Creating Places of Belonging: Expanding Notions of Permanency with Indigenous Youth in Care

Sandrina de Finney and Lara di Tomasso

Cite this article

de Finney, S. & di Tomasso, L. (2015). Creating Places of Belonging: Expanding Notions of Permanency with Indigenous Youth in Care. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, *10*(1), 63–85. https://doi.org/10.7202/1077183ar

Article abstract

This paper calls for creative pathways of engagement that delineate places of belonging for and with Indigenous youth in care. It draws on two community-based research studies conducted in British Columbia, with urban and off-reserve Indigenous youth to contextualize and extend understanding of permanency for Indigenous youth in care. Our discussion explores permanency in relation to both Western understandings of government care, guardianship, and adoptions, and Indigenous customary caregiving and cultural planning for cultural permanency, such as naming and coming home ceremonies, custom adoptions, and kinship care.

Creating Places of Belonging: Expanding Notions of Permanency with Indigenous Youth in Care

Sandrina de Finney[a] and Lara di Tomasso[b]

a School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada
b Independent scholar, Ontario, Canada

Corresponding author: Sandrina de Finney, sdefinn@uvic.ca

Abstract

This paper calls for creative pathways of engagement that delineate places of belonging for and with Indigenous youth in care. It draws on two community-based research studies conducted in British Columbia, with urban and off-reserve Indigenous youth to contextualize and extend understanding of permanency for Indigenous youth in care. Our discussion explores permanency in relation to both Western understandings of government care, guardianship, and adoptions, and Indigenous customary caregiving and cultural planning for cultural permanency, such as naming and coming home ceremonies, custom adoptions, and kinship care.

Key words: Indigenous youth; youth in care; permanency; custom adoption; cultural planning

> *Adoption is about belonging. After so many foster homes,*
> *I just always always just wanted to know I belong somewhere.* (adopted youth)

Permanency is a complicated child welfare concept built on an elemental need for connection and belonging. As complex and multilayered as the concept is in general child welfare terms, "permanency" must be unpacked still further when it comes to the needs of Indigenous youth in government care. In Canada, Indigenous youth are overrepresented in both the child welfare and the youth justice systems, and they face particular barriers to healthy and sustainable cultural and relational connections. As Indigenous youth continue to be apprehended by child welfare authorities disproportionately to other youth (Kozlowski, Sinha, Hoey, & Lucas, 2011), they are also more likely than their non-Indigenous peers to experience multiple foster care placements and less likely to go back to their families (Bertsch & Bidgood, 2010; Brisebois & Lee, 2012; Richard, 2004). Not only are many youth severed from their cultural traditions and identities, but Indigenous communities across Canada are losing an irreplaceable piece of their social fabric—their young people, who cannot help shape their communities' presents and futures when they are being raised in a climate of disconnection and shame. Community efforts to engage

and honour the unique perspectives and capacities of young people in care are curtailed by colonial effects of cultural and familial disconnection, uprootedness from community and land, and economic and political marginalization.

This paper is an urgent call for creative pathways of engagement that delineate places of belonging for and with Indigenous youth in care. Our young people in care sorely need us to engage with them to create collaborative, flexible practices that sustain safe, healthy, loving, and permanent caregiving arrangements.

Our discussion is inspired by findings from a series of community-based research studies conducted in British Columbia with urban and off-reserve Indigenous youth who have personal experience related to permanency. We draw on these studies and on these young people's powerful experiences to contextualize and extend our understanding of permanency for Indigenous youth. We explore permanency in relation to Western understandings of government care, guardianship, and adoptions, but also in relation to customary and kinship caregiving, custom adoptions, and other forms of cultural planning that may include cultural reconnection approaches, such as naming and coming-home ceremonies.

A note on terms and concepts used: The term "youth" typically refers to young people between 12 and the age of majority, which is set at 18 or 19 in Canada. Here, our discussion of youth in care extends beyond the legal age of majority. An expanded definition of youth is particularly salient to discussions of "aging out of care" and "permanency," concepts that rely on Euro-Western categories that differentiate youth from adults. Such distinctions do not necessarily exist in Indigenous communities and they need to be problematized, particularly when considering cultural traditions of caretaking and adoption.

We also refer to youth being "in care," which is an expansive term used to describe the full range of living arrangements that youth may experience while technically under the care of a government ministry, including foster care, kinship care, residential care and group homes, and youth agreements such as semi- and fully independent living. It also refers to the circumstances that bring a youth back into care following an adoption breakdown.

When an adolescent in care reaches the legal age of majority, they cease to be legal wards of the state and their formal guardianship relationship with the child welfare authority ends. This event is referred to in the literature as either emancipation or "aging out of care." How youth transition out of care and what kinds of funding formulas and services are offered post-transition vary from province/territory to province/territory and also from youth to youth (for instance, based on the level of special needs or whether the youth pursues further education). Generally speaking, though, before a young person transitions out of government care, emphasis is placed on creating a "permanency plan" that will connect them with a permanent caregiver and/or prepare them to live independently. It is instructive to identify at the outset, however, that the concept of permanency as we discuss it here does not refer simply to connecting a young person with a caregiver. Many Indigenous young people over the age of 12 who are either in the child welfare system or have been disconnected from their families and communities through intergenerational breakdown and trauma grow up without a web of permanent connections. Disconnection from family, kin, community, culture, ancestral relations, and language necessitates that the goal of permanency include more than the pursuit of a stable "forever family." It must also aim to

create lifelong healthy connections to community, culture, and land that can bring Indigenous youth the experience of truly belonging—of being "claimed back" as proud First Peoples.

Thus in this discussion, we use the terms "adoption" and "permanency planning" to describe a range of Eurocentric statutory and Indigenous customary arrangements and the ways these might conflict, overlap, or complement each other. The latter may include custom adoption and related practices and ceremonies, extended family and kinship care arrangements and adoption, other cultural care arrangements, such as the ongoing involvement of grandparents or family members in providing care and mentoring, and even the welcoming and adoption of non-Indigenous adoptive or foster parent(s) into an Indigenous community following traditional protocols. Most Indigenous languages do not have words for the concepts of adoption and permanency, so we use them cautiously. Indigenous societies and families have always had their own systems and approaches for caring for children who require guardianship. Thus, any cultural or customary arrangements to reconnect youth with their families and communities will involve the language and teachings of the community or communities in question, rather than Euro-Western concepts. Yet we are mindful, too, that English terms such as adoption and permanency are currently used, not only in policy and practice, but by young people. This wide usage warrants further exploration of the concepts' complex histories and applications across policy, practice, and research realms.

