Connecting to opportunity: The urban mobility and everyday survival of youths transitioning from government care in Metro Vancouver

by
Clete A. Hanson

B.A, Simon Fraser University, 2013

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Urban Studies

in the Urban Studies Program Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY Summer 2018

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Approval

Name: Clete A. Hanson
Degree: Master of Urban Studies
Title: Connecting to opportunity: The urban mobility and everyday survival of youths transitioning from government care in Metro Vancouver

Examinining Committee: Chair: Karen Ferguson
Professor of Urban Studies and History
Noel Dyck
Senior Supervisor
Professor of Social Anthropology
Peter V. Hall
Supervisor
Professor of Urban Studies
Leslie A. Robertson
External Examiner
Associate Professor of Anthropology
University of British Columbia

Date Defended/Approved: August 23, 2018
Ethics Statement

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this work, has obtained, for the research described in this work, either:

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Abstract

In Metro Vancouver, youths transitioning from government care are routinely failing to become independent ‘adults’ and are struggling to secure housing, access resources, and develop the requisite life skills and education needed to gain greater financial security over time. Unlike their parented peers, whose familial support network allows them to rebound or ‘boomerang’ in the face of failure, these youths are continually at risk of homelessness and other adverse conditions. By using the mobility concept of ‘tacking,’ this ethnographic study examines the everyday experiences of seven Metro Vancouver youths from government care, as they navigate through challenges, obtain resources, and seize opportunities in a Canadian urban setting. This study adds to the field of urban studies and mobilities research by providing insight into the survival tactics of this marginalized category of young people who exist in cities across the world.

Keywords: youth from government care, mobility, tactics, urban studies, affordable housing, Metro Vancouver
Dedication

This work is dedicated to my daughter Acacia who taught me how to love unconditionally, and reminded me of the importance of this work.

And to the seven youths who entrusted me with their stories, thank you. The courage and resilience you show each day is an inspiration to all of us.
Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which this work took place is the traditional territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, specifically the shared traditional territories of the Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Musqueam, Kwantlen, Semiahmoo, Tsawwassen, Katzie, Kwantlen, Kwikwetlem, Qayqayt, and numerous Stó:lō Nations First Nations.

This work would not have been possible without the support of many selfless, caring individuals who helped guide and support me along the way. First, I would like to thank Gale and Drew, who changed the course of my life by introducing me to this important issue. Thanks for giving a young, inexperienced university graduate a chance. I will forever be an advocate for youth in care. Drew, I also want to thank you for your mentorship and for creating a work environment that brought the best out of me.

I would like to recognize the staff who helped me recruit participants for this study, thanks for creating a space for me to reach out to youths, and trusting me to respect the people you serve. Also, special thanks go to the youth council who took the time to meet with me. Your advice and input helped guide my work and gave it authenticity. Good luck with your future projects, the public needs your voice and opinion.

To Noel, I can’t thank you enough for standing by me and advocating for this research. I would have never completed this work without your inspiration, wisdom, and patient supervision. I am so grateful to have learned from and worked with you these past few years. I also want to thank the SFU Urban Studies faculty and administrative staff for creating a welcoming environment that is both diverse and challenging. I’m excited to take the knowledge that you’ve passed on to me and apply it in my workplace and community.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family who continue to throw their full support behind everything I do. Mom and Dad, thanks for the words of encouragement and for spending your precious free time proofreading my paper. Finally, to Jessica my amazing wife, you have been my rock throughout this process. Thanks for your daily motivation, I could not have completed this project without you.
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<td>AYA</td>
<td>Adult Youth Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>British Columbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCTV</td>
<td>Closed-Circuit Television</td>
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<tr>
<td>CID</td>
<td>City Improvement Districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ2S</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two Spirited</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCFD</td>
<td>Ministry of Children and Family Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organizations</td>
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<td>PTSD</td>
<td>Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder</td>
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<td>REB</td>
<td>Research Ethics Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>SFU</td>
<td>Simon Fraser University</td>
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<tr>
<td>SROI</td>
<td>Social Return on Investment</td>
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<td>WHMIS</td>
<td>Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System</td>
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# Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ageing Out of Care</td>
<td>Ageing out is used to describe anytime a youth leaves a formal system of care designed to provide services below a certain age level. There are a variety of applications of the phrase throughout the youth development field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreements with Young Adults</td>
<td>The Ministry of Children and Family Development, Agreements with Young Adults program provides supports to 19 to 24 year-olds who were under a Continuing Custody Order or were in a Youth Agreement at age 19.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density Bonusing</td>
<td>Density bonusing refers to the practice of giving developers the right to build additional density in exchange for providing affordable housing. The increased density is given to offset the cost burden of providing the units.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Aid</td>
<td>Emergency care or treatment given to an ill or injured person before regular medical aid can be obtained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOODSAFE</td>
<td>The FOODSAFE program is a comprehensive food safety training program designed for the food service industry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Care</td>
<td>Foster care is a system in which a minor has been placed into a ward, group home, or private home of a government-certified caregiver, referred to as a &quot;foster parent&quot; or with a family member approved by the government. The placement of the child is normally arranged through the government or a social service agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedge City</td>
<td>A safe, stable city with extremely high real estate values caused by foreign investors buying properties as a hedge against instability in their own countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing First</td>
<td>Housing First is a recovery-oriented approach to ending homelessness that centers on quickly moving people experiencing homelessness into independent and permanent housing and then providing additional supports and services as needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Assistance</td>
<td>An amount for shelter and support provided under the Employment and Assistance Act.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial Downloading</td>
<td>The range of ways that provincial governments pass administrative costs, capital costs, service provision and other expenses and responsibilities to local levels of government without adequate funding or revenue streams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tacking</td>
<td>Tacking is a mobility concept developed by Vared Amit and Caroline Knowles to examining the creative processes of navigation and improvisation through which</td>
</tr>
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people approach and reflect on the irregularities and uncertainties of their everyday rounds. Tacking describes processes of ongoing adjustment and modification.

**WHMIS**

The Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) is Canada's national hazard communication standard. The key elements of the system are hazard classification, cautionary labelling of containers, the provision of (material) safety data sheets ((M)SDSs) and worker education and training programs.

**World Host**

Customer service training and certification for front-line staff and managers.

**Youth Agreement**

A Youth Agreement is a legal agreement made between youth and the Ministry of Children and Family Development in cases of extreme need.
Chapter 1.

Why Study Youths From Government Care?

The challenges youth[s] aging out of foster care in British Columbia today face are great, the outcomes poor, and the costs of those outcomes substantial. But it needn’t be this way. (Shaffer & Anderson, 2016, p. 1)

1.1. Witnessing the Issue First Hand

In my professional career, I have gravitated towards serving and working with young adults between the ages of 18-27 years old. This age range is especially significant because, although societally we expect individuals of these ages to be entering a phase of independence and adulthood, the truth is that these young people need the guidance and assistance provided by supportive individuals as much, if not more, than ever. As a university wrestling coach, I have helped to guide privileged, bright young men and women through their undergraduate schooling. These youths, entering their twenties, were all 'legal' adults, yet they were often far from being independent or capable of acting with the maturity or responsibility of an adult. They were, however, transitioning to adulthood in a supportive space. As a coach, I helped my athletes find housing, gave them rides to the doctor, helped them to secure employment, provided academic support, and offered general advice and counsel during times of personal distress. In short, the transition to independence or adulthood for every young person is a challenge. Even those who are positioned with a reliable career path and a network of support require mentorship during this exploratory, and sometimes tumultuous life stage.

I contrast this with my experience of working as a Communication and Development Coordinator for a Metro Vancouver based non-profit organization that serves youths transitioning from government care. In this role, I worked directly with youths, hearing their stories and advocating on their behalf to the media, funders, and government bodies. For the over 200 young individuals who voluntarily walked through our doors, their circumstances, shortcomings, and victories have been entirely different from anything I had previously seen. For these youths, securing any form of housing, finding entry-level employment, or completing their secondary school education counts as a significant accomplishment that is by no means taken for granted.
My office, at the non-profit organization, was located in-between two other support workers’ offices and had a window that looked out onto the front door and a flex workspace for youths. It provided me with a vantage point from which to observe activity in the building. The most profound observations for me always came when new youths entered the building for the first time. Their appearance in many respects resembles that of any other young person their age, but what I have also detected was an unsettling loneliness, doubt and trepidation that seemed to pour out of them. Their heads were down, shoulders hunched over, and their speech typically mumbled and quiet. In comparison, the young athletes entering university walked into my office with some nervous excitement, but they felt wanted and they knew this education would help them reach their personal career goals. The fact is, the overwhelming majority of young people in Canada will never come even remotely close to the experience of fear, brokenness, and desperation that these youths from care felt entering our non-profits office. These youths needed the support that most parented youths are given freely. Yet, some youths from government care perceive this absence of support as a sign of failure or weakness on their part, as evidence that they could not make it on their own. But the truth is, no one can.

From that non-profit desk, I witnessed how challenging the transition to adulthood is without the assistance of a guardian to help subsidize various costs and provide guidance and mentorship along the way. The youths we worked with came to us with nothing: no government identification documents, no medical support (e.g. counsellor, family physician, optometrist or dentist), little in the way of resources (e.g. food, money, clothing), and little to no social capital (e.g. family, friends, coworkers, teachers, social worker). They have hit the proverbial ‘rock bottom.’ Despite these circumstances and the myriad of challenges that the region of Metro Vancouver poses to them daily, these youths remain resilient in the face of adversity. The courage and strength that these youths showed me every day by walking in that building inspired my work and convinced me that we could make an impact in our cities if we take a moment to focus in on and understand the needs of this relatively small category of youths. This work begins this process of understanding by examining these youths and their effort to obtain housing, move around the city, procure resources, and build a community of support.
1.2. Rationale and Research Question

In the spring of 2016, the volunteers at Vancouver’s annual homeless count noticed an interesting trend: there were “so many young [homeless] people” (Quinn, 2016). Young homeless people are often an invisible population in our cities, as they are adept at finding couches to sleep on and redefine ‘public’ urban spaces, such as malls and youth centres, to be ‘home-like’ (Ahmet, 2013). This year, however, there were too many youths to miss. In Vancouver, 15% of the counted homeless population were under the age of 24 (Thomas, 2016).

This population, however, isn’t as hidden as we might think they are, because a significant portion of these young people are in, or from, government care (Shaffer, Anderson, and Nelson, 2016). They each have a common background and connection to larger governing bodies who can, if they wish, help them to transition successfully. Recognizing this distinctive category of young people, which I will define in the section below, and their daily survival tactics is, I believe, necessary for effective policy generation so governing agencies can address strategies that impede these youths’ ability to navigate and live successfully in urban environments. In the region of Metro Vancouver, this could include pragmatically targeting its social services budgets towards resources, such as modular affordable housing units or drop-in centres, which can help effectively reduce its potential future homeless population. Much like Housing First policies, which specifically target those individuals who repeatedly cycle in and out of homelessness and use a disproportionate share of social aid funding, social and community planners can channel their knowledge and capital into policies or projects that will result in a higher social return on investment (SROI). Within Canada, independent analysis by Charity Intelligence (2017) and Success Markets Inc. has shown that programs which target youths from government care have some of the highest SROI’s in the country. The reason for this high rating is because these youths have significant potential, and by supporting their growth, we can not only change a life but forestall the development of future generations of homeless persons and welfare users.

Furthermore, it is essential to recognize that these youths are active agents in Metro Vancouver who help to define and create certain aspects of urban life. Generally, young people may not have the purchasing power, civic authority, or community impact
that other categories of individuals do, but that does not mean they are silent participants in cities (De Boeck and Honwana, 2005; Langevang and Gough, 2009; Dillabough, & Kennelly, 2010; Skelton and Gough, 2013; Skelton, 2013; van Blerk, 2013). Instead, youths’ experiences provide insight into the workings of cities and the strategies laid out by those in power that shape their lives (Thomas and Taylor, 2005; Jackson, 2012; Ahmet, 2013; McAuliffe, 2013; Skelton, 2013; Ursin, 2018). These urban dynamics are amplified for youths from government care because they often lack the financial capital, human capital, and social capital that helps build resiliency during moments of turmoil and flux (Smith, et al, 2015).

For agencies to create targeted policies that positively influence these youths’ lives or be in a position to advocate on behalf of these young people to other authorities, governing bodies need to know not only the extent of the problem but also understand the specific nuances of this issue. It is not enough for our civic leaders to know how many youths from government care are homeless or on income assistance or end up in the criminal justice system. Instead, our leaders need to know why these young people are struggling to find or maintain housing and what obstacles are preventing them from accessing programs or resources or training, which might allow them to climb the social ladder and remove themselves from a life of poverty and the threat of homelessness. By drawing on the theory of mobility and the concept of ‘tacking’ this study explores how youths navigate the city, and the tactics they employ to resist strategies that control their mobility and obstruct their ability to survive in Metro Vancouver.

1.2.1. Research question

For youths from government care in British Columbia, there are multiple socioeconomic, family, and community factors that separate them from their ‘typical’ parented peers in BC, while they are transitioning to ‘adulthood.’ Most striking is the abrupt cessation of stable support that occurs when these youths reach the age of majority (i.e. 19 years of age in BC), known colloquially as ‘ageing out of care.’ It is during this moment of turmoil, when this category of youths are thrust into a chaotic state of transition, where they must perform adult tasks and develop survival tactics on the fly. My research aims to develop a nuanced understanding of this transitional process by examining the experiences of these youths, as they redefine their lives outside of the
institutionalization of the government care system and learn to ‘make do’ in Metro
Vancouver.

To examine these experiences of youths from government care, I will be
employing Amit and Knowles’s (2017) concept of ‘tacking.’ Tacking, which I will
elaborate on further in the literature section, is used to examine the creative processes
of navigation and improvisation that occur in everyday life. It entails both larger and
smaller instances of localized movement, and the effort and calculation it takes to
manage routine situations (p. 172). Using this extended theory of mobility, this study
takes an in-depth look into how youths from government care make their way in the
world by exploring four distinct, yet interconnected, areas of daily life: housing,
transportation, resources, and community. Adopting a starting point similar to that of
Langevand and Gough (2009), this paper views youths from government care as active
agents in the city and explores their tacking in conjunction with the factors that facilitate
or obstruct their social and material survival in Metro Vancouver. From this stance I aim
to discover the answer to the following sub questions: How do youths from government
care navigate and move throughout Metro Vancouver? And what role does tacking play
in this movement? What obstacles prevent youths from government care from attending
programs and accessing established resources and opportunities? And how do these
youths learn about the supports available to them? Where do young people from care
develop new relationships and communities? And who are these relationships with?
How do these young people’s mobility or immobility impact the formation of their urban
identity? By answering these questions and showing the lived experiences of youths
from government care, this study will contribute insight and understanding to this
marginalized category of young people.

Furthermore, this research helps to raise the profile of youths from government
care, adding context to local research that points to this as a growing, costly issue in
Metro Vancouver (Shaffer, Anderson and Nelson, 2016). Researchers from Simon
Fraser University have found that nearly 60% of adult participants using Housing First
subsidies in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, had experienced government care as a
child (Patterson, Moniruzzaman, and Somers, 2015, p. 6). By ignoring these youths and
simply maintaining the status quo, Metro Vancouver will continue to funnel marginalized
young people into a cycle of poverty, homelessness, and towards other adverse effects
experienced by these youths, which I will discuss further below. This issue will not self-
correct overtime and stands to potentially worsen as the cost of living continues to rise in the region. If Metro Vancouver truly aspires to eliminate homelessness, as previously stated by its elected officials (Fumano, and Culbert, 2018), it needs to look towards preventative, not reactionary, interventions that stop homelessness before it starts. Targeting the circumstances of youths from government care is one way to do this. This work can be viewed as complementing Shaffer and Anderson’s economic analysis on youths transitioning from government care (Shaffer, Anderson, and Nelson, 2016), by identifying qualitative aspects about this population, which lead to logical inferences and empirical findings about how cities and regions can refine policies and improve outcomes for this marginalized population.

1.3. Background and Context

Across the province of British Columbia, approximately 1,000 youths each year will age out of government care or Youth Agreements and forever lose their most stable form of support. Although there is no data that tracks the migration and outcomes of young people who have to leave care at 19, an intentionally low estimate suggests that approximately 540, or 54% of these youths, currently live in Metro Vancouver, and 84% live in urban areas throughout the province (Smith, et al, 2015, p. 13). Therefore, at any given moment, there are approximately 6,000 youths age 19-29 with government care experience living in Metro Vancouver. Within a region of over 2.4 million people (Statistics Canada Census, 2016), this is by any measure a small subpopulation. However, as will be discussed throughout this study, their financial, social, and physical impact on this region is immense. Youths from care are far more likely than their peers to experience homelessness, be involved in the criminal justice system, and remain unemployed. Furthermore, their lives offer a unique lens with which to understand the urban landscape, as they are dependent on the services and resources offered in the city. Their lives also provide timely insights into how we can, if we choose to do so, more effectively serve vulnerable young citizens in our cities.

My research project investigates seven case studies of youths transitioning from care in Metro Vancouver. To better understand the experiences and challenges faced by these seven young individuals, it is necessary to establish the context surrounding their lives. To do this, I will first look at the evolving definition and societal expectations generally applied to all Canadian youths transitioning into adulthood. I will then contrast
this with the experiences and social outcomes of youths ageing out of government care. Finally, I will highlight the region of Metro Vancouver and examine the challenges and opportunities this urban area provides to youth transitioning from government care to independence.

1.3.1. A shifting definition of ‘youth’

In Metro Vancouver, as across Canada, a cultural shift is occurring that is seeing youths prolong their transition to adulthood and independence. Statistics Canada reports that across the country 59.3% of 20 to 24-year-olds and 42.3% of 20 to 29-year-olds live in their parental home (Fostering Change, 2016, p. 22). This prolonged transition is strategically supported by parents to help youths offset rising costs of living, precarious forms of employment, and higher levels of education. In Metro Vancouver, as will be discussed in more detail below, this issue is further exacerbated by an extremely aggressive and expensive housing market, record low vacancy rates, and stagnant wages (Robinson, 2016). However, despite the many challenges youth face when ‘coming of age’ in Metro Vancouver, most of these individuals continue to enter the urban social order and succeed as independent adults, albeit at a somewhat older age than was usual with previous generations. As the rites of passage to adulthood are steadily shifting, for this study I view independent adulthood broadly as being achieved when young persons have the necessary life skills (e.g. budgeting, cooking skills), educational attainments, and financial security that permits them to maintain a stable or increasing quality of life without facing any immediate threat of homelessness or severe turmoil.

A significant reason for this success on the part of most youths who are ‘coming of age’ is the family, an invaluable social safety net that ensures Metro Vancouver and Canada’s youths usually succeed, regardless of the challenges or adversity faced during their transitional years. This success comes in a variety of forms: for example, if a young person has a falling out with a roommate, parents are there to help them find a new home, or if they are considering a career change, parents can provide guidance. Moreover, if they are in a financial bind, parents will open their chequebooks or offer supplementary supports (Mitchell, 2006; Fingerman, Miller, Birditt, & Zarit, 2009). Independent research conducted by the Vancouver Foundation (2013), has found that between the ages of 19-28, most Canadian families provide their children with a
multitude of types of support, including stable housing (i.e., a bedroom at home or subsidies to help with rent), food security, financial assistance (e.g. microloans), employment and educational guidance, and emotional counselling. Even when children move away from home, the report shows that 80% of parents still provide their ‘adult’ children with financial or other kinds of support (p. 6). The result of this support increases the level of resiliency built into these youths as they make this transition to adulthood. This report helps to establish that there is a general level of support given to BC parented youths after they reach the age of majority and it serves as a useful comparison point in portions of this research. However, it should be noted that these youths all have different experiences and different levels of supports, which this paper does not explore. Both youths with and without government care experience share many of the same traits and life experiences, and therefore they cannot be viewed as simple binary categories. In the section below, I will single out and define the category of youths from government care to provide clarity and understanding to subsequent discussions.

1.3.2. Youth transitioning from government care

There is one category of young people in Metro Vancouver, however, whose members do not typically benefit from this same level of parental support, namely, youths from government care. For many of these individuals, their developing years are often quite unstable, characterized by precarious living arrangements, a constant state of movement, and a lack of trusting relationships, which can be leveraged to access financial capital, basic resources (e.g. bus fare, food), and human capital opportunities (e.g. a new job or budgeting skill training). Like their parented peers, youths from government care come from a range of unique experiences and circumstances, such as their family background or time spent in care, making this an arguably broad categorization. However, I believe this is a useful categorization for the young people examined in this study because being a ‘youth from government care’ speaks to three specific experiences that each of these youths have lived through, which help unify them as a category. First, youths from government care are forced to leave their parental family homes and enter a contractual form of care administered by the government. The reasons and terms in which these youths leave their family homes vary, like Sam¹, a

¹ Each of the participants’ names cited in this study, are pseudonyms used to protect the confidentiality of that person.
participant in my study, whose mother suffers from a mental health disorder and kicked him out onto the street after he came out as gay at the age of 14. Sam describes this saying:

If I didn’t come out to my mom, I would have never had to deal with this [homelessness and ageing out of government care] and honestly, if I could go back in time, I would, and tell my 10-year-old self “don’t you dare tell your mother when you are 14. Don’t you dare!”

