. 124) just as the research participants highlighted in this study.

While the children yearned to be treated normally, they were well aware of the surrounding child welfare systems that were raising them. They understood that their worker was responsible for their well-being and academic progress. The children spoke about how their workers tried to guide them towards the, "Right path", and re-direct negative behaviours. The children made the following statements about how their workers tried to help, "Like right choices, like not the wrong ones that a bunch of people do" and, "They make sure you're in the right place, like position, like what you're supposed to be doing". The children spoke about seeing their workers, although some children saw their workers more often than others. One participant said they saw their worker, "Every Wednesday" and another participant added that "My worker will know if I'm adjusting when she asks me". Children were relying on their workers to help them and advocate on their behalf, although there was a difference in opinion on whether the worker should go to the child's school and speak to the principal about the child's progress, or visit the home instead. One participant recommended that, "They can go, they can go to your new school and talk to your Principal". Other participants preferred that workers go to "Your house" and not to the school setting, stating, "I would freak" if their worker went to the school.

The children pointed out how the child welfare systems were designed to "check in" on their school progress. One child explained, "My worker would know if I'm adjusting or not through e-mail from my foster parents or through the monthly report". Another participant shared how their worker checked in on their school progress during Plan of Care meetings. "Yah, whenever I have a Plan of Care, they would ask me […] so they will like meet my needs, so they will ask me what I need".

Recognized in the literature as a key support for children in care (Happer et al., 2006; Martin & Jackson, 2002) the research participants also confirmed that foster parents were helpful by offering emotional support. Children saw their caregivers as part of their support system, referencing the different ways that foster parents could help them adjust to their new school. Participants offered the following advice to their caregivers:

- "What our caregivers can do is, the first thing is to give us support, love, and hugs, it's helpful for us."

- "The caregivers can also access different resources that we may need to adjust."

- "[I]t would be helpful if they were there for us, on the first day of school, to drive us and be supportive."

- "They have to be understanding."

Another way foster parents can help is to ask the child about how their day went. One participant described this as, "Ask me how my day went and genuinely be caring about how you are." On one hand, the children wanted the foster parents to ask them about their day while on the other hand, this was only helpful if they trusted the person. For example, the children would not reveal the true state of their situation if they did not trust the caregiver. One participant explained, "[O]r be like the amount of trust that you had, for example I wouldn't tell my mom,

like my foster mom what was happening". The children's indication that they need to be able to trust a person before revealing their true feelings, is especially true for Indigenous peoples, where relationships are valued and the starting place of building trust (Baskin & Sinclair, 2015). Indigenous peoples have historical experiences of " broken promises in terms of environmental protection, employment, revenue sharing, and community benefits [….] it's a timeline of broken promises that dates back to Confederation" (Indigenous Corporate Training Inc., 2017, Be Trustworthy section, para. 1) that impacts their current mistrust of social service and governmental systems. The mistrust of these larger systems influences the ways that Indigenous peoples interact with others.

While the children pointed to the importance of supportive adults and the importance of the child welfare systems being accountable for their progress, they never spoke about the child welfare and education systems working together. The children did not articulate any evidence of their workers being actively involved with school staff. Instead, they spoke about the workers assessing their school progress through the foster parents or by students' own accounts of their academic progress. They did talk about teachers and/or principals calling their foster parents to report their progress. They described the school contact with the foster parents, not the workers. It seems to makes sense to the school staff to deal directly with the foster parent (who are the primary caregivers) similar to any other student where teachers speak directly to the child's parent. Albeit the local CAS is the legal guardian of the child which means that the foster parent is simply a conduit for information (between the school and the CAS) rather than the decision-maker.

Along with having supportive adults, the youth participants stressed the need for the child welfare and education systems to help them if they had any special needs. For example, the

children relied on their caregivers, teachers and workers to ensure there were "[R]esources that would help if we have learning disabilities and stuff". In contrast to adjusting to a new school, where the youth did this on their own, where their special needs were concerned, they needed the education and child welfare systems to intervene on their behalf. Although the children never stated outright that the child welfare systems and education systems need to work closely together, they knew that both systems were accountable for their success. It follows that these systems need to work closely together for children in care who often need enhanced academic supports (Brownell et al., 2010, p. 806; Mantilla, 2012, p. 24). Experts in education confirm that the child welfare and education systems need to work closely together to ensure success for children in care, given their special needs (Lahey, 2014, para. 6 ; Weegar et al., 2016, p. 30-31).

Adjusting – A Learnt Skill

In particular, the children spoke about adjusting to their new school by learning how to do so on their own, explaining, "Everyone has their own way to do it". Many of the children felt that this was strictly their burden to bear, and that they could not rely on other people to help them to adjust to their new school. Participants stated, "They didn't really help because I wanted to do it on my own". They also stated, "I did it independently". These same sentiments are expressed by other children in care captured in the phrase: "Doing it all alone, every day". (Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, p. 10). The majority of children in both focus groups held these views, yet at the same time, the children contradicted themselves by emphasizing the importance of having supportive adults to help them adjust to their new school.

There was a degree of resilience to the children's statements, with a very matter-of-fact approach to this part of their lives, saying, "It gets easier, as you do it more". One participant

described their increasing knowledge and skills in going to new schools, by saying, "You get more competent". Another participant said, "It's not hard at all". Another viewpoint was to simply accept "the Creator's plan".

Overall, the children portrayed a very stoic attitude towards their school moves and the coping methods developed through their increased experience – appearing as experts at adapting to new schools. This lived experience and acquired skill-set reflected a degree of tolerance towards their life situation, a reckoning of sorts. One of the NCFST workers described this process as: "Children in care 'normalize the experience in order to survive' the changing of schools [...] they would add this experience to the part of their mental state that 'numbs out', which can appear to be resilience" (J. Stonefish, personal communication, April 28, 2017).

Resilience is defined as "The ability to avoid negative outcomes despite being at risk for psychopathology" (Mash & Wolfe, 2016, p. 515). Generally, this means being able to overcome adversity; with an emphasis on something "bad" happening before a person is considered "resilient". Thus, resiliency is measured by a person's capacity to "bounce back". While the children described their experience of going to a new school as frightening and anxiety-provoking, one might question whether the children were resilient to these changes as defined by Mash and Wolfe (2016) or if the children were numbing out the experience as described by the NCFST worker.

Excitement in the North

I placed *Excitement* in the North (Kiiwednong in the Ojibway language). The North represents the physical aspects of life and the colour white. "White is a symbol of winter,

movement, air and caring." (Nabigon, 2006, p. 69). For me, white represents pureness and goodness. The North is also a place of healing. For example, "The Bear, which sits in the North is the ultimate healer, able to heal any physical, spiritual, or mental illnesses." (Nabigon, 2006, p. 117).

The theme of *Excitement* is about how many of the children were able to use the experience of changing schools as an opportunity to embrace change as a good thing. These children looked for the positive aspects of going to a new school, and they were excited to read new books, meet new people and participate in new sports clubs and join new after-school programs. The children were excited at the prospect of reading books that they had never read before and the chance to have new school supplies. They were eager to know what sports teams and after-school clubs were available in their new schools. Overall, the children were excited to go to a new school to meet new people and try new things.

Their positive attitude helped counteract the large number of negative impacts resulting from the school move. The small number of findings in the North are essentially a depiction of an imbalanced Medicine Wheel where the negative aspects of the children's experiences in starting a new school outweigh the positive aspects. Despite the small number of positive aspects Indigenous children in care experience when starting a new school, it was still refreshing that the children were able to frame a distressing event with a sprinkling of positivity.

The children considered moving a "fresh start". Since the children were hopeful, demonstrating a positive attitude and spirit about the moves, I placed the *Excitement* theme in the North – a good and caring place. Understandably, this theme fit perfectly in the North, a place of healing, and a place where the children enjoyed their experience in going to a new school.

The following subthemes will be discussed further below: a fresh start, and sports and extra-curricular activities.

A Fresh Start

The children had many positive things to say about going to a new school. They considered changing schools a fresh start in life, expressing: "[T]he fresh start was a good thing". One participant explained what this meant for them, "You can start fresh, and be a different person, a better person than you were before". Another participant added that it was "A new start in your life, without like being a baby". For some participants, changing schools was a welcome change, especially if there were problems in the existing school. One child described this as, "Changing schools can be good, sometimes it can be happy and sometimes it can be like you want to change schools". A change of principals was also considered a good thing, and part of having a "fresh start".

It was refreshing to hear the children's positive attitudes towards starting a new school knowing the fears and worries that the children experience with changing schools. By having a positive outlook about a potentially frightening situation, the children were actually reducing their stress by focusing on the positive aspects in their situation. Whether the children did this knowingly or unknowingly, positive thinking (instead of negative thinking) is a proven strategy to help with stress management (Mayo Clinic, n.d., para. 2).

Sports & Extra-Curricular Activities

The children held fond memories about their participation in sports teams and extra-curricular activities. One participant said, "My favourite memory of going to a new school is

trying new things, example: Grade 8 Choir!" Another participant said, "My favourite memory of going to a new school is trying out for sports and trying new things". Importantly, one child (who attended eight schools over several provinces) thought the most important part of attending a new school was "basketball".

Extra-curricular activities help students engage in school and promote a sense of belonging (National Centre for Homeless Education, 2010, p.1). For Indigenous children in care, this is of great importance, as this group is increasingly vulnerable with each school move. Not only do they need these types of positive activities to support their well-being, but they also help them connect to their new school community. It is no surprise that the children expressed such an affinity towards participating in sports and extra-curricular activities. The importance of children in care participating in extra-curricular activities is a key theme for this study similar to another study where 20 former children in care also prioritized participation in extra-curricular activities as a key theme (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016, p. x).

Summary of Key Findings

The findings above were captured on a micro level within the Medicine Wheel to reflect a thematic analysis of the children's experience in accordance with the Medicine Wheel direction, whereas the discussion below is a macro perspective of the key findings. The following contributing factors relating to children in care who start a new school is discussed further: friends – a factor in school connection, placement stability, lack of preparation to start a new school, constructing identity through social inclusion, social adjustment, and the indicators of adjustment.

Friends – A Factor in School Connection

A key finding of this study is that Indigenous children in care need to have a sense of belonging in the education milieu in order to adapt to a new school. For the research participants, their sense of belonging is predicated on making new friends and having a friendship group. Although the children recognized other aspects of school connectedness, such as having positive student and teacher relationships, having opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities and experiencing academic success, their primary concern was social inclusion.

Having friends at school is a factor in school connection (Akar-Vural, Yılmaz-Özelçi, Çengel & Gömleksiz, 2013). Students who are connected are more likely to attend school, more likely to experience academic success and less likely to have mental health issues or be involved in crime/delinquent behaviour (Akar-Vural et al., 2013; Mantilla, 2012; United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2009).

The United States Department of Health and Human Services (2009) proposes that there are four factors to create school connectedness "adult support, belonging to a positive peer group, commitment to education, and a positive school environment" (p.1).

The same four factors were echoed by the Indigenous research participants (to varying degrees) with an emphasis on having friends and belonging to a peer group. The importance of belonging is further supported by Indigenous research studies and scholars, concluding that the education systems need to foster a sense of belonging for Indigenous learners, who have unique needs (Cajete, 2005; van Ingen & Halas, 2006; Kanu, 2007; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Dion et al., 2010; Donovan, 2011; Dion & Salamanca 2014). While Indigenous research concludes that education systems are not usually culturally responsive to Indigenous learners (and that a sense of belonging is founded on this), the research participants prioritized friendships rather than

culturally responsive education systems. However, the research was focused on adjusting to a new school (and not the learning needs of Indigenous students) which may account for the participants prioritizing social inclusion over culture.

Having friends is an important part of adolescence. Notably, having friends at school is a protective factor for all students (Merritt & Snyder, 2015, p. 492). According to a study of 108 teens (ages 13 to 16 years old) researchers found that teens needed friends to develop a sense of belonging and importantly, that a teenager's friends were a better support system than adults (Knudsen, 2017).