Missing Research, Unheard Voices: A Need for Youth-Engaged Research and Practice

The stories and conversations presented in this article are drawn from two community-based research studies conducted with urban and off-reserve Indigenous youth and community members on southern Vancouver Island, British Columbia. The studies addressed several gaps in knowledge about how to support the cultural connectedness and permanency of Indigenous youth over 12, especially those living off reserve. We know that children who remain in foster care into their adolescence live through an average of 16 different foster placements and that most Indigenous youth will still be in care when they reach the age of majority (Bertsch & Bidgood, 2010), but we lack information about forms of permanency other than formal adoption, such as independent living, supported group care, custom adoption, and informal kinship care arrangements. We also need more information about how to increase the number of Indigenous resources and supports for youth and potential adoptive families, especially those living off reserve in urban centres, as well as about concurrent planning to support connection with and return to birth parent(s). Most importantly, the perspectives of Indigenous youth themselves are missing from the literature on adoptions and permanency planning. This gap results in part from the complexity of contacting young people in care and obtaining the consent of legal guardians (Jones & Kruk, 2005). As a result, literature that centres first-person accounts of Indigenous experiences with foster care and adoption consists primarily of studies conducted with adults who were adopted or in foster care as children (e.g., Arsenault, 2006; Carrière, 2005; Corcoran, 2012). These studies with "alumni" (Corcoran, 2012) of the Canadian child welfare system provide powerful retrospectives, but the voices of Indigenous children and youth presently in care are "virtually nonexistent" (Johnson, 2011, p. 52) in Canada and internationally (Atkinson, 2008; Ignace & Ignace, 2005). A few studies and reports generated in the

Canadian context have looked at youth transitioning out of care (e.g., Government of British Columbia, 2012; McEwan-Morris, 2006; Rutman, Hubberstey, Barlow, & Brown, 2005; Rutman, Hubberstey, Feduniw, & Brown, 2007; Tweddle, 2005); however, very few of these sources focus on Indigenous children and youth and none look specifically at urban and off-reserve Indigenous youth in care, permanency, and adoption. Further, as we discuss in our findings, our review of the literature emphasizes that even when Indigenous youth are featured in adoption and foster care research, they tend to be pathologized through a risk-centred, overly individualized lens.

Our studies engaged with these knowledge gaps by providing needed information about adoption and permanency planning for youth from an urban Indigenous perspective. Funding for the studies was provided by the Victoria Foundation (Lex Reynolds Adoption and Permanency Trust Fund) and the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD).

The first study, conducted between 2008 and 2010, focused exclusively on urban Indigenous youth currently living across British Columbia. Individual and group interviews were conducted in person or by phone and/or Skype with 22 youth and young adults aged 12–25 who were not living with their birth parent(s) and who had direct personal experience with permanency planning. Participants included youth in care, including those with youth agreements, youth living with relatives and/or in kinship placements, and youth who had been adopted and/or whose adoptions had broken down. Some had special placement considerations due to special needs and developmental challenges. All self-identified as living off reserve and as First Nations, Native, Indian, Métis, and/or with mixed Indigenous background.

The second study, the NONG SILA urban adoptions research study, explored the adoption and permanency needs and perspectives of the urban Indigenous community in Greater Victoria, BC. NONG SILA is a Lekwungen word meaning "many grandparents, many grandchildren." NONG SILA was conducted in partnership between Surrounded by Cedar Child and Family Services, a delegated agency for off-reserve families in Victoria. Under the guidance of a community advisory group, the study involved numerous cycles of individual interviews, focus groups, and public consultations with more than 100 community members. As part of the study, we conducted interviews, focus groups, and a cultural camp with youth aged 12–18 who were living in care and/or were involved with MCFD. In addition to providing cultural leadership and peer and intergenerational connections with Elders and cultural teachers, we invited the youth to share their experiences of foster care, permanency planning, adoptions, cultural planning, and custom or cultural adoptions. In this paper, we outline what we heard only from youth participants and not from other community participants (for a full description of the whole NONG SILA study, see de Finney, Johnson, Coverdale, & Cowan, forthcoming).

In both studies, we considered two key questions:

- What are the barriers to successful adoptions and permanency planning for Indigenous youth living off reserve?

- How can we increase the number of successful, culturally respectful placements for urban Indigenous youth?

Interviews from both studies were coded by an all-Indigenous team of researchers and graduate students using a qualitative thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The collaborative analysis process involved multiple, cumulative readings of all data sources to identify patterns, connections, contradictions, and silences within and across individual and group interviews, leading to the identification of key themes and subthemes. In keeping with the principles of community-based research, collaboration and consultations at every step were key to producing transparent, balanced, meaningful results that benefit communities and other stakeholders. Since the number of youth in care is relatively small in Victoria and BC, we have opted not to identify which of the two studies the quotes used in this paper are drawn from. The way the speakers are described varies from quote to quote because we identify the youth as they requested, including how they self-identified their background, cultural heritage, age, gender, and experience with permanency, and whether they wanted their real name or a code name used.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who participated and courageously and graciously shared their stories and perspectives.

Key Findings and Discussion

We first outline the main themes identified by youth we engaged with in our studies, beginning with barriers to successful permanency and adoptions and then moving to the youths' perspectives on ways to achieve successful permanency. We cover key findings related to a range of permanency options, such as independent living, custom adoptions, and adoptions into Indigenous homes, topics that are underaddressed in the foster care and adoption literature. Throughout this section we link the youth-identified themes to trends and gaps in the literature on Indigenous youth in care and permanency planning.

Barriers to permanency for indigenous youth in urban settings

The youth we interviewed identified four barriers to successful adoptions and permanency planning for off-reserve Indigenous youth: invisibility and "unadoptability"; racism and colonial effects; oversimplification of complex youth identities; and gaps in knowledge (on the part of youth, families, communities, and service providers) about the range of permanency and customary care options.

Invisibility and unadoptability

An important theme identified by a majority of the young people we spoke with was a sense of being perceived as "high risk" or "dangerous" and thus unadoptable. A public perception that youth in care are too old and too damaged to be successfully adopted is a powerful narrative that erodes young people's sense of worth and deservedness. Several youth talked outright about damaging stereotypes and misconceptions about the realities and needs of adoptable youth:

> I totally feel like people think, "Oh, they're too old, they're damaged goods." (youth in care)

> The biggest thing I hear is, "Will they burn my house down?" (youth in care)

> Yeah, it's like, about babies, like on TV or whatever, it's always the nice new baby ... not like me, like a hoodie and tattoos. (youth in care)

Stories like these were common among the youth. Many talked about "not feeling lovable," feeling "like a lost cause" or "damaged goods," being "an outcast," and experiencing "a lot of rejection." As a result, they experienced difficulty "really loving" themselves, "trusting adults," and feeling "hope for the future." Several emphasized that they feel "invisible" and "not included" in the public narrative of adoption, which tends to focus on "the nice new baby." A focus on Indigenous youth as "high risk" impacts young people in care, youth waiting to be adopted, and youth who have experienced adoption breakdowns.

The literature confirms that Indigenous youth in care are typically less likely than other children to achieve permanency in the form of legal adoption or guardianship (Bertsch & Bidgood, 2010; Turpel-Lafond, 2014). In part this is due to narrow conceptualizations of permanency within current child welfare practices, which we discuss below. However, it is also partially due to the construction of youth in the system as "unadoptable" by service providers such as child welfare workers (Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks, 2010). This pathologizing operates through the deficit-oriented approach that is used to articulate and understand the complex challenges confronting Indigenous youth in care. Literature in this area centres predominantly on deficit and risk. A literature search with the terms "Aboriginal," "youth," "adoption," and/or "foster care" between the years 1995 and 2013 yields articles covering a wide range of topics, including youth justice (e.g., La Prairie, 2002), drug use (e.g., Miller et al., 2011), gang involvement (e.g., Totten, 2009), and suicide (e.g., Strickland, 1997). Risk-centred explorations of youth in the child welfare system paint youth as "broken" and "lost causes" who lack social skills and resilience, are unable to form healthy attachments, and are deviant, untrustworthy, or dangerous.