Jordan, another study participant, was apprehended by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and put into foster care after it was discovered that he and his siblings were being abused by their father. No matter how these youths were forced out of their family homes, this experience separates them from some of their peers who may also come from situations of poverty or limited care from a single parent. At this moment, youths in government care enter into a state of heightened precarity, where they do not know what will happen to them next.

Second, these youths each experience the institution of government care. This experience can take multiple forms, such as foster care\(^2\), where the young person is placed in the care of another family, which is paid by the provincial government to provide care and advocate for the ‘foster child.’ The dynamics of a foster family can range from a group home, with multiple foster children, to a parent who watches over a single foster child. These foster parents can either provide a loving, positive environment, as experienced by study participants Taylor and Corey, or can function negatively as a site of institutional trauma. These relationships are often precarious, as it is common for a youth to move multiple times while in care. For example, Corey, who entered foster care at the age of 16, described to me the surprising number of times she moved while in government care:

I ended up going in care and they moved me to a place in Arbutus... and from Arbutus I moved to North Delta, and then I moved from one house in North Delta to another—one just up the street. From there I went to

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\(^2\) Youths are placed in foster care for a variety of reasons, often because the youths are victims of abuse and neglect, but potentially because the parents are in need of assistance due to illness, family issues or parent/child conflicts. Foster Care parents provide “the [youth] with a safe place to live, nourishing meals, appropriate clothing and accommodation,” they are also called to advocate for the youth they care for and are a member of a youths Foster Care Team, which includes the foster caregiver, child, child's family and social worker, resource social worker, and other service providers involved with the child's care. Foster Care services are provided to each youth until the age of majority, or midnight on their 19th birthdays (Government of British Columbia, 2018).
[...] program in Surrey, I think it's in Guilford. From there I went to back to North Delta (laughing), and from there I went to Surrey [into a Youth Agreement].

Additionally, a youth can also, depending on his or her age, qualify for a Youth Agreement\(^3\), where they live in an apartment on their own and finish their final years in care under the supervision of a support worker. In each case, a social worker manages the child's file and acts as their financial and authoritative guardian providing funding for clothes, extracurricular activities, medical treatment and dictating where they live and what opportunities they can access.

The third and final shared experience is that of 'ageing out of care.' No matter what home or program these youths are in, they are cut off from government support and discharged from care at the age of 19. The social worker is supposed to ensure that the child is prepared for this moment and ready to be an adult. However, the staff at these youth-serving organizations say that this is merely a formality, because regardless of the youth’s maturity or preparedness, the contract is over, the youth is now legally an adult, meaning that the government’s work is completed.

For the purpose of this study, these three distinct experiences help to identify the category of young people whose circumstances are to be observed. Furthermore, this category has an administrative or professional meaning as well, as all of these youths will have had an official file or record of their time in government care. This will include documentation about when they are cut off from care, what future services they can access and for how long, such as an education program offered by the government for former youths in care. This administrative categorization however is rather different than this study’s three categorical features noted above. Moreover, whether and how a young person identifies as a child from government care and how they are perceived by others is another major consideration, that should not be left unacknowledged. Take for example Jordan, who is irritated by the ‘industry’ language used to describe young people who are transitioning from government care:

\[^3\] A Youth Agreement is a legal agreement made between a youth, and the MCFD. The program is available for youths between the ages16 to 18 who cannot return home to their family for reasons of safety, and youths who have no parent or guardian willing to take responsibility for them. This program provides financial assistance for housing, as well as supports and training for life skills, education and employment. The program is accessed through local MCFD offices, with support workers assigned to each youth (Government of British Columbia, 2018).
Clete: Do you have anybody helping you through that process, like applying for [income and disability assistance]?

Jordan: Not really, I'm just doing it myself.

Clete: Is that a pain jumping through all of those government hoops?

Jordan: I've jumped through hoops my whole life, that's the resilience [emphasis added] that I have — such a dirty word.

Clete: Resilience?

Jordan: Yeah because resilience is forced onto you.

Clete: Is that the general sentiment felt, or is it the way you think of it?

Jordan: That's the way I think about it, everyone is like, “Wow you’re so resilient,” and I am like, “Please never use that word to describe me.”

Clete: Yeah, that’s...

Jordan: I wouldn't have to be resilient if I didn't have to work against a system that's working against me. That's my whole thing, so...

Clete: That's a very true statement.

Jordan: It's a very sad statement.

While the youths’ self identification vs. categorical definition will never identically match up, the discussion above helps to frame what is meant by the category of youths from government care. I will now address the poor outcomes and adverse effects that befall young people who age out of government care.

**The adverse effects of government care**

Marvin Shaffer, a Simon Fraser University economist, and Lynell Anderson, a family policy researcher, conducted an extensive economic analysis of the outcomes that youths from government care experience on behalf of the Vancouver Foundation’s Fostering Change initiative⁴. Their report, *Opportunities in Transition: An Economic Analysis of Investing in Youth Aging out of Foster Care*, provides a comprehensive account on the academic literature regarding the educational, economic, social, and

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⁴ The Fostering Change initiative was created to advocate for policy change, fund innovative programming, and create community connections for youths transitioning out of foster care in BC. Working with multiple youth serving NGOs the Fostering Change initiative goal is “that every young person leaving foster care has the opportunities and support needed to thrive as adults.”
wellness outcomes for youths ageing out of government care compared to the general population (Shaffer, Anderson, and Nelson, 2016). I will now review in detail key findings of Shaffer and Anderson’s work in order to identify the critical role that parents and guardians play in the lives of Canadian youths transitioning into adulthood.

Housing is one of the key themes discussed in this study, as it is a well-known challenge for young people in Metro Vancouver. This report shows that 90% of youths who age out of government care in BC will not live with their family, whereas upwards of 59% of parented youths will live with their families to offset rising living costs (i.e. housing) and needs (i.e. post-secondary education). The report goes onto state that previous studies show that 22% of youths from government care will experience homelessness within one year of ageing out of care (Shaffer, Anderson, and Nelson, 2016, p. 22). Other local studies, not referenced in this report, show that as high as 45% of youths from care will experience homelessness within three years of ageing out of care (Rutman, Hubberstey, Feduniw, 2007). Youths who experience homelessness are more likely than not to fall into homelessness again (Gaetz, O'Grady, Kidd, & Schwan, 2016). Furthermore, the experience of homelessness is traumatic and can lead to mental health issues, further hurting these youths.

The formative years of youths with government care experience are tumultuous, and defined by traumatic moments of disruption. Many of these youths will either experience homelessness or move more than five times during their time in foster care. Because of this chaos, these youths struggle to finish their education. Shaffer and Anderson report that only one-third of these youths will earn a secondary school diploma, compared to 84% for the general population. Furthermore, these youths are only one-sixth as likely to graduate from university compared to the general population. As a point of comparison, 68% of youths from government care are reported to have had some involvement with the criminal justice system (Shaffer, Anderson, and Nelson, 2016) – over double the secondary school graduation rate found by Shaffer and Anderson!

These poor educational outcomes lead to financial precarity, as these youths struggle to qualify for jobs. Shaffer and Anderson’s report shows that employment rates for youths from government care are low and tend to involve low paying jobs. Studies referenced in this report show that upwards of 45% of these youths report being on
income assistance, equal to $8,520 annually, compared to 4.4% of the general population (Shaffer, Anderson, and Nelson, 2016).

Finally, at rates of 63% for females and 67% for males, youths in care were four times more likely than members of the general population to suffer from a mental health illness, and their death rates were 6.5 times the general population (Shaffer, Anderson, and Nelson, 2016). In sum, the importance of support during the transitional period to adulthood cannot be understated. Youths in or from government care were found to be falling overwhelmingly behind their parented peers in every socioeconomic metric Shaffer and Anderson reviewed.

Ultimately, Shaffer and Anderson’s report finds that the adverse outcomes faced by youths in care cost society between $220,000 and $268,000 per youth ageing out of care (Shaffer, Anderson, Nelson, 2016, p. 21). These statistics, along with academic work by Rutman and Hubberstey (2016) from the University of Victoria, the McCreary Centre Society (Smith, et al, 2015), and Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond (2014), the BC Representative of Children and Youth, all of which find similar poor results, present a clear case to change policy in British Columbia. These reports are, it should be noted, geared toward making provincial changes, such as extending the ‘age out’ date for youths in government care from 19 to 25 years of age. However, this data does not speak more specifically to the circumstances of youths from care who live in municipalities, and it does not inform urban policies that could impact their everyday survival in Metro Vancouver. What is missing from the majority of these commissioned reports, and the other available literature on youths from government care, is a qualitative understanding of the processes and factors that limit or promote the chances of youths in care to take the next step to find communities of support and access resources or opportunities, which might help them to climb the social ladder.

The reports and statistics referenced above point to a severe problem surrounding the outcomes of youths from government care. The baselines established in these works provide academics and legislatures with valuable information for future research and policy considerations. For the region of Metro Vancouver, this information is an SOS call that should alert municipalities, regional authorities, and the public to the injustices and undue suffering experienced by youths transitioning from government care in their midst. The outcomes faced by these youths are unacceptable given the region’s
prosperity and potential opportunities for young people. I will now turn to and examine
the region of Metro Vancouver, the site of each of the seven case studies examined, and
provide a brief overview of this area, touching on its housing challenges, transportation
system, and the supports available to youths transitioning to adulthood.

1.3.3. Metro Vancouver

This study takes place across the Metro Vancouver Regional District of British
Columbia, a federation of 21 municipalities, one Electoral Area and one Treaty First
Nation. Metro Vancouver sits along the West Coast of Canada, nestled between pristine
mountains, the Pacific Ocean, and the United States border. For the purpose of this
study, Metro Vancouver is the ‘city’ that I am dealing with when I speak to aspects of
urban or city life. When the term municipality is used, it is in reference to one of the 21
municipalities in the region, such as Surrey, Langley, or Coquitlam. Many of these
municipalities, such as the latter three, can be viewed as suburbs on the periphery of
Metro Vancouver.
The Economist Intelligence Unit consistently ranks Metro Vancouver as one of the world’s top three “most livable cities” (The Economist, 2017). Metro Vancouver has become highly sought after by foreign investors as a safe place in which to park their money in real estate, making it one of the world’s ‘hedge cities’ (Dorfmann, 2015). As a result of this, and other factors, such as the scarcity of land, over the past ten years the housing market has surged to the point of crisis (Rees, 2018). As of the first quarter of 2018, the average residential property cost in Metro Vancouver has climbed to $1,084,000 (Real Estate Board of Greater Vancouver, 2018).

For renters, the situation has become increasingly pressing. Metro Vancouver’s (2018) most recent Housing Data Book report shows that for over the past decade, median apartment rents across the region have increased 45%, from $830 to $1,200 per month. The report goes onto show that during this time, “median apartment rents have increased at a rate greater than the average wage increase and the increase in the general price index (inflation)” (p. 2.9). This dramatic price increase has occurred during a roughly 20-year absence of affordable housing creation initiatives by the federal government5, which during the 1990’s stopped subsidizing any housing projects (Zon, 2015, p.3). Furthermore, the population growth, when combined with increasing financial barriers to homeownership, has put an immense strain on vacancy rates in the region. In 2017, the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2017), found that the vacancy rate for rentals across the region sat at only 0.9%.6 In brief, both Metro Vancouver’s housing and rental market pose a multitude of challenges for its citizens to manage if they wish to continue to live in this region. These challenges have led to open expressions of frustration by millennials and families who have threatened to leave the city and move to slower, less expensive markets outside of the region (Clark, 2018; Dmitrieva, 2016; Lindsay, 2015).

5 For the youths interviewed in this study, it is likely, that there have been no new developments made to affordable housing during their lifetime!

6 Vancouver’s challenging housing market has led to entrepreneurial innovations that prey on the scarcity of rental units in the city. An example of this is Biddwell (https://www.biddwell.com/), introduced in 2016, this rental app encourages renters to submit full resumes and bid, silent auction style, against one another on rental property.
Beyond housing, Metro Vancouver boasts one of North America’s premier public transportation systems. TransLink, the region’s transit authority, has developed a proficient network of buses, light rapid transit trains, and sea-buses to transport residents throughout the entire region. The primary infrastructural piece tying the region together is SkyTrain, TransLink’s light rapid transit system. SkyTrain connects to seven of the region’s most densely settled urban municipalities, and its stations provide a central hub for buses, thereby facilitating densification in both housing and businesses. In short, the transit system is an integral part of Metro Vancouver’s livability, providing transportation to hundreds of thousands of individuals, serving as a form of connection concerning both movement and social activity.

Finally, though not a mainstream or highly visible feature of this region, I would like to briefly address the social supports available to youths in Metro Vancouver. For those marginalized and destitute citizens in cities, the available social supports are critical to improving their quality life and their general advancement up the social ladder. For youths ageing out of care in the region, there are many organizations that provide resources and guidance specifically designed for young people in their circumstance. These available services cover a wide range of expertise, including employment guidance, sexual health services (e.g. birth control contraceptives, education, STI tests, pregnancy support), LGBTQ2S communities, counselling, addictions, life skills training, and recreation. Many of these programs also offer specific programming or resources for youths in and from government care, such as driving educational courses, or the assistance of transition workers to help guide youths during this time. Important to note, however, is that all these programs, except for one, have an upper age limit, typically set at around 24 years of age. The majority of these resources are located on the North side of the Fraser River, primarily in Vancouver and Burnaby.

1.4. Organization of This Project

Having established the rationale and context for pursuing this ethnographic research, I will, in the next chapter, move to a review of the literature that guides and informs my research. As the concept of tacking is new in academic literature, I will begin

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7 In 2017 the Arcadis Design & Consultancy firm, ranked Metro Vancouver’s transit system 28th in their Sustainable Cities Mobility Index, and 3rd among North American cities.
by breaking down the core principles of Amit and Knowles’ (2017) theory, which includes De Certeau’s (1984) concept of tactics, as well as ideas of wayfinding. After presenting this concept, I will then discuss the literature on mobility for urban youths, focusing on issues of power pertaining to strategy, immobility, and social mobility or identity formation. Finally, I will close by examining the appropriate academic literature regarding youths in or ‘graduated’ from the government care system.

Following the literature review, Chapter 3 will then outline the methodological approach adopted for conducting qualitative ethnographic research with youths in care. As this is a distinct population, I took significant care during the recruitment process and subsequent interviews to ensure the creation of relationships of trust so that these youths were sufficiently comfortable to respond to my questions in rich, detailed answers. This section will review these processes and how I analyzed the data gathered.

In Chapter 4, I will introduce each of the young people who participated in the study. This research examines seven unique case studies, and it is important to humanize the data and show that what is discussed in Chapter 5 comes from actual lived experiences. These youths have aspirations and desires, like any of their peers, and their backgrounds shed light on these details and make the data more transparent.

In Chapter 5, I will review the data and discuss the navigation and tactics employed by these youths to survive in Metro Vancouver. This chapter starts with a discussion around housing, and considers how increased prices are forcing youths to move further out into the suburbs and away from services found closer to the urban core of Vancouver. Next, I will discuss how youths move around the region and the role that public transportation plays, as both an opportunity and barrier, to these youths while they access resources and knowledge, such as food, life skills training, employment guidance, counselling, and community connections. In this section, I will also examine the tactics used to overcome these challenges.

Chapter 6 presents a summary of findings, an analysis of directions for future youth-based urban policies, and provides directions for future research on this topic. Finally, I will discuss the limitations of my research and provide concluding thoughts.
Chapter 2.

Literature Review

It is essential that all urban actors and social agents are considered in urban studies if the diversity and complexities of urban spaces are to be fully captured (Skelton & Gough, 2013, p. 463).

To aid in my analysis of youths transitioning from government care and their everyday survival in an urban setting, I reviewed the pertinent literature in the fields of urban studies, sociology, geography, family studies, and social work. From this multidisciplinary approach, I organized my review into three sections. The first will review ‘tacking,’ the key theoretical concept used in this study. Tacking is an extended theory of mobility that marries ideas of various forms of daily navigation to the concept of tactics. The youths interviewed in my research actively engage their surroundings and strive to improve their situation. They do not passively absorb challenges; instead they employ various methods to circumvent and prevail over the barriers that confront them. The literature on tactics, which I address along with my review of tacking, will help to establish how to view the maneuvers observed in the case studies. Second, I will review the literature on youth mobilities. Examining this literature, I will highlight three commonly addressed themes, which capture this body of work: strategy, immobility, and identity formation. Finally, I will briefly review the academic work on youths transitioning from government care. The literature in this review was chosen because it provides both an analytical and substantive foundation that will allow me to explore the themes and findings brought out in each of the case studies undertaken in this study.

2.1. Tacking

The concept of tacking is a natural fit for studying the nuanced details of how youths from government care access resources and opportunities in order to survive during this period of transition to adulthood. In developing the notion of tacking, Amit and Knowles (2017) aimed to elaborate on the theory of mobility, by developing a “frame for examining the creative processes of navigation and improvisation” (p.165) that occur during daily routines. The authors position the conceptual frame of tacking as an extension of the new mobilities paradigm posited by John Urry (2007), Jeffrey H. Cohen
and Ibrahim Sirkeci (2011), and Nina Glick Shiller and Noel B. Salazar’s (2013) works. In each of these, the authors highlight how the theory of mobility is moving away from strict notions of a linear trajectory (i.e. A to B), and instead should be viewed as a fluid concept, with multiple course directions, changes and adaptations. Amit and Knowles (2017) show that this is best represented with respect to the concept of migration, which “rarely involves one guiding plan because it rarely involves just one decision” (p. 166).

Having established the need for this extended concept of mobility, Amit and Knowles (2017) define tacking as a process of “ongoing adjustment and modification” (p. 166), one that relies upon the practice of both navigation and improvisation. Using the term ‘navigation,’ the authors aim to dissociate tacking from the concept of trajectory, and any preconceived notions of linear movement. Instead, the authors align navigation with notions of ‘wayfinding,’ and define it as “open to all kinds of possibilities.” They note that it “operates in small-scale, localized encounters with time and space…Navigation is about next steps, rather than grand plans” (p. 173). Building from this definition, Amit and Knowles add two additional characteristics to the practice of navigation. First, navigation requires inventiveness and experimentation by an individual to continue moving. The authors describe how even a person’s most routine trips, such as one’s daily commute, can have unforeseen challenges that require them to make adjustments on the fly to get them to their next destination. This aspect of navigation ties into the practice of improvisation, which I will discuss in greater length below. Second, Amit and Knowles, drawing from the seminal works of French sociologists Henri Lefebvre (1984) and Michel de Certeau (1988), acknowledge that space is a social construct, formed through relational and social activities. From this, Amit and Knowles (2017) conclude that navigation is not just a way to move through the physicality of the world, but rather it is a “flexible set of practices for finding ways through complex social activities, relationships, and apprehensions” (p. 174).

The second characteristic of navigation described by Amit and Knowles (2017) is improvisation. Improvisation, as the authors observe, is not commonly used in scholarly work as a complete analytical concept. Rather, it is used as a descriptor for aspects that are impromptu. The authors, however, identify two exceptions, these being scholarly works covering the performance arts (Banes, 1980; Berliner, 1994; Faulkner and Becker, 2009), and organizational studies that use the “jazz metaphor” (Kamoche and Cunha, 2003). Building off these previous works, Amit and Knowles define innovation across
three criteria: inventiveness, timing, and the unexpected. With inventiveness, Amit and Knowles describe how improvisation, though frequently perceived as being quite innovative from an outside perspective, is often a relatively routine process, built from many previous journeys before it. Howard Becker’s work on jazz ‘jam sessions’ is used to describe this process, where musicians rather than inventing a new composition on the spot, build off familiar themes and set pieces performed many times before. Second, the authors discuss the element of timing, and the ability to act on chance opportunities as these arise. Amit and Knowles describe how timing is both “retrospective and prospective” (p. 170). Like inventiveness, it builds from an individual's prior knowledge and the ability to anticipate changes and understand the impacts of the tack chosen in response to those changes. For both inventiveness and timing, there is an element of learning that takes place during each tacking experience. Finally, running counter to this is the unexpected. While an individual may anticipate to the best of his or her ability what will happen in a foreseeable situation, it is not possible to fully understand all of the details on the fly, which leads to an element of surprise during improvisation. Amit and Knowles state that during instances of tacking, “one can expect the unexpected” (p. 171). The authors conclude by stressing the importance of academics learning from the practice of improvisation. They state that despite acts of improvisation occurring in all our lives on a regular basis, to think of these as mundane or unworthy of our attention is a fault that devalues the skill, ingenuity, and energy required to perform these actions each day.