> For many parents, the truth is hard to admit: Adolescents begin to rely less and less upon the adults in their lives and more heavily on their peers. Starting to let go is difficult. But teens' reliance on buddies is good for their development and sense of belonging. A new study found that this is especially true in the immediate aftermath of a stressful event, like failing a test. Researchers from Australia's Murdoch and Griffith universities surveyed teens in real time throughout the day and found that, after something bad happens, they cope better emotionally when they're with peers rather than with adults. (Knudsen, 2017, para. 1–2)

Similarly, the participants found sanctuary in their peer group compared to the bullying they faced from other students who made fun of them for being in care. Participants were subjected to cruel remarks such as: "[Y]our mom doesn't want you" and, "[Y]our parents left you". Participants talked of how frightening it was to go to a new school for fear of being bullied and facing the unknown. Thus, having solace in a friendship group helped to counter these factors. In *Promoting Resilience in Child Welfare*, Gilligan (2006) also recognizes the importance of having friends while in care, and concludes that resilience is enhanced for children

in care by a "sense of secure base/confiding relationships" and "social support" (p. 31). Thus, it comes as no surprise that participants focused on having friends as a priority, given the therapeutic and protective value in friendships, as noted by Merritt and Snyder (2015), Knusden (2017) and Gilligan (2006) above.

Placement Stability

Another major finding from this research mirrors previous studies of children in care: changing placements (including going to a new school) is a scary, lonely experience (Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2012, p. 14). It is psychologically distressing (ACS-NYU Children's Trauma Institute, 2012; Hyde & Kammerer, 2009; Unrau, 2007). In addition, placement moves and/or school disruptions interfere with one's ability to form meaningful relationships (Happer et al., 2006, p. 2; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016, p. 32) leaving children in care more vulnerable (Martin & Jackson, 2002; Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2012; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016, p. 32). Along with the known impacts of moves, according to the Indigenous children in care in this study, their difficult school experiences are compounded with racism and bullying.

Given the aforementioned impacts of placement changes, it is understandable that children in care yearn for placement stability. For example, in a 2006 study of 59 children interviewed, their primary goal was placement stability (Fernandez, 2006, p. 134). While the children in the research project did not outright say they preferred to stay in one placement, by describing the negative impacts of their school changes and placement moves, they promoted the benefits of placement stability.

Lack of Preparation to Start a New School

Changing schools is a significant adjustment where children face numerous unknown and frightening situations. In fact, changing schools can be the "most daunting experience" that children face at a young age (Parent Info, 2018, Five Tips For Starting a New School section, para. 1). The children (in the study) were able to manage these experiences using coping strategies developed over time from their personal experiences. Curiously, the children did not identify any supportive actions or efforts that occurred before starting a new school. One would think that such a significant event in a child's life would require a degree of support to prepare the child for such an event.

The lack of attention by caregivers and child welfare workers to support children in care as they adjust to a new school was reflected by a lack of policies and procedures guiding the process. For example, when I asked nine Indigenous child welfare agencies to share their policies and procedures to support children in care to adjust to a new school, they were unable to produce any. Consequently, it was unsurprising that the children could not identify any formal strategies used by the child welfare and education systems to help them adjust to a new school.

Constructing Identity Through Social Inclusion

Without a preemptive approach to help children adjust to their new schools, the children mostly relied on themselves (to adjust to a new school) rather than relying on anyone else. The children were easily able to identify what they needed to adjust to a new school. Through their own lived experiences, the children were unanimous in the conclusion that most important part of starting a new school was to find new friends. Their collective experience described a framework to construct their school identity with social inclusion as the first step.

The children's narratives support Erikson's (1963) stage of psychosocial development where a young person (between ages 12 to 18) must form their identity during adolescence which lays the foundation for the next stage of development as they move towards adulthood. This stage of Erikson's psychosocial development model is known as *Identity Versus Role Confusion*. Erikson suggests if a person does not clearly understand themselves as a teenager (by exploring what their value and belief system is during adolescence) that they will have an "identity crisis" triggered by their own role confusion.

Given that the research participants were adolescents aged 12 to 17 years old, as predicted in Erikson's *Identity Versus Role Confusion* stage, it comes as no surprise that their primary goal was to form their identity (through social inclusion) just like other teenagers of the same age that need a friendship group in order to belong (Knudsen, 2017). The research participants were searching for a peer group that would accept them as an Indigenous child in care, a tolerant and just social network unlike other students who bullied them for their race and foster care status. One participant framed this as needing to "pick wisely".

Although Erikson suggests that the foundation to a person's identity is formed during adolescence, it can be argued that a person's identity is constantly developing based on a variety of social and environmental factors:

> We are constantly developing our identity, from birth to the end of our lives. We build it based on our relationships to relatives, friends, community, geography, language and other social factors. Identity plays a key role in healthy child development. When a child feels a sense of belonging to family, community and peers he or she is better able to deal with adversity. (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2013, Aboriginal Children: The Healing Power of Cultural Identity section, para. 4)

Regardless of any disagreement of where, when and how a person's identity is formed, there is agreement that identity is a key factor in well-being (Donovan, 2011, p. 133; Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2013, Aboriginal Children: The Healing Power of Cultural Identity section, para. 4; Restoule, 2006, p. 185). Indigenous people also understand the significance of one's identity in relation to a person's well-being. It is a common belief amongst Indigenous peoples, that a person's identity is linked to their culture, community and relationship with the land. Although in urban settings, the same concept of land connection can be reimagined as "place". For example, in a 2011 study, researchers focused on identity formation in Inuit youth in Ottawa with an understanding that there is are "assumed associations between people and place" (Patrick, Tomiak, Brown, Langille & Vieru, 2011, p. 71). If a person's identity is linked to their environment then the research participant's responses fit perfectly into this line of thinking reflected in their desire to find friends (in their new place) as their primary task to form their student identity. The children's emphasis on social inclusion does not diminish the importance of having a culturally responsive education system to create a healthy school environment. Understandably, the conversations with research participants centered around having friends as the most important part of adjusting to a new school. If the conversations were focused on learning rather than adjusting perhaps a greater emphasis on culture would have occurred given what is known in the research on Indigenous models of teaching and learning (Dion et al., 2010; Kanu, 2007).

Social Adjustment

The social adjustment of children in care needs to be understood and supported by the child welfare and education systems. Children without a healthy social network are more vulnerable (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016, p. 32).

The importance of social inclusion for children in care is evidenced in the research where children in care consistently demonstrate difficulties with social adjustment (Barber & Delfabbro, 2006, p. 164). The research participants similarly highlighted their need to feel included, hence their desire to fit into their new social system as the first order of business when changing schools. Since the research participants were unanimous in their thinking that making friends in their new school is a primary consideration, adults at home and at school need to support children in care to find friends. These opportunities can be created by ensuring that children in care have access to social, recreational and cultural activities. Although the children viewed school as their only means to find friends, non-academic and community settings also provide natural ways to form friendships. NCFST's cultural programs are a prime example of how to provide opportunities for social inclusion. By using culture as the foundation of their programs, it allows the children to build a sense of their cultural selves and to form bonds within their own social group. These bonds and sense of self were evidenced in the focus groups, where the children demonstrated cultural competence in Indigenous customs (smudging, receiving tobacco, and participating in a talking circle) and appeared to have positive relationships with each other. In fact, many children in both focus groups knew each other from participating in NCFST's cultural programs. Participating in cultural programs offers children social opportunities and provides cultural continuity, which is a protective factor that contributes to a child's resiliency (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998).

Indicators of Adjustment

Similar to protective factors discussed above, the children identified a number of indicators that would show how well they were adjusting to their new school. They provided specific examples in the following categories: emotional, social, cognitive and behavioural. These indicators (as they relate to adjusting to a new school) are described further below and conceptualized in the Medicine Wheel (see Figure 2: *Child in Care Indicators of Adjusting to a New School*).
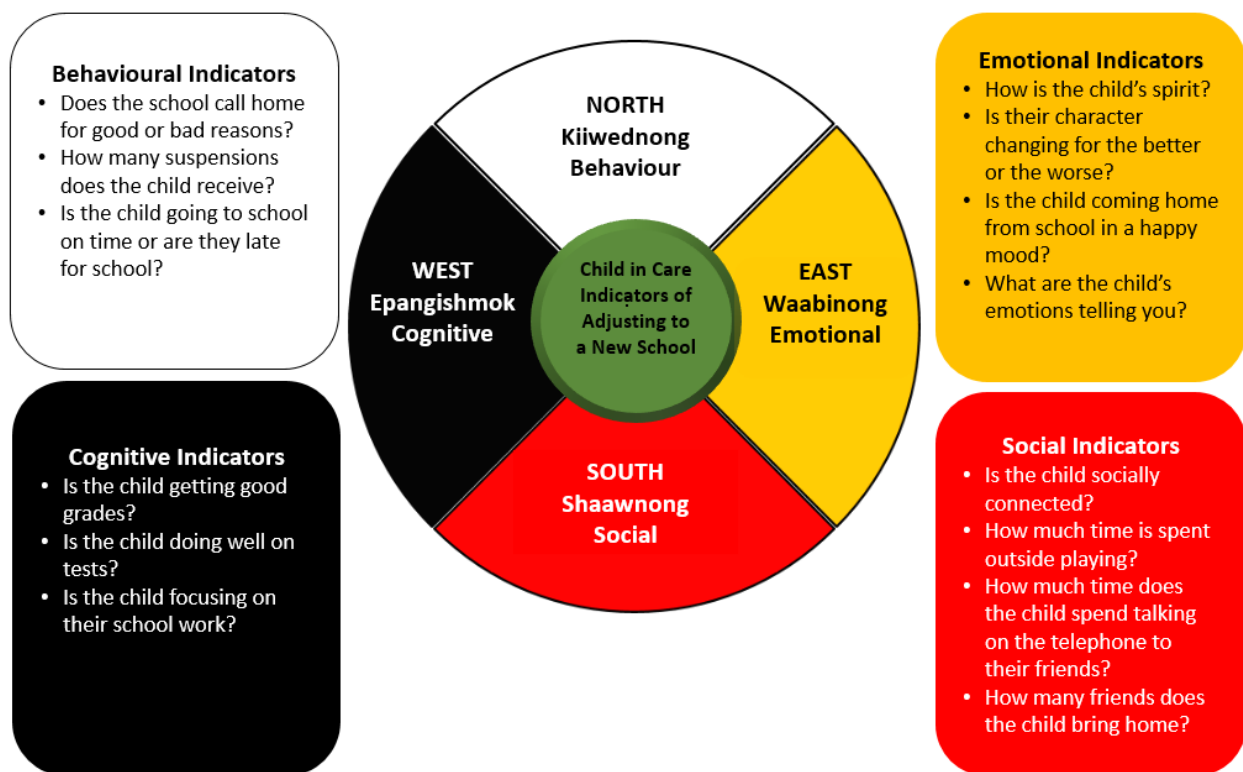

Figure 2: Child in Care Indicators of Adjusting to a New School

Overall, the children simply described healthy behaviours and ways of functioning that can be considered a model of well-being for children in care who are adjusting to a new school.

For example, the children explained how their moods were a good indicator of their adjustment. This is the starting place of the Medicine Wheel. The East is where a person's "spirit is born" (Pitawanakwat, 2006, The East – Waabinong *s*ection, para. 3) and where their attitude towards life is formed. The influences of the East help to create a "healthy mind" (Laframboise & Sherbina, 2008, Introduction section, para. 6). In essence, the participants described the Eastern characteristics of their spirit and emotions. Participants said, "We came home and we were happier" and, "So, it's your emotions, your changing your character that's how people know you adjust".

Next, when asked how their caregivers, teachers and workers could tell how the children were adjusting to their new schools (or not), the children said that they were doing well when they were socially connected. Again, the children reiterated the importance of having friends, punctuating the need for social connection. The children described the components that rest in the South – where relations reside. The South guides "how we interrelate" to one another (Laframboise & Sherbina, 2008, A Medicine Wheel's Life Learning section). Participants shared the following indicators of being socially connected: "[T]he amount of time that you're out playing,"; "The amount of times you're on the phone"; and "The amount of friends you bring home". Again, the children's indicators of adjustment point to the importance of having friends and a social network, features of the South.