As our participants explained, these deficit-based generalizations significantly affect how youth perceive themselves. Corcoran's (2012) master's research with foster care alumni also captures how being categorized as "foster child" or "problem child" erodes youths' sense of self. The participants in Corcoran's study used powerful images like "ghost" or "zombie" to describe intense feelings of invisibility, of being ignored, of not mattering to anyone, of not being worthwhile or even alive (Corcoran, 2012, p. 73). The sense of being dehumanized that so many youth in care describe should in itself provoke a radical reimagining of foster care, permanency, and adoption practice. Assuming that it is somehow "too late" to make positive change in the lives of Indigenous youth in care constricts vital conversations and action about permanency at a time when creative strategies are urgently needed. Understanding individual psychological risks and responding to them is important; however, it is equally or more important to focus on creating healthy, loving, lifelong connections for Indigenous youth in care. This, in turn, requires us to look beyond overly psychologized, individualistic accounts of young people in care, and into the structural systems that shape unequal outcomes for Indigenous youth, a theme we address next.

Racism and Colonial Effects

In a settler society such as Canada, any context of government care is necessarily shaped by active colonial policies and structures operating at multiple levels and resulting in persistent racial, gender, and class stratifications. Chronic racism, poverty, and the intergenerational effects of colonialism were identified

by the young people we spoke with as significant barriers to permanency on several fronts. First, these interlocking effects were named as barriers to the recruitment and retention of potential Indigenous adoptive parents and families, and to the involvement of extended family and community members in cultural planning and adoption supports for youth.

> Like they looked for a Native family for me, but like they have their own, the same stuff I'm going through as a Native, they have the same issues. (Teresa, 17, youth in care)

> I was told a lot by my social worker that there's no Cree family out there to adopt me because they have lots of kids already, no housing, and they're like scared of the system for how it treats us. (Anonymous, 19, aged out of care)

The intergenerational effects of racialized poverty and colonial policies are insidious. We heard that they erode families' capacity to reconnect with, invest in, and reclaim their youth, and that they impact everything from a family's emotional and cultural readiness, their financial capacity to participate in reconnection and caretaking efforts, and the funding available for staff, travel, and services to support permanency. Some youth who live off reserve, particularly those who live long distances from their home communities, expressed regret that their birth and extended families could not take part in reconnection and caretaking efforts because they were "too damaged from residential schools," "too poor, no jobs on reserve," "didn't have it together," or "didn't have the money to really meet with me."

Second, Indigenous youth described the kind of implicit and explicit racism and discrimination that manifests at systemic levels in state-driven child welfare policies and practices, and in (typically non-Indigenous) caregivers' and/or service providers' ignorance of the multiple impacts of colonization. Youth we spoke with shared stories about "the government stealing our culture from us," "getting looked down at because of my skin colour," and surviving "in a system that basically hates Natives."

During one of our cultural circles for youth in care, we invited Elders who spoke about the history of residential schools and the Sixties and Millennium Scoops. One of the circle participants, 15-year-old "Jayden," eloquently summed up the need for us to engage with young people about Canada's colonial history:

> Nobody else ever took the time to even explain to me, "Hey, guess what? There was residential schools and stuff, that's what happened to your mom." Like, the Canadian government and churches forced her to give up her culture and she was so abused. And yeah, it finally made sense. It's not just, "your family had problems," but it's more, it's a whole Canada-wide problem that they forced us all Natives to give up our culture and everything that made us strong. So it's not, wasn't our fault, and they never explain it to us that way. It's just like, "Oh, your mom is messed up so we're taking you away."

Jayden was all too aware of what Corcoran (2012) describes as "the hegemonic control of the state over access to basic cultural information" that represents "a very deliberate and intimately damaging policy of colonial assimilation and forced marginalization that continues to impact thousands of Indigenous families" (p. 71). Jayden's experience shows firsthand the interlocking intergenerational damage caused by colonial policies on Indigenous families and communities, effects that are well documented in

Indigenous child welfare research (Castellano, Archibald, & DeGagné, 2008; Hughes, 2006; Silburn et al., 2006; Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013).

Thus permanency planning in an Indigenous sense is not simply about a young person in isolation, but also about healing and restoring relations in families and communities that have lost generations of children through colonial policies. This process requires vision and leadership, not only from young people and families and communities, but from agencies, service providers, and policy makers who must reimagine what cultural planning entails. This reimagining requires radical decolonizing and structural and political transformation, but it can also be enacted through creative and courageous changes in day-to-day practice. As an example, Jayden spoke about what it meant to him that a worker was willing to seek out connections to his community and background:

> The first time I met her she told me what Nation I am. It was in my file the whole fuckin' time…. It took her one day to tell me more about my family, where I'm from and all, than I never heard from being in care for six years. She actually drove to my community for a coming home ceremony. She was the only non-Native person there. She stood by me.

Jayden's experience serves as a powerful reminder of the need for further training and supports for workers and agencies, a need highlighted by BC's Representative for Children and Youth in her scathing report of the province's failure to meet the needs of Indigenous children and youth in care (Turpel-Lafond, 2013, p. 5). Some youth said they wanted to be actively involved in that process:

> I want to do something against the racism that's done to us as First Nations youth. I'm definitely more, like, more into not being part of the mainstream. Like, as a two-spirit woman, more into social change and things like that. (Raven, 24, aged out of care)

Echoing Raven's compelling call to action, a few youth talked about their desire to be advocates and "do more" to support youth who are "just lost in a system that is really not friendly toward Native youth." This desire can be linked to the need to connect youth so that they can take on leadership and mentoring roles and return to places of honour and purpose in their communities—wherever their communities are and whatever they look like.

Complex youth identities

Perhaps the most layered barrier to successful permanency planning identified by Indigenous youth is the multifaceted nature of young people's identities. Numerous scholars emphasize that adolescence is an important time in the formation of identity, and research with Aboriginal adoptees and youth in care has affirmed the desire of youth to connect with others and to understand who they are and where they come from (Arsenault, 2006; Carrière, 2005, 2011; Richard, 2004; Sinclair, 2007). Yet, many of our study participants discussed a lack of understanding on the part of service providers and caregivers of Indigenous youth's complex developmental and cultural realities.

First, youth in our studies shared a spectrum of experiences and perspectives about their Indigenous identities, backgrounds, and heritage. Some reported knowing "very little," "not much," or "nothing"

about their Indigenous backgrounds. Some questioned the meaning, relevance, or applicability of terms such as "Indian," "Native," "First Nations," and "Métis" to describe themselves:

> Not even sure, like what to call, what to say I am. Am I Native? I guess I've been told I am, at the end of the day it's a label just like any other label. ("Jennifer," 16, adopted at birth)

> Saying I'm Indian, is kind of an empty, empty word at this time. So what? So. Did it mean anything for me? Not really, other than a lot of heartache. (Anonymous)

We spoke with many young people who knew nothing about their Indigenous backgrounds, who expressed deep shame or a deliberate lack of interest, who did not feel entitled to claim an Indigenous identity, and/or who said they did not want to be pigeonholed as Native. Some felt torn between a desire to know their culture and background and a sense of gratitude and loyalty to non-Indigenous families who provided care and/or an adoptive home. One youth asked, "Why do I have to choose?"