A foundational aspect of both the practices of navigation and improvisation is the sociological concept of tactics or the art of ‘making do.’ Amit and Knowles (2017) describe tactics as being consonant with tacking, the difference being that tacking is moored within the theoretical realm of mobility. Since the notion of tactics is critical, both to the concept of tacking and to understanding how these youths, who were previously in government care, seek to access resources and opportunities, I will now turn to a discussion on this concept.

2.1.1. Tactics

The notion of tactics comes from the French sociologist Michel de Certeau’s (1988) seminal work The Practice of Everyday Life. For de Certeau, tactics are a response to strategies, which are not to be confused by the war terms of the same name
(Goff, 2018). Strategies are defined by de Certeau as involving a controlled situation, developed by bureaucracies or in-groups of power, such as city planners, who have the complete understanding of time and perspective of a situation and create mechanisms to control it. In short, strategy plans for and controls an environment. Opposing these strategies are tactics, which are performed by those in positions outside of power, such as youths from government care. Tactics are practiced in isolated incidences and are expressed by seizing opportunities which subvert the strategy aimed to control the environment in which people live. An example of this is driving through back streets to avoid rush-hour traffic or a roadside accident. While urban planning staffs determine the major arterial roads for public use, the individual driver may make decisions on the fly to avoid an encountered obstacle. Like tacking, tactics provide a frame to examine peoples ordinary, everyday experiences and practices, not extraordinary events.

In the field of urban ethnography, de Certeau’s theoretical framework of strategies and the tactics of individuals to resist them have come to be an integral component of describing particular human experiences. By examining the tactics employed by youths, researchers can speak intimately about the challenges and social conditions young people contend with in cities. Mark S. Dolson (2015), examines how street youths in London, Ontario, use tactics to selectively resist Ontario’s neo-liberal workfare program, Ontario Works. Dolson, who studied seven youths during his 14 months of fieldwork at a youth shelter, which he calls ‘At Home,’ describes how these youths each have their own set of personal goals which run contrary to the stated aims of the Ontario Works program. Dolson describes how one of the youths observed collects his funding from Ontario Works and spends it on marijuana to help him cope with his ADHD as a form of self-medication, while another uses the “tactic of financial management” (p. 127) to slowly save up and purchase a computer. Through these examples, Dolson shows how these youths’ subversive tactics undermine the intended strategy of the Ontario Works program. This resistance by youths, he argues, calls for more affordable housing, and policy shifts that can inspire caring community approaches, such as bringing food and blankets to people living on the street.

The literature on youth mobility, which I will examine in detail below, draws on the use of tactics regularly to explain how youths move about the city. In her study of the tactics of mobility for young homeless people in London, UK, Emma Jackson (2012), describes how mobility creates three kinds of responses and tactics for street youths,
those being “mobility as a resource, mobility as loss, and mobility as managing” (p. 740). As a tactic, Jackson describes how homeless youths in London use mobility to “respond to a state of uncertainty and danger” (p. 733). Furthermore, she discusses how for other youths, mobility is used to gain knowledge of the city they live in and to “avoid overstaying one’s welcome” (p. 740) when couch surfing. These two ideas of safety and knowledge are explored by Leyshon, DiGiovanna, & Holcomb (2013) who look at the use of mobile technologies (i.e. cellphone) as a tactical object which connects them to safety. These young people are found to experience greater freedom because they can explore the city knowing that they can use their GPS enabled phones to navigate new areas and call for help if they are in danger. Unlike the homeless youths examined by Jackson (2012), these young people do not memorize their surroundings and are dependent on their phones for exploration. Finally, Langevarg and Gough (2009) describe how the mobility idea of navigation is itself a tactical practice, because it acts as a response to and resists the structures of society.

Caitlin Cahill (2000), uses the framework of strategy and tactics to develop a sub-concept to tactics that she calls “Street Literacy.” Cahill characterizes “Street Literacy as a way of describing the relationships between environmental transactions and subjectivity, is … an elastic concept that accounts for the creativity and plurality of meaning making” (p. 255). Cahill’s work focuses primarily on how youths in these urban environments are preoccupied with their concerns for personal safety and violence in their neighbourhood. Her research ultimately shows the strengths of critical thinking and creativity youths display when negotiating their social and environmental settings. Similarly, Dillabough and Kennelly (2010) examine how the experiences and tactics of economically disadvantaged youths are used to create meaning in their lives through self-imaginations. These works show how tactics are embedded into the life experiences of urban youths and are essential elements that add a deeper understanding in combination with other theories.

2.2. Youth Mobility

Having established the principal theoretical concepts of tacking and tactics employed in this paper, I will now turn to the literature on mobility, specifically youth mobility. The concept of mobility used in this paper and the works below is derived from John Urry’s (2000) Sociology Beyond Societies, which helped to establish a
transdisciplinary field of mobilities research that is socially focused and accounts for both large-scale and local processes of movement related to people, goods, capital and information (Skelton and Gough, 2013; Sheller, 2014; Freudendal-Pedersen and Cuzzocrea, 2015, Amit and Knowles, 2017). Additionally, the literature on mobility revolves around a broader discussion on power and how it is expressed through mobility. This includes both the power to liberate or control movement (i.e. mobility vs immobility), and for youths in transition to adulthood to form a sense of identity (Thomas and Taylor, 2005; Langevang and Gough, 2010; Porter, et al, 2009; Holt and Cosetello, 2011; van Blerk, 2013; McAuliffe, 2013; Skelton, 2013; Skelton and Gough, 2013; Sheller, 2014; Freudendal-Pedersen and Cuzzocrea, 2015; Ursin, 2018). Urry’s (2000) concept of mobility reinforces the extended theory of tacking outlined above, as it moves the concept of mobility beyond movement as occurring along a linear-trajectory and underscores the importance of small movements, tactics, power, and the social aspects of mobility.

The works on urban youth mobilities referenced below were all written after Urry’s (2000) seminal work, which has been called by other academics as the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller, 2014). In the subsections below, I will highlight three overarching themes that run through these works on youth mobility, which speak to the data analyzed in this study’s cases. First, I will look at mobility as a form of power both for the mover and the authoritative figures whose strategies are meant to control these young people. Notions of both power and strategy link to de Certeau’s (1988) work on strategy and tactics mentioned above. Second, I will discuss the immobility of these marginalized youths. While mobility is commonly viewed as being liberating and opportunity inducing, for young people it is often the missed opportunities, caused by their immobility that speak the most about their lives. Third, I will discuss the social aspects of mobility and identity formation. Finally, it should be noted that the literature reviewed below often interweaves many of the themes identified above as these concepts interact and play off of one another. Therefore, while some articles are emphasized over others for a particular idea, they often speak to each of the ideas presented.
2.2.1. Strategy

The expression of power and the strategies employed by authoritative figures to control mobility are a consistent refrain that emerges in the literature on youth mobility (Thomas and Taylor, 2005; Langevang and Gough, 2009; Porter, et al, 2010; Holt and Costello, 2011; van Blerk, 2013; McAuliffe, 2013; Skelton, 2013; Skelton and Gough, 2013; Ursin, 2018). Academics routinely document this issue of power as a struggle between a young person’s expanding mobilities, experienced during their transition to adulthood, and those who exercise control over it. Skelton and Gough (2013), who have each contributed to the academic literature on urban geographies, describe this interplay as a necessary challenge to power structures, which helps to contribute to more equitable urban spaces. In their work on the mobilities of urban youths in sub-Saharan Africa, Porter et al. (2010) describe how young people’s mobility performances, such as the ability to meet friends, loiter and move about freely, are seen as expressions of power and defiance to authoritative figures. The impact of these young people’s presence on city streets is what Porter et al. call ‘youthscapes,’ which is shorthand for the concept of youths as active participants in the cityscape. Porter et al. describe how, in response to these expressions of power displayed by youths, strategies are developed by older generational adults to control the mobilities of these young people. This can be done by threatening extra tasks around the home (i.e. chores), setting boundaries, and eliciting fear by describing potentially dangerous scenarios on the street (e.g. physical or sexual assault).

Adult strategies of control and expressions of power by the youth described in Porter et al.’s (2010) work were derived from a familial context. More commonly in the literature these strategies are employed by government agencies and larger societal bodies (Langevang and Gough, 2009; van Blerk, 2013; McAuliffe, 2013). Lorraine van Blerk’s (2013) ethnographic research looks at these urban governance strategies by examining the mobilities of street youths in Cape Town, South Africa. In this case study, van Blerk explores the intricate ways in which street youths’ complex urban mobilities rely on developing tactics to redefine urban street geographies in response to local management practices and policies. As in the case reported by Porter et al. (2010), the expression of power displayed by the street youths in Cape Town created unease and moral panic among older generations. In response to this fear of malcontent and the perceived negative impact youth had on businesses, van Blerk (2013) describes how
public-private partnerships between businesses, tourist boards and chambers of commerce began to organize as City Improvement Districts (CID) to address this and other local issues. For seven years, the CID championed restrictive bylaws, invested in private security companies, and installed closed-circuit television (CCTV) surveillance systems to ‘clean up’ the city. As a tactic devised to avoid authorities, street youths broke off into small groups to avoid detection and retreated to safer areas with less surveillance. However, over time, the impact of these strategies brought the forced removal of street youths from the city centre and their relocation into increasingly less affluent suburbs and neighbourhoods.

Prior to the CID’s strategies, the street youths in van Blerk’s (2010) study lived highly mobile lives, which were necessary to connect socially with friends, access new opportunities, and to obtain supports from NGOs and shelters. Additionally, the ability to move freely helped these young people express themselves publicly and form their urban identities. However, the strategies by the CID’s reshaped these youths’ street geographies to constrained, localized areas, thus limiting their freedom. Van Blerk concludes her analysis by noting that by being forced further away from the city centre, these street youths’ mobilities were greatly frustrated, causing a loss in previous opportunities and supports.

Van Blerk’s (2010) work shows the impact local governing strategies can have on youth mobilities. The strategies executed by the CID’s are direct and designed to curb youth from engaging in Cape Town’s city centre. While van Blerk’s observation of mobility as a positive tool for survival and identity formation is consistent with other academic research on youth mobilities (Thomas & Taylor, 2005; Langevarg & Gough, 2009; McAuliffe, 2013; Skelton, 2013), her work identifies the importance of context and the negative effect others can have on youth mobilities. As van Blerk (2010) states, the interplay of power can be “held by those engaged in mobility, but sometimes by outsiders shaping the nature of that mobility” (p. 559). Finally, though not identified as such, her analysis alludes to the experience of immobility, which is routinely identified in the literature on youth mobilities. I will now turn to this concept and discuss the negative impacts of immobility and its connection to power and survival in the city.
2.2.2. Immobility

While mobility can open up new opportunities and is associated as a positive trait for youths and marginalized populations, it is often their immobility that defines their lives. Mimi Sheller (2014), a professor of sociology and the founding Director of the New Mobilities Research and Policy Center at Drexel University in Philadelphia, describes how blocked movement, immobilization, uprooting, mobility rights, and justice have become emerging topics in the field of mobilities. Building from Cresswell’s (2010) ‘politics of mobility,’ urban geographer Tracey Skelton (2013) argues that the concept of immobility needs to be taken as seriously as movement in mobilities research. Within cities, this understanding of mobility or immobility can help describe how opportunities arise for those in positions of power and pass over marginalized populations (Freudendal-Pedersen and Cuzzocrea, 2015).

Geographers Thilde Langevæng and Katherine V. Gough (2009), from the University of Copenhagen, explore this issue of power and immobility in their work on mobility as a survival tactic for youths in the urban capital city of Accra, Ghana. In the rapidly globalizing south, coming of age is characterized by Langevæng and Gough as uncertain and filled with economic hardship and unemployment. The authors, using the new mobility paradigm described above, frame their work around the issue of power expressed through mobility. Their work speaks to the idea that not all movement is equal when viewed in relation to power, and as a result, people who move frequently may even experience immobility, especially when this movement has been forced upon them (see: van Blerk, 2010; Jackson, 2012; Skelton, 2013). Finally, like Amit and Knowles (2017), Langevæng and Gough’s (2009) research on youth mobilities is framed conceptually by the use of tactics, via navigation. In this work, the authors describe how young people’s movement is not linear; instead, they navigate through life adjusting to varying circumstances, such as their social position, changes within the urban space, and the relationships and networks they are connected to and sought after.

By undertaking an in-depth observational study of 15 youths, ages 15-31, in Accra, Langevæng and Gough’s (2009) research found that movement was both a purposeful tactic to their survival and an aimless activity. Young people in Accra described movement as critical to connecting with social networks (e.g. peers, family, and communities), accessing resources, and seizing opportunities for employment.
However, Langevang and Gough’s research showed that while these survival activities
did take place, often these youths would move around for no particular reason, merely
waiting for an opportunity to arise. Thus, despite moving regularly, these young people
experienced a form of immobility, in that they could not progress towards their goals.

The final area of immobility Langevang and Gough (2009) discuss is on the issue
of regulated movement. The authors describe how young people, based on their gender,
generational stage, and socioeconomic status can have a wide range of external
controls placed on their movement. The most pressing of these is their reliance on public
transit, or *tro-tros* (mini-bus), because this is the cheapest transit option. As with nearly
every city, the challenge with this bus system is that it is tied to the ebbs and flows of
traffic, making it a time-consuming option. Furthermore, the rising cost of public
transportation fares in Accra puts an additional strain on poor youths. As a result of
these factors, some of the youths observed in this study were forced to give up on
education or employment opportunities.

The impact of a youth’s socioeconomic status on their urban mobility or
immobility is a global issue experienced by young people from many different contexts
and backgrounds (Thomas and Taylor, 2005, Langevang and Gough, 2009; McAuliffe,
2013; Skelton, 2013). A youth’s socioeconomic status can either constrain or broaden
her or his movement, and as a defining aspect of mobility, its impact has a profound
effect on shaping these youths’ identities (Massey, 2005; Adey, 2010). Mobility is more
than movement, it is a product of social relations, connected to spaces which are
created and given meaning by the young people who use them (Langevang and Gough,
2009; Skelton, 2013; McAuliffe, 2013; Ahmet, 2013; Skelton and Gough, 2013; van
Blerk, 2013). I now turn to these ideas and conclude my review of the literature by
discussing youth social mobility and identity formation.

**2.2.3. Social mobility and identity formation**

For youths transitioning to adulthood, mobility is a meaningful expression of
power that represents freedom, independence, and social status. With transitional
periods for youths becoming more elongated and less pronounced, control over one’s
mobility can be viewed as a rite of passage for young people who are coming of age
(Thomas and Taylor, 2005; Porter; 2009; McAuliffe, 2013). Drawing on longitudinal data
from the ‘Inventing Adulthoods’\(^8\) study conducted in the UK, Thomas and Taylor (2005) examined how mobility is used as a resource during a young person’s transition to adulthood. They defined this resource as either cosmopolitanism (i.e. broad mobility and weak ties) or localism (i.e. constrained mobility and strong ties) and show that youths during transition experience aspects of both resources, often dreaming of an expanded mobility, while being fixed to the controls placed by their family and community (e.g. religion). The degree to which these youths experience cosmopolitanism was found to be defined by their family network and social and material resources, with less affluent youths experiencing immobility and being defined by localism.

In her research on youths urban immobilities in Auckland, New Zealand, Tracey Skelton (2013), explores how a young person's socioeconomic status not only constrains or expands their movement but also plays into the urban identity they form for themselves. Skelton (2013) contends that for young people especially, their ability to move freely and the speed at which they move contribute positively or negatively to their identity formation. Skelton argues that socioeconomic status is a decisive factor in young people’s access to mobility, and that this is largely determined by their familial household income, which is “beyond their own responsibility and control” (p. 471). As such, the ability to move between places is connected to new opportunities for social encounters, which contributes to the identity formation of a young person.

For young Aucklanders, Skelton’s research points to the car as an essential form of independent mobility, because Auckland is seen as being designed for car use, while public transportation is perceived as unreliable and expensive. The use of a car, with the flexibility and freedom it brings, becomes part of these youths’ social identity. However, the car also reflects a socioeconomic divide, with more affluent youths having access to an automobile, while others remain constrained to public transit. Youths without cars were found to lament the loss of social space that trains and buses applied to their daily commute. As more friends begin to drive or carpool, those stuck riding public transit in effect lose a routine hangout space because their friends no longer ride with them.

\(^{8}\) The ‘Inventing Adulthoods’ study is a qualitative longitudinal study that follows over 100 young people throughout their teens, twenties, and thirties. The participants were selected from five ‘socially and economically contrasting areas of England and Northern Ireland’ (University of Southampton).
Moving forward, this constrained mobility impacts opportunities to hang out with friends who explore spaces located away from transit lines.

Cameron McAuliffe (2013), in his mobilities research on youth and adult graffiti writers in Sydney, Australia, defines these missed opportunities as socio-spatial exclusions. His research, which examines the opportunities for creative expression afforded to adult over youth graffiti writers, finds that young people in Sydney “disproportionately suffer the burdens of accessibility compared with adults” (p. 520). Rising transit costs, limited mobility options (e.g. no drivers license or access to a car), and policies that target youths, control these young people’s movement and in turn impact their inclusion in social spaces and identity in the creative arts. Though young people and adults may often use the same forms of transit or navigate to similar destinations, McAuliffe’s work shows that their experiences are profoundly different. These experiences bring greater understanding to urban environments and the networks that connect people and places.

As the highlighted literature shows, youth mobilities research evokes a discussion about power, justice, and the right to social and spatial space. For urban youths, the fight for greater autonomy and space in the city is challenged by older generations and governing authorities who implement strategies to control their movement and define their presence outside of formalized settings (e.g. home, school, work) in terms suited to a moral panic. In turn, youth were shown to develop tactics to subvert these strategies. The literature also pointed to the importance of a youth’s socioeconomic status concerning his or her ability to move throughout the city. Youths with cars reported to have much greater control of their mobility than youths who relied upon walking or public transit. The characteristics defining these young people’s immobilities are shown to be integral to the formation of their identities as they transition to adulthood. Finally, authors on youth mobilities continually stress the importance of young people as significant contributors to city life. The literature on youths illuminates aspects of urban life and tell stories that are not often seen by the general population.

2.3. Youths Transitioning From Government Care

Within the field of social work, there is a diverse body of literature that touches on a range of disciplines and that considers varying stages in the life cycle of individuals.
Here, I will focus on a portion of this literature that concentrates on youths transitioning from government support to independent living. Authors who are researching this issue discuss a familiar range of factors in their works, including familial support, mentorship, resilience and living conditions as well as informal support (Collins, 2001; Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Geenen & Powers, 2007; Samuel & Price, 2007; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). These studies predominantly use surveys and an interview-based mixed methods approach. I will now review a selection of these works, which serve to show the importance of relationships for youths from government care.

Deborah Rutman and Carol Hubberstey (2016), from the University of Victoria’s School of Social Work, are two of the leading experts on the outcomes and experiences of youths both currently in and from government care in Canada. Their most recent work, conducted in Metro Vancouver, is one of the few longitudinal studies performed on youths who have left government care and presents rich contextual data and insights on the informal support networks these young people access. Their findings show that youths transitioning from government care age out with limited financial resources, a lack of social support, mental health concerns, and a need for employment and educational opportunities. Their data sheds light on the importance of peer networks, as this reduces feelings of isolation. Additionally, their data points to the multitude of supports, including employment, budgeting advice, education, mental health services, legal advocacy, housing, and childcare, which these youths seek out and leverage through informal networks, such as youth-serving organizations. It’s also worth noting that in their concluding remarks, Rutman and Hubberstey call for additional research to be conducted on “to whom youth in care turn for support” and “how can relationships be nurtured and expanded” (p. 26). My research on youth mobility will address these questions by identifying barriers that prevent youths from developing supportive relationships.

Reaching similar conclusions to those of Rutman & Hubberstey (2016), researchers Sarah Greenen and Laurie E. Powers (2007), examined the experiences of youths in foster care during their transition to adulthood and found that relationships from family and informal networks were deemed to be critically important supports for these youths. Their data, gathered from 10 focus groups of youths from care in Portland, Oregon, shed light on the importance of coordination and facilitation between services in these youths’ lives. It was found that the multiple systems these youths worked with,
such as youth-serving organizations and healthcare providers, would not communicate with each other, leaving gaps in the services provided to these youths. They conclude their study by highlighting the importance of flexibility in programming and for the creation of opportunities designed specifically for these youths, as their lives are deemed to be tumultuous and lived day-to-day. Based on Greenen and Powers’ assessment, the concept of tacking will provide a useful frame for viewing these youths lives, as these young people are individually forced to make do and navigate each day.