Further, the children noted that getting good grades was an indication of how well they were doing. Basically, the children described the characteristics of the West – where knowledge comes from. One child said, "[B]ut like if you feel bad or anything, then you probably like not do good on tests and stuff". Another child said, "Teachers would know if I'm adjusting by my grades […] or focusing". It was interesting that the children tabled good grades as an indicator of

their adjustment, given that children in care are a group known to fall behind (Trocmé et al., 2009, p. 3) and are more likely to repeat a grade (Brownell, et al., 2010, pp. 806–807; Trocmé et al., 2009, p. 3). Despite these odds, the research participants yearned to do well at school and pointed to their cognitive functioning as a good marker of their adjustment.

Lastly, the children stated that their behaviour at school is an indicator of how well they were adjusting to their new school. This is the physical component of the Medicine Wheel, in the North, where behaviours reside. The North is also a place of healing (Nabigon, 2006, p. 117). Therefore the North is a good gauge for recognizing problem behaviour and understanding the extent of the problem. The children agreed that problematic and non-problematic behaviours were indicators of their adjustment. They provided examples of how caregivers would receive calls at home because there were problems at school (or better still) receive calls at home for good reasons. One participant said, "And like, you're not getting calls home [from the principal] and you're not getting suspended and stuff", and another participant added, "And like when they got calls home it was good stuff". Another behavioural indicator identified was whether they were arriving on time.

CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In October 2017, the Ontario government turned their attention to the number of school moves for children in care by committing 21 million dollars over three years to reduce the number of school moves (by busing children in care to their original schools) and adding "educational liaison staff" to support children's education plans:

> The money will help school boards pay for busing so kids in the care won't have to switch schools when they move. It will also help children's aid societies hire educational liaison staff to develop education plans and co-ordinate school and community supports to ensure these vulnerable children and youth reach their full potential. "This funding will bring stability to students at a critical time that will enable them to focus on their education," Education Minister Mitzie Hunter said in a statement Monday. "Students will also be able to maintain important relationships in school with friends, staff and educators, from Kindergarten to Grade 12 and beyond," she said. (Monsebraaten, 2017, para. 2–4)

The three-year funding to support busing for children in care to remain in their current schools is a good start to address a historical problem of placement disruption and school moves. Ongoing analysis is needed to monitor spending of the new money, and more importantly, to measure the anticipated and unanticipated outcomes of this initiative including maintaining statistical data for Indigenous children in care, separate from the non-Indigenous children in care data. Apart from the current collection of statistical data regarding Indigenous children in care (University of Ottawa, 2014), it is more important to utilize their experiences to shape policies and procedures.

It is important to take a closer look at what policies are in place to help children in care adjust to their new school. Further, if there was a provincial or national repository to collect the statistical data on school moves, efforts to reduce school changes could actually be quantified. To affect true change, the child welfare and education systems must use these strategies or follow the advice of the research participants to create policies where none exist.

Legacy of Residential Schools

The research findings from this study confirm the existing knowledge in the field (that placement disruption is psychologically distressing to children in care and affects their academic capacity to be successful), and they confirm the need to take greater action to promote placement stability for Indigenous children in care and minimize school disruptions. Children in care are a vulnerable group and Indigenous children in care are even more vulnerable with the added complications of race, colonization and inter-generational trauma.

The research participants' traumatic experiences of being bullied and frightened in their new schools are similar to experiences of other Indigenous children during the Indian Residential School era (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada). Today's child welfare and education systems designed to care for Indigenous children in care are an epilogue to the Indian Residential School systems and Sixties Scoop era (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2018) because they forcibly remove children from their homes and legislate them to attend a colonial education system.

With the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in Canada's child welfare system (Statistics Canada, 2011) the historical displacement of children from their homes and

communities during the residential school era continues in modern times, simply shifting as what was previously the Sixties Scoop morphed into what is known today as the Millennium Scoop (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2018). In fact, there are more children in care today than at the height of residential schools:

> The review by the [Ontario] province's human rights commission finds a "staggering" number of Indigenous children in care across Canada — more now than there were in residential schools at the height of their use — and Ontario is part of the dismal situation. (Canadian Press, 2018, para. 2)

The current paradigm of care is rooted in colonialism and imperialism, which is causing "multiple negative social and economic disadvantages, such as low levels of education, high levels of unemployment, extreme levels of poverty, inadequate housing and health disparities" (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018, Indigenous Children section, para. 3). This is a direct cause for the over-representation of Indigenous children in care, as "research shows that Indigenous children are severely over-represented in Canada's child welfare system (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018, Research on Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare section, para. 1). There must be a paradigm shift in the approach to looking after Indigenous children that is bound by the social well-being of the Indigenous community. The child welfare and education systems have a legal and moral obligation to do a better job responding to the needs of Indigenous children in care. The current child welfare and education systems are perpetuating broken systems resulting in poor outcomes and traumatic experiences. As the study's findings show, Indigenous children in care are subjected to multiple school and placement changes causing extreme duress and increasing their chances of being subjected to various forms of racism, discrimination and bullying. The findings did not reveal any cultural

indicators that would support the children to reduce their traumatic experiences while in care. Yet Indigenous peoples repeatedly state (and have proven) that the only solution to heal the trauma and promote wellness for Indigenous peoples is to have culture as the foundation of their lives (Assembly of First Nations et al., 2011; Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Kirmayer et al, 2000; McIvor et al., 2009). Knowing that Indigenous children in care experience multiple school and placement changes, if the foster homes and schools were culturally responsive then these types of forced moves would be less traumatic. By utilizing culture as the guiding principle, children could anticipate a consistent and supportive response from foster homes and schools as part of their move. The children would be able to anticipate the cultural markers (ceremonies, community engagement, traditional parenting styles, relationships with Elders, Indigenous curriculum and representation in schools etc.) that would establish a culturally consistent environment. These types of culturally intelligent responses would make placement and school changes less frightening and more predictable or, better still, when children are brought into care, all efforts should be taken to keep them in the same school and community.

Researchers Coston, Lord and Monell (2013) describe the school transfer process (for post-secondary students) as "Transfer shock" (p. 22) in recognition of the "distress" (p. 22) experienced by students who leave their home communities to start a new school in a different jurisdiction. Although the Coston et al. (2013) study participants were post-secondary students (presumably adults) compared to the 12 to 17 year old Indigenous research participants from this study, the researchers show how school moves and community changes are stressful for older students. Clearly, moving schools and changing communities at any age is distressing, although it can be argued that these types of moves can be more difficult for younger children (who do not have the same adult faculties) and that these types of moves are especially difficult for

Indigenous children in care who already have a laundry list of issues from being Indigenous and from being in care. Thus, moving children from their schools and communities is simply propagating the legacy of harms caused by Residential Schools and should be avoided at all costs.

The reason we are moving children in the first place is that the Indigenous community lacks capacity to care for their children due to the ripple effect of residential school. The legacy of the residential school system has brought about issues such as intergenerational trauma, poor parenting, substance abuse, poverty, mental health issues, family violence, neglect, abuse etc. Before the residential school system Indigenous peoples were able to care for their own children within a community context. For example, when a member of the community was unable to care for their own child, another family member or another community member would care for the child (temporarily) until the parent was ready to resume care of their own child. This traditional way of looking after children is known as Customary Care. In Ontario, the law compels CASs to consider Customary Care as an option for all Indigenous children who cannot remain with their families of origin. The Ontario *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* (2017) states that "Societies shall make all reasonable efforts to pursue a plan for Customary Care for a First Nations, Inuk or Métis child if the child is in need of protection" (section 80). Customary Care allows children to remain in their own community and maintain family connections. By facilitating Customary Care placements within a child's own Indigenous community, children will have less disruption.

Reconciliation

The Canadian government's commitment to take action by addressing their historical wrongs and reconciling their relationships with Indigenous peoples has been a painfully slow and

arduous journey. There have been significant events that have drawn attention to the Indigenous peoples' plight to reclaim their land and inherent rights such as: Oka Crisis (1990), Ipperwash Crisis (1995), Grand River Land Dispute (2006) and the Idle No More Movement (2012). As well, there have been key efforts towards reconciliation: such as The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1991–1996), The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (2007), A Statement of Apology to Former Students of Indian Residential Schools (2008) and The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2009–2015). These historical events helped to mobilize the Indigenous community and laid the groundwork for reconciliation. With the 94 Calls to Action identified in the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* (2015) report and the Canadian government's commitment to implement them, the ground is fertile for genuine reform to the child welfare and education systems. It is important to note that calls for reform in child welfare and education were prioritized as the first two items listed in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) report. Relatedly, the Ontario child welfare sector represented by the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) also acknowledged the harmful effects of child welfare for Indigenous peoples:

> On October 1–3, 2017, OACAS hosted a gathering called "A Moment on the Path" at Geneva Park and Rama First Nation to acknowledge and apologize for the harmful role child welfare has played historically, and continues to play, in the lives of Ontario Indigenous children, families, and communities. (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, n.d., Child Welfare Apologizes to Indigenous Families and Communities section, para. 1)

As part of Ontario's child welfare sector apology, the OACAS identified nine reconciliation commitments to address the historical wrongs and improve relations between the

child welfare sector and the Indigenous community. Notably, the number one commitment made was to reduce the number of Indigenous children in care in the province (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, n.d., Child Welfare Apologizes to Indigenous Families and Communities section, para.7).

In November 2018, The Government of Canada followed suit by pledging to transfer child welfare services (in 2019) to Indigenous communities in an effort to "drive down the massive number of Indigenous children in foster care" (Tasker, 2018, para. 1). The federal government's decision to transfer child welfare jurisdiction to Indigenous communities supports the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Call to Action #4 where the federal government is called upon to "enact Aboriginal child-welfare legislation that establishes national standards for Aboriginal child apprehension and custody cases and includes principles that: Affirm the right of Aboriginal governments to establish and maintain their own child-welfare agencies" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, Calls to Action, p. 1). This long awaited change is welcomed by Indigenous leaders who describe today's child welfare systems as: "dysfunctional"; "inadequate" (Tasker, 2018, para. 5); and, "inattentive to [Indigenous children in care's] unique needs" (Tasker, 2018, para. 3).

This thesis promotes a platform for change and an opportunity for reflection and reconciliation. It allows Indigenous children in care to have their voices heard about the impact of placement disruption on their educational experiences. It has the potential to minimize the negative aspects of placement disruption on their educational experiences – a direct response to their needs. Indigenous children in care need the community, government, child welfare and education systems to work in partnership to help them have a better experience in adjusting to their new school and subsequently a better experience in care. The pleas of the children in this

study resonate with and add to the existing literature on best ways to address their needs and wishes.

The children provided a range of responses to the research questions, leading to a possible framework for the kind of supports needed to help them adjust to a new school. Many of the children identified needing supportive adults and effective child welfare and education systems to help them achieve academic success and also to respond and take action when they are under duress. Some of the children relied on their workers to monitor their progress and help them make good choices in life. Some of the children expected their workers to maintain frequent contact with their school and caregivers. In particular, the children expected their workers to advocate for them and offer them a choice whether they could stay in the same school or start a new one. The children offered practical advice for their teachers to, "be helpful" on the first day of school and they encouraged teachers to make children in care feel comfortable on their first day by, "offering to give us extra support". They wanted their caregivers to be "understanding" and "encouraging" by offering, "support, love, and hugs" and driving them to school on the first day. At times, some children relied on their caregivers and biological parents for advice. They wanted their caregivers to ask how their day was and take a genuine interest in how they were adjusting to their new school by paying attention to their non-verbal cues. For example, they stressed the importance of paying attention to their health indicators in accordance with the social, emotional, cognitive and physical components of their lives. Additionally, the children identified the following key areas for the child welfare and education systems to focus their attention on: bullying, school safety, academic progress, behavioural issues, social adjustment, sports and extra-curricular activities, and access to academic resources. To honour the principles and key areas that the children identified as part of their support plan, one must

keep in mind that each child has their own version of what constitutes support. Therefore, the development of any support plan for a child in care must be created with the child as the leading voice.