To truly understand what is at stake in permanency planning, it is critical to honour and hold up these stories of grief, disconnection, and pain. They are an all-too-familiar and heartbreaking theme across many stories, here and in the literature (e.g., Johnson, 2011; Wagamese, 2009; Windh, 2010). But to accept these stories as inevitable means we simply submit to the consequences of colonization that sustain the intergenerational outcomes of lateral and internalized racisms. Doing so would also constitute Indigenous youth as perpetually victimized, passive, culturally disconnected victims of colonization. Instead, our permanency discussion should engage with these issues head on, honestly, and with dignity, honour, patience, and profound care. We need to walk with these youth onto paths where, eventually, their ancestral and community connections will matter. For so many youth participants in our studies, particularly those of mixed backgrounds who may not identify as Indigenous or who grew up disconnected from their territories, cultures, and communities, the ability to reconnect matters greatly, even if their experience is tenuous, partial, or painful. As Krestin and Sarah, two friends who grew up in foster care, explained when they spoke with us about "not knowing our culture," their connections to their ancestors and communities are still meaningful even if not always accessible:

> It's hard, because for me, I personally don't have that cultural knowledge. I … didn't grow up knowing my culture. But it still matters to me. I mean, I do want that choice…. I wouldn't just give that up. (Krestin, 17, raised by her aunt)

> I grew up in care, and it's so important (…) It's just knowing, "OK, I'm not that drunk Indian" or also, on the flip side, I don't have to live it up as a white girl. (Sarah, 19, aged out of care)

Krestin's assertion that she would "not just give up" her connection with her community and Sarah's celebration of not having to be either "a white girl or that drunk Indian" are powerful examples of how grief and loss can be infused with hope and possibility. So many other youth also talked about "looking," "searching for," and "wanting to explore" their culture, family, and community. Some held a firm sense of their Indigenous backgrounds, felt "a lot of pride," and wanted more opportunities to engage in cultural connections and activities, a topic we explore further on.

Importantly, many participants conveyed in vivid terms how a lack of understanding or acknowledgement of their complex cultural and developmental identities obstructed successful permanency planning. Some participants—especially those with mixed backgrounds—suggested that overly rigid or one-dimensional cultural approaches fell far short of meeting their needs. One youth talked a lot about how parts of his background felt "ignored" even though he had a strong, positive placement with a First Nations family that was deemed to match his cultural background:

> I'm Irish, Black, Cree, and Ojibway, but like my mom is Cree, so they were like, "Oh, you're Cree." And my adoptive family, they're really Cree and it was awesome, don't get me wrong at all. But I do have to add, just sometimes, like I couldn't talk about other stuff in me. I felt like I really missed that part. (adopted youth)

One young woman whose cultural adoption into her birth father's family was contested by her birth mother's band described feeling "torn apart" by the process:

> Well, like my mom's family—I understand now, they were coming from a "we love her, she belongs to us" thing, but at the same time, the whole time they were just fighting over me. Nobody was really, you know really, really asking me how I saw, and like, where I felt I belonged. And I do truly feel, I understand now that they had the best of intentions, but it shouldn't never be so hard, like burning bridges and all that, it should be handled in a more better way, like, for me, not their agendas or whatever. (Anonymous)

These young people are sharing the profound complexity of what permanency planning looks like in a contemporary context of mixed backgrounds and urbanization. Indigenous families and communities urgently and understandably want to reclaim their young people and honour their cultural traditions. From these places of deep commitment, love, and pride, struggles can still arise. As we can hear in the stories of the young people we have spoken with, actions in support of the most laudable goals can disempower or even alienate youth if the youth are not placed at the centre of the process. Permanency planning often takes place in the midst of intricate political situations. Nations are asserting self-determination in the context of a heavily controlled settler state colonial system, and this dominant system tends to gloss over all the complexities we highlight here. In addition, funds and other supports are completely insufficient, leading to outcomes that can fragment youth, families, and community relations. Much more attention must be paid to youth of mixed backgrounds, including those who belong to multiple Nations, to ensure that young people do not become casualties of jurisdictional wars. First and foremost, we must respect youth enough to consider how they understand their own connections and identities as a way to inform collaborative dialogue on permanency.

Along the same line of developing permanency plans that honour a young person's perspectives on their complex backgrounds and identities, several participants stressed that placement plans should be sensitive to other facets of their identity, including age, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, and special needs, among many others, which often impact and intersect with youths' cultural identities. Several participants discussed mental health and special needs:

> [What I would worry the most about when aging out would be] like my depression and my meds, like how to get that—not to lose that support. (Anonymous, 18, living with relatives)

My brother has that fetal disorder from alcohol, so that too. I would really like someone to help me on that end. (Anonymous, 19, adopted)

Two young people shared their struggles with rigid gender and sexuality norms while going though the foster care and adoption systems:

Okay, my family was really against me being gay and I felt like they didn't accept me at all, even though they were Native. (Anonymous, adopted)

Me too, being, like I was transitioning to being a man, when my file described me as girl and like I was treated as a girl for adoption and it was, it—I can't even explain it now how bad it was like to have that in my face every day. I felt like I did not even have, that, the basic control to say who I was, like. Even now I'm so fuckin' angry about it. (Adam, 23, Anishinabe/Dene, former youth in care)

Others, such as the young woman below who was adopted as a baby, talked about looking for mentoring to develop healthy gender and sexual identities as an integral aspect of being "strong and proud" Indigenous people:

For sure, I needed someone to show me some things around self, self-respect, my body. Protecting myself, self-respecting my body and myself (...) So someone to show me, like, this is how you can respect your body, as a Native female, like a strong proud Native female. (Anonymous, 21, adopted)

As all of these youth attest, their relationship with their Indigenous background(s) is entangled with the politics of gender, sexuality, race, social class, family background, personal histories, loss of status, and so on. We heard clearly that celebratory back-to-culture ceremonies, policies, and practice—when not done in respectful ways with the full participation of the young people themselves—can have damaging effects, not only by placing undue pressure and shame on youth who may already feel disconnected from their Indigenous backgrounds, but by pushing them even further into the margins through a lack of attention to their diverse identities. Central to this struggle is the urgent need to disentangle the threads of disconnection and secrecy that go along with intersecting colonial legacies of racialization, poverty, gender normativity, heterosexism, and other forms of violence and discrimination that Indigenous youth in care encounter. The identity formation of young Indigenous people living off reserve in urban centres cannot be extracted from these shifting forces. An important point that can be garnered from participants' comments is that even the term "identity" is in many ways insufficiently complex to accommodate the many formations that shape young people's lives. Blanket, tokenistic, decontextualized cultural reconnection policies like those found in too many cultural plans tend to erase heterogeneity among youth, their communities, and their Nations. Therefore, permanency plans must be developmentally and culturally appropriate and flexible, and take into account each youth's unique needs, strengths, and social locations. They also need to consider the length and nature of a young person's stay in care and the relationships that were forged and severed during this time, a theme we address next.

Gaps in knowledge about the range of permanency and cultural options

A final barrier to successful permanency planning identified by the youth we spoke with is gaps in knowledge about the full range of permanency options available to them that would help maintain familial, relational, and cultural connections. Youth in group homes or residential care facilities, in youth agreements such as independent living, who are aging out of care, or live in other precarious conditions (e.g., couch surfing, living in shelters or with friends and relatives) may have limited access to formal adoptions. However, they often still want formalized and/or culturally grounded connections with family, extended family, and their communities. Many of the youth in our studies emphasized this point:

> If I'm not adopted I still always wanted just something, you know. Well, like my, when my mom passed I ended up in a [group] home but I wished my family was around more for even like, weekends, or for family things. Um, to do some home visits. I did really wanted to learn fishing or carving like in my culture. (Jesse, youth in care)

Just like Jesse, who said he had accepted that he was "never gonna get adopted," many youth talked about "still always" wanting *something*. This "something" is at the heart of the complicated questions we must ask ourselves when considering the range of permanency options for Indigenous youth. In this regard, many of the youth lacked knowledge about cultural planning before and after adoption and about the availability of custom adoptions:

> I know we can do like an adoption that's with Elders and stuff, like in our culture, so you can get adopted into your culture. I've heard about it, but not sure what it is. (Jesse, youth in care)

> Yeah, I heard, too, a non-native family can get sorta adopted by a native group, too. (Anonymous, 17, adopted)

Some youth clearly have an interest in pursuing cultural and custom permanency options, which points to the need for increased transparency and information about cultural and customary options to support permanency, something we discuss next in the paper. As Atwood (2008) explains, permanency is a "chameleon term" (p. 1) in the child welfare world, contingent on context, culture, and other factors. In the context of Indigenous youth in care, mainstream definitions of permanency fall short because they tend to focus solely on facilitating attachment to a caregiver. In an Indigenous context, notions of permanency need to expand beyond caregiver attachment into supporting the creation of permanent connections with culture, relations, kin, community, and land.