Looking at the concept of resilience among youth transitioning from government care, Clara Daining and Diane DePanfilis (2007), surveyed 100 youths from government care, looking across metrics such as education, employment, drug use, homelessness, and criminal activity, to determine the personal and interpersonal factors that build resilience. This data confirms, through quantitative measures, the importance of relationships found in the studies mentioned above. Additionally, Daining and DePanfilis stress the importance of integrated, holistic services for youths transitioning from government care. This recommendation was also advocated for by Greenen and Powers (2007). Finally, Daining and DePanfilis (2007) conclude by stressing the importance of education in building resilience and long-term success for youths transitioning from government care.

Finally, Sonja Lenze-Rashid (2005), a professor from San Francisco State’s School of Social Work, examined the employment experiences of homeless young adults and homeless youths with experience in the government care system. Lenze-Rashid’s research showed that youths from care were far more likely to have a mental health disorder, which was the key predictor of whether a youth would find employment or not. The research report, which finds no other significant difference between these categories of youth after controlling for mental health, concludes by stressing the importance of organizations working collaboratively with employers to foster opportunities for homeless youths. Lenze-Rashid’s research points to two key considerations; first, even among homeless youths, youths in care, because of their past circumstances and experiences, are at a disadvantage compared to their peers. Second, organizations have the ability to increase the employment rates of youths from government care by connecting them directly to employers. The above studies all stress the importance of social relations as a critical resource in helping youths transition from
government care to independent adulthood by creating opportunities around housing, employment, education, and personal resilience.

2.4. Summary

The literature examined in this chapter provides a theoretical foundation through which to explore the urban mobilities and survival of youths transitioning from government care. Youth mobilities were shown to be influenced by multiple external factors, like their socioeconomic status, and governing bodies who devise strategies that control their mobilities. It was also shown that during this time of transition to adulthood youth are in the process of forming their identities, and this is significantly affected by their mobilities. The literature on youths from government care highlighted the importance of relationships and programming to improve these young people’s lives. The ability to find and access these two things is paramount to these young peoples’ survival. In light of this, I believe that the concept of tacking is a useful frame to view the urban experiences of the youths in this study. I will now move onto a discussion on my methodological approach and design and show the techniques that I used to capture the experiences of youths from government care in Metro Vancouver.
Chapter 3.

Methodological Approach and Design

Generally, [ethnographic] approaches call for logical rather than statistical inference, for case rather than sample-based logic, for saturation rather than representation as the stated aims of research (Small, 2009, p. 28).

This study was created to address an apparent gap in current scholarly knowledge, in the field of urban studies, concerning the circumstances of youths who have exited from government care arrangements. The lack attention given to the situation of youths such as these leads to missed opportunities to plan for a population that resides in nearly all cities in North America and not least in Metro Vancouver. As noted previously, I discovered this gap firsthand while working at a youth-serving organization as a member of their development team. In this position, I would regularly work with municipal, regional, and provincial bodies, from which I would seek financial support or legislative assistance to support youths from care. During this time, it came to my attention that in Metro Vancouver there is, in fact, a great deal of statistical data collected about this minority population by small advocacy groups and NGOs9, such as the study mentioned above by Shaffer and Anderson (2016). This data, however, does not offer models or an in-depth discussion about how any particular outcome that is measured might be impacting these youths’ lives or which factors might lead to a particular outcome. Instead, these reports are designed to put a spotlight on not only the adverse outcomes these young people face after ageing out, but also the financial impact to the region over the long-term. In contrast to the approach taken in these studies, the methodological approach I have chosen addresses the various factors invoked by the statistical measures found in these reports, and asks how they come together and are experienced in actual ‘lives lived.’ These studies, nevertheless, have been necessary both to define the scope of the problem and show why governing bodies should allocate more resources to this marginalized category of young people. This strategy has begun to work too, as provincially, this data, along with multiple horrific

9 The Vancouver Foundations Fostering Change initiative, the McCreary Centre Society, First Call BC, and Aunt Leah’s Independent Lifeskills Society have each issued privately conducted studies giving the region a range of data to help understand this unique problem.
case management issues from the MCFD\textsuperscript{10}, has helped to start conversations around this issue with provincial decision makers.

For municipal and regional governing bodies, this emerging set of data in BC speaks to yet another form of provincial downloading, in which responsibilities and costs are shifted to a lower level of government. This downloading occurs the moment these youths reach the age of majority and are no longer eligible to remain under the provisions of the provincial government. Instead, they now become ‘adults’ who are at risk of homelessness in Metro Vancouver. This not only creates a challenge for these youths, but also places demands on local governments to commit funding and develop initiatives to keep these young people safe and off the streets. Furthering this problem is that except for this local, privately conducted research, there is little to no knowledge about this population, especially from an urban lived perspective. This data would account for details that go beyond housing, income, and education rates, and look instead at how these youths integrate themselves into the city and live urban lives. Questions need to be asked about matters such as how youths navigate the city, which modes of transportation do they use, what services do they use in cities (e.g. parks, libraries, community centres), which forms of employment do they engage in, and what roles do they play (e.g. cheap labour for service economy) or contributions do they make to the city. It is essential to obtain this knowledge because in order for cities to help mitigate the outcomes faced by these youths and design inclusive cities that work for everyone, we need first to know about the residents themselves and how cities play a role in their lives.

As discussed above, the previous studies conducted on this distinct category of young persons, too often fail, by virtue of their design, to interconnect the statistics collected with the actual young lives that these are meant to represent. This lack of

\textsuperscript{10} In 2015, Paige, a 19 year old young indigenous women, who grew up in the government care system and spent her childhood in Vancouver's Downtown East Side passed away from a drug overdose after shortly ageing out of government care. The story was covered extensively by local papers, after an investigation by the BC Representative for Children and Youth showed there were extensive errors made by Ministry of Children and Family Development, when Paige was in care (Culbert, 2015). Shortly after this, Alex Gervais, an 18-year-old and only a few months away from ageing out of care, was forced to live in a hotel room with minimal supervision while MCFD searched for a new housing arrangement. During this time, Alex, in deep depression, took his own life by jumping out of a hotel window. This case also garnered a great deal of media attention and prompted policy changes around hotel placements by the MCFD (Talmazan, 2017).
knowledge, however, is understandable, when one begins to think of the logistical challenges a researcher confronts when developing a qualitative study on this population. Researchers must first identify participants, narrowing down this population from the hundreds of thousands of young people in their twenties, who are located everywhere throughout the region of Metro Vancouver. These youths, from a surface level, are the same as their peers: they have cellphones, dress in roughly the same fashion trends, and take part in some of the same recreational activities, resulting in no clear markers, which makes identifying them an onerous task. After identifying and recruiting a set of research participants from this group of young people, researchers must next create a connection of trust, which will allow them to share personal details and understanding from these youths’ lives. As will be discussed below, this is a considerable challenge, as young people from care are often skeptical of adults who probe into their lives due to past experiences of working with people in authority positions. These young people are adept at providing minimal answers and stonewalling responses. Lastly, if trust is gained, or youths are open to speaking about their lives, researchers need to be able to understand and take account of personal sensitivities that figure in these youths’ lives. They may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), have mental health concerns, or a learning disability, all of which are elements that studies must account for. These three concerns, among others, make research with youths from government care challenging to conduct. For the Metro Vancouver region and its constituent cities, however, allowing this gap in knowledge to continue should be seen as concerning. Knowing there is a population in need is far different from knowing the varied needs of that population and the views of the individuals included within it. To discover these needs in a more integrated manner, a qualitative study of this population offers a means to explore this issue further and bring into perspective the disparate forms of quantitative data being produced.

3.1. Qualitative Research

Beyond a perceived gap in knowledge, the decision to pursue qualitative research with youths transitioning from care is predicated on the belief that these young people are the experts of their lives and environment. Their lived experience gives them insight into our cities that cannot be readily pulled from large datasets. Sam,
passionately backed up this assertion when we were speaking in a private counselling room at a youth-serving NGO he frequents for support:

I see a lot of people being really disrespectful to homeless people, disabled people and just youth[s] in general. And not acknowledging, like hey yeah, they're young, but you don't know where they come from, you don't know what they've had to go through in their life. You don't know anything about them. Don't automatically assume. I've had people be like, "oh you will understand when you get to my age, once you get to my age you've been through enough you will understand." I'm like, bitch really, I can list a ton of different things that you probably have never had to deal with.

I agree with Sam; these youths know their lives and our cities intimately. A better understanding of their lives can help us create practical policies for youths like them. By understanding the specific nuances of their challenges, we can move towards designing our cities to accommodate their needs better, and in turn, reduce the poor outcomes that result from this challenging transition; which are experienced by not only these youths, but the cities and society that they live in and are members of.

To draw out and organize this knowledge, I will be employing the extended case method, which is a departure from the mixed methods approach commonly employed in the social sciences. I chose this method because my research seeks not just to review and generally speak about a particular issue, such as housing for youths, but to dissect and provide a detailed examination of the urban experiences, mobility, and everyday survival tactics performed by this category of young people. As stated above, there is a gap in qualitative knowledge surrounding the details of these youths’ lives during this transitional period to becoming an independent adult. By exploring the nuanced challenges, like housing and employment, identified in previous statistical data, a complete understanding of these youths will be formed. There is only one approach that I believe is suitable to capture the details and experiences of these youths and that is through an ethnographic method of research.

Given the distinctive societal setting of Metro Vancouver, where these youths are coming of age and transitioning to adulthood, the extended case method is the appropriate methodology to capture these youths lived experiences. Mario Luis Small (2009) explains that the extended case method is used in ethnographic research to “analyze a particular social situation in relation to the broader social forces shaping it” (p.
In this research, the particular social situation is the everyday survival of youths from government care, in Metro Vancouver’s globalized urban environment.

### 3.1.1. Youth advisors

An essential aspect of this study’s methodology was the inclusion of youths from government care, when appropriate, in each stage of the research. These youths contributed as advisors for both the research question posed and recruitment methods, all the way through project implementation and data collection. I decided not only to undertake case studies with individual youths, but also to include them in each phase of the research to meet the evolving methodological standards of youth-centred Canadian research. Stephen Gaetz and Bill O’Grady, lead researchers from the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and the authors of *Without a Home: National Youth Homelessness Survey* (2016), contend that youths with lived experiences of homelessness should be included during the planning process for research on policies or programs. Including young people in the decision-making process was a practice I observed first hand at the youth-serving agency I worked for. In this environment, members of the youth advisory council attended program and leadership meetings and were regularly consulted to help improve access to resources and generate better outcomes for the young people who relied upon these services.

Seeing the strengths of these youths first hand, I knew their inclusion would benefit my study making it more responsive to the best practices set out in previous research. To include youths in my research who had experience of ageing out of government care, I contacted one of the five youth advisory councils operating in the region. These councils, like the one at the agency I previously worked for, are often tied to an organization or advocacy project. Their meetings take place once or twice a month in the evening, and have a fluctuating rate of attendance, between 5-15 youths, based on the time of year (i.e., summer vs fall), the weather (i.e., sunny vs rainy), and the advocacy projects they are working on. These meetings often revolve around a group meal and a guest speaker, like myself. If no guest speaker is scheduled, then the youths enjoy the free meal provided and spend time with their peers, joking, venting their

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11 After speaking with the youths, I discovered that it is common practice for young people to sit on multiple advisory groups. As one participant described, the community is tight knit so you see the same individuals at many events.
frustration, and working through the other agenda items defined at the beginning of the meeting. An agency staff member also attends to help keep the group on track, to provide pre-paid transit fare tickets for rides home, and to lock up the office after the meeting ends.

After getting approval from the management staff of one organization to reach out to their associated youth council, I was quickly taken aback when they notified me that it was going to be an approximately two-month wait before I could meet with them and present my project. Limited by a bi-monthly meeting schedule, the group at the time was organizing its annual camping trip, meeting and reviewing a new program with staff, and spending time organizing a small youth-centred grant to fund their committee. The night I presented my research proposal, there were seven young people in attendance. Over a boardroom table, we discussed each part of my study’s methodology, from recruitment and ethics, to interviewing questions and analysis. Their input helped refine these documents to be more youth-centric and less legal sounding. Furthermore, they helped develop my line of questioning and gave me insights into government care experiences that could be used to draw out more detailed responses. As one of the young people at the table pointed out, youths who grew up in the government care system “know the drill” and are used to being asked personal questions by people they have never met. This familiarity, however, can make for a challenging environment, as I was told it was common for youths in care to have trust issues, stemming from post-traumatic stress ensuing from previous unpleasant dealings with an adult or authority figures. Therefore, it was impressed upon me that being able to quickly establish rapport and create a two-way conversation where youths are treated as equals, would be critical to the success of this study.

Working with members of the youth advisory council as consultants during the early stages of my research was not only a measure of best practice, but also added a level of authenticity that reverberated throughout the entirety of this research project. As someone who does not have this lived experience and is not a social worker, the ability to approach service providers and point to the review process and contributions of this youth advisory council gave me the ethos with which to recruit participants from their organization. Similarly, I was able to establish that critically important rapport with participants, by beginning our discussion with a conversation around how their peers had helped to create this study and how they too can help contribute to this research.
3.2. Participants and Recruitment: Case Study Selection

Seven youths were recruited from across the Lower Mainland to take part in this study. To qualify for inclusion, the young person needed to be living in Metro Vancouver, to have had experience in government care, and be between the ages of 19 to 29. The length of their time in care was not a factor, and neither was the state of their current involvement with their families, with whom two of the youth still had steady relationships. This age range was chosen for three reasons; first, the upper limit of 29 years-of-age was selected as it is recognized by both the Government of Canada (2016) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2018) as an appropriate classification for “youths” (Statistics Canada, 2015). Second, I have set the lower limit to this range at age 19, which is the official age of majority in BC when youth are deemed by the government to be ‘adults,’ and their financial support is cut off. Furthermore, this lower limit eases the recruitment process in this study, as the individuals can, as adults, consent to participating in the study themselves. Any youth under the age of 19 and currently in care would require a signature from and potential oversight by their social worker, greatly complicating this recruitment process. Finally, this age range was chosen because while it is wide enough to capture any young person who is still in the process of transitioning to independent adulthood, it does not cast judgment on an individual’s transition.

To locate potential participants, I focused my outreach efforts on NGOs and advocacy groups where I could target services and programs tailored to youths in and from government care. Furthermore, I know that for each of these youths there were unmet needs (i.e. resource, knowledge, community contacts) in their lives that required additional support. These youths were going to youth-serving NGOs and advocacy groups to improve their lives by leveraging the organizations’ staffs to find work, housing, food, and counselling. These young people are seeking the types of supports that typically youths are provided freely in their home.

Using the three criteria outlined above (i.e. location, government care experience, and age), I was able to capture a diverse set of experiences that show how vulnerable youths in this category are when alone in the city. The average age of the individuals featured in these separate cases is 23, with an overall age range of 21-27 years of age. Four of these youths ‘aged out’ while in a foster home and three had been
on a Youth Agreement at the time. Two of these individuals have Indigenous heritage, which allows me to extend consideration to members of this important cultural group, who are unfortunately disproportionately represented in the government care system. Finally, two of the other youths who took part are also LGBTQ2S, a category shown in the case studies as requiring additional supports during this transition. By using the methodological approach for qualitative ethnographic research defined by Small (2009), there was no probability-based sampling strategy employed for this study. Instead, as Small recommends, this study does not use a rigid, calculated approach of sampling, but rather an evolving mode of inquiry that builds from one case to the next, which focuses on added findings and questions to be built into future questions pursued in subsequent cases.

In determining the number of cases I would examine for this study, I turn again to Small (2009) who argues that ethnographic case studies that explore the “why” or “how” of something need to focus not on sample size and statistical representativeness, but rather on saturation and depth of understanding (p. 28). Citing Clyde Mitchell, Small goes as far as to say that for interview-based case studies, statistical representativeness “is an irrelevant criterion” and that “inference from case studies … cannot be statistical and … extrapolability from any one case study to like situations is based only on logical inferences” (p. 22). The quality and breadth of details I received during the in-depth interviews and observations would conclusively determine the number of case studies I would need to conduct. Ultimately, as Small suggests, the number of cases wouldn't be known to me until the study was nearly completed, and I believed that an appropriate degree of saturation had been reached. After my initial five interviews, I began hearing many of the same stories and challenges repeated by different participants. By the seventh interview, I noticed myself steering the conversation to find specific details that were alluded to by other participants or to subjects that I felt were missing. Looking at similarly designed qualitative studies, which ranged anywhere from 2-15 cases (Dolson, 2015; Jackson, 2012; Amit and Dyck, 2012, Walcott-Francis, 2017), I determined that at seven cases, I had collected sufficient data to complete my analysis and this study.

3.2.1. Recruitment

To locate and recruit these young people, I reached out to multiple youth-serving organizations and advocacy groups. It should be noted, that each of the youths who
participated in this study has utilized the services of a youth-serving NGO to help them with their transition. This shared experience is a necessary limitation, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 6. Having worked in the field, I knew many of the organizations and had a general understanding of the services they offered. However, I didn’t know if these organizations focused on youths in care specifically, whether youths regularly sought out their services, or if they had a youth advisory board. In short, I did not know which organizations were likely to yield the best results when recruiting participants for this project. To discover this information, I presented my tentative list of eight organizations to contact for this study to the youth advisory council. Their input helped focus my efforts on organizations that had a range of drop-in supports for youths transitioning from care, over specific programs, and other advisory councils, which would be full of youths used to speaking out on various issues. They even provided me with the names of some staff members, whom I could then reach out to within some of these organizations.

Using this narrowed list, I subsequently contacted each organization’s executive director and/or program director to present my study details in person or over the phone. Next, I arranged to have one of the organization’s staff members organize a recruitment session or discuss this opportunity with the youths using their services. Finally, I received the contact information for those youths who were interested in participating in the program and reached out to them to go over any final details and arrange an interview. The recruitment process turned out to be long and arduous. Having spent the previous three years working at a youth-based non-profit organization and attending conferences and networking events, I came to realize that many of these organizations are understaffed and lack the capacity to facilitate any new projects that are not immediately likely to influence policy or provide increased funding. Furthermore, the staff at these youth organizations are protective of the young people they serve and are rightfully skeptical of individuals who want to look into the personal details of these youths lives. At the organization I worked for, we had regularly turned down requests for university research projects and film or television documentaries about youths in and from care, even from established production studios and networks.

It is when initiating conversations with organizations about this study that my initial work with the youth advisory council helped carry this project forward. Showing that youths had informed this study and vetted the questions helped to open doors and
provided me with some level of credibility. Once I had a staff member on board, I would ask them to advertise my research project among their clients. I discussed the project with prospective participants by phone, highlighting the importance of advocacy and how this project sought to leverage youths’ knowledge. The project would seek to avoid treating them as “subjects” to be studied. I provided them with the recruitment materials such as the poster advertising the project and one-page statement of study details. The staff members I contacted assisted by discussing the study with participants and then forwarding me the emails of those interested in taking part. I followed up by replying to these emails to ask if they would like to set up a time to conduct the interview. I quickly discovered that this is a complicated and acutely time-sensitive process. I found that if I waited even a week after the staff introduction, I would lose the participants and it would be highly difficult to reconnect with them. Therefore, it was vital for me to have a flexible schedule dedicated to this project, so I treated myself as ‘on call’ every day until the interview process was completed. The times for conducting interviews ranged from roughly 9 am to 7 pm and took approximately three months to complete.

The interviews took place in locations across Metro Vancouver in publicly accessible locations with private rooms, such as the Vancouver Public Library, or in private meeting rooms or offices within youth-serving organizations. Communicating with participants via email before interviews, I would present a couple of potential locations. My suggestions of location were based on where I had met them, as I assumed they likely lived in proximity to it or at least knew the area. The participant would then confirm which location they would like the interview to take place at.