The children never spoke about the role of community in their experiences. Perhaps the absence of this was based on their lack of experience with community support. Regardless, it is understood that the Indigenous community involvement is valuable to Indigenous students (Friesen & Krauth, 2012, p. 20). Relatedly, researchers Dion, Johnston and Rice (2010)[34] confirm the need to increase community involvement in order to decolonize and Indigenize the school curriculum, thus improving the Indigenous student's school experience. Following this line of thought, the same proves true for Indigenous children in care, by Indigenizing services to help them to form a cultural attachment to their community and strengthen their Indigenous sense of identity, commonly known in the child welfare system as the provision of "culturally relevant services" (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017, p. 8). The need for child welfare workers to work more closely with Indigenous communities is also reinforced in the Ontario *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* (2017) where the children's aid society is compelled to involve the child's Indigenous community (First Nation, Métis or Inuit) by communicating with them on a regular basis (section 72). While the role of the Indigenous community was not identified by the children as part of their framework (to support Indigenous children in care to adjust to a new school), the inclusion of a child's Indigenous community in their lives is an obvious protective factor (Kirmayer et al., 2000, p. 607). Thus, the additional

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[34]In 2010, researchers Dion, Johnston and Rice conducted an evaluation of the Toronto District School Board's Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project (UAEPP) with "over 200 students, parents, teachers, community members, administrators and other UAEPP stakeholders" (Dion, et al., 2010, p. vi).

support gained from the involvement of the child's Indigenous community can only be viewed as an added layer of support for an Indigenous child in care.

Responsibility

Once a child is brought into care, the government has a fiduciary responsibility to raise healthy children and provide each one of them with every advantage for a good life. As government parents who hold the responsibility of raising a child, it is their legal and ethical duty to help that child realize their potential. To this end, the government must ensure that the children under their care have a positive educational experience that is stimulating as well as edifying. "Education is not just about what happens in the school day, and this should be recognized by care givers and professionals alike. Education is also about igniting curiosity and creating and feeding ambition" (The Who Cares? Trust, 2015, p. 35). Under Article 29 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), a child in Canada has a right to education that "[S]hall be directed to: The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential" (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). An education that helps children reach "their fullest potential" is not only a legal right it is a moral imperative.

Poverty is a root cause that leads children into foster care and a contributing factor to the over-representation of Indigenous children in care (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018, Impacts of Being Taken into Care section, para. 2). Given the correlation between low graduation rates and high unemployment rates (Richards & Vining, 2004), the imperative to help children have positive school experiences (and in turn be successful in school) is even more

critical for Indigenous children and considered a pathway to economic security for the

Indigenous community:

> Motivating youth to complete their education is of great importance to the economic
>
> future of Indigenous communities. Youth need a strong foundation in their traditions and
>
> proficiency in the skills valued by contemporary society. Those who master these skills
>
> and contribute to their communities and nations deserve to be celebrated as the modern
>
> equivalents of the great hunters and leaders of the past." (Government of Canada, n.d.,
>
> Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, People to
>
> People, Nation to Nation, Restructuring the Relationship, Education and Training section,
>
> para. 3)

For Indigenous children, the full expression of this right and imperative must include a

culturally healthy and meaningful education that promotes their self-confidence and secures their

Indigenous identity. "The importance of identity is particularly true for Indigenous children's

healthy development since community and belonging are such important parts of their cultures'

belief systems" (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2013, Aboriginal Children: The Healing

Power of Cultural Identity section, para. 4). The social, emotional and cultural health of an

Indigenous child in care is formed, in part, by the education systems. If an Indigenous child in

care has a positive school experience, the impact of the placement move will be minimized.

The child welfare and education systems must have a true understanding of an

Indigenous child in care's educational experience in order to help them have positive school

experiences. Hence it is of vital importance that we understand the factors that underpin positive

school experiences among Indigenous children in care who are submitted to changing multiple

schools because of placement moves. However, unfortunately at present, other than this current

study, research focusing on Indigenous children in care and their experiences of disruptive school placements is a relatively neglected area and in need of immediate attention.

Recommendations for Future Research

As this study was confined to an urban Indigenous group of children in care in Toronto, Ontario, it would be important and balanced to hear from other Ontario Indigenous children in care (outside of Toronto) to understand their experiences with changing schools and whether their experiences are similar to the Toronto group or not.

In addition, as some of the children actually moved and/or changed schools during the study it would be beneficial to follow the same children in care (on a longitudinal basis) and asking them about their school experiences after changing schools thereby providing greater insight into these experiences from an individual perspective rather than a group perspective. It may also prove helpful to have individual interviews at the exact point in time when they are changing schools for a real-life perspective of this experience rather than a reflective perspective.

Furthermore, having former youth in care as research participants may reveal different viewpoints and experiences that did not emerge with the 12 to 17 year old group of children in care participants from this study.

The importance of friendships as the primary goal for children especially those in care lends to the fact that research in the area of Indigenous children's experiences of friendships at school is worth exploring further in a study of its own.

Moreover, an attempt was made to attain policies and procedures (about changing schools) from nine Indigenous child welfare agencies (in Ontario), by conducting an environmental scan of policies for changing schools. While some of the agencies provided

anecdotal information, no actual policies were attained. Therefore, accessing policies from non-Indigenous child welfare agencies in Ontario would shed light on how the child welfare system formally responds to children in care who change schools (e.g., Joint Protocol for School Achievement "JPSA").

It would also be useful to have teachers' perspectives on how they respond to new Indigenous students (who are in care). This specific recommendation stems from the fact that the children worried about the teachers' personalities and whether the teachers would be "nice" or "helpful" to them. In particular, the children worried about whether teachers would "like" them, or not. Therefore, a study on Indigenous children in care's perceptions of their teachers would offer more insights in this area.

Lastly, since participants emphasized participating in sports teams and other extra-curricular activities as a positive aspect (and an important part) of adjusting to a new school, it is essential to explore the significance of sports and extra-curricular activities for Indigenous youth in care in Ontario schools.

Conclusion

In closing, this study highlights that Indigenous children in care, ages 12 to 17 do not receive additional support nor the necessary preparation to start a new school. The findings confirm that changing schools is a major source of stress for Indigenous children in care (with many complicating social, emotional and academic factors that influence their experience), which ultimately increases their vulnerability to other life stressors and increases their negative school experiences. Consequently, the child welfare and education systems have a shared responsibility to provide additional supports for Indigenous children in care when starting a new

school. These types of supports must nurture a child's spirit as the place of preparation for adjusting to a new school environment and later academic successes. Additionally, support plans to help Indigenous children in care need to be developed in consultation with the child as the leading voice and with the following conclusions derived from the research, in mind. These are: **having friends and a sense of belonging,** being that it is the most important part of an Indigenous child in care's school adjustment; **incorporating protective factors** in their support plans to promote resiliency in a child's development, which could include friends, culture, community, and supportive adults such as teachers, workers, caregivers, and biological parents and systems of care; **fostering positive childhood memories** that are proven to contribute to good health in adulthood thereby creating a pathway for adult well-being; and, **participating in sports and extra-curricular activities,** thus helping to form meaningful childhood memories that offer Indigenous children in care comfort and respite from their stressful life circumstances.

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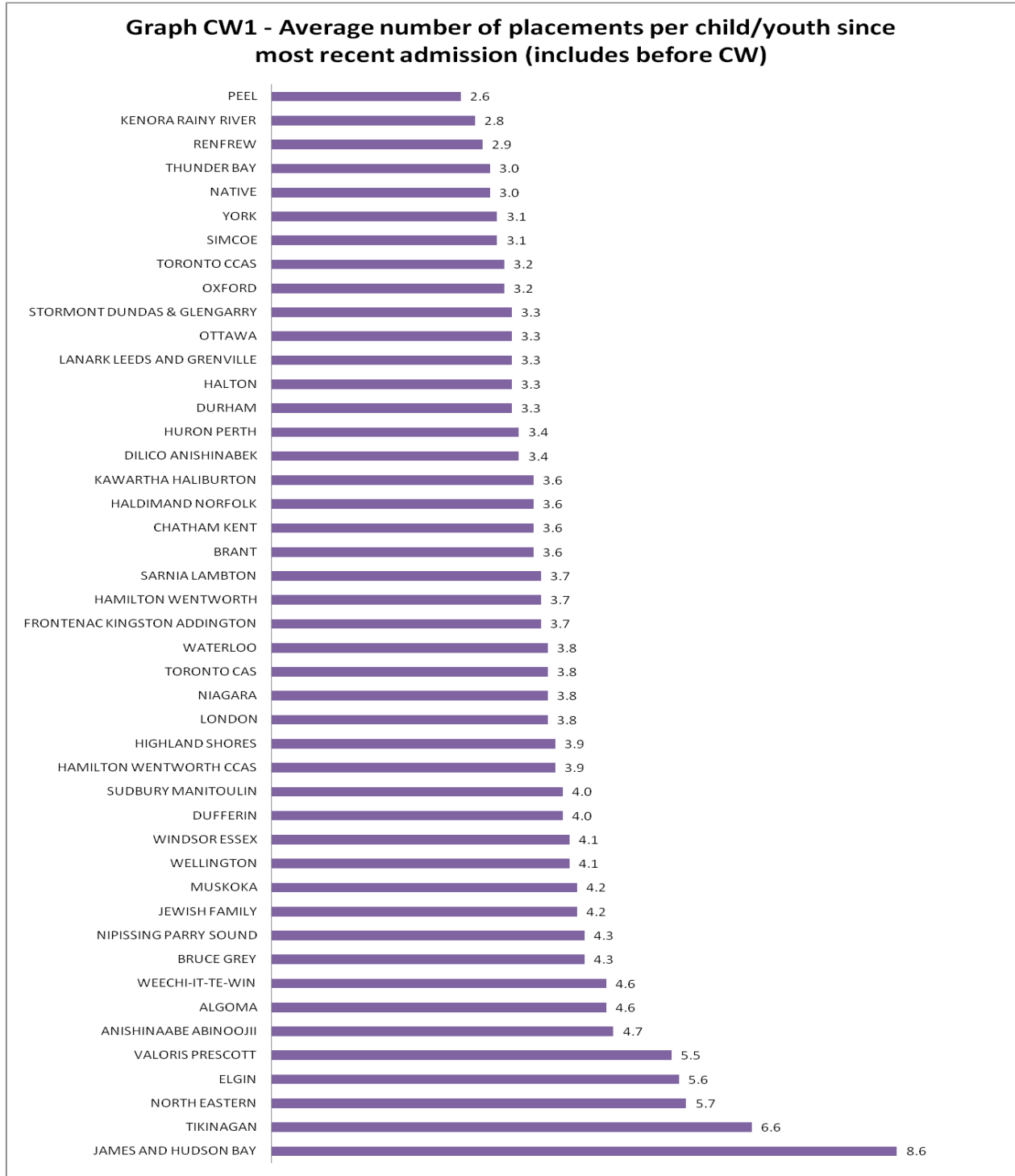
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APPENDIX A

Average Number of Placements Per Child/Youth Since Most Recent Admission, Includes Before Crown Wardship (Contenta, Monsebraaten, Rankin, Bailey & Ng, 2015, p. 21)

Graph CW1 - Average number of placements per child/youth since most recent admission (includes before CW)

Agency	Value
PEEL	2.6
KENORA RAINY RIVER	2.8
RENFREW	2.9
THUNDER BAY	3.0
NATIVE	3.0
YORK	3.1
SIMCOE	3.1
TORONTO CCAS	3.2
OXFORD	3.2
STORMONT DUNDAS & GLENGARRY	3.3
OTTAWA	3.3
LANARK LEEDS AND GRENVILLE	3.3
HALTON	3.3
DURHAM	3.3
HURON PERTH	3.4
DILICO ANISHINABEK	3.4
KAWARTHA HALIBURTON	3.6
HALDIMAND NORFOLK	3.6
CHATHAM KENT	3.6
BRANT	3.6
SARNIA LAMBTON	3.7
HAMILTON WENTWORTH	3.7
FRONTENAC KINGSTON ADDINGTON	3.7
WATERLOO	3.8
TORONTO CAS	3.8
NIAGARA	3.8
LONDON	3.8
HIGHLAND SHORES	3.9
HAMILTON WENTWORTH CCAS	3.9
SUDBURY MANITOULIN	4.0
DUFFERIN	4.0
WINDSOR ESSEX	4.1
WELLINGTON	4.1
MUSKOKA	4.2
JEWISH FAMILY	4.2
NIPISSING PARRY SOUND	4.3
BRUCE GREY	4.3
WEECHI-IT-TE-WIN	4.6
ALGOMA	4.6
ANISHINAABE ABINOOJII	4.7
VALORIS PRESCOTT	5.5
ELGIN	5.6
NORTH EASTERN	5.7
TIKINAGAN	6.6
JAMES AND HUDSON BAY	8.6

APPENDIX B
Research Orientation Flyer, April 29, 2016

STAFF ORIENTATION
For workers who have children in care who attend Camp Kawartha

RESEARCH PROJECT

Listening To, And Learning From, Aboriginal Children In Care: The Experiences Of Aboriginal Children In Care Who Have Multiple School Changes As A Result Of Placement Disruption

LANDY ANDERSON
Graduate Student
York University
Toronto, ON

Graduate Program in Education – Language, Culture and Teaching

Master of Education

FRIDAY APRIL 29, 2016 @ 12PM
LUNCH & LEARN ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY

Please RSVP to Landy Anderson

On May 14, 2016 I will conduct a research focus group with NCFST's children in care at Camp Kawartha (Peterborough). If you are a CSW or FSW with a child in care who attends Camp Kawartha, please attend this orientation to learn about this research project. If you are a RW with a child in a Foster Home who attends Camp Kawartha, please come too!