When the Caring for First Nations Children Society (CFNCS, now Indigenous Perspectives Society) asked delegated Aboriginal agencies about the most important way to improve experiences and outcomes for children and youth in residential care, they received this response: "Maintaining connection to his or her family, extended family, community, and culture" (Federation of Community Social Services of BC & BC Ministry for Children and Family Development, 2012, p. 62). Distressingly, policies and attitudes within the child welfare system itself may prevent adequate resources and time from being devoted to exploring permanency options for youth (Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks, 2010). While agencies stated that a range of permanency options are available for Indigenous youth, they expressed concern that new social workers might not be aware of all of these options (Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks,

2010, pp. 70–71). It is critical to extend Indigenous approaches to customary care into mainstream services because the longstanding equation of permanency with adoption has led to a perceived lack of permanency options in mainstream child welfare agencies. Such a paradigm shift would also ensure that non-Indigenous adoptive and foster families are supported to develop and maintain adequate cultural plans and connections with birth families and communities. This support could include, for instance, the ceremonial or custom adoption of non-Indigenous adoptive families into Indigenous communities as a way of mentoring and including them over the long term and in a more generative and positive manner, rather than simply during the transfer of custody.

The challenge of expanding permanency options is exacerbated by jurisdictional battles and chronic underfunding among federal, provincial, and territorial governments when it comes to Indigenous programs. In addition, the devolution of adoption services to Indigenous agencies will increasingly include cultural planning for adoption and custom adoption mandates, but without adequate training, resourcing, and policy supports to ensure comprehensive change. Although the issue of funding and resourcing is not one brought up by our youth participants and is therefore beyond the scope of this paper, it is nonetheless central to the feasibility of these options, and it warrants further discussion.

Successful Permanency Planning for Indigenous Youth in Urban Settings

Having presented the barriers identified by youth and relating the most salient themes to a discussion of systemic barriers, we now turn to strategies identified by youth as promising ways forward. Here again, we link the youths' individual voices to an analysis of themes addressed in other research and literature. We do this deliberately to honour the individual stories by nesting them in a broader context that makes structural and systemic issues more tangible. We have headed our discussion of these strategies as *thinking outside the box* and *recentring the village*. Throughout these two sections we link the youth-identified strategies to the literature on three important themes related to permanency: concurrent planning, kinship care, and custom adoptions.

Thinking outside the box

Despite the child welfare system's focus on "forever families" as the ideal permanency plan, adoption is not the best option for all youth. Adoption and long-term stays in government care can sever a young person's vital connections to kin, culture, and community. Permanency plans are needed for Indigenous youth that focus on Indigenous understandings of age and life stages, consider every aspect of a young person's identity, and foreground connection to provide consistent support and a sense of unconditional belonging and safety. As much as possible, concepts need to be stretched and made more flexible to create safe, sustainable, culturally grounded and relevant permanency options. As one participant told us, "you have to think outside the box."

In our research, one youth brought up the idea of "mentoring, not parenting," which sums up how so many young people in their late teens understand permanency when a clear path to formal adoption is not available. Youth described the "lifesaving" importance of access to consistent, loving mentors—whether they be family members, Elders, service providers, friends, siblings, or others—who were not bound

by rigid policies and procedures. These findings are echoed in the literature. For instance, in a 2012 report, delegated Aboriginal agencies made the following suggestions in regard to creating permanency for Indigenous children and youth: include more support for alternative options like maternity homes; involve biological parents in permanency options; maintain agency contact with adoptive homes; create ceremonies to mark transitions; involve Elders in the permanency plan and connect them with children and youth; and support mentors with whom the child or youth identifies who will be there for them through and after the permanency plan (Federation of Community Social Services of BC & BC Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2012, p. 62).

Another example of "thinking outside the box" mentioned by youth was questioning access to resources and supports based on rigid distinctions between "youth" and "adult" rooted in Eurocentric child development theories imposed on Indigenous peoples. This reality was succinctly described by "Levi," a 20-year-old participant in our research who had aged out of care:

> I'm 18 or 20 and I'm supposed to have it figured out. Who does that? Don't cut me off just because you think suddenly I'm grown. That's just so crazy. Like, "surprise!" I'm 20 now so all the shit I went through is fixed? I don't need anybody?

As Levi points out, youth without adequate permanency plans are vulnerable to policy and funding shifts based on age. Atkinson (2008) concurs: "Most troubling is the irreversibility of aging out. Unlike other young adults who have the option of returning home during difficult times, foster care youths … do not have the option of reentering the foster care system once they age out" (p. 183). A legal differentiation between "minor" and "adult" contrasts sharply with what Indigenous Elders emphasized throughout the course of our research: a strong value in many Indigenous communities is that accountability to young people transcends legal frameworks; connections "are forever" and do not end, no matter the person's age or how long they have lived away. During one of our talking circles with youth in care, an Elder shared these thoughts:

> For our culture, being young lasted a lot longer. It was more based on your knowledge and your standing in the community … not about "can you live on your own?" and some age limit. (Elder, Saanich)

We also heard from some of the youth that cultural adoptions and kinship connections, which we discuss further on, can supplement other forms of permanency planning that focus on more formal physical custody. For instance, a youth in group and residential care or (semi)independent living may be culturally adopted by his or her community or extended family in an adoption ceremony even if formal, physical custody is not transferred. In the words of Greg, an 18-year-old Cree/Métis youth living independently,

> Of course you want to say "I'm adopted, I belong, someone wants me." … But at this point, I'm in independent living, so someone breathing down my neck—not good.… I just would prefer like, connecting to my family, community. Someone that's always there. Like if I'm sick, holidays, having someone to phone if I need to. Going out into the bush, learning our language, beading.… I like stuff like that.… An adoption ceremony for that would be awesome.

Certainly, broader concepts of cultural and relational permanency are gaining saliency in child welfare policy and discourse, and these expanded concepts are supported by research. For instance, a US study suggests that long-term foster care in Indigenous cultural contexts—what they call an "American Indian cultural environment" or AICE—is a more viable and culturally appropriate form of permanency for Indigenous children. The findings of this five-year study indicate that children with the strongest AICE had, on average, fewer and significantly longer placements (Quash-Mah, Stockard, Johnson-Shelton, & Crowley, 2010, p. 896).