Recognizing youths for their contributions

An essential aspect of the recruitment process for this study is that I recognized these youths as having valuable contributions and paid them for their time. Each youth participant received a $25 honorarium for their participation in this study, and I also covered the cost of their transit or taxi fare, parking or childcare expenses incurred by participating in an interview. I chose to pay these youths and to cover their costs of participation for two reasons: First, paying youths for their participation in research is recognized as a best practice by Canadian youth researchers who are dealing with

12 The poster however, I believe was rarely used, it was more of a prop that built legitimacy into my pitch to the staff and youth.
homeless or marginalized youths (Canada Without Poverty, 2016; Gaetz, O’Grady, Kidd, & Schwan, 2016). Second, it was and remains a standard practice at the youth organization I had worked at. The organization pays youths for almost any work-related task, including participation in interviews, writing (i.e. youth stories), photography, office work, and cleaning. During my first ethics submission, I didn’t include an honorarium for participating in the study, as I worried it would impact my study, due to youth being motivated to participate because of the money. However, as I reflect on this arrangement, I concluded that it would be unethical for me to leave these marginalized youths without some form of compensation. This was then reconfirmed by members of the youth advisory council, who collectively stated that while they would be interested in participating regardless of the money, they believed that the money would be a gesture of respect and help cover any transit fares, meals, and out-of-pocket expenses associated with taking time out of their day to do this interview. These young people gave me their time and expertise to facilitate my research. As academic researchers, it’s important that we recognize their efforts and encourage them to express their views, so their experiences can be heard in broader circles. These young people have valuable insights to offer, and we can show our appreciation for their contribution and participation in our studies by paying them a modest amount for their time.

3.2.2. Ethics

This study was approved and deemed ‘low risk’ by Simon Fraser University’s (SFU) Research Ethics Board (REB). The REB complies with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2) and Policy R20.01, SFU’s policy and procedures for review of ethical considerations arising from research involving human participants. Youths in care are a strong, resilient, and capable group of individuals, and though they are at risk of homelessness and other adverse outcomes due to their circumstances, they are in many other respects similar to their parented peers. They are certainly capable of determining whether they wish to participate in this research. Unlike many of their parented peers though, many of these young people have grown up in traumatic and stressful environments. Some of them, even a few of the individuals whom I interviewed, were afraid of authorities and authoritative figures due to a life of rotating between different foster parents. Knowing this, the methodology of this research has taken great care to focus on areas of strength and to avoid stirring up
troublesome events that might have occurred in their pasts. Though I did ask general questions about their families and upbringing, I allowed the participants to guide how much they wanted to share.

In obtaining the required ethical certification from the SFU REB, this research uses the best practices for conducting research with youths outlined in the interest group Canada Without Poverty’s (2016), *Youth rights, right now* report. These recommendations include creating a safe space, ensuring consent, providing adequate compensation, acknowledge stress and trauma, and ensuring privacy and safety.

3.3. Data Collection Techniques

The data for this study was collected over a six-month period. During this time, I worked at a youth-serving organization, an arrangement that afforded me a distinctive perspective from which to not only observe how youths used the space but to also speak with staff and gain their insight on the struggles they see when working with youths. The details of each case study were gathered during a one-hour, face to face, in-depth interview. Supplementary data was gained through dozens of formal and informal conversations with staff members, and through observations taken while working. This supplemental data focused on high level concepts and did not include the solicitation of any third-party information about the individual participants in my study.

3.3.1. In-depth interviews

The bulk of the data collected for this study came from the seven in-depth interviews conducted with participants. I selected this method as it gave me an opportunity to speak candidly with youths about their experiences and to allow them to provide answers that could not have been gathered through other methods. Each participant responded well to the questions and gave the impression that it was a relaxed and enjoyable experience. We laughed a lot during the interviews. This positive feeling may be attributed to my determination to treat these youth with respect and to ask them questions that were different from the more routine ones they had been asked throughout their lives in government care by social workers. My questions asked how they navigated around the city or whether they had a mentor? The youths seemed able to answer each question reasonably easily, as these were intentionally broad in scope,
designed to tease out responses based on their life experience, something they could speak to with authority. The general list of questions I asked (See Appendix B), served as a starting point in our conversations. I would wait for their responses and follow up on these, referring to their prior answers or personal details that I believed might open up a story and insights that I could probe into further. For example, this is a conversation I had with Avery, which started somewhat generically, but ultimately yielded an instructive story about who she is:

Clete: What's your favourite thing about Metro Vancouver?

Avery: The scenery, I just love how natural it seems to be, like there is a lot more nature to look at and the trails and everything. And also, the indigenous culture, it thrives a lot more out here.

Clete: Does it?

Avery: Yes, way more.

Clete: Compared to Alberta?

Avery: In Alberta, you mainly you go to pow-wows or you see people drunk. So it's like...really.

Clete: Are you pretty connected to the culture?

Avery: I'm not really connected to my own culture but I'm connected to the culture out here because mine was very affected by residential schools, so I don't really have much connection.

Clete: Has that been an important part...

Avery: Yeah, I was working for [...] for a while, as a peer support worker with their Indigenous roots program and also for the City of Surrey advocating for youth ageing out of foster care for indigenous youth.

By asking Avery what her ‘favourite thing about Metro Vancouver is,’ I was able to learn how deeply connected she is to the Indigenous cultures here and that she is continually finding opportunities to engage with this community in meaningful ways. This detail about her culture then became a key touch-point for the remainder of our conversation.

Thanks to my work as a communications director, I had previous experience interviewing youths from government care. Most importantly, I knew what not to do or ask when working with these young people. I've stood in a room with youths many times as a media coach, whose role was to protect the interest of these young people from
aggressive media personnel, who dig too deeply, or press too hard with personal questions, which can result in stonewalled responses and pain in the young person. During the interviews, I was able to navigate these responses and focus on each youth’s strengths and frustrations with living here, rather than on negative family circumstances or personal deficiencies (e.g. limited education).

Connections & Activity Map

Connections & Activity Map exercise

At the end of each interview, youth participants were also invited to go through a mapping exercise, which I have entitled the Connections & Activity Map (Figure 2). During this exercise, I asked participants to identify areas of personal significance (e.g., home, work, school, etc.) and important social connections or hubs throughout Metro Vancouver. The map was created directly from Google Maps, a fair use application, and something I hoped the youths would be familiar with. The map shows the entire Metro Vancouver region. I provided only a little guidance in this exercise and didn’t require them to put anything specific, just encouraging them to add as much detail as they could.
think of. I also let them know that the map was strategically zoomed out so that they didn’t have to worry about me identifying any personal locations.

After they completed the exercise, I reviewed it with them, asking questions about their travel and areas of importance they had identified on the map, such as a resource centre or community group. This activity served two purposes; first, it prompted my participants to think about different connections in their life which contributed to many new questions, insights, and elaborations on previous answers. Second, their maps gave me a sense of how these young people structured their lives. For example, both Taylor and Dakota have managed to maintain residency in Vancouver for most their adult lives, and with ample social resources around them, their activities took place in a relatively small geographic area or ‘footprint,’ whereas, Taylor and Avery travel all over the region on a consistent basis.

3.3.2. Conversations with staff

Prior to and during the field research phase of this project, I had the opportunity of working day-to-day with the frontline staff of a youth-serving the organization, as one of the organization’s grant writers. In this capacity, I would regularly ask staff members what the problem points were for the youths we serve, and how could the organization address these problems? Sometimes my co-workers would suggest a need for additional staff budgets or computers or the youths’ need for greater food security. This continuing back-and-forth conversation proved immensely beneficial in this study, as they would be able to broadly interpret what they knew about the experiences of over 200 program participants and tell me what in their view was hindering these youths and where they believed an intervention of some sort was necessary. Often, they would provide anecdotal examples of these problems as well, such as how youths couch surf, moving from one precarious living situation to another. Staff members also pointed to bureaucratic details that would have been difficult to elicit from youths in this short study.

These staff members acted as a sounding board for challenges or experiences that the youths visiting their office shared with them. The conversations I had with staff, along with the internal data of the organization, showed me how common some of the experiences these youths were going through really were, such as getting an identification card or applying for BC health insurance. Additionally, I was able to fill in
the general context around or ask questions about an experience a youth may have had, such as applying for and managing income assistance. Over the course of this study, I had dozens of informal conversations with frontline staff and program coordinators, which contributed to shaping my analysis of these case studies. The contents of each case and the details of the participants were never shared with staff.

3.3.3. Observation

As with the staff conversations, I was able to observe youths’ interactions while working at the youth-serving organization. I watched how young people used the space, accessing computers for job searches, sifting through the fridge for food, and seeking out the help of staff for things like counselling, mentorship, tutoring, or employment advice. I also observed the community bonds that formed between youths who frequented this location, as they would regularly meet here to hang out, play online video games, watch a movie, have a meal together, and discuss their struggles and successes. Though I was not able to observe directly most of the experiences described by the participants whom I interviewed, by observing youths who appeared at this youth-serving organization, I gained a greater appreciation of their commitment and the humbleness with which they approach these facilities.

3.4. Data Analysis

The process for organizing my data and preparing it for analysis was straightforward, albeit time-consuming. After each interview, I created a pseudonym for the participant, transcribed my recordings, organized my field notes, and made a digital copy of the Connections & Activity Map which participants marked up. I then printed the transcriptions, and a backup file was saved in the Simon Fraser University Vault (a secured Canadian cloud-based storage system that meets the requirements of the BC Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act). Following these steps, the data was ready for analysis and critical examination.

To process and analyze the data, I utilized the coding method outlined in Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw’s (1995) Writing Ethnographic Field Notes. This method starts with open coding, a process where I lightly read through my transcriptions and made a note of any great quotes, specific scenarios and potential themes. I then began
to make more detailed memos based on the information gathered and emerging analytical themes. Next, I went through a process of focused coding, where I once again reviewed the transcription in fine detail and used the identified themes to focus my attention and draw out more information. After this, I made a series of integrative memos that are more substantive and connected my themes, quotes, and scenarios. Finally, I stepped back and reflected on my findings as a whole, thus completing my data processing and initial analysis.

After processing the data, identifying themes, and performing an initial analysis, I then completed the extended case method approach by relating my data back to the social context to formulate an empirical statement about the mobility practices and everyday survival of youths from government care in Metro Vancouver.

3.5. Methodological Challenges

By consulting with a youth advisory council before setting about recruiting participants, I believe I eliminated several potential hurdles, such as building a rapport and trust with the participants and organizations I worked with. Overall, the youths who participated in this study were excited to give back and have the opportunity to offer their opinions and advocate for their peers. Each youth was very responsive and responsible once a dialogue with her or him was started. They answered their emails quickly, and to my amazement, I did not have to reschedule even one interview. Working as a Communications Coordinator, I have, on multiple occasions, been stood up by youths from government care at a media engagement, at which they were scheduled to speak. Due to these previous experiences, I had expected this to be a tedious part of the process, with multiple cancellations and no-shows.

The most significant challenge faced was the back and forth negotiations conducted with organizations and their staff members who assisted in helping me to recruit participants. Establishing a working connection with an organization and then with its individual staff members would take anywhere from two weeks to upwards of two months. Overall, the difficulties of communication and the paucity of meetings with staff members stalled the progress of my project on and off for roughly four months.
An unexpected outcome that changed my methodology was discovering that youths routinely shop around for social programs, as I will elaborate on below. I learned from the youth advisory council and my first two interview participants that youths from care typically take help from wherever they can, meaning that most have been part of 3-4 different youth programs throughout the region. Only one of my youth research participants had participated in only one youth-serving organization. At the outset of this study, I had reached out to four different organizing bodies that I had intended to visit. However, as a result of the youths’ experience with multiple programs, a pattern which was later confirmed by staff members, I decided I had acquired enough data from visiting only two organizations. After all, the combined thoughts and experience of my youth participants with such bodies had been derived from their contact with multiple organizations.

3.6. Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the methodology for this qualitative study, which examines the cases of seven youths transitioning from government care. Drawing from Small (2009), I argued that ethnographic techniques and the extended case method are the appropriate methods for this study and its goal of capturing the lived experiences of youths from government care. In this chapter, I have also highlighted the extensive efforts I went through to include young people with lived experience in contributing to the design of the methodology of my research. This effort, I argue, proved vital for an ethnographic study such as this. Their input helped inject essential insights into this study that served to create trust, helped with recruiting and improve the quality of interviews and, thus, the scope of the project.
Chapter 4.

Profiles of the Study’s Participants

I was 14, never touched a drug in my life, was homeless for about 6 months, got addicted to drugs, because being homeless you have to deal with people spitting at you, beating you up, stabbing you, peeing on you while you sleep, stealing your shit, taking your money from you when you have nothing. They take your money, they abuse you, and they harass you because your homeless. And I found this and I found it to be really depressing and I wanted to help people that don't get the help cause I know what it's like to not get the help. I wanted to start to change that, because I wanted to raise awareness for LGBTQ youth[s], I want to raise awareness for homeless youth[s] and homeless people in general. (Sam, youth participant)

The primary interview data collected for this study comes from the lived experiences of seven youths who grew up or had involvement in the government care system. In the following chapters, I will present and analyze the findings collected from these interviews. Since these chapters rely upon evidence gleaned through ethnographic research, I believe it is necessary to first introduce these youths as individuals, to share their backgrounds and tell parts of their stories, all the while taking care to respect their confidentiality. In the below section, I will provide additional details about these youths in order to establish the complexities that figure in their lives and to counter any tendency to regard them as categorical figures, to ensure recognition of them as persons, even though they must remain unnamed.

4.1. Corey

Corey is 21 years old, she is of Indigenous heritage, and has a soft, quiet voice, which she uses to deliver dry sarcasm about her life’s challenges. It is clear the moment we begin speaking that she is tired of running around the government system, and longs for a simpler life with a steady job, a few friends and a stable home. Her time in care has left her with high anxiety, depression, and a sober outlook on life. However, Corey is a great worker, compassionate, intelligent and a leader among her friends. Given a different set of life circumstances, she would be excelling in university right now.
Due to an upbringing rooted in transiency, Corey knows Vancouver intimately. Before turning 19, she had moved 11 times, bouncing around the entire Metro Vancouver region, with many short stops in East and South Vancouver. Since ageing out of government care, Corey has moved three more times and experienced homelessness once. When she speaks of Metro Vancouver, it is through the lens of experience. She identifies the geography of the region through local terminologies, such as Vancouver’s “Little India,” and citizens are described through stories and a critical lens.

Corey, unlike some of the other youths interviewed, is acutely aware of her situation – she has not given up hope for her future, but she knows the proverbial deck is stacked against her. Because of this, Corey states that she is dependent on the social supports and resources (e.g. food, internet, transit fare) provided by the multiple youth organizations she attends on a regular basis. Like other youths in care, Corey has completed nearly every entry-level employment training certification offered to young people, including First Aid, FOODSAFE (i.e., workplace food preparation and handling certification), WHMIS (i.e., hazardous material training), and World Host (i.e., service industry training). However, these certifications have not resulted in employment beyond fast food chains. And while she aspires to go back to school and eventually work in an administrative position or on the development side of a non-profit, she knows that her need to pay rent is forcing her further both financially and geographically from schooling opportunities that would enable her to achieve this goal.

4.2. Kelsey

Kelsey is a 22-year-old mother; she was in a rush when I met her and had to race off to catch a bus for an appointment shortly after we spoke. Kelsey grew up in a midsize British Columbian city, located outside of Metro Vancouver, a place she described as a “black hole” and “boring.” Her biological father and grandparents lived away from her, in Metro Vancouver, during her adolescent years. At 17 she became estranged from her mother and entered into a Youth Agreement. Kelsey became pregnant a year after ageing out of care. While living in this city, Kelsey battled drug addiction and eventually moved to Vancouver to seek treatment. Upon completing the treatment program, she began using the services at one of the youth-serving organizations and from there began to build a community of support.
Kelsey is an intelligent young woman, who spoke in clear, brief sentences and had a noticeable drive about her. Kelsey’s career ambition is to become a drug and rehabilitation counsellor. Like many youths involved in the government system, she wants to give back and support those individuals who are going through similar life circumstances. When I spoke to Kelsey, she was lining up a meeting with a local post-secondary institution to discuss her education options; she had accomplished all of this without consulting any of the local staff at the NGO she was attending for life skills training and housing supports. These support workers helped get her life back on track, but it was her father, she said, who had encouraged her to pursue a college education.

Out of the many conversations I have had over the years with youths who have exited from care, Kelsey’s life is one of the most stable I have seen. Although Kelsey faces many steep challenges, such as housing, transportation and financial restrictions, her family network — which is in a position now to encourage and support her — along with the broader support network she has developed while attending a youth-serving organization, has given her this stability.

Kelsey’s long-term goal is to earn her college education and become employed in a stable, well-paying job that provides for her family. She aspires to “have that normal boring life… I want to have a house, a career, a car, and just, just have a normal life,” something she missed during her adolescent years.

4.3. Avery

Avery is 27 years old. Like other interviewees in this study, she went out of her way to speak with me, despite having her two-year-old daughter in tow: she patiently watched a movie on her mom’s phone while we spoke. Avery has a big personality and speaks with a confident voice in rapid sentences. She was excited to meet with me because she aspires to do civic and policy work in the future. Avery grew up in the Edmonton Metropolitan Region and is part of a small First Nations band, which, as she describes, was torn apart by the Residential School System. Avery has lived in and out of Metro Vancouver for the past decade, but it is the place she feels most at home with because of the city’s large Indigenous community.
Despite the challenges and trauma Avery experienced earlier in her life, the Indigenous community in Metro Vancouver has since provided her with supports and opportunities similar to those of a family. When Avery needed a job, her Indigenous community stepped in and provided her with work doing advocacy and peer support. When she needed housing, Avery was able to move into a group home that supported her and her daughter. It then comes as no surprise why she gravitates to Vancouver; the community she has found here has been a lifeline that has helped her move beyond her tumultuous upbringing.

Within the city, Avery’s greatest concern is that of local travel. Avery is one of the rare young people from government care in Metro Vancouver who had a driver’s license. However, due to an accident and subsequently increased automobile insurance premiums, which Avery cannot afford, she has now lost this opportunity to drive indefinitely. Avery, like other youths from government care, is now entirely dependent on transit, which, she laments, makes her travel time far too long. This dependency has prompted her to move back to the city of Vancouver, a move which also gives her more immediate access to the services she requires. As our interview finished and we stepped out into the evening, I overheard her inform her anxious daughter that it would be another hour until they were finally home again.

4.4. Sam

Sam is 21 years old and has a personality that can fill a room. When I met him, he was quick to notice and point out little personal details about myself, such as that I was tired, and that he thought the colour of my shirt matched my eyes. He is a natural conversationalist with a bright, kind, and sharply opinionated mind. Sam’s hair, makeup and clothing — which range from Drag to business casual — match his personality perfectly. On the day that we met, Sam had blushed cheeks and dark expressive eyes from an application of eyeliner, his hair dyed a light strawberry blond and exploding with curls.

I’ve watched Sam interact with the media before — they love him. Though this shouldn’t be a surprise, Sam catches your eye, and his story is heartbreaking. Sam grew up in a strict Roman Catholic family with his mother and little sister. Although his mom was on a disability allowance, his extended family was “wealthy” and provided him and
his immediate family with opportunities to travel the world. Sam describes the first 13 years of his life as one of privilege. However, this changed forever when he came out as gay to his mother. Within days Sam’s home became so emotionally hostile that he was forced onto the streets. For the next two years (ages 14-16) Sam was homeless and forced to couch surf with friends or sleep underneath bridges. It was during this time that he developed his tactics for survival and turned to drugs and alcohol to numb the pain of being homeless.

At the age of 17, social services were finally notified of Sam’s situation and intervened, putting him on a Youth Agreement, where he lived independently in a basement suite while being supported through life skills training and guidance by a local NGO. Thanks to the encouragement and guidance of this NGO, Sam finished his secondary school education before ‘ageing out’ of care. He has a future goal of attending a local college so he can work with the deaf and hard of hearing while moonlighting as a makeup artist. The ambition is there, the schools are selected, but at this point, he has no means of completing his plan. Casual jobs and the rising costs of living are limiting his educational opportunities. Like some of the other youths interviewed for this study, Sam participates as an advocate for youths in care. Sam also advocates for youths in the LGBTQ2S community, in which he is heavily involved.

Sam is currently in-between work and struggling financially to stay close to the community that supports him, as he is being pushed further to the residential fringes of Metro Vancouver’s suburbs. He is trapped in his circumstances, and though he is capable of finding short-term jobs here and there, the precarity of his situation makes him unable to advance to more stable living.

4.5. Taylor

Taylor is 23 years old; she has a big smile and a relaxed personality which fits with the Slurpee she casually drinks throughout the interview on a sweltering summer day. Like many people in our region, Taylor loves Vancouver: “I wouldn’t live anywhere else,” she says confidently. She adores the weather, is captivated by the natural beauty of the region and believes there is a culture of friendliness and helpfulness in Vancouver — much friendlier than cities on the East Coast of Canada, she notes. Unlike the majority of youths in government care, Taylor has had the luxury of living in the same
Taylor is an outspoken advocate for youths in government care in this region. She lists “facilitating community building” as one of her major passions and has participated in four different youth advisory councils. Over the course of two years, I have seen her speak multiple times at various advocacy and policy events held throughout the region. Like Kelsey, Taylor's career goal is to give back to her community and become a social worker, so she can help to improve the lives of other youths from government care. However, she is hesitant to pursue this career because it is not a lucrative field.