APPENDIX C
Parental Information Letter

Parental Information Letter
Parent/Legal Guardian
For: Biological Parent or Legal Guardian or Children's Services Worker

April 24, 2016

RE: Research Project: Listening to, and Learning From, Aboriginal Children in Care: The Experiences of Aboriginal Children in Care Who Have Multiple School Changes as a Result of Placement Disruption

Dear Parent/Legal Guardian:

My name is Landy Rynnae Anderson, and I am mixed-heritage Métis and Chinese. I am a member of the Gaspé Peninsula, Lower St-Lawrence, Magdalen Islands Métis Aboriginal Community in Quebec. My husband and children are members of Alderville First Nation, an Ojibway reserve in Ontario. My Chinese name translates as "beautiful jade" and was given to me by my maternal uncle. My Indigenous spirit name translates as "one who brings the drum", which means I bring balance. My traditional name was given to me by a Cree Elder. I walk in 2 cultural worlds, comfortable in both.

I am a York University student, and I am doing research as a requirement for my Master of Education degree. I would like to do research with Aboriginal children in care because this is a group of children that I feel close to. My husband used to be a Crown Ward and spent his childhood growing up in care. Also, we used to be foster parents, where we cared for teenagers. As you may know, I have worked for Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST) for 10 years.

The research that I would like to do is about what it is like for children in care to go to a new school. The reason I am doing this research is because children in care have to change homes and whenever they go to a new home they usually have to go to a new school. I would like caregivers, Children's Aid Society (CAS) workers and teachers to better understand what it is like for a child in care to have to go to a new school. By hearing directly from children in care about their experiences of going to a new school, I can help raise awareness about this issue, and I hope that my research will be used to make improvements to the care system and help children in care better adjust to enrolling in a new school.

I am going to give your child information about my research study and invite them to be part of a research study, only if you provide permission first. Your child can choose whether or not they want to participate. I plan to discuss this with your child individually by calling them on the telephone. The actual research will take place at Camp Kawartha on **Saturday May 14, 2016**. If your child has any questions about the research, they will be asked to call you between April 11, 2016 and May 13, 2016. Children will be encouraged to speak to you or anyone they feel comfortable with about their decision to participate or not participate in the research (camp staff, counsellor, caregiver, parent, friend, teacher, auntie, etc.).

I will ask your child to participate in the research study in the following ways:
1. Participate in a focus group discussion on Saturday May 14, 2016 for 2.5 to 3 hours at Camp Kawartha;
2. Take home a journal, fill it as per the instructions provided (a copy of the instructions is attached), and return it to me. The amount of time your child dedicates to completing this task is at their discretion and
3. Review the research findings, to the extent they are willing.

After the journal is completed, your child will be asked to seal the journal in a self-addressed stamped envelope that I will provide to them. They will be asked to send the sealed envelope by placing it in a Canada Post mailbox or going to a Canada Post postal outlet and placing it in a mail slot.

For more information on the research, please see the attached documents: Parental Permission Letter (Informed Consent), Letter of Assent, Caregiver Information Letter and Participant Instructions to Complete the Journal. You will need to give permission for your child to participate in this research study and your child must also agree to participate. You both have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw your consent at any time after the research has begun. Your decision to participate, stop participating or not to participate will not affect your relationship with the researcher, Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, York University, or any other group associated with this project.

I will inform your child's caregiver about this research project before May 14, 2016. I will call each caregiver and have a direct conversation with them, and then I will send each caregiver a Caregiver Information Letter.

Please feel free to call me, should you have any questions or concerns or would like to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

Landy Anderson
Graduate Student – York University, Toronto, Ontario
Graduate Program in Education – Language, Culture and Teaching
Master of Education – Focusing on Urban Aboriginal Education

Attachments:
1. Parental Permission Letter (Informed Consent)
2. Letter of Assent
3. Caregiver Information Letter
4. Band Representative Information Letter
5. Participant Instructions to Complete the Journal

APPENDIX D
Parental Permission Letter (Informed Consent)

Parental Permission Letter
Consent Form
For: Biological Parent or Legal Guardian or Children's Services Worker

Date: April 24, 2016

Research Project (Study Name):
Listening to, and Learning From, Aboriginal Children in Care: The Experiences of Aboriginal Children in Care Who Have Multiple School Changes as a Result of Placement Disruption

Researcher:
Landy Anderson, Graduate Student, York University, Toronto, ON
Graduate Program in Education – Language, Culture and Teaching
Master of Education – Focusing on Urban Aboriginal Education

Purpose of the Research:
The purpose of this research is to understand children in care's experiences of starting new schools in order to help make this process as smooth and easy as possible for children currently in care or children in care in the future. I would like to understand (directly from Aboriginal children in care) what it is like to have multiple school changes, the rewards and challenges of going to new schools, and what helps alleviate the impact of multiple school changes. Additionally, I am interested in strategies that helped them adjust to their new schools, including whether they found coping methods themselves and/or if (and if so, how) other people in the child welfare and education systems (teachers, caregivers and Native Child and Family Services of Toronto "NCFST" workers) helped them adjust to their new school. Research will be conducted in a focus group at Camp Kawartha and then children will be asked to bring home a Journal as part of the research with instructions on its use. It is hoped that the research will help Aboriginal children in care have their voices heard about the impact of placement disruption on their educational experiences and minimize the negative aspects of placement disruption on the educational experiences of Aboriginal children in care. Once the research is completed, the final report will be shared with the children, caregivers, NCFST workers and other interested groups that work with children in care. The final report will be shared with interested child welfare groups through personal communications, direct consultations, publication and training sessions.

What Your Child Will be Asked to do in the Research:

Your child will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion at Camp Kawartha on Saturday May 14, 2016. The research focus group will last approximately 2.5 to 3 hours. Your child has the right not to answer any questions and withdraw from the focus group at any time.

After the focus group discussion, your child will be invited to bring home a journal as part of the research. Accompanying each journal will be a pencil case containing a set of colouring pencils,

pens, pencils, a pencil sharpener, stickers, an eraser and a glue stick. These drawing/art supplies are being supplied to your child in order for them to complete this portion of the research.

I will be the only person to see the journal. The journal is intended to be private and should not be shown to anyone. Your child's experiences may upset other people and there is no guarantee that other people will keep your child's information confidential or respond favorably to your child when they see your child's journal. If your child would like to show the journal to anyone before it's returned to me, that is their choice, otherwise no one else will see the journal, except me.

The journal can be used in the following ways:
- To share personal reflections from the focus group;
- To offer new information; additional feelings and thoughts and
- To reveal information that they didn't feel comfortable to share in a group setting;

Where your child submits an image, in order for the meaning of their submission to be accurately interpreted, your child will be asked to provide a written explanation of their submission. Your child has the right not to participate in the journal portion of the research study or stop participating at any time. Should your child choose not to submit a journal, they may keep the journal and pencil case/supplies provided to them.

I will invite your child to participate in analysis of the data. I will suggest ways to share the preliminary findings (from the focus group and journals)[1] with them, like:
1. Convene a meeting with study participants;
2. Disseminate the information by e-mail and
3. Post the material on a pass worded (secure) section of my web-site[2].

While it is my preference to actively engage your child/all the youth study participants during the data analysis phase, your child has the right to refuse to participate in the data analysis.

Risks and Discomforts:
Your child may become sad or upset recalling any negative experiences about going to a new school. The Elder will pray for all the children at the start of the focus group discussion and end with a prayer at the conclusion of the focus group discussion. Your child will have their tobacco tie, which also contains good prayers for their well-being. The youths will be encouraged to speak to their Children's Service Workers or caregivers should they be upset. The youths will be provided with the Researcher's contact information, should they wish to speak to the Researcher after the focus group. The NCFST staff at Camp Kawartha will be available to support your child during and after the focus group.

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[1] All data will be stripped of identifying information before dissemination.
[2] All data will be stripped of identifying information before dissemination.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to Your Child:
Your child will have an opportunity to raise awareness to the lived experiences of Aboriginal children in care who experience multiple school changes. Their experiences will assist in shaping current and future practices to help youth in care better adjust to attending a new school.

Your child/youth research participants will be provided options on how to engage the child welfare system in collectively improving the experiences for youths in care who are enrolled in new schools. The youths will determine the level of their involvement during the study and determine the level of on-going advocacy after the study. This allows them an authentic opportunity to have their voices represented in the care system.

How the Research Findings will be Presented:
Your child and the youth research participants will decide how involved they would like to be in presenting the research findings. Some options will be presented to your child/youth participants such as: creating a handbook, writing a poem, drawing a picture, creating a collective piece of art, advocating within the child welfare system, presenting at a child welfare conference, hosting an information session for child welfare workers/teachers and foster parents, making a video, etc. Your child has the right to refuse to participate in the research and/or any activities beyond the research.

After the research findings are jointly disseminated with the youth participants, I intend to publish the research and present the findings at various training conferences.

Voluntary Participation:
Your child's participation in the study is completely voluntary. You/and or your child may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to have your child volunteer will not influence the on-going relationship you have with myself as colleagues (employees) of Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, either now, or in the future. Your decision not to have your child participate will not affect you/your child's relationship with York University, either now or in the future.

Incentives:
All youth attending Camp Kawartha on Saturday May 14, 2016 will receive a journal and art supplies. Each youth participating in the research will be asked to fill in the journal at home as part of the research. Accompanying each journal will be a pencil case containing a set of colouring pencils, pens, pencils, a pencil sharpener, stickers, an eraser and a glue stick. These drawing/art supplies are being supplied to your child in order for them to complete this portion of the research. Your child has the right to withdraw from the journal portion of the research study. Should your child choose not to submit a journal, or participate at all in the study, they may keep the journal and pencil case/art supplies provided to them.

Withdrawal from the Study:
You/your child can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you/your child so decide. If you/your child decide to stop participating, you/your child will keep the journal/pencil case. You/your child's decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer

particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher, Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you/your child withdraw from the study, all associated data generated as a consequence of their participation shall be destroyed wherever possible.

Children and youths participating in the research focus group discussion will be offered a ceremonial Tobacco Tie[3]. This is a traditional custom in the Aboriginal community, prior to seeking important guidance/advice, a person is presented with Tobacco. Although Tobacco signifies an agreement between the person offering and receiving it, after the youths are presented with the Tobacco, they will be reminded that they still can choose to leave the project or not participate in any aspect of it at any time, regardless of whether they accept the Tobacco or not.

At the beginning of the research focus group discussion I will remind the youths on the intent of offering/receiving of Tobacco including the youths' right to refuse the Tobacco and the youths' right to withdraw from the research (focus group discussion or journal submission), at any time, regardless of whether they accepted the tobacco, or not.

Confidentiality:
All information your child supplies during the research will be held in confidence to the fullest extent possible by law. There are limits to confidentiality, however, due to the nature of focus groups, For example, while I will ask participants to refer to themselves using an animal name during the study, I cannot ensure that others in the groups do not disclose statements made by your child during the group discussions. At the beginning of the focus group, I will remind all children of the importance of respecting that the discussion during the focus group should remain confidential.

The focus group discussion will be audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim by the Researcher. Data from the transcribed focus group discussion will be stripped of all identifiable information and coded using a qualitative research software program. Transcripts, journals and the audio recordings will be locked in a filing cabinet in the Researcher's home office or stored on the Researcher's home computer, which is password protected.