In BC, the Ministry of Children and Family Development now includes "relational" and "cultural" permanency as important forms of permanency that can supplement physical permanency. The MCFD Pathways program emphasizes "child-focused family recruitment" to strengthen connection to birth culture(s) and community. The Adoptive Families Association of BC (2014) explains that the program honours "relational, cultural, and physical permanence with the ultimate goal of legal permanence" (para. 1). And, according to the provincial representative for children and youth, permanency planning goes beyond placement to strengthening a child's relationships, cultural identity, and sense of belonging (Turpel-Lafond, 2013).

This more flexible and community-centred approach to permanency breaks down some of the sturdiest tension points regarding adoption as a painful rupture for Indigenous people rather than a positive new beginning. Adoption is particularly political in situations where it cuts ties with Indigenous families, communities, Nations, and cultures as a precondition to solidifying a relationship with a non-Indigenous adoptive parent. In a compelling critique of adoption as the ideal permanency plan, Coupet (2005) writes:

> As it reflects political and social inequalities, the hegemonic narrative of adoption, with its tendency to define permanence in only the legally binding terms of parent and child dyads, encourages the continued marginalization of families. (pp. 454–455)

Defining permanency in terms of adoption can shut out adolescents who live independently or in residential care and group homes, rendering it more difficult for them to connect with family and permanent caregivers and other support systems. It may also curtail opportunities for effective concurrent planning, which could add a crucial component to permanency planning for Indigenous children and youth. Briefly, concurrent planning means that case workers explore and pursue multiple avenues to lasting relationships between youth in care and unrelated caregivers while working at the same time to repair and maintain existing relationships with birth family and kin. This latter part is especially important if we consider that youth who transition out of government care often seek out family members. Bussiere (2006, cited in Collins, Paris, & Ward, 2008) asserts that permanency is evolving to mean:

> an integrated service plan that prepares youth for independent living but also creates permanency for older youth. Moreover, this revised method of concurrent planning involves older youth participating in their own permanency plans, identifying caring and supportive adults, and including family members in reunification plans. (p. 56)

Several articles discuss the trend of young people returning to their biological families after they have aged out of government care (Carrière, 2005; Collins, Paris, & Ward, 2008; Jones & Kruk, 2005). As

Jones and Kruk (2005) write, "children's attachment to their biological families ... seems to endure in spite of the obstacles created by foster care, adoption or maltreatment" (p. 407); it is also extremely important in alleviating loss and results in fewer foster home placements (Jones & Kruk, 2005). Jones and Kruk's research has important implications for conceptualizing permanency and cultural plans in Indigenous contexts, and it poses serious challenges to the mainstream Western equation of adoption with the severance of parental and family ties.

Recentring the village: Kinship care and custom adoptions

Kinship care offers Indigenous youth in care the possibility of achieving permanency within their own extended family networks, communities, and cultures. Kinship care is something that youth in our studies repeatedly requested, even when they knew little about their backgrounds and even when they felt conflicted about reconnecting with their family, community, and culture. Participants told us about their desire to be cared for by relatives in the following terms: "I want to know my birth family regardless"; "I would, yeah, definitely like to go to my reserve and visit there"; "live with my relatives, or at some point, like for them to be my foster family"; and "if I could find out, for sure I would choose that, if they were into it" even if it was "part time" or "just once in a while."

Geen (2004) emphasizes that a wide variety of kinship care arrangements can be made. He broadly defines kinship care as "any living arrangement in which children do not live with either of their parents and are instead cared for by a relative or someone with whom they have had a prior relationship" (p. 132). Across Canada, kinship care is the preferred form of placement for children and youth in care because it is believed to lead to fewer foster placements and increased success in permanency (Brisebois & Lee, 2012). In a 2004 study with 316 children, those in kinship care reported feeling more cared for than those in foster care (Chapman, Wall, & Barth, 2004).

Although the benefits of kinship care are mentioned frequently in the literature, this caretaking arrangement is not without complications. In their study of kinship outcomes in Ontario, Brisebois and Lee (2012) found that children in foster care were more likely than children in kinship care to be reunited with a biological parent or adopted. While children and youth in kinship care homes experienced fewer disruptions in placement, they were also more likely to run away, perhaps due to the fact that they often stayed in their community of origin and wanted to return to their parent(s).

It is important to note that the studies mentioned above do not focus specifically on Indigenous contexts. In any discussion of Indigenous children and youth in care, we must be careful how we evaluate what constitutes a successful placement. For example, non-Indigenous scholars and service providers may define stability differently than Indigenous families do. Kinship relations are often quite fluid in Indigenous communities, and it may not be disruptive to a child or adolescent to move back and forth between different placements as long as there is oversight from a local Indigenous agency and case workers to ensure that the placement is safe and meets the child's needs and desire for connections with birth parents and kin. A youth's siblings and cousins can also play important roles in relational and cultural permanency. In sum, the goal of kinship care in Indigenous contexts is to provide a sustained, flexible, integrated way of supporting youth.

Just as stability may be viewed differently in Indigenous communities, the importance of kin and the meanings accorded to complex systems of connectedness may be completely distinct from the ways in which child welfare systems define kinship. Little Bear (2000) emphasizes that kinship care necessitates complex arrangements of rights and obligations that transcend the boundaries of Western notions of the nuclear family. He describes kinship as a "spider-web of relations" that includes humans and the natural world (Little Bear, 2000). Carrière (2005) argues that kinship "can influence the recognition of one's place and responsibility in the universe" (p. 46) and that this sense of balance is vital to "overall community health and strength" (p. 46).

For Indigenous adolescents, who, as we have seen, tend to fall outside of mainstream adoption discourses, culturally based customary forms of care and adoption offer an opportunity to be reclaimed by their family and community. Indigenous custom adoption, which is tied inextricably to concepts of kinship, customary law, and self-determination in Indigenous communities, holds much potential for Indigenous youth in care due to the practice's capacity to be flexible. Although the terms and teachings vary widely from one community to another, custom or traditional adoptions have been practiced by Indigenous peoples around the world for millennia (Arsenault, 2006; Baldassi, 2006; di Tomasso & de Finney, 2015a, 2015b; Keewatin, 2004; Quebec Native Women Inc., 2007, 2010).

Customary adoptions go beyond transferring custody or parenting responsibilities. They surround youth with love and care, recentre the responsibilities of extended family and community across generations to support and claim youth, and retrace the circle of ancestral, spiritual, and territorial belonging. One youth participant in our research who had been adopted by a family in her own First Nation community shared what it meant to her:

> To be adopted in my community—how can I explain it? It's been life changing. I didn't have to give up that connection to my culture or my family. I am so thankful for that. (Anonymous, 20, adopted)

What is exciting about customary adoption practices is the scope of possibilities they offer. When a full or formal mainstream adoption is not possible for a youth, custom adoption can still support cultural and relational permanency. For instance, even if the youth is not physically living with their "customary" adoptive parents or family (for instance, if their family lives on reserve and the youth lives in a city) the ceremony and practices enacted through custom adoption activate a set of principles, commitments, and relationships among the young person and their kin and community. Customary practices to initiate these important connections encompass traditional protocols described throughout this special issue, such as coming-home and naming ceremonies and feasts where youth are introduced to, welcomed back to, or integrated into their extended families and communities. A whole-community approach might also include designing interventions and processes that welcome and incorporate non-Indigenous families, Indigenous families from other communities, and Indigenous families from the community who may have little involvement in cultural practices.

The practice of custom adoption and related ceremonies also provides the kind of flexible customary framework that is capable of bringing siblings and young family members such as cousins together within a culturally based, community-rooted commitment without requiring formal joint care placements under

the same roof. Children and youth in care often have siblings who may be living in different homes or in other types of placements, or siblings who have left their placements and/or aged out of care. Thus once again, flexibility and diversity are crucial in meeting the permanency needs of Indigenous youth in care.