Despite some favourable circumstances (i.e., family contact, stable housing), Taylor struggles to make progress towards her goals and is burdened, like other youths in care, by “barriers” she encounters in the city. These barriers include a lack of access to employment opportunities, an outcome often caused by transportation issues. Taylor is currently taking a break from work and upgrading her Grade 12 English, though she has no immediate plans of attending post-secondary education.

4.6. Jordan

Jordan, who is 22 years old, met me in downtown Vancouver, a cane in his hand, expressive purple hair, and a friendly smile on his face. He politely asks me if we can take the elevator to our meeting room and he makes a dry, sarcastic joke about his disability. On the way to our interview room, I learned that he and his partner travelled two hours, from the Fraser Valley, so he could participate in this study.

Jordan loathes the location of his home, but at $1,300 a month, it is one of the only places within his meagre price range that is willing to accommodate three youths who own multiple pets. Since the age of 19, Jordan has twice been homeless and has
lived in 11 different homes (spanning nine different municipalities!), with a revolving set of roommates. With each subsequent move, Jordan’s is pushed further and further away from the urban core of Vancouver, where his resources, academic institution, and community connections reside.

Jordan is originally from the East Coast of Canada and moved to the Fraser Valley with his father and siblings when he was nine years old. A few short months after the move, Jordan was removed from his abusive home environment and put into the foster care system. While in government care he lived with five different foster families across four municipalities. Jordan no longer speaks with most of his family members, but occasionally stays with his father if he is homeless for too long.

Jordan’s upbringing and subsequent homelessness have left him with severe mental health illnesses, including PTSD, anxiety disorder, and Bi-Polar Type 1. His mental health issues have made maintaining steady work nearly impossible. These issues are also why he has adopted many pets, and though some of these he considers therapy pets, like his cats, others he has taken in because he feels compelled to rescue them: “We know what it’s like to be not wanted by someone. We can relate to them.”

Today, Jordan says he is "working to better his mental health before committing to making people happy.” He is not focused on employment right now and is taking time to upgrade his Grade 12 Math, with a vision of attending post-secondary school in the future, though as he admits, he has no money or plan to see this vision through.

Despite being a self-proclaimed introvert, Jordan has a great desire to step out and advocate publicly for those caught in situations similar to his. This sense of “giving back” comes from the communities that have unconditionally helped him along the way, including the LGBTQ2S community and the anime community. The thriving anime community in Vancouver meets regularly at large anime and cosplay conventions, which are designed to “celebrate and enjoy a colorful culture not readily available in North America… allow(ing) individuals to meet, socialize, grow, collaborate and inspire like-minded youth, fans, and creatives.” (Anime Revolution Events, 2018). Anime and cosplay conventions are where Jordan feels he is most comfortable. During the week of

13 Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines Anime as “a style of animation originating in Japan that is characterized by stark colorful graphics depicting vibrant characters in action-filled plots often with fantastic or futuristic themes.”
a convention, Jordan says that he will volunteer upwards of 70 hours. He does this because the community is like a family to him: “the community doesn’t judge me because I’m LGBTQ or from foster care.” With the recorder off, as we were getting up to leave the meeting room, Jordan felt compelled to show me an intricate coin he had received at one of his conventions. The coin is a community tradition he explained, a sort of badge of honour, and it shows both the commitment and knowledge a person has of the anime community. Jordan says "The coin reminds me that I have a community, that I have a family."

4.7. Dakota

Dakota is 27 years old, tall and skinny, with frizzy, tight curled hair, a big smile, and a Nintendo portable gaming device in his hand. He has an affable manner and is expressive when he speaks. Over the last decade, Dakota has drifted along British Columbia’s Southern Coast, living on a whim and taking advantage of opportunities as they present themselves. As he describes himself to me, it sounds like something out of a millennial’s blog, though, in reality, his frequent moves and hitchhiking excursions were based on necessity, not a sort of Pacific Northwest romanticism.

Dakota grew up in East Vancouver with his mother, who suffered from mental health issues. When he was 17, she kicked him out his home. With a backpack full of his possessions, he stepped out onto the street and called the Kids Help Line from a payphone, remembering the number from a TV commercial jingle. The line directed him to a safe house, and he was quickly put on a Youth Agreement, living independently. This dramatic change caused him to dropout of high school, which he never managed to complete, despite multiple attempts to go back. At the age of 20, he was homeless, so he travelled with some older acquaintances to the Gulf Islands. Shortly after arriving, he got into a big argument with his companions, who later stole his backpack of possessions and left. Dakota was now alone, on an island, with no cash or way to get back to Vancouver.

It was on this island that Dakota developed tactics for survival and learned how to locate and access resources. “[The Island] has free food and free meals in town and
they have a nice food bank every Tuesday, it’s friendly to travelers." Dakota, eventually made it back to the mainland where he reconnected with a youth-serving organization that helped him to secure employment and housing. This program only ran for a year, because it was tied to funding provided during the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics. Once this program and its housing subsidy ended, Dakota moved once again on to another program, which offered him general guidance and resources, such as food. After ageing out of this program at 24, he moved onto yet another program, with which he has been connected during the past three years.

During this time, Dakota moved in and out of homelessness, searching for stability and employment. At the age of 24, Dakota said he “shattered” his elbow in an accident, leaving him with painful arthritis, which reduced many prospective employment opportunities: “To support myself, it’s mostly labouring [jobs offered] these days, and I can’t lift anything heavy.” Currently, Dakota lives on income assistance, working odd jobs here and there or volunteering when he can.

Although Dakota never completed his secondary school education, he is a capable writer and has even won a grant from a large organization for a youth-led project that he designed. Dakota has a passion for giving back to youths from government care and he believes that his experience wandering the streets has some value. He aims to take the tacit knowledge of resource (i.e., food, services) procurement that he acquired over a decade and turn it into explicit, codified source of knowledge for youths ageing out today. “I like that I know the nooks and crannies of it [Metro Vancouver] now…I like to show people where they need to go.”

14 In BC it is common for individuals to travel and vacation along the region’s Southern Gulf Islands. There are many blogs and social media feeds that glamourize the bohemian-chic lifestyle glamourized in the Pacific Northwest.
Chapter 5.

The Urban Experiences of Youths From Government Care

Yes, I am actually applying for [...] for the civic engagement and facilitation certificate and I want to do policy analysis as well...So I just want to make a change so there is certain policies in place so they don’t have to go through certain things that I went through and that’s just to do with having not proper care when ageing out in regards for mental health and support for my kids and everything, it was just really hard for me. I want to make sure there is certain things in place, especially with mental health (Avery, youth participant)

The in-depth interviews conducted with the participants introduced above covered a broad range of topics. These youths shared with me their future aspirations and provided detailed stories which include oral accounts of the lived experiences of youths transitioning from government care to adulthood in Metro Vancouver. In the section below, I have highlighted key aspects of their reported experiences, breaking these into four areas: housing, mobility, resources, and community. These four areas were selected because the youths identified them as significant issues impacting their urban lives. Furthermore, they provide direct insight into the everyday navigation, improvisation and tactics performed by youths from government care in Metro Vancouver. By examining these young people’s lives holistically and taking into account their struggles to find housing and to build supportive communities, the data discussed in this chapter begins to unfold the nuances of how members of this category of young people experience and shape their urban environment.

5.1. Housing

As described above in the Background and Context section, the housing and rental market in Metro Vancouver has reached a crisis point. For renters contending with rapidly rising prices\(^{15}\) and vacancy rates at less than one percent, the challenges are deemed by some as insurmountable. For the youths interviewed, housing was cited consistently as the most significant challenge faced in Metro Vancouver. Yet, it solicited

\(^{15}\) The median rent for one bedroom unit in a purpose built apartment in Metro Vancouver is $1,165! (Metro Vancouver, 2018)
the fewest responses of the four areas covered in this study. Each youth’s detailed critique of housing focused mainly on how ‘expensive’ the cost of rent is in Metro Vancouver. These three separate comments show the consistency in this critique:

Kelsey: it's so expensive out here.

Sam: rent is ridiculously expensive.

Dakota: I don't like how expensive it is, that's for sure. So expensive.

I anticipated that these youths would vent their frustration about the price of housing; however, I was surprised by the overall lack of discussion around this issue. My prior observations and experience of working at an NGO made clear that this is the most pressing need for youths from government care and I anticipated that these youths would dedicate most of their interview to venting on this topic. However, within the societal context of Metro Vancouver, it was almost as if housing didn't need to be discussed in length, because it was a ‘fact of nature’ discussed already by everyone all the time. Local politicians speak about it as a primary concern, academics from the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University are regularly consulted in local newspapers, and grass-root rants or jokes consistently appear on social media. I surmise that what seems to be ‘policy discussion’ for some, however, is an inescapable fact of life for these youths. Whether these youths followed these detailed policy discussions or not, they assuredly stated what they experienced and rightfully assumed everyone knows: housing is too expensive - what more is there to add? An example of this appeared when, while discussing housing, Taylor mentioned how a social worker of hers had recently moved to a different part of BC because of the cost of housing. Jordan provided a succinct and telling answer when I pressed him more on this issue:

Clete: So, everyone knows [housing is expensive] here, it's like you don't even have to say it.

Jordan: No, God No.

Of the seven youths interviewed, only Taylor and Avery had found accommodations which shielded them from this market. Taylor, after ageing out of care, was able to move in with her 80-year-old grandmother who owns a home in Vancouver. Avery, since moving to Vancouver permanently, has leveraged her indigenous community connections to bounce from one organizational program to another.
Clete: What made you move back to Vancouver specifically?

Avery: Mainly the resources and because I was able to call last Tuesday and... I was able to get a confirmation for a room. Which is very rare, because there is a long waiting list, but I know the manager (laughing).

Clete: Ahh, connections.

Avery: Yeah, I even brought [the staff] cheesecake.

Though Avery is forced to move every few years as the programs she has been enrolled in expire, she has learned to navigate these transitions successfully with her family by being diligent, and seizing opportunities when they present themselves.

Regardless of their current housing situation, immediately after ageing out of care at 19 years of age, the youths interviewed were forced to confront Metro Vancouver’s competitive housing market with little in the way of resources in hand. In each case, the youth interviewed was at a heightened risk of homelessness. Indeed, the Canadian government’s Homelessness Partnering Strategy’s Housing First16 initiative views all youths from government care as chronic or episodically homeless while still in care because their support is temporary (Government of Canada, 2014). Six of the youth in this study had experienced homelessness, and for Sam, Jordan and Dakota, managing episodic homelessness had already become a regular facet of their young adult lives. Speaking on this issue, Sam offered a detailed statement about what it is like to be young and homeless:

Then my mom kicked me out when I was 14 and I ended up becoming homeless. Finding out that there is not a lot of resources or a lot of support out there for youth[s] or for people that are in need. Especially for homeless people, a lot of people have the stigma that homeless people are drug addicts or that they are crazy. And I didn’t get that stigma because I had friends where I could go take my clothing and get it washed and I could quickly wash my hair and wash myself. But if I didn’t know those places, people would probably think I was crazy or addicted to drugs as well. Because homeless people don’t have the resources to clean themselves, they don’t have all that stuff that everyone has and everyone takes for granted in their day to day life... And, yes, there are a lot of drug addict homeless people, but they turn to drugs to numb the pain of being homeless.

16 Currently, there is only one program in the region which offers Housing First to youths transitioning from government care, and internal results show that it is successfully keeping these youths housed, year after year (Aunt Leah’s Place, 2017).
Sam used his friendships with other youths to ensure that even while he was homeless for multiple years, he never appeared to be homeless. The importance of having friends or agencies to lean on during these trying times is essential for these youths’ survival, the alternative being the streets. These connections however are not permanent, Sam must make many on the fly adjustments and improvisations to avoid ‘burning bridges’ and maintain his outward appearance as a youth who is not battling such hardships.

5.1.1. Forced urban sprawl and the challenge of being a youth

Despite having only brief discussions about housing, the impact of these youths housing arrangements were shown to affect their everyday mobilities, significantly hampering their access to community contacts, opportunities, and resources found throughout Metro Vancouver. The most critical challenge these youths encountered in regards to their housing situation involved the locations they were forced to live in, due to the cost of housing and the increased competition these young people face as they attempt to locate themselves closer to the urban core (i.e. Vancouver) or near transit hubs (i.e., SkyTrain stations, and central bus terminals) from which it is easier to access resources, community, and opportunities for employment and education.

In each of these cases, the youth being interviewed feared being pushed further away from the urban core, to the suburbs on the “other side of the river”17 (i.e. Langley, Surrey, Abbotsford, Delta) where public transportation is limited (e.g. fewer or no SkyTrain hubs, fewer bus stops), causing longer commutes and travel times. In brief, being forced to live further away from the urban core is detrimental to these young people’s lives, as Corey describes:

Corey: There are no places on this side [Vancouver], on the other side [Surrey] it's a little cheaper, I noticed that’s going up too though.

Clete: It’s not even that much of a reward.

Corey: Yeah, you’re even further from the core.

17 The Fraser River runs through the middle of the geographic region of Metro Vancouver. On one side sits Vancouver and its surrounding municipalities, while on the other side of the river lies Surrey and the municipalities surrounding it. The Surrey side also known as the Fraser Valley or colloquially by the youths I interviewed as the “other side of the river.”
Clete: Did you need to be by transit and stuff, was that a requirement?

Corey: There is no way I would be able to go grocery shopping because I am kinda’ limited to what I can carry.

For Sam and Jordan, their housing arrangements made connecting to the LGBTQ2S community a laborious affair. Each of them vented their frustration at their financial limitations, which have forced them to live in a neighbourhood where it is difficult to connect and build relationships with individuals they identify with. Openly upset, and with voice raised, Sam stated:

Sam: I live in Surrey. I hate Surrey. I live there because it's the cheapest place I can live and the only place I can live.

Clete: If you were to live somewhere else, where would you live?

Sam: ...I would probably live in Vancouver. I would choose Davie Street\textsuperscript{18}.

In a similar vein, speaking about the LGBTQ2S community in Vancouver, Jordan quipped:

Jordan: I don't really have an opinion on it, since I don't really, I don't do anything out in Vancouver because it takes me three hours to get out here.

Clete: Oh, ok. That's a huge challenge because you have to be on this side of the river.

Jordan: Yeah to access anything, and it's like I can only afford Langley and I can't even afford Langley.

This forced urban sprawl has resulted in frustrated mobilities because these youths must contend daily with a less efficient public transit system, and localization in neighbourhoods these youth do not want to associate with. This immobility, which is described below, has a direct impact on the resources and opportunities available to these young people (van Blerk, 2013). Furthermore, for Jordan and Sam, this sprawl has hampered their ability to express themselves and form their social and urban identities as gay men in Metro Vancouver.

\textsuperscript{18} Davie Street is a one of Metro Vancouver most established LGBTQ neighbourhoods.
Figure 3  Taylor’s Connections & Activity Map
Taylor’s connections and the resources she accesses are all located on the North side of the river, close to the urban core of Vancouver. Moving around and accessing these places are more efficient, compared to other youths, because of this.

Taylor and Dakota were the only two youths who lived in Vancouver, and not surprisingly, they were the only two who did not complain about how their housing arrangements impact their access to resources. Reflecting on her friends who also grew up in government care, Taylor understands the favourable position she is in, stating, “I think that I am really lucky to live in the main city because once you leave Vancouver, the services are more dispersed and they are more rare and hard to find.” In short, because of the location of their housing, transit was less of an issue for both Taylor and Dakota, allowing them to focus on personal goals and other more pressing issues.

Along with the rising cost of housing, the youths interviewed also experienced the compounding effects of the region’s low vacancy rates. Corey, Sam, and Jordan believe
age discrimination was a factor in their struggles with housing. Sam described this saying that:

If you are under the age of 19, no one wants to rent to you. Even if you have a social worker or something like that, they know that you have a stable payment of rent, they still don't want to rent to you and that's sad.

Additionally, these young people described how landlords have been demanding increased documentation from potential tenants, such as a person’s tax returns, or three previous rental references. Reflecting on my own life, there is no way I would have qualified at the age of 19 or 20 for an apartment by meeting the standards described by these youths. I received my first apartment, located in Metro Vancouver, only because my parents cosigned on the place. These young people do not have this option, and as a result get turned away. Landlords can demand such guarantees and documentation, some of which is illegal to ask for, because they know, given the rental climate, that someone will meet their demands. Furthermore, a person desperate for housing does not have the time to take up a legal battle or report an infraction to the BC housing authorities. For these youths, there is not much they can do to fight against this reality, so they have developed tactics to compete in this market. For example, to appear as more mature and responsible, Jordan says that he and his partner tell prospective landlords that they are engaged. He says that “you have to portray that [maturity and stability]” if you want to beat out other potential applicants and that ‘settling down’ is taken as the mark of a responsible person. These youths also employ the tactic of enlisting roommates, to help reduce the monthly rental costs of a home, sometimes even sharing a room to reduce these costs further.

While these youths’ housing needs don’t speak directly to the everyday mobilities and small acts of tacking addressed in this paper, I have included this section because it helps to illustrate their marginalized position of power in relation to society and how this directly impacts where they live. In the following sections, I will show how these youths’ inability to control where they live, due to their socioeconomic status and age, impact their mobility and the tacking they must undertake each day.
5.2. Transportation

Transportation and the methods youths used to move around the region, was the most discussed topic during the interviews because it impacted each youth’s life immensely. Public transportation was a focal topic because it acted as both a necessary tool and a barrier to community, resources, and opportunities around the region. To better understand the challenges surrounding the use of public transit, I will first discuss the implications of having a car and driver’s license, and how the lack of these can place youths in an unfavourable position as they move further away from the urban core and areas of more efficient public transit. Next, I will look into Metro Vancouver’s public transportation system and the challenges it poses, as well as the tactics that these youths have developed to make-do with its limitations. Finally, I will highlight the importance of walking as a free, reliable way to move around cities in Metro Vancouver.

5.2.1. The car and driver’s licence

Like many other citizens in Metro Vancouver, I do not own or rely on a car to move about the region. Living close to a SkyTrain station, I can catch the train to work each day and use the occasional bus when necessary. I have the benefit of living in an area that is densely populated and easily walkable, so there is no need for me to own a car. I do, however, subscribe to Evo, one of Metro Vancouver’s many car-sharing programs. This provides a convenient fallback option if I need to take a trip that would take an hour or more worth of travel by public transit or if my destination lies outside of transit routes (i.e. hiking trails). In short, my usage of a car is directly tied to how far I remove myself from major urban centres within the city. Unsurprisingly, I am not alone in how I select my mode of transportation, as TransLink’s (2013) 2011 Metro Vancouver Regional Trip Diary Survey: Analysis Report shows: individuals who live further away from the Metropolitan Core use cars the most and public transportation and walking the least. Using a car is logical for these citizens as their public transportation trips are shown to be up to 65%-90% longer than those of the average rider.

Avery and Jordan were the only youths interviewed who had obtained their driver’s license, however, both were no longer driving. Avery stopped driving because she could no longer afford her insurance after an accident dramatically raised her monthly premiums. Jordan was forced to stop because he could no longer renew his
license because he had been issued SkyTrain tickets or fines, an issue I will discuss in more detail below. At the time of the interviews, none of the participants used a car as a regular mode of transportation; all of them were dependent on Metro Vancouver’s public transit system to move them around the city and the region. Speaking with staff from an organization dedicated to serving youth from care, I learned this isn’t uncommon, as it is rare for the youths they work with to hold a driver’s license. It is important to recognize that this is not merely a matter of choice. These youths would like to obtain a license, but the precarity of the government care system more often than not prevents them from sharing in this otherwise routine, societal rite of passage. In order to receive a license, these young people need to live with a foster parent who is willing to allow these youths to practice in their car and take them to drivers education classes. This all has to be done in a tight enough time frame, because these young people are regularly moved to different homes. For example, Corey shared with me that when she was 16 she had been enrolled in a drivers education course, but was forced to withdraw because she was relocated to a new home on the other side of the region. Her new foster parents were not comfortable with her driving, because they had just met her, and so she never earned a drivers license. With this experience in mind, Corey indicated that there is a growing desire among her peers to obtain a license19, because new modes of car sharing have opened opportunities for youths from care to drive, by eliminating the steep cost of insurance and car ownership.