Excerpts from the journals will be scanned and archived on the Researcher's home computer. Original journals will be returned to the study participant or destroyed (as per the participant instructions) by May 14, 2017. Original Consent Forms will be saved for TWO (2) years following the completion of the research and copies of the Consent Forms will be scanned and stored in the Researcher's home computer for TWO (2) years and then removed. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions About the Research?
If you have questions about the research in general or about your child's role in the study, please feel free to contact Landy Anderson. This research has been reviewed and approved by the

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[3] For this project, 1-2 grams of tobacco will be placed in a small piece of square red cloth (15 cm. x 15 cm.) and then rolled and tied into a knot, constituting a "tobacco tie". Once the tobacco is placed in the cloth, tied, and prayed over, it is transformed into a ceremonial item.

Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics.

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I_____ consent for my child _____to participate in: *Listening to, and Learning From, Aboriginal Children in Care: The Experiences of Aboriginal Children in Care Who Have Multiple School Changes as a Result of Placement Disruption* conducted by Landy Anderson. I have understood the nature of this project and wish for my child to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent for my child to participate.

_____ **_____** **Signature of Biological Parent, Legal Guardian or Children's Services Worker**	**_____** **Signature of Researcher**
_____ ____ _ **Relationship to Child**	**_____** **Date**
_____ ____ _ **E-Mail Address**	
_____ ____ _ **Telephone Number/Extension**	
_____ ____ _ **Date**	

APPENDIX E
Letter of Assent (Youth Consent)

Letter of Assent
Consent Form
For: Minor Child/Youth in Care

Date: April 24, 2016

Research Project (Study Name):
Listening To, and Learning From, Aboriginal Children in Care: The Experiences of Aboriginal
Children in Care Who Have Multiple School Changes as a Result of Placement Disruption

Researcher:
Landy Anderson, Graduate Student, York University, Toronto, ON
Graduate Program in Education – Language, Culture and Teaching
Master of Education – Focusing on Urban Aboriginal Education

Introduction To The Researcher:
My name is Landy Rynnae Anderson and I am mixed-heritage Métis and Chinese. I am a
member of the Gaspé Peninsula, Lower St-Lawrence, Magdalen Islands Métis Aboriginal
Community in Quebec. My husband and children are members of Alderville First Nation, an
Ojibway reserve in Ontario. My Chinese name translates as "beautiful jade" and was given to me
by my maternal uncle. My Indigenous spirit name translates as "one who brings the drum",
which means I bring balance. My traditional name was given to me by a Cree Elder. I walk in 2
cultural worlds, comfortable in both.

I am a York University student and I am doing research as a requirement for my Master of
Education degree. I would like to do research with Aboriginal children in care because this is a
group of children that I feel close to. My husband used to be a Crown Ward and spent his
childhood growing up in care. Also, we used to be foster parents, where we cared for teenagers.
I have worked for Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST) for 10 years and I
know your workers and some of your caregivers.

The research that I would like to do is about what it is like for children in care to go to a new
school. I would like to learn how you think that your caregivers, Children's Aid Society (CAS)
workers and teachers can help better support children in care when they are enrolled in a new
school. After learning more about this, I hope my research will help other children in care be
better supported when they go to a new school.

I am going to give you information and invite you to be part of a research study. You can choose
whether or not you want to participate. I have discussed this research with your Children's Services
Worker and they know that I am also asking you for your agreement. If you are going to participate
in the research, your Children's Services Worker also has to agree. But if you do not wish to take
part in the research, you do not have to, even if your Children's Services Worker has agreed. You
can speak to anyone you choose about the research before you make up your mind to participate.

You may discuss anything in this form with your parents, caregivers, teachers or friends or anyone else you feel comfortable talking to. You can decide whether to participate or not after you have talked it over. You do not have to decide immediately.

There may be some words you don't understand or things that you want me to explain more about because you are interested or concerned. Please ask me any time and I will take time to explain.

Purpose: Why are you doing this research?
The reason I am doing this research is because children in care have to change homes and whenever they go to a new home, they usually have to go to a new school. I would like caregivers, CAS workers and teachers to better understand what it is like for a child in care to have to go to a new school. By hearing directly from children in care about their experiences of going to a new school, I can help raise awareness about this issue and I hope that my research will be used to make improvements to the care system and help children in care better adjust to enrolling in a new school.

Choice of participants: Why are you asking me?
I am asking you because most research about children in care is conducted by reading files, looking at documents, or by talking to former children in care. Instead of doing this, I would prefer to hear directly from children in care who are experts in their own lives and their own stories. I would like to honour your stories and raise awareness to this issue by giving you an authentic opportunity to have your voice represented in the care system through this research project.

Participation is voluntary: Do I have to do this?
You do not have to be in this research if you do not want to be. It is up to you. If you decide not to be in the research, it is okay and nothing changes. Everything stays the same as before. Even if you say "yes" now, you can change your mind later and it is okay to withdraw from the research at any time.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the on-going relationship you have with myself as an employee of NCFST, either now, or in the future. Your decision not to participate will not affect your relationship with anyone at NCFST or York University, either now or in the future.

Procedures: What do you expect of me?
You will be asked to participate in a 2.5 to 3 hour research focus group discussion on Saturday May 14, 2016 at Camp Kawartha. I will ask you questions about your experiences during the focus group, certain NCFST Camp Staff (Special Projects Coordinator, Band Liaison, and Youth Justice Worker) myself and an Elder will be present. The focus group will be audio-recorded and later I will listen to the tape recordings and transcribe them verbatim (exactly as the words are spoken). This to make sure that I accurately represent your stories and recommendations, and it is also a normal part of doing research.

After the focus group discussion, you will be asked to bring home a journal/art supplies as part of the research, fill in the journal (as per the instructions provided) and return it to me by May 31, 2016. You are asked to seal the journal in a self-addressed stamped envelope that I will provide to you, and place it in a Canada Post mailbox or go to a Canada Post postal outlet and place it in a mail slot. I will be the only person to see your journal. Your journal is intended to be private and should not be shown to anyone. Your experiences may upset other people if you share this information with them and you cannot guarantee that other people will keep your information confidential or respond favourably to you if you show the journal to them. If you would like to show the journal to anyone before you return it to me, that is your choice, otherwise no one else will see your journal, except me. The contents of the journal will be used for research purposes only and the information from the journal will be stripped of any identifying information to preserve your anonymity in any written work that I publish or any trainings that I conduct.

Accompanying each journal will be a pencil case containing a set of colouring pencils, pens, pencils, a pencil sharpener, an eraser, stickers and a glue stick. All youth at Camp Kawartha on Saturday May 14, 2016 will receive a journal/art supplies. Even if you don't participate in the research, or join the focus group and leave, you can keep the journal/art supplies. You have the right to withdraw from this portion of the research, and the right to refuse to participate, and you can keep the journal and art supplies.

The journal can be used in the following ways:
- To share personal reflections from the focus group;
- To offer new information; additional feelings and thoughts and
- To reveal information that you didn't feel comfortable to share in a group setting.

Where you submit an image, in order for the meaning of your submission to be accurately interpreted, I will ask you to provide a written explanation of your submission. You have the right not to participate in the journal portion of the research study or stop participating at any time.

After I analyze the focus group information and the journals, I would like to hear your feedback on the research results (my data analysis) and I will ask you for your opinion on my work. You can participate to whatever extent you are willing. You do not have to look at my work if you don't want to.

Risks: Is this bad or dangerous for me?
You may become sad or upset recalling any negative experiences about going to a new school. The Elder will pray for all the children at the start of the focus group discussion and end with a prayer at the conclusion of the focus group discussion. I will also present you with a Tobacco Tie before joining the research, which will contain good prayers for your well-being. You are encouraged to speak to your Children's Service Worker or caregiver if you are upset. You are welcome to call me at any time. Most importantly, the NCFST staff at Camp Kawartha will be available to support you during after the focus group.

Benefits: Is there anything good that happens to me?
At the end of the research, you will be offered options on how to let other people know about this issue. The people that need to hear about this are the people in the child welfare and education systems that make decisions on your behalf or that help you adjust to your new school. You can decide how much you would like to be involved or not.

Reimbursements: Do I get anything for being in the research?
You can keep the journal and the art supplies, whether you participate in the research or not. The value of the journal and art supplies per participant is approximately $20.00.

Confidentiality: Is everybody going to know about this?
All information from the focus group and journals will be anonymous in my written work and/or training sessions. That means nobody will know what you said or what another child said. No names will be used. I will be the only person to see your journal. If I use any of your words, pictures, or artwork from your journal in my written work or training sessions, nobody will know that it was you.

During the focus group, children will share their private stories. At the beginning of the focus group, I will remind everyone of the importance of respecting other people's privacy. This means that that whatever we talk about in the focus group should remain confidential, although I cannot guarantee that other children in the focus group will comply. I will not tell your parents, caregivers, Children's Services Workers or anyone else what you said during the focus group or in your journal. No information will be shared about you, unless you tell me that you are going to hurt yourself or someone else, or that you are being abused, or have been abused, or you are worried that someone may hurt you. If you tell me anything like this, I will have to make a report to the proper legal authorities (Police or Children's Aid Society).

Sharing the Findings: Will you tell me/others about the results?
I will ask everyone how they would like to be informed about the research results. For example, should we have a meeting to review the results? Or should I e-mail everyone the results? Or should I post the results on a secure part of my web site? I will take direction from the group how I should share the research results. I anticipate sharing the results from December 2 to December 31, 2016. After the research is completed, I would like to publish the results and conduct trainings at conferences in the community about the research findings, so that caregivers, teachers and CAS workers can help children in care better adjust to their new schools.

You can decide how involved you would like to be in presenting the research findings. Some options for consideration are: creating a handbook, writing a poem, drawing a picture, creating a collective piece of art, advocating within the child welfare system, presenting at a child welfare conference, hosting an information session for child welfare workers/teachers and foster parents, making a video, etc. You have the right to refuse to participate in the research and/or any activities beyond the research.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw: Can I choose not to be in the research? Can I change my mind?
You can choose not to be in the research and even if you agree to be in the research you can withdraw at any time. You can say "yes" now and change your mind later and it will still be okay. You can walk out of the focus group and you don't have to submit your journal if you change your mind. Your participation is completely voluntary. You do not have to be in this research, even if your Children's Services Worker approves it. No one will be mad or disappointed with you if you say no. It is your choice.

You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. If you decide to stop participating, you will still be eligible to receive the journal/art supplies as promised for agreeing to be in the project. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with me, or Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, or York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, I will not use any of the information that you shared with me during the focus group or in the journal, and I will destroy all the information that you provided during the research, wherever possible.

Who to Contact: Who can I talk to or ask questions to?
You can talk to your Children's Services Worker or you can call me. You can also talk to anyone that you want to about this (camp staff, worker, counsellor, caregiver, parent, friend, teacher, auntie, etc.).

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics.

If you choose to be part of this research I will also give you a copy of this paper to keep for yourself. You can ask your caregiver or Children's Services Worker to look after it if you want.

You can ask me any more questions about any part of the research study, if you wish to. Do you have any questions?

Certificate of Assent

I understand the research is about the experiences of children in care who have to go to new schools and how caregivers, teachers and CAS workers can help children in care adjust to their new schools. I understand that I will participate in a focus group and that I will bring home a journal to fill in about what it is like to go to a new school.

I have read this information (or had the information read to me). I have had my questions answered and know that I can ask questions later if I have them.

I agree to take part in the research.

OR

I DO NOT wish to take part in the research and I have <u>not</u> signed the assent below._____(initialed by child/minor)
<u>Only if child assents:</u>

Print name of child _____

Signature of child: _____

E-mail of child: _____

Date: _____

Print Name of Researcher (person taking the assent)_____

Signature of Researcher (person taking the assent)_____

Date _____

Copy provided to the participant _____ (initialed by researcher)

Date of signed Parental Permission Letter (Informed Consent):

_____

Name of person who signed Parental Permission Letter (Informed Consent):

_____

APPENDIX F
Caregiver Information Letter

Caregiver Information Letter
For: Foster Parents or Kinship Parents or Group Home Staff

April 24, 2016

RE: Research Project: Listening to, and Learning From, Aboriginal Children in Care: The Experiences of Aboriginal Children in Care Who Have Multiple School Changes as a Result of Placement Disruption

Dear Caregiver,

My name is Landy Rynnae Anderson, and I am mixed-heritage Métis and Chinese. I am a member of the Gaspé Peninsula, Lower St-Lawrence, Magdalen Islands Métis Aboriginal Community in Quebec. My husband and children are members of Alderville First Nation, an Ojibway reserve in Ontario. My Chinese name translates as "beautiful jade" and was given to me by my maternal uncle. My Indigenous spirit name translates as "one who brings the drum", which means I bring balance. My traditional name was given to me by a Cree Elder. I walk in 2 cultural worlds, comfortable in both.