Caveats to implementation

Before we conclude our discussion of the promises of customary care for permanency with off-reserve youth in care, we want to attend to some caveats. This type of close, collaborative work with urban Indigenous youth in care may remain elusive in Canadian child welfare systems, where budget cuts translate into decreased funding for the country's most vulnerable children, youth, and families. As we heard from youth in our studies, cultural permanency involves practical supports—cultural continuity does not simply happen on its own. Youth need financial and other support to travel back to their communities, including travel assistance, mentoring, and preparatory and follow-up support from service providers who can accompany the youth. Shadow, a 15-year-old participant in our research, described what can happen when these supports are not provided:

> I totally was into having like a Native adoption or whatever. I did meet my family, like my social worker took me this one time to meet my grams and stuff, my uncles and cousins and stuff…. It didn't really go anywhere, like we put so much time in that, meeting them, but it didn't really go anywhere after. Like I went back to Vancouver and they're like a plane ride, it's far. I don't have the money to make that trip. They don't have the money to make that trip. We kind of just stayed as strangers.

Racism, poverty, and intergenerational trauma often erode families' capacity to reconnect with, invest in, and reclaim their children and youth. Increasing urbanization is both a result of these conditions and a source of further complexities such as mixed identities and overlapping jurisdictions; in any case, additional funds and resources for travel and other supports are required (see our discussion on these points in di Tomasso & de Finney, 2015b). Permanency planning in an Indigenous sense is not simply about a young person in isolation, but also about healing and restoring relations in families and communities that have lost generations of children through colonial policies. Permanency planning with and for Indigenous children and youth therefore requires a long-term investment in leadership and healing in communities, and must be connected to governance, self-determination, and the practice of customary laws. Permanency also needs to involve connection to ALL relations that help sustain an Indigenous cultural connection, including access to land, cultural teachings, language, community relations, family, and so on. These connections cannot be made without political will to provide the necessary resources and capacity for implementation.

"What Helps the Most is Love"

> "See, it's being ripped from love that causes the wound in the first place and it's only love in the end that heals it." (Wagamese, 2009, p. 13)

This paper has sounded an urgent call for creative strategies of engagement that delineate places of belonging for and with Indigenous youth in care. If we are going to reclaim our young people, we must mobilize all of our resources to imagine new pathways for belonging. At the heart of permanency for Indigenous youth lies a sense of belonging within interdependent relationships with family, community, ancestors, Nations, and the land itself (Arsenault, 2006; Morrison, Fox, Cross, & Paul, 2010). This article has highlighted that continuity of relationships and cultural connectedness are central for Indigenous youth in care, as emphasized by the youth who spoke with us and by multiple sources in the literature on permanency (Arsenault, 2006; Federation of Community Social Services of BC & British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2012; Morrison et al., 2010; Quash-Mah et al., 2010; Turpel-Lafond, 2013). Service providers, government, communities, families, and young people themselves continue to stress the urgent need for strategies such as kinship care and custom adoptions that "focus on finding and strengthening other types of ongoing connections to people, culture and community" (Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks, 2010, p. 5). The permanency options discussed in this article are much more expansive and fluid than simply bringing a young person together with a caregiver. Because urban Indigenous youth involved in the child welfare system experience degrees of disconnection on many levels, including from self, mentors, peers, family, culture, community, and land, they urgently need responsive practices that can reconnect them on as many of these levels as possible. As we begin to see the convergence of custom and statutory adoptions, we also see the importance of strengthening customary caregiving as a pathway toward a whole-community approach rather than treating youth as individuals disconnected from their histories, families, ancestors, and the future of Indigenous Nations.

Responsive practices necessitate foregrounding the voices of young people. The most often identified barrier to successful placements, both in the literature and by practically every participant in our studies, concerns the lack of control youth have over their experience of being in care and their permanency planning. The Caring for First Nations Children's Society (quoted in a report by the Federation of Community Social Services of BC & BC Ministry for Children and Family Development, 2012) stresses that youth's lack of input into their permanency planning negatively affects the success of their placements. The lack of youth engagement in their own care is mirrored by a lack of research featuring young Indigenous people's diverse perspectives and experiences. Our capacity to move forward is slowed by the conspicuous gap in research and in practice and policy debates in Canada about the experiences and needs of Indigenous youth in government care, those who are living in other permanent "out of home" placements, and those who have been adopted.

Finally, while the importance of youth making decisions in every aspect of their care and assessments is established in child welfare and adoption literature (Federation of Community Social Services of BC & BC Ministry for Children and Family Development, 2012), Indigenous youth also hold the right to self-determination *as members of Indigenous communities*. Just as the right to autonomy is regularly stripped from Indigenous youth on multiple levels, First Peoples are subjected to colonial settler state control over every aspect of their lives, lands, and societies—in addition to control of their children.

The struggle for self-determination is not a simple one. Decolonizing child and family services involves mourning as much it does recovery, action, and dreaming. Indigenous communities have within them customary laws and practices and abundant untapped resources, not the least of which is youth themselves. Young voices are instrumental to imagining and implementing creative, culturally appropriate permanency options. Young people in care negotiate their permanence in many different ways, sometimes through shame, anger, loss, and grief, but also with love, hope, creativity, subversion, outrage, imagination, political action, critical analysis, and spirit. As this young woman shared, their stories "still matter" and they definitely "add up":

> You can't give up. It's kind of all the little things. It's a daily struggle. I mean, most of the time I don't think about sexism, racism, but it's more just a daily thing, saying "I'm here, I'm here." I try to just keep my head up and do what I can, you know? The little things add up, just talking with Elders, community events. I try to role model to my little sisters that we can do things differently. It does add up—that's what I believe. In my heart I believe that. (Anonymous)

Creating places of belonging for urban Indigenous youth in care requires all of us to expand our ideas of permanency and belonging—and to believe, heart and spirit, that our actions do add up.

References

Adoptive Families Association of BC. (2014). *Pathways training program*. Retrieved from: https://www.bcadoption.com/pathways.

Arsenault, A. (2006). *The life cycle experiences of adoption through Aboriginal adults' stories*. Master's thesis, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.

Atkinson, M. (2008). Aging out of foster care: Towards a universal safety net for former foster care youth. *Harvard Civil Rights/Civil Liberties Law Review, 43*, 183–212.

Atwood, B. A. (2008). *Permanency for American Indian and Alaska Native foster children: Taking lessons from tribes.* Arizona Legal Studies Discussion Paper No. 08-22.

Baldassi, C. L. (2006). The legal status of Aboriginal customary adoption across Canada: Comparisons, contrasts and convergences. *UBC Law Review, 39*(1), 63–100.

Bertsch, M. & Bidgood, B.A. (2010). Why is adoption like a First Nations feast?: Lax Kw'alaam indigenizing adoptions in child welfare. *First People's Child and Family Review, 5*(1), 96–105.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.

Brisebois, K., & Lee, S. J. (2012). Foster and kinship care: An examination of the legislation that aims to improve permanency and continuity of care in Ontario. *Canadian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 3*(1), 101–114.

Carrière, J. (2005). *Connectedness and health for First Nation adoptees*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.

Castellano, M. B., Archibald, L., & DeGagné, M. (2008). *From truth to reconciliation: Transforming the legacy of residential schools*. Ottawa, ON: Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

Chapman, M., Wall, A., & Barth, R. P. (2004). Children's voices: The perceptions of children in foster care. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 74*(3), 293–304.

Collins, M. E., Paris, R., & Ward, R. L. (2008). The permanence of family ties: Youth transitioning from foster care. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 78*(1), 54–62.

Corcoran, R. (2012). *Rethinking "foster-child" and the culture of care: A rhizomatic inquiry into the multiple belongings of foster care alumni*. Master's thesis, University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.

Coupet, S. (2005). Swimming upstream against the great adoption tide: Making the case for impermanence. *Capital University Law Review, 34*, 405–458.

de Finney, S., Johnson, S., Coverdale, J. & Cowan, B. (forthcoming). Nong Sila: A model for community-based urban Aboriginal adoptions.

di Tomasso, L., & de Finney, S. (2015a). A Discussion Paper on Indigenous Custom Adoption, Part 1: Severed Connections: A historical overview of Indigenous adoption in Canada. *First Peoples Child & Family Review 10* (1), 7–18.

di Tomasso, L., & de Finney, S. (2015b). A Discussion Paper on Indigenous Custom Adoption, Part 2: Honouring our caretaking traditions. *First Peoples Child & Family Review 10* (1), 19–38.

Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks. (August, 2010). Belonging 4 ever: Creating permanency in and from care. New Westminster, BC: Author. Retrieved from: http://www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/Transitions/2-permanency%20report.pdf

Federation of Community Social Services of BC & British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development. (June, 2012). *Residential review project: Final report*. Victoria, BC: Author.

Geen, R. (2004). The evolution of kinship care policy and practice. *Future of Children*, *14*(1), 137.

Government of British Columbia. (2012, February). *2012/13–2014/15 service plan*. Ministry of Children and Family Development. Retrieved from: http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2010/sp/pdf/ministry/cfd.pdf

Hughes, E. N. (2006). *BC children and youth review: An independent review of BC's child protection system*. Victoria, BC: Ministry of Children and Family Development.

Ignace, M., & Ignace, G. (2005). Tagging, rapping and the voices of the ancestors: Expressing Aboriginal identity between the small city and the rez. In W. F. Garrett-Petts (Ed.), *The small cities book: On the cultural future of small cities* (pp. 303–318). Vancouver, BC: New Star Books.

Johnson, S. (2011). *"I screamed internally for a long time": Traumatized urban Indigenous children in the Canadian child protection and education systems.* Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.

Jones, L., & Kruk, E. (2005). Life in government care: The connection of youth to family. *Child and Youth Care Forum, 34*(6), 405–421.

Keewatin, D. (2004). *An Indigenous perspective on custom adoption.* Master's thesis, Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada.

Kozlowski, A., Sinha, V., Hoey, S., & Lucas, L. (2011). *First Nations child welfare in British Columbia.* Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal. Retrieved from: http://cwrp.ca/infosheets/first-nations-child-welfare-british-columbia

Little Bear, L. (2000). Jagged worlds colliding. In M. Battiste (Ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous voice and vision* (pp. 77–85). Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.

McEwan-Morris, A. (2006, November). *"Strengthening our youth": Their journey to competence and independence.* A report on youth leaving Manitoba's child welfare system. Winnipeg, MB: Office of the Children's Advocate.

Miller, C. L., Pearce, M. E., Akm, M., Thomas, V., Christian, W., Schechter, M. T., & Spittal, P. M. (2011). The Cedar Project: Risk factors for transition to injection drug use among young, urban Aboriginal people. *Canadian Medical Association Journal, 183*(10), 1147–1154.

Morrison, C., Fox, K., Cross, T., & Paul, R. (2010). Permanency through Wabanaki eyes: A narrative perspective from "the people who live where the sun rises." *Child Welfare, 89*(1), 103–122.

Quash-Mah, S., Stockard, J., Johnson-Shelton, D., & Crowley, R. (2010). Fulfilling the hope of ICWA: The role of community context. *Children and Youth Services Review, 32*, 896–901.

Quebec Native Women Inc. (2007). *Traditional and custom adoption in the First Nations.* Paper presented to Working Group on the Quebec Adoption System, Department of Justice, Department of Health and Social Services. Retrieved from: http://www.faq-qnw.org/old/documents/Adoptrad07_eng.pdf

Quebec Native Women Inc. (2010). *Complementary research on traditional and customary child care practices/adoption within Aboriginal communities in Quebec.* Paper presented to Working Group on Customary Adoption in Aboriginal Communities, Justice Quebec. Retrieved from: http://www.faq-qnw.org/old/documents/QNWCustomAdoptionReportFinalversion.pdf

Richard, K. (2004). A commentary against Aboriginal to non-Aboriginal adoption. *First Peoples Child and Family Review, 1*(1), 101–109.

Rutman, D., Hubberstey, C., Barlow, A., & Brown, E. (2005). *When youth age out of care: A report on baseline findings.* National Crime Prevention Strategy. University of Victoria Research Initiatives

for Social Change Unit, BC Ministry of Children and Family Development, Greater Victoria Child & Youth Advocacy Society, & National Youth in Care Network.

Rutman, D., Hubberstey, C., & Feduniw, A., with Brown, E. (2007, September). *When youth age out of care: Where to from there?* Final report based on a three year longitudinal study. Funded by Public Safety Canada. University of Victoria Research Initiatives for Social Change Unit, BC Ministry of Children and Family Development, Greater Victoria Child & Youth Advocacy Society, & National Youth in Care Network.

Silburn, S. R., Zubrick, S. R., Lawrence, D. M., Mitrou, F. G., De Maio, J. A., Blair, E., Cox A., Dalby, R. B., Griffin, J. A., Pearson, G., & Hayward, C. (2006). The intergenerational effects of forced separation on the social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous children and young people. *Family Matters, 75*, 10–17.

Sinclair, R. (2007). Identity lost and found: Lessons from the sixties scoop. *First Peoples Child and Family Review, 1*(3), 65–82.

Sinha, V., & Kozlowski, A. (2013). The structure of Aboriginal child welfare in Canada. *International Indigenous Policy Journal, 4*(2), n.p.

Strickland, C. J. (1997). Suicide among American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Canadian Aboriginal youth: Advancing the research agenda. *International Journal of Mental Health, 25*(4), 11–32.

Totten, M. (2009). Aboriginal youth and violent gang involvement in Canada: Quality prevention strategies. *Institute for the Prevention of Crime Review*, 3, 135–156.

Turpel-Lafond, M. E. (2013, March). *Much more than paperwork: Proper planning essential to better lives for B.C.'s children in care: A representative's audit on plans of care*. Victoria, BC: Representative for Children and Youth. Retrieved from: http://www.rcybc.ca/

Turpel-Lafond, M. E. (2014, June). *Finding forever families: A review of the provincial adoption system*. Victoria, BC: Representative for Children and Youth. Retrieved from: http://www.rcybc.ca/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/reports_publications/rcy_adoptionsreport2014_final.pdf

Tweddle, A. (2005). *Youth leaving care: How do they fare?* Briefing paper prepared for the Modernizing Income Security for Working Age Adults Project. Toronto, ON: Modernizing Income Security for Working Age Adults Task Force.

Wagamese, R. (2009). The sixties scoop, the primal wound and home. *Canadian Dimension, 43*(5), 12–13.

Windh, J. (2010, July 29). *Family ties: Listening to Native youth*. The Tyee. Retrieved from: http://thetyee.ca/News/2010/07/29/FamilyTies/