Though the youths interviewed could not drive, some of them had devised tactics for gaining access to a car and its benefits. For Avery, transiting from her home in Surrey with her young daughter to events or appointments, for instance, to visit her doctor in Vancouver, is a stressful and time-consuming experience. Knowing that some staff members at the youth-serving organization she attends make regular trips throughout Vancouver, Avery organizes car-pool rides in advance to help her get to these further away destinations. On rainy days, Avery would hang out around the office waiting to seize an opportunity to hitch a ride home with staff who live out in Surrey. Like Avery, Taylor works with her friends to eliminate barriers that prevent her from traveling to places beyond the public transit network.

19 The growing demand for car ownership is reflected in programming offered to disadvantaged youths throughout the region, such as the BC Federation of Youth in Care’s “Take the Wheel” program, which offers bursaries for driver training, applications, and testing fees.
Clete: When you go to Buntzen [Lake] tomorrow how are you getting out there?

Taylor: Oh, my friends driving me.

Clete: Gotcha, so you're leveraging that car connection.

Taylor: Yeah, it's important to have friends with cars, especially 'cause I can't drive.

In the cases examined, an inability to access a car as a mode of transit caused additional hurdles and made life more difficult, especially for those who have been forced further into the suburbs for accommodation. For these youths, the car does not automatically exist as a mode of transportation, and in that light, the logistics for accessing all of Metro Vancouver and its full range of opportunities changes substantially. For youths who are on welfare assistance and dependent on public transportation, their urban life and self-identities become tied to this form of mobility (Thomas & Taylor, 2005; McAuliffe, 2013; Skelton, 2013). Without a car, movement slows, and the carrying out of otherwise routine tasks becomes difficult. These challenges increase the further removed a person is from efficient transportation options. Finally, I want to acknowledge that, as shown by Skelton (2013), the matter of having access to a car is not a "panacea" for these youths’ mobility problems (p. 477). Contextually, the lack of access to a car, much like the location of housing, is necessary to consider because of the decisions and limitations to navigation it forces on these youths. I now turn to these other modes of travel and explore how these youths move around and navigate Metro Vancouver.

5.2.2. Public Transportation

For the youths interviewed, public transit is described as both an opportunity and a barrier. As an opportunity, public transit is an essential resource, which helps foster independence and allows youth to navigate and travel throughout the region, albeit sometimes slowly and within restricted hours. The youths in this study are obliged to live highly mobile lives and must navigate Metro Vancouver to obtain resources (i.e. food, advising), visit health appointments, education, employment, and to sustain social relationships. All of us are mobile to a certain extent in regard to the above points; the difference is these youths are often not able to control the location of these points in relation to their home and transit options. For example, if Dakota wants to grab some
food for his home, he cannot simply walk or train over to the nearest grocery store and buy food, because he does not have the purchasing power to shop there. Instead, Dakota must visit a food bank or youth centre, which is likely to have much more limited hours and to be located sparsely throughout the region. This detoured journey applies to all manner of things for this category of youths, from medical services to specialized education or training. Jordan’s completed Connection & Activity Map (Figure 5) provides an indication of how geographically spread out these youths’ lives can be. Jordan can navigate this entire space through bus connections, SkyTrain, and on his bicycle. Similarly, Dakota, Sam, and Avery’s maps also span the Metro Vancouver region. Generally, the young people interviewed understood the value of the public transit system and praised its extensive connections that enabled them to travel throughout the region. When asked about moving throughout Metro Vancouver, Avery and Jordan both alluded to the density of the region serving as a benefit for navigating:

Avery: No, ’cause it's pretty accessible, it may take a little bit of time to get from place to place if you’re not driving or even if you’re driving. You can get really far, you can get from city to city to city to city.

Jordan: …everything in Metro Vancouver is condensed. I can easily go to one mall and then like say the dollar store if I need to and it’s only like a block down the road.

However, any benefits conferred by the region’s geographically expansive transit system were offset by corresponding inconvenience, high prices and slow travel times. With the sole exception of Taylor, these youths’ dependence on public transportation left them with the perception that this mode of transit was more of a necessary evil than perk to living in the region. There were three issues discussed by the youths, which negatively impacted their views of public transit these were slow travel times, the cost of transit, and accessibility. As a transit user for the past eight years, I have experienced or observed these issues myself, but not to the same degree these youths have. Due to forced sprawl, little to no spare income, and either total or near-total dependency on this system, these youths see a different side of transit than do many other users. In short, every challenge associated with using transit appears amplified for them.
Living in Langley, the resources Jordan accesses are incredibly far from his home, making travel times more difficult and immobilizing him from opportunities.

The most commonly cited challenge experienced by these youths was the inescapably slow speed of transit, they contended with each day (Langevang & Gough, 2009; Jackson, 2012; Skelton, 2013). While some of them acknowledged that travelling along the SkyTrain corridor (i.e. SkyTrain station to SkyTrain station) was quick, the reality is that due to their housing, they must often take one or two buses, with many stops in between before they even reach a Skytrain station. Living in Coquitlam, Kelsey lamented the extensive time it took her to travel to appointments and to visit her family, who live in the neighbouring municipality:

It takes so long with the transit too, even with the SkyTrain it can take an hour, an hour and a half... Usually to get from Coquitlam to Port Coquitlam it's 2-3 buses and it's not even that far, it just totally depends on where you have to go.
For Kelsey, this extended travel time is an inevitable part of living in the Metro Vancouver region. Similarly, Sam feels frustrated by the extent of his everyday travel, but he does not allow his housing circumstances to dictate his actions:

Clete: Do you find the public transit is good here [Metro Vancouver]?

Sam: Ugh, yeah, unless you live in the middle of nowhere, because buses stop at like 9 [p.m.].

Clete: Is that an issue?

Sam: Ugh, yeah! If I get to Surrey Central at like 12 [a.m.] and it's a weekend, say out having some drinks, I have to pick one of two buses that go in polar opposite directions to go home and then walk an hour and a half in the middle of the night, through a field, through a park. If I don't walk through the park, then it's a two-hour walk. Umm, in the middle of the night, in the dark, walking by myself.

Clete: So, is that a limiting thing? Do you like plan not to go out.

Sam: It's terrifying, but no, I don't let that control the fact that I go out late. If I do end up having to go home late, I will like carry hair spray, a lighter and a knife on me.

As a youth with aspirations of becoming a Drag performer, Sam's activities, community relationships, professional aspirations, and focal events occur primarily in the evening. The public transportation system, rather than being perceived as a safe, efficient, affordable mode of transportation, is perceived instead as a challenge and sometimes as a risk to his safety.

For Jordan and Corey, the challenges of using transit are of such a degree that they alter their pursuit and accomplishment of community contacts, family interaction, recreation, and employment opportunities:

Clete: Do you find that the LGBTQ community is pretty strong or what is your feelings on that?

Jordan: ...Like I want to go hang out at more parties, I want to meet new people, I want to do a lot of stuff. I just can't because I live all the way out in Langley.

Corey, while benefitting from living near a SkyTrain station in one of the region’s urban transportation hubs, is hampered by the limitations of transit in another way. As an
outdoor enthusiast, Corey’s dependency on transit denies her opportunities to engage in affordable recreational activities.

Clete: Do you find there are any barriers that would prevent you from doing other things?

Corey: It’s definitely transit accessibility, it’s hard to go camping or do all of these other things when you don’t have a car and there’s just not going to be a bus taking you.

Furthermore, this dependence has resulted in missed opportunities to connect with the only family members she has left. While reviewing her Connections & Activity Map, Corey lamented this fact, adding it to her list of the challenges that dependent transit users are forced to confront.

Clete: Do you find while doing this activity [i.e., seeing family] that you notice anything about the way you interact within Metro Vancouver?

Corey: It’s definitely all transit oriented.

Clete: Right, so that has huge implications on where you go and what other opportunities you look at.

Corey: I’ve got a cousin who lives in Abbotsford, she ended up going there because she got put into care and I think the foster family moved and I haven’t seen her since we’ve been like three and five and I know she is literally two hours away, and that’s what really sucks about it.

For nearly each of these youths, the long travel times weren’t just a daily commuting issue either (i.e., going to school or work and back). I discovered that these young people live precarious, highly mobile lives, which require lengthier trips, to accomplish less. Since each of the youths I interviewed is unemployed and living on income assistance, their monthly budgets are constrained to the point that they spend their days travelling great distances for necessities, like food, or appointments, such as mental health counselling. Furthermore, these youths regularly attend youth centres to search for employment, use the internet and develop life skills to improve their quality of life. Finally, on top of all of this, they also must manage their income assistance, which is not a passive process, but requires a host of other trips and requirements, such as active job searching. In short, the travel habits described by these youths appear unlikely to facilitate social advancement. These travel activities were corroborated in general terms by the staff from one youth-serving NGO I spoke with, who said that it is common
for the youths they work with to run around the region all day for various tasks. These young people, especially those who live on the fringes of Metro Vancouver, spend much of their days transiting. They are trapped in their mobility, which, ironically, entails a state of immobility and fixedness of form in their lives. Their ability to develop new relationships and move beyond their current social state is fixed, hampered by external factors that force tedious and time-consuming forms of quotidian movement upon them (Langevang & Gough, 2009; Jackson, 2012; Skelton, 2013; van Blerk, 2013). I surmise that the time these youths spend transiting in order to meet basic needs is comparable to holding a part-time job, which is one reason why these young people have a hard time maintaining employment.

In addition to the amount of time spent getting around the Metro Vancouver region, there is also the matter of the cost involved in riding transit each day. Although this cost is substantially less than necessitated by car ownership, it is, nonetheless, a significant challenge for youths with limited resources (Porter et al., 2010; McAuliffe, 2013; Skelton, 2013). At the organization I worked for, the staff would give out more than 1,500 fare passes (a.k.a. bus tickets) to youth clients each year. Fare passes, as espoused by Corey, are a lifeline for these young people.

Corey: Umm, I mean like I suppose I am self-sufficient. I definitely need help with the bus tickets, I usually rely on [youth-serving organization] or other programs. It just gets really expensive.

Clete: Especially after they increased their fares recently.

Corey: Again with it, and it’s like a three-year process now. Starting I think it was September and for three more years every September after. Everybody, buy a bike! (said in a sarcastic voice)

As necessary as it is for these youths to travel around the region, their budgets never stretched far enough to pay for daily transit use. For many of the youths, even the least expensive monthly fare pass, or Compass Card as it is called in Metro Vancouver, was out of reach. When it comes down to housing or food and transit, the first or second always takes precedence over the third. As a result, the youths interviewed would ride illegally when that option presented itself or when it was deemed necessary to get to their destination.
During the Summer of 2015, TransLink introduced an electronic gating system on the SkyTrain to crack down on fare evasions and increase its revenues. The previously open entry system was monitored by TransLink staff and police who would perform random fare checks at stations or while on trains. Under the old system, it was relatively simple to hop on a train illegally, provided that no one was stopping you from doing so. However, the new system brought with it a need to improvise and devise new tactics to avoid paying and continue riding for free. Take for example the series of elaborate tactics used by Sam to avoid paying transit fares:

Clete: So, is the cost for bus tickets a big challenge?

Sam: A lot of youth[s] hop trains and buses.

Clete: I thought that would still happen even after they put the gates in. The gates don't really stop anything?

Sam: No, you just follow the person in front of you. You wait for a giant crowd so it looks less suspicious, grab your phone, tap your phone on the thing right behind someone else. You walk in and then when you're getting off, you go down the emergency exit - don't have to tap out, don't have to worry about the possibility of cops asking for tickets either.

Clete: Do you carry around a bus pass just in case?

Sam: No, I get bus tickets from here [youth-serving organization]. But when I don't have any bus tickets I just hop the train and, like, ask the bus driver in my most feminine voice possible, because [as he speaks in a feminine voice] my feminine voice makes me seem a little younger, umm and it also makes me sound, like, a lot nicer, so they tend to let me on. "Excuse me sir, could I possibly get a ride?" They're like "Oh you don't have fare?" and I will say, "no I don't have my wallet on me".

Clete: So, they [bus drivers] don't want to stop you, it's just this larger body [TransLink], cracks down and forces you to pay?

Sam: Yeah, bus drivers are usually really nice about it. Sometimes you get the dick one that's like, you know, if you get caught that's your fine. "yeah, yeah". But most of the bus drivers are really cool with it.

Sam’s fare evasion tactics involve timing, deception, mapping techniques, and artistry. Sam is not the only one doing this; both Dakota and Jordan alluded to similar tactics of hopping onto trains. Buses were described by the youths as the trickiest mode of transit to use without paying, but even this mode had its 'workarounds.' The young people
described how, if it is necessary for them to ride a bus to their destination, they will navigate to major, crowded, transit lines, which for efficiency reasons, have relaxed security as all bus doors on articulated buses open at the same time. On these buses, people are allowed to board en masse with no way of detecting who has paid or not. If timed right, the chaos of boarding provides an opportunity for a free ride. This instance of tacking, however, has its downside, because these youths trade off a more efficient ride that puts them closer to their destination, for a free ride, that drops them off further away. As a result of choosing this option, these youths have to walk the final leg of their journey to reach their destination, which compounds the travel times mentioned above.

Fare evasion, although sometimes deemed necessary for surviving in this urban environment, is not a desirable action. These youths are not rebellious, and they do not appear to enjoy cheating ‘the system.’ The act itself is stressful, and the stakes are high. Getting caught not having paid the fare on transit may be seen by some as a petty offence, but for these youths, it can be a long-term barrier. In BC, a transit ticket for fare evasion brings with it a $173 fine (TransLink, 2018), which equates to approximately one-fourth of a youth’s monthly income assistance cheque. To be able to pay this debt off is an immense task for these youths, which would require months of effort. These tickets don’t simply go away, as additional fines are added over time if the ticket remains unpaid. Additionally, the ticket payment may be pursued by collection agencies and more importantly, can prevent an individual from acquiring or renewing their driver’s license. The degree of punishment meted out to fare evasion was viewed unanimously, by the youths asked, as overbearing and absurd. Three of the youths had nearly identical conversations about this issue. Taylor stated:

Taylor:  The government just kinda hates poor people.

Clete:  Can you give me an example of that?

Taylor:  So, like take Transit fines. I have $1,000 in transit fines because a couple of times I didn't have enough money to pay the $2.75 to get on the bus. And so, I got a transit ticket and it's like, if I can't afford the $2.75, what makes you think I can afford the $175 for that transit ticket [emphasis added]. They can make it go to collections now which affects your credit. Umm, you can't get your driver’s license and that sets up a different barrier because having your driver’s license is really important to getting a job.

Dakota added:
Dakota: I have gotten SkyTrain tickets before, I have been caught without having fare. It's still in my history, I am not paying the ticket, I can't. I was homeless at the time. It makes no moral sense for me to pay it now, even if I do have money. And it stacks up, I have like 5 or 6 tickets now that I've gotten over the years.

Clete: It just accumulated eh, one one year, one the other?

Dakota: Yeah, exactly

And finally, Jordan stated:

Clete: Have you gotten any transit tickets?

Jordan: Umm, several times. I still got tickets under my name, why do you think I don't drive?

Clete: Right. I heard that's a huge issue.

Jordan: If I can't afford this [transit fare], then what makes you think I can afford this [transit tickets].

Jordan added later that there are options for getting fines reduced or removed, such as contesting it in court or through a local program which helps pay off tickets for youths from government care. Knowledge about or access to these opportunities seems limited, as only Jordan had taken advantage of them, and he still had to pay down hundreds of dollars in debt.

The final issue experienced by the youths was that of accessibility. For the mothers interviewed, transiting with a stroller on the bus was an annoying, potentially time-consuming part of their day. Both mothers told stories about buses in Metro Vancouver, which can only take one stroller at a time, passing them and forcing them to wait for the next bus, which could take anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour. Once again, this issue relates to the location of their housing, which forces these mothers to live in the suburbs and away from major transit hubs, thus increasing their usage of multiple smaller buses, which could trigger a combination of factors that result in an hour-long delay.

While riding transit with an infant and a stroller is a common enough experience in this city, an issue that is more specific to this population is the rejection or criticism experienced by the youths from bus drivers when they do not have the funds required to purchase a bus ticket. As described above, sneaking onto a bus is much trickier than a
SkyTrain. Dakota describes his negative experiences attempting to ride on the bus for free, saying that:

...sometimes you would get a nice bus driver who would let you get on for little to no money. And sometimes they will shame you, "no, get off my bus!" I have bad memories of that. Even if I was desperate or I didn't know where the hell I was, 'cause I needed to walk or get somewhere, this is when I was homeless, around the age 20-22 kinda thing.

Getting berated publicly and called out for being poor is a traumatic experience, especially for a young person who is 'desperate' for a ride. These moments also negatively shape these youths' identities by reminding them that they are poor, in an inferior position of power, and that authoritative structures may treat them as a burden, not a human (Thomas & Taylor, 2005; Skelton, 2013). Lacking the cash needed to legally access buses can create stressful experiences for these youths. The prospect of being yelled at or potentially missing a meeting because they were not allowed on the bus is enough to cause many of the youths to take alternative modes of transit, such as bicycling for lengthy distances. Jordan admits that when he does not have the cash for transit, he will bike over 40 kilometres (one way!) from Langley to Vancouver to attend school or a youth hub. The other alternative form of transportation used extensively by the youths interviewed is walking, which I will discuss next.

5.2.3. Walking

Walking is one of the primary modes of transportation engaged in by youths from care. As explained by both Sam and Jordan, who live in places with less frequent public transportation, a 30 to 40-minute walk from a bus stop to get home is a regular part of their daily commute. There is no feasible alternative available to them because to afford rent these young people needed to move deep into the suburban fringes of Metro Vancouver. Their locations, however, come with reduced access to public transportation. Corey’s views on walking help to illustrate the rationality behind these sorts of daily commutes. To begin her day, Corey has only a 15-minute walk to the SkyTrain station, after which she feels she can travel anywhere along the SkyTrain corridor:

I can walk to most places, I may not like walking to [...] but it’s only a 20-30 minute walk from Commercial. The beach is at most 40min from any Skytrain really. I can walk there from Yaletown or Granville, anywhere basically.
Corey’s walk not only highlights the importance of accessible public transportation for youths from government care, but also shows the necessity of locating youth social service agencies close to public transportation. As described above, since there are no guarantees that youths can sneak on to a bus or SkyTrain without paying the fare, walking is the only mode of movement they have control over.

For Corey, Avery, Kelsey, Taylor and Jordan, walking is more than just a form of transportation: it is a form of recreation as well.

Clete: Is there anything you do for fun in Metro Vancouver?
Kelsey: My biggest thing is that I like to go hiking.
Clete: Well you're in a good region.
Kelsey: I haven't gone too much, with the weather and stuff. But I've gone to [...] Park, it's by my house. There is another place, I don't remember what it's called though, but I have to find somewhere that is stroller friendly and so...

Due to limited disposable income, these youths, like their parented peers and many citizens in Metro Vancouver, seek out free activities such as hiking, going to the beach, or just walking around the city with friends. In several interviews, participants cited the beauty of the Metro Vancouver as one of their favourite things about this region. This mode of mobility shapes their identity, providing knowledge of the street (Cahill, 2000) as well as a form of leisure with which to connect with friends and relax.

In summary, the ability to move around the region or even the city they reside in is a significant challenge for the youths interviewed, and especially those living in distant suburban neighbourhoods. Combining low incomes with a dependency on public transportation makes each trip, whether it be to the grocery store, the youth centre, or to meet with friends, a challenge. Like the difficulties involved in acquiring housing, the inadequate and demanding mobility options upon which they rely have compounding effects on their lives. Having difficulty moving around and navigating across the urban region makes holding jobs, completing schooling, or fostering personal development hard to accomplish.
5.3. Resources

In every case examined, the young person interviewed expressed reliance on the supports found at youth-serving NGOs to help them get by each day and to open up opportunities for personal growth. The services offered by these organizations include education, employment, life skills training, and health services, as well as providing basic provisions, such as washrooms, food, and condoms. The youths all spoke highly of these organizations, telling stories of how they would be homeless or lost without them, and describing them as “magical” and “amazing.” Speaking with excitement, Jordan attempts to capture the extent of services offered by these organizations to youths from government care:

They’re great, they have helped me with getting my identification. They’ve helped me find housing, they’ve helped me get a job... umm, which I didn’t keep but that is another topic. They helped me with food if I really need it. They’ve helped me with my bills. They are an amazing resource.

The youth-serving NGO’s these young people frequent can be viewed as special ‘home-like’ spaces of belonging, where they can let their guard down and develop their social identities (Ahmet, 2013). These are safe and inclusive spaces, which were duly dotted along each participant’s Connections & Activity Map. When navigating the city, these are checkpoints the youths can stop into before continuing their journeys.

The youths interviewed did, however, express reservations about some of the specific services offered at these NGOs, such as employment programs. These programs provide youths with many workplace certificates designed to give them a leg up or help them to qualify them for a variety of labour positions (e.g., First Aid, World Host) and also assist these young people to make connections with employers. In the cases examined, rarely did these certificates or connections land them a steady job. The reason for this is due in part to the fact that the employment opportunities presented to these youths are located in close proximity to the youth organizations themselves. These employers are chosen because it is easier for staff to make connections and manage

\[20\text{ Some of the young people who approach these youth focused NGOs come into the organization without any form of personal identification, not even a birth certificate, making aspects of their lives, like applications for medical insurance, or getting a driver’s license difficult, if not impossible. These staff at these organization will work with youth to hunt down the requisite information to receive identification.}\]
relations near their place of work, and they 'know' that the youths they support can make it out to this location. However, as discussed above, because these youths can live nearly an hour away from these organizations, these jobs are found to be too out of reach to sustain. Furthermore, the employment skill and workplace training programs offered are not capable of providing the mandatory job qualifications that employers may demand, such as a secondary school diploma or driver's license. Taylor speaks to this overall frustration with employment programs, saying:

Yeah, I would go to [youth-serving organization] because they have an employment worker, but I haven't like found him to be super helpful because they try and put you into like Skills Jobs programs. But like I already have done like a couple, and they weren't really helpful, like you get all of these certificates, but none of those certificates mean anything if you don't have the experience or someone to like back you up.

In several cases, the youths discussed how the lack of a driver's license has prevented them from securing a job. For example, Corey, when interviewing for an administrative assistant job, was informed after the interview that despite her qualifications, she would not be moving on to the second round of interviews because she did not have a license. Ironically, Corey strategically chose to pursue this employment opportunity because they "advertised that they were super close to transit."

Educational guidance was also offered in earnest by these youth-serving organizations, but the impact of it on these young people was mixed. While in every case the youths aspired to pursue their postsecondary education, only two individuals, Avery and Kelsey, had come up with a plan to do so. Both Jordan and Taylor were upgrading some of their secondary school grades in order to be admitted into a postsecondary institution in the future, though neither of them had a plan for how to accomplish that. Similar to the latter two, Sam, having already completed his secondary school education, illustrated the anxiety that ensues from the prospect of having to navigate the postsecondary education process, including admissions, enrollment, financial costs for tuition, and passing classes, with little support:

I wanted to go to college. I was scared of going to college because I was, like I'm not going to make it. Also, the fear of how am I going to get college funding? How am I going to be able to pay my rent while going to college? Am I going to have to choose between rent, college and food? Because I already have to choose between rent, food, phone, bus fare. And I am ok with leaving my phone and bus fare, but food?
Recently, the BC Provincial government issued a tuition waiver to youths from care to enable their enrollment in all universities and colleges, reducing part of the financial hurdle (Government of B.C., 2018). However, as Sam indicates, there is a fear of failure and the necessity of a juggling act that must be performed while attending school with little in the way of support. Government programs, such as the Adult Youth Agreement (AYA) program, can help with the cost of schooling, but they are not a free ride. AYA offers funding for housing and basic needs while youth are attending an education or training program. This funding gives youths from government care a financial path to obtain higher forms of education. The program was expanded in 2017 to help youths up to the age of 26, giving program users more time to complete their postsecondary education and determine which field of study they would like to pursue. However, in several cases, these youths described how their lives become more financially precarious when using this service. When receiving support from AYA, the youths can no longer collect their income assistance, which from a policy standpoint is logical as one form of government funding is replacing another. However, these youths can only receive a cheque if enrolled in eligible training activities. So, what happens if there is a setback or they take a break for personal reasons, such as attending to mental health issues? As Dakota discovered, there is little room for error or maneuver on the part of recipients in this government program.

Dakota: I was put on an AYA at 19 because I had dropped out of high school and I was taking a course again. At 20, school was stagnant and they cut me off right away, I was living in an apartment near Metrotown at the time.

Clete: So, because you were in school you could access that AYA funding.

Dakota: That's right.

Clete: And as soon as you were just like hey, I need to take a break and work on some stuff they...

Dakota: Yeah, I don't even know what happened, but something had fallen through. I think I had failed a test and didn't go back or something, whatever it was and that was it, I was cut right off.

Clete: That was it, you took one break from school.

Dakota: That was it and I couldn't get back on Income Assistance fast enough to save the apartment and so I was literally homeless after that.
This program’s response to setbacks highlights the underlying problem facing youths transitioning from government care as being that there is no certainty of a safety net if a person fails. For many parented youths, this setback likely wouldn’t necessarily have changed their quality of life. They would still have shelter, food, and family. In contrast, Dakota wound up homeless and alone.

Along with giving up income assistance, which for each youth was their only guaranteed support at the time, the youths must also play by a new set of rules while on AYA, such as accounting for all of their spending. Jordan, who is no longer using AYA, dropped out of the program because it was too much extra work to manage. While on AYA, he needed to periodically visit an official Ministry of Children and Family Development office monthly to prove he was still attending school. During these visits, Jordan also needed to submit all his eligible receipts, from books to small coffees. If a receipt was missing, that amount could be deducted from his next month’s allotment, which once happened, costing him $400 the next month. This program demands as much or more personal accounting work than many professional jobs require. Furthermore, the housing portion of the grant is only $600 per month, which has forced Jordan to live over an hour away from his academic institution to obtain affordable accommodation, thus leading to the other problems described in the previous sections. In brief, like many of the employment opportunities offered to youths, the academic programs and supports extended to them are well-intentioned, but ultimately may have mixed results due to the administratively unanticipated consequences of program provisions that contribute to the daily challenges faced by these youths.

When speaking about these youth-serving NGOs, these young people also described how similar and different each of these organizations are to one another. While many of these organizations offer a full range of services and resources, from life skills training to housing supports to education guidance, each youth organization will offer unique programs (e.g., housing subsidies for mothers pursuing their education), based on their specific mandates and focus (e.g., homelessness prevention). In light of this, the youths tended not to depend solely on a single organization to meet their needs. Rather, they would shop around and visit organizations for different reasons, or for a
second opinion, or because they ‘aged out’ of another organization’s services\textsuperscript{21}. For example, during the past few years Avery has hopped from one organization to another to qualify for subsidized housing for her family. In a desperate attempt to find employment, particularly a job outside of the food industry, Corey has attended five employment training programs at different locations throughout the region. She eventually found her ideal job at a non-profit organization, but it was cut short before the end of her probation period due to limited funding. Dakota prefers some organizations because they have better access to hot meals and food that can be taken home.

Taken as a whole, these programs are viewed by the youths as a necessary resource to help them succeed, no matter their level of independence. Even if some of these programs have age limits or restricted opportunities, like employment referrals, which are difficult to take advantage of, they are still better than the alternative of going it alone with no extra support. Oddly, despite the respect and appreciation these youths show to these programs, many individuals who are transitioning from care do not access them. At the organization I worked for, which was one of the larger dedicated youth-serving organizations in the region, we worked with only approximately 200 of the 6,000 plus youths with government care experience in the region. Considering the housing and mobility challenges described above, I wondered what else might be holding youths back from accessing support. The youths whom I interviewed alluded to two other discreet issues, which prevent more of their peers from utilizing these services, namely location and communication.

5.3.1. Location

Location is one of the deciding factors that shape whether youths access resources designed for their use. First, as has been discussed in the transportation section, the further away these youths reside from these resources, which are located predominantly in Vancouver, the more difficult they are to access. What I found was that

\textsuperscript{21} Many youth-based social services will have a defined cut off date based on age. Most programs will cut off a youth at the age of 24, but like AYA, which increased its funding from 24 to 26 years of age, these cut-off ages are being increased due to the demands placed on youths in Metro Vancouver.
these youths remain willing to travel to the resources deemed necessary to their lives, albeit less frequently than they would prefer.

A greater deterrent than distance to accessing these resources was not necessarily the general location of each of these organizations, but rather where they are located. If an organization was near a SkyTrain station or along a major bus route, this was deemed as highly beneficial to the youths interviewed. However, if that service was situated down a back alley or was coupled with adult services, this proved to be a major turnoff for the youths. Dakota, who takes pride in knowing the range of available youth resources throughout the city, described these feelings from a young person’s perspective:

Clete: Is there a difference between adult services and youth services?

Dakota: Yeah.

Clete: Is it just kind of like a feel thing?

Dakota: Well the adult one, there’s going to be people from generations past yours, right, and a lot of them have a lot more issues than you do, right. And in some ways, they’ve been around a lot longer than you, right. So, when you go to those places with all of those types of people it’s a lot more rough, but when you go to youth service places, not always, but it’s usually just full of youth[s] and people who are a lot calmer, who don’t have as many issues or not yet anyways. You feel a lot more comfortable there than [at] the adult ones, that’s for sure.

Clete: That’s why you want to develop this youth-based map.

Dakota: Yeah, I don’t want to send them to the Downtown East Side if I don’t have to. There are other places out there that they don’t have to feel unsafe or uncomfortable.

As Dakota explains, youths from government care need support to get by during this transition, just like their parented peers. Moreover, like their parented peers, just because these young people need help at this moment, does not mean that they are down and out or have hit ‘rock bottom.’ Sam, elaborated on this point, which is worth quoting in full.

Sam: Make them [youth resources and services] more visible and get them away from the creepy sketchy areas... ’cause these are youth!

Clete: Right, and these are all the youth-based places, right?
Sam: Yeah, where youth go to get tested, where youth go to feel safe. And they're right next to recovery homes and where people get their clean needles, so they can reuse. You will see people shooting up in the alleyway like right in front of the building or people smoking a crack pipe like right in front of the building.

Clete: And you're thinking, "I'm going in there?"

Sam: Yeah! You're like, umm, am I in the right area? You will ask one of the crackheads, you will be like, "Youth clinic?" "Oh yeah, right down there" [said with a toothless voice and laughing].

Clete: So that is daunting.

Sam: Yeah, Yeah!

As Sam describes, it is scary, intimidating, and demeaning for youths to be served in the same locations and potentially cast in the same light as homeless adults, who may be suffering from addictions and severe mental health issues. Unlike the safe 'home-like' space provided by the youth centres, navigating these spaces negatively impacts the formation of their identities (Thomas & Taylor, 2005; Skelton, 2013). Even if the young people themselves are homeless or suffering from similar afflictions, the youths interviewed do not see themselves as ‘homeless.’ There is still immense hope for, as Kelsey wishfully puts it, “that normal boring life.” However, by moving through these spaces, marginalized youths are being told that this is their future, that the drug addict and the young person with no parental support are one in the same. This is a dramatic characterization, but it brings to light the idea that the movement of a young person through these adult service centres changes how we view this space in Metro Vancouver (Amit and Knowles, 2017). Objectively it is a valuable resource to treat people with addictions and mental health problems, but viewed in the context of a young person it is a place of fear and hopelessness. For this reason, the young people who have experienced this negative space will warn their friends and avoid it when possible.

5.3.2. Communication

While the above challenges hamper the ability of youths to access resources which could otherwise benefit them, perhaps the most significant barrier for these youths is just knowing where these places are. Part of the challenge of ageing out with little to no support to fall back on is that not only do these youths lack the resources to support
themselves, but often no one informs them where to go to receive guidance, food, health supports, or education. Furthermore, these resources are typically not housed in easily identifiable locations, because they are housed where rent is cheapest, such as tucked into the third floor of an office building, or down an alley. Again, I will quote Sam, who gives a detailed description of this issue.

Sam: There is also a lot of resources around these areas [SkyTrain Stations and major bus routes], but they are all like hidden.

Clete: Can you describe that more?

Sam: So, like Surrey Central for example, there is the Aboriginal Youth Care office there. There is a youth clinic there, there is a mental health clinic there, there is a lot of like health resources in places there, but they are all like in the back of buildings or hidden in dark creepy pathways that you have to go through. In New West there is the youth clinic there, that's right next to the recovery home.

For youths from government care, it does not matter what resource or program an organization offers, if an individual cannot locate it, it will not be of help to them. When I asked Sam how he found these hidden locations, he described how youths lean on each other to find help.

Clete: So, these places, are they well marked? How do you find these for the first time?

Sam: By other people telling you where to go.

Clete: So, you're just standing around the Skytrain and they're like ok so you can go here...

Sam: So, you talk to one of your friends and say like, I have to go get checked out sometime soon. And they will be like "oh you can do that right over here." And you will be like "where?". And they will be like "oh yeah, it's just around the corner, down the street, take a left, if you see two glass doors it's the second glass door, go down the stairs."

Clete: There is no formal map, it's just communication.

Sam: Between the youth[s].

Clete: And if you hadn't been told this information?

Sam: I would have never known where any of these are. Like not at all.
Clete: So, it’s super important that you spread information.

Sam: Yeah.

Youths vetting out places and sharing their experiences with their peers is an essential tactic for spreading knowledge of resources throughout the city. This tactic of building social connectedness gives youths access to knowledge of urban spaces to improvise and seize opportunities as they navigate their environment each day. Like Sam, Corey, Jordan, and Dakota all shared similar stories about how they found new resource possibilities through their friends.

The youths also mentioned the Internet as a potential tool for finding and navigating to resources spread throughout the city. However, the young people rarely used the Internet as a tool to help navigate the city because of three hurdles. First, these youths depend on free WIFI to access the Internet, because none of them can afford a phone plan with ‘data,’ only talk and text. Despite having little to no disposable income, each of the young people interviewed owned a cellphone or tablet, which had the capability of browsing the Internet and using apps (i.e. Google Maps). Without free WIFI, these youths cannot search the Internet for programs or network with their friends remotely to learn of these opportunities (Leyshon, DiGiovanna, & Holcomb, 2013). Second, even when these youths do have access to WIFI or an address on hand, the ‘hiddenness’ of these places, as described by Sam, makes them still challenging to find, even online. Third, the ability to search for services or resources is a time-consuming and challenging task. While searching for things online has become ubiquitous in society today, not all search queries are easy to conjure up. For example, looking for free meals or housing subsidies for youths with government experience pursuing an education. What makes these searches tricky, is that the youths conducting the search may not even be aware of the full range of resources available to them, such as free mental health counselling, and recreational activities. Furthermore, Internet searches lack the trust that a friend or mentor who has vetted the place out can provide, which can lead to stressful situations, such as having to perform a prayer or listen to a sermon before receiving resources from a religious organization – what Dakota calls "singing for your supper." In short, there is no question that the Internet is an immensely powerful tool, in this situation, however, speaking with trusted sources remains the most effective and relied upon method to learn about and navigate the resources available to them throughout the region.
5.4. Community

The final issue I wanted to examine while speaking with these youths was about their community of support, or those with whom they connect and interact after ageing out of care. The Metro Vancouver region is a diverse, globally inflected area, which allows ample opportunities for its citizens to grow and connect with new groups and experiences. What I wanted to know was what communities these youths were connecting with now that they are removed from the government care system? Are they reinventing themselves or carrying on along the same path? And, where and how are they going to make new connections or reconnect with old ones? While each youth’s connections reflected their individually varied hobbies, cultures, and established connections, I identified three distinctive aspects of what they individually saw as making up their respective communities that are worth further consideration.

First, I learned that developing new relationships beyond the realm of the youth in government care community can be incredibly difficult. This stems first from their tumultuous upbringing, where the relationships experienced by these youths while in government care were often precarious and unsustainable. At the organization I worked for, staff indicated that internal data showed that the youths they serve moved an average nine times before their 19th birthday. This lack of permanency impacts their ability to trust and shapes their future relationships outside of care. Speaking of these trust issues, Corey described the apathy towards new relationships that comes from growing up in this system.

Corey: I find like, obviously as a former youth in care at a youth in care kinda hub you’re going to find people who really have trust issues and they have hard times letting people become their friends or just talking to people. Umm, sometimes especially with youth[s] you will also find that it’s not worth their time.

Clete: Why is that?

Corey: I mean like, going back to that whole like you’ve got trust issues, you don’t want to take the time to open up to this person, just to find out that it really wasn’t worth your time… Like when I was a kid going through five different elementary schools, I came to a lot of different realizations. One of them being when I went to a different school, I could almost pick out the same types of kids in all of the schools. Like the one girl with too much time on her hands, or that one that wanted to be accepted but they were really mean about it. It was almost
like they were fitting a mould, 'cause I went to so many. I got to a point when I just stopped trying to make friends and whoever stuck around is who I kept.

Due to this lack of trust, the youths interviewed tend to turn to the only people whom they believe genuinely understand their situation, peers who grew up in government care themselves. Furthermore, the highly particular challenges and experiences these youths encounter each day makes their lives unrelatable and less compatible for relationships with their parented peers. While the young people interviewed are struggling to maintain housing and must spend their days travelling around the region to access resources like food, their peers at this age are attending university or building careers and taking part in activities that are financially available to them (e.g. eating out, going to the movies or concerts, going on vacations). Speaking with Taylor, I learned how this process unfolds for youths in care.

Clete: Do you find it's easy to meet people in this City?

Taylor: It like depends, it is really easy to meet people in like the youth in care community. But like the minute you leave the youth in care community and those who have worked with youth in care, then it is like difficult. I would say that like 85% of my friends all have like government care experience.

Clete: And why is that? Is it because you are accessing [youth social service organizations]?

Taylor: I don't know, I guess there is just like a shift of like after high school when I was in high school I was like the only foster kid in the whole entire like high school, 'cause I went to a really wealthy school. Umm, but then after that, all my friends became like youth in care, 'cause I guess I am really tapped into the youth in care community because I started doing [youth advocacy]. Yeah, it's just like weird. I don't know, it's difficult to find friends who aren't foster kids.

Clete: Right OK. Do you think that common experience creates that, because you can each understand each other?

Taylor: Yeah, it's hard to relate to people who don't have like, like it's really weird to relate to those who don't have foster care experience. All though I am fine with it, it's just like, for example, I went to my friend’s house last week and their parents were fighting and it should have been like, and they were in the middle of an argument and my friend was like, "oh excuse my parents for fighting' and I was just like "ha this isn't anything like, I grew up in foster care this is nothing."
As in Taylor’s case, each of the other youths I spoke with presented a similar story about building community and connecting to new friends while attending a youth organization. As described above, connecting with other youth in government care is seen as an invaluable tool for discovering the region and learning how to access youth-serving resources. The other side of this, however, is that these youths are missing opportunities to develop relationships and weak-tie connections, which could lead them to opportunities for employment. When these youths and their friends are unemployed, it is exceedingly difficult to find employment opportunities or get a proverbial ‘foot in the door’ at a company.

Their lack of external relationships became even more apparent after I spoke to these youths about individuals whom they would consider to be mentors in their lives. In each case, the youths identified one of the staff members from an organization they were now or previously had been participants in as key mentors in their life.

Clete: So, do you have any mentors in your life or significant individuals who encourage you or you look up to?

Jordan: Uhh, [name] from [youth-serving organization]. Spot on woman, she's more like a mother to me than my own parents were... She’s been like an amazing help for me in general.

This speaks to both the respect these youths seem to have for the staff at these organizations as well as how limited their social connections are. Often these staff members are some of the very few, if not the only, adults who have shown genuine interest and concern for these young people.

A second thing I learned from these youths is that a shared identity or culture may be the easiest way to connect with new groups and meet new individuals. Only three of the youths interviewed described having communities of which they were members beyond the one made up of their peers in government care. Each of these three mentioned communities directly related to their sexual identity or Indigenous heritage. For both Sam and Jordan, who are gay, the LGBTQ2S community has provided opportunities to connect, meet new friends and find support outside of the government care system. Sam has a passion for drag and public advocacy for youths in the LGBTG2S community. His engagement gives him purpose and platform from which to share his experience. Jordan has capitalized upon an opportunity to upgrade his
secondary school education through a unique LGBTQ2S friendly course offered at a local postsecondary institution.

Similar to Sam and Jordan, Avery has also benefited from established communities outside of the government care system, thanks to her cultural heritage as an Indigenous woman. Though Avery’s specific heritage is from a tribe located in Alberta, she feels deeply connected to the Indigenous culture in Metro Vancouver and considers this her favourite thing about the region. Avery’s cultural ties have helped provide housing support to her family, and she also gained employment through these community connections doing advocacy work and outreach. In short, although these connections to external communities are not a guaranteed source of success, they do offer these youths new relationships, which can create links, open opportunities and help them achieve independence beyond the government care system.

Jordan was the only individual who discussed having a community of strong relationships outside of those identified above. For Jordan, the anime community, as discussed in his profile (Chapter 4.6), has provided relationships that he considers “family” like. This community, which he discovered as a teenager, has allowed him to define himself on his terms. The individuals in the anime community appreciate Jordan