I am a York University student, and I am doing research as a requirement for my Master of Education degree. I would like to do research with Aboriginal children in care because this is a group of children that I feel close to. My husband used to be a Crown Ward and spent his childhood growing up in care. Also, we used to be foster parents, where we cared for teenagers. As you may know, I have worked for Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST) for 10 years.

The research that I would like to do is about what it is like for children in care to go to a new school. The reason I am doing this research is because children in care have to change homes and whenever they go to a new home they usually have to go to a new school. I would like caregivers, Children's Aid Society (CAS) workers and teachers to better understand what it is like for a child in care to have to go to a new school. By hearing directly from children in care about their experiences of going to a new school, I can help raise awareness about this issue, and I hope that my research will be used to make improvements to the care system and help children in care better adjust to enrolling in a new school.

I am going to give your child information about my research study and invite them to be part of a research study, only if their Children's Services Worker gives permission first. Your child can choose whether or not they want to participate. I plan to discuss this with your child individually by calling them on the telephone. The actual research will take place at Camp Kawartha on **Saturday May 14, 2016**. If your child has any questions about the research, they will be asked to call their Children's Services Worker before May 13, 2016. Children will be encouraged to speak

to you or anyone they feel comfortable with about their decision to participate or not participate in the research (camp staff, worker, counsellor, parent, friend, teacher, auntie, etc.).

I will ask your child to participate in the research study in the following ways:
1. Participate in a focus group discussion on Saturday May 14, 2016 for 2.5 to 3 hours at Camp Kawartha;
2. Take home a journal, fill it as per the instructions provided (a copy of the instructions is attached), and return it to me. The amount of time your child dedicates to completing this task is at their discretion and
3. Review the research findings, to the extent they are willing.

After the journal is completed, your child will be asked to seal the journal in a self-addressed stamped envelope that I will provide to them. They will be asked to send the sealed envelope by placing it in a Canada Post mailbox or going to a Canada Post postal outlet and placing it in a mail slot.

For more information on the research, please see the attached documents: Parental Permission Letter (Informed Consent), Letter of Assent and Participant Instructions to Complete the Journal. These documents will be given to your child before May 14, 2016**.** The Children's Services Worker and your child must both agree to participate in this research. Your child has the right to refuse to participate. Your child's decision to stop participating, or to refuse to participate, will not affect their relationship with the researcher, Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, York University, or any other group associated with this project.

Please feel free to call me, should you have any questions or concerns or would like to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

Landy Anderson
Graduate Student – York University, Toronto, Ontario
Graduate Program in Education – Language, Culture and Teaching
Master of Education – Focusing on Urban Aboriginal Education

Attachments:
1. Parental Permission Letter (Informed Consent)
2. Letter of Assent
3. Participant Instructions to Complete the Journal

APPENDIX G
Band Representative Information Letter

Band Representative Information Letter
For: First Nations Bands of Native Child and Family Services of Toronto Children in Care who are Invited to Participate in a Research Study

April 24, 2016

RE: Research Project: Listening to, and Learning From, Aboriginal Children in Care: The Experiences of Aboriginal Children in Care Who Have Multiple School Changes as a Result of Placement Disruption

Dear Band Representative,

My name is Landy Rynnae Anderson, and I am mixed-heritage Métis and Chinese. I am a member of the Gaspé Peninsula, Lower St-Lawrence, Magdalen Islands Métis Aboriginal Community in Quebec. My husband and children are members of Alderville First Nation, an Ojibway reserve in Ontario. My Chinese name translates as "beautiful jade" and was given to me by my maternal uncle. My Indigenous spirit name translates as "one who brings the drum", which means I bring balance. My traditional name was given to me by a Cree Elder. I walk in 2 cultural worlds, comfortable in both.

I am a York University student, and I am doing research as a requirement for my Master of Education degree. I would like to do research with Aboriginal children in care because this is a group of children that I feel close to. My husband used to be a Crown Ward and spent his childhood growing up in care. Also, we used to be foster parents, where we cared for teenagers. I have worked for Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST) for 10 years.

The research that I would like to do is about what it is like for children in care to go to a new school. The reason I am doing this research is because children in care have to change homes and whenever they go to a new home they usually have to go to a new school. I would like caregivers, Children's Aid Society (CAS) workers and teachers to better understand what it is like for a child in care to have to go to a new school. By hearing directly from children in care about their experiences of going to a new school, I can help raise awareness about this issue, and I hope that my research will be used to make improvements to the care system and help children in care better adjust to enrolling in a new school.

I am going to give your child (who is a member of your First Nation) information about my research study and invite them to be part of a research study, only if their Children's Services Worker gives permission first. Your child can choose whether or not they want to participate. I plan to discuss this with your child individually by calling them on the telephone. The actual research will take place at Camp Kawartha on **Saturday May 14, 2016**. If your child has any questions about the research, they will be asked to call their Children's Services Worker before May 14, 2016. Children will be encouraged to speak to you or anyone they feel comfortable with

about their decision to participate or not participate in the research (camp staff, worker, counsellor, parent, friend, teacher, auntie, etc.).

I will ask your child to participate in the research study in the following ways:
1. Participate in a focus group discussion on Saturday May 14, 2016 for 2.5 to 3 hours at Camp Kawartha;
2. Take home a journal, fill it as per the instructions provided (a copy of the instructions is attached), and return it to me. The amount of time your child dedicates to completing this task is at their discretion and
3. Review the research findings, to the extent they are willing.

After the journal is completed, your child will be asked to seal the journal in a self-addressed stamped envelope that I will provide to them. They will be asked to send the sealed envelope by placing it in a Canada Post mailbox or going to a Canada Post postal outlet and placing it in a mail slot.

For more information on the research, please see the attached documents: Parental Permission Letter (Informed Consent), Letter of Assent and Participant Instructions to Complete the Journal. These documents will be given to your child before the research takes place on May 14, 2016. The Children's Services Worker and your child must both agree to participate in this research. Your child has the right to refuse to participate. Your child's decision to stop participating, or to refuse to participate, will not affect their relationship with the researcher, Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, York University, or any other group associated with this project.

Please feel free to call me, should you have any questions or concerns or would like to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

Landy Anderson
Graduate Student – York University, Toronto, Ontario
Graduate Program in Education – Language, Culture and Teaching
Master of Education – Focusing on Urban Aboriginal Education

Attachments:
1. Parental Permission Letter (Informed Consent)
2. Letter of Assent
3. Participant Instructions to Complete the Journal

APPENDIX H
Participant Instructions to Complete the Journal

Participant Instructions
To Complete the Journal

Research Project (Study Name)
Listening to, and Learning From, Aboriginal Children in Care: The Experiences of Aboriginal
Children in Care Who Have Multiple School Changes as a Result of Placement Disruption

Principal Investigator "Researcher"– Contact Information
Landy Anderson, Graduate Student, York University
Graduate Program in Education – Language, Culture and Teaching
Master of Education – Focusing on Urban Aboriginal Education

Instructions
After the focus group, you are invited to bring home a journal as part of the research. The journal
can be used in the following ways:
- To share personal reflections from the focus group;
- To offer new information; additional feelings and thoughts and
- To reveal information that you didn't feel comfortable to share in a group setting.

The journal is a blank slate and you can put anything related to the research project inside the
journal that you think would be helpful for me to better understand your experience of attending
a new school, in hopes of improving this experience for you and other children in care in the
future.

If there is any new/additional information that you would like me to know about since we spoke
in the focus group on May 14, 2016, you are welcome to include this in your journal. I have
included the focus group questions for you to review (attached).

If you have any questions or comments that you would like to share with me, please feel free to
send me an e-mail or call me.

Describing the Images
Should you choose to draw a picture or insert any images, I would kindly ask that you write a
brief description of what the image means, so that I can ensure that your submission is properly
represented. I may include your artwork as part of the research as an example of what youths in
the project created to express their views.

How the Journals Will Be Used
Artwork, words and pictures collected from the journals will be used as part of the research.
Information in the journals will be transcribed, archived, kept anonymous and stored in a secure
location in the home computer (password protected) in the office of the researcher. After ONE

(1) year by May 14, 2017 I will return the original journal to you or destroy it, based on your instructions (see below). I will scan selected pieces of your journal and archive them to my home computer. I will take a picture of your artwork and archive the picture/description, where I may use the picture of your artwork for future publications (where it is permissible publish an image) and/or in training sessions. If your artwork is selected for publication, it will remain anonymous. If you submit anything in writing, I will transcribe it and may use part of or all of it in future publications and/or training sessions. Again, all work published will remain anonymous.

Returning the Journal to You
On the front page of the journal, there will be a section that says:

Name (please print): _____

Would you like this journal returned to you? □YES or □NO

If you selected YES, the journal will be returned to you by May 14, 2017.
If you selected YES, please tell me where to send the journal (list the address):

_____

If you selected NO, the journal will be destroyed on May 14, 2017.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

If you would like me to return the Journal to you, please check the "YES" box on the front page of the journal. I will ensure that the journal is returned to you within ONE (1) year by May 14, 2017.

Below, are the focus group questions that we discussed at Camp Kawartha on May 14, 2016. I included these questions in the event that you would like to add anything further in the journal.

Returning the Journal to the Researcher (Landy Anderson)
When you are finished with your journal, please seal it in the self-addressed stamped envelope that I have provided to you, and place it in a Canada Post mailbox or go to a Canada Post postal outlet and place it in a mail slot. I will be the only person to see it. Your journal is intended to be private and should not be shown to anyone. Your experiences may upset other people if you share this information with them and you cannot guarantee that other people will keep your information confidential or respond favourably to you if you show the journal to them. If you would like to show the journal to anyone before you return it to me, that is your choice, otherwise no one else will see your journal, except me. The contents of the journal will be used

for research purposes only and the information from the journal will be stripped of any identifying information to preserve your anonymity in my written work and/or training sessions.

May I please ask that you complete your journal within TWO (2) weeks, by May 31, 2016.

Chi Meegwetch! (The most/biggest thanks in Ojibway)

Focus Group Discussion
Questions

Experience
1. What would you like to tell me about having multiple school changes because of being in care?
2. What does it mean to "adjust" to a new school?

Adjusting to a New School
3. How did your caregivers know if you were adjusting to your new school?
4. How did your teachers know if you were adjusting to your new school?
5. How did your Children's Aid Society "CAS" workers know if you were adjusting to your new school?
6. How did your caregivers, teachers and CAS workers work together to help you adjust to your new school?

Challenges
7. What is the most difficult part of going to a new school?

Rewards
8. What is the best part of going to a new school?
9. What are your favourite memories of going to a new school?

Preparing for a New School
10. What did you do to prepare yourself to enter a new school?
11. How did you develop these strategies?
    a. Independently (through your own experience of trial and error) or
    b. With help?
12. If you received any help to prepare for your new school, who helped you?

Helpful Strategies
13. What can caregivers do to help you adjust to your new school?
14. What can teachers do to help you adjust to your new school?
15. What can CAS workers do to help you adjust to your new school?
16. Is there anyone else or anything else that can help you adjust to your new school?

Informing Research
17. Is there anyone else that needs to know about this issue/other people you want me to talk to?
18. What can I do to learn more about your situation?
19. When I am finished the research:
    a. How should I share the outcome with you and the other participants?
    b. Who else should I share the research findings with?

Closing
20. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about experiencing multiple school changes?

APPENDIX I
Focus Group Flyer, August 24, 2016

RESEARCH FOCUS GROUP

WEDNESDAY AUG 24, 2016 – 11:30 AM TO 2:30PM
LUNCH PROVIDED

LISTENING TO, AND LEARNING FROM, ABORIGINAL CHILDREN IN CARE: THE EXPERIENCES OF ABORIGINAL CHILDREN IN CARE WHO HAVE MULTIPLE SCHOOL CHANGES AS A RESULT OF PLACEMENT DISRUPTION

GRACE PLACE COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTRE
HEARTH ROOM
156 MAIN STREET NORTH, BRAMPTON, ON, L6V 1N9
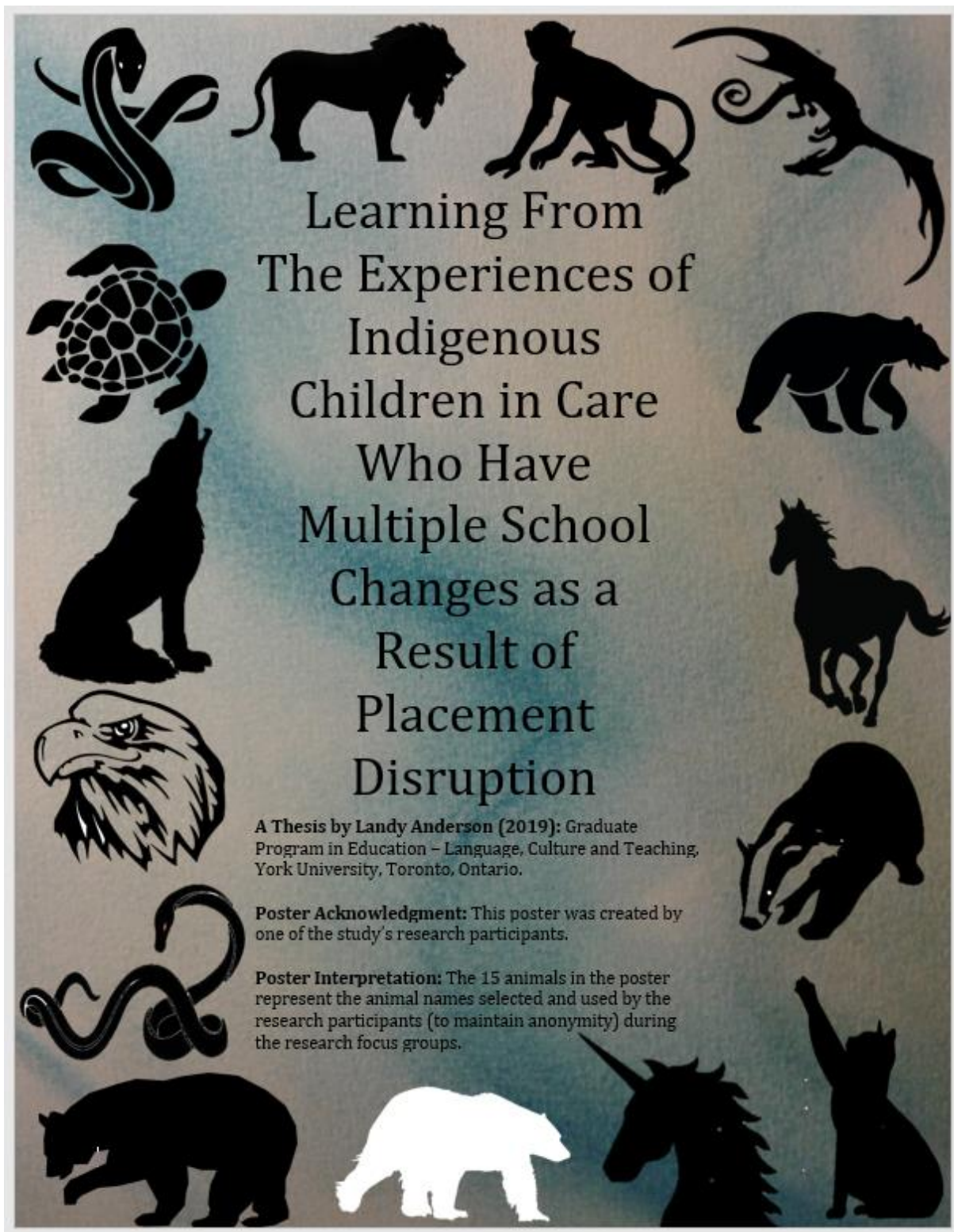**DOWNTOWN CORNER OF MAIN & CHURCH, NEXT TO THE 7/11**

The purpose of this research is to understand children in care's experiences of starting new schools. I would like to understand (directly from Aboriginal children in care) what it is like to have multiple school changes. Children in care of **Native Child and Family Services of Toronto** ages 12 to 17 are welcome to attend. For more information please contact:

LANDY ANDERSON
GRADUATE STUDENT, YORK UNIVERSITY, MASTER OF EDUCATION, FOCUSING ON URBAN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

APPENDIX J
Research Poster Designed by a Participant

APPENDIX K
Research Focus Group Questions

Large Group

The large group will answer questions in a traditional Talking Circle. If the participants would like to hold a sacred feather, the feather will be passed in a circle to each participant. Each participant will have the opportunity to answer the question while holding the feather, or decline to answer the question and pass the feather to the next person.

Small Group

The youth will be assigned to a small group and allocated a topic (focus group question related to the research). After answering the question as a small group, the small group will present their answer to the large group. The small groups will be offered suggestions on how to creatively present their work by: role playing, drawing a picture, creating a rap song, writing a poem, or whatever creative manner the youth see fit. I will ask the youth to verbally describe any pictures, if appropriate.

Experience (Large Group Question – First Round with the Feather)

1. What would you like to tell me about having multiple school changes because of being in care?

Experience (Large Group Question – Second Round with the Feather)

2. What does it mean to "adjust" to a new school?

Adjusting to a New School (Large Group Questions – Open Forum)

3. How did your caregivers know if you were adjusting to your new school?

4. How did your teachers know if you were adjusting to your new school?

5. How did your Children's Aid Society "CAS" workers know if you were adjusting to your new school?

6. How did your caregivers, teachers and CAS workers work together to help you adjust to your new school?

Challenges (Small Group Work)

7. What is the most difficult part of going to a new school?

Rewards (Small Group Work)

8. What is the best part of going to a new school?

9. What are your favourite memories of going to a new school?

Preparing for a New School (Small Group Work)

10. What did you do to prepare yourself to enter a new school?

11. How did you develop these strategies?

      c. Independently (through your own experience of trial and error) or

      d. With help?

12. If you received any help to prepare for your new school, who helped you?

Helpful Strategies (Small Group Work)

13. What can caregivers do to help you adjust to your new school?

14. What can teachers do to help you adjust to your new school?

15. What can CAS workers do to help you adjust to your new school?

16. Is there anyone else or anything else that can help you adjust to your new school?

Informing Research (Large Group Questions)

17. Is there anyone else that needs to know about this issue/other people you want me to talk

to?

18. What can I do to learn more about your situation?

19. When I am finished the research:

      c.   How should I share the outcome with you and the other participants?

      d.   Who else should I share the research findings with?

Closing (Large Group Questions)

20. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about experiencing multiple school

changes?

APPENDIX L
Analysis Shared With Youth Participants

Analysis
Research Project: Listening to, and Learning From Aboriginal Children in Care Who Experience Multiple School Moves as a Result of Placement Disruption

<u>Themes</u>
1. **Vulnerability** – Aboriginal children in care are more vulnerable when they change schools. They are at heightened risk of being bullied and subjected to racism and stereotypes.
2. **Relationships** – Moving has a significant impact on relationships. Children experience grief and loss with each move and face numerous challenges in making new friends.
3. **Adaptation** – Changing schools is a significant adjustment where children face numerous unknown and frightening situations. Subsequently, they develop ways to adapt and quickly learn how to "fit in" in an effort to adjust to their new surroundings.
4. **Culture of Being in Care –** Children in Care are accustomed to changing schools and gain expertise with each new move.
5. **Support –** Children in care depend on caregivers, biological parents, workers and teachers to intuitively support them while adjusting to a new school.
6. **Excitement –** Going to a new school is exciting because it is a "fresh start" (new beginning in life) and presents opportunities to meet new people and join extra-curricular activities.

<u>Priorities</u>
Participants' comments were captured on flip chart paper and then participants were asked to place check marks on what they thought were the most important comments:

Group #1 – Kawartha Camp Saturday May 14, 2016	Group #2 – Grace Place Wednesday August 24, 2016

Experience – ranked in order of priority
  1. Bullying
  2. Worried that the teacher doesn't like you
 	
Adjusting to a New School – ranked in order of priority
  1. Where do you fit in?
	Experience (no ranking, all issues below were identified as a priority and equally important by having one check mark per participant)
	   - Leaving friends – "Re-set" button on friends - Making fun of you for being in care – "Your mom doesn't want you" - Kids are mean - Have to explain your life story over and over – it's annoying and complicated - Fresh start – restarting your life without being a baby - Racism - Retaliation, we won't take it, it's not a joke, it's not necessary

APPENDIX M
Me, Myself & I, Song Lyrics by G-Eazy, Bebe Rexha

Oh, it's just me, myself and I. Solo ride until I die. Cause I got me for life. (Got me for life, yeah) Oh I don't need a hand to hold. Even when the night is cold. I got that fire in my soul. And as far as I can see I just need privacy. Plus a whole lot of tree fuck all this modesty. I just need space to do me get a world that they're tryna see. A stellar max flow right beside of me. A Ferrari I'm buyin' three. A closet of Saint Laurent, get what I want when I want. Cause hunger is driving me, yeah. I just need to be alone, I just need to be at home. Understand what I'm speaking on if time is money I need a loan. But regardless I'll always keep keepin' on. Fuck fake friends, we don't take L's we just make M's. While y'all follow, we just make trends. I'm right back to work when that break ends. Oh, it's just me, myself and I. Solo ride until I die. Cause I got me for life. (Got me for life, yeah). Oh I don't need a hand to hold. Even when the night is cold. I got that fire in my soul. I don't need anything to get me through the night. Just the beat that's in my heart. Yeah, it's keeping me alive. (Keeps me alive). I don't need anything to make me satisfied (you know). Cause the music fills me good and it gets me every time. Yeah, and I don't like talking to strangers. So get the fuck off me I'm anxious. I'm tryna be cool but I might just go ape shit. Say fuck y'all to all of y'all faces. It changes though now that I'm famous. Everyone knows how this lifestyle is dangerous. But I love it the rush is amazing. Celebrate nightly and everyone rages. I found how to cope with my anger. I'm swimming in money. Swimming in liquor my liver is muddy. But it's all good I'm still sippin' this bubbly. This shit is lovely, this shit ain't random, I didn't get lucky. Made it right here cause I'm sick with it Cudi. They all take the money

for granted. But don't want to work for now tell me, isn't it funny? Oh, it's just me, myself and I Solo ride until I die. Cause I got me for life. (Got me for life, yeah). Oh I don't need a hand to hold. Even when the night is cold. I got that fire in my soul. I don't need anything to get me through the night. Just the beat that's in my heart. Yeah, it's keeping me alive. (Keeps me alive) I don't need anything to make me satisfied (you know). Cause the music fills me good and it gets me every time. Like ba-ba-ba-ba-da-ba. Ba-ba-ba-da-ba. Ba-ba-ba-ba-da-ba. Ba-ba-ba-da-ba. Ba-ba-ba-ba-da-ba. Ba-ba-ba-da-ba. Cause the music fills me good and it gets me every time. Yeah, lonely nights I laid awake. Pray to lord, my soul to take. My heart's become too cold to break. Know I'm great but I'm broke as hell. Having dreams that I'm folding cake. All my life I've been told to wait. But I'mma get it now it's no debate. Oh, it's just me, myself and I. Solo ride until I die. Cause I got me for life. (Got me for life, yeah). Oh I don't need a hand to hold. Even when the night is cold. I got that fire in my soul. I don't need anything to get me through the night. Just the beat that's in my heart. Yeah, it's keeping me alive. (Keeps me alive). I don't need anything to make me satisfied (you know). Cause the music fills me good and it gets me every time. Like ba-ba-ba-ba-da-ba. Ba-ba-ba-da-ba. Ba-ba-ba-ba-da-ba. Ba-ba-ba-da-ba. Ba-ba-ba-ba-da-ba. Ba-ba-ba-da-ba. Cause the music fills me good and it gets me every time. (G-Eazy, Bebe Rexha, n.d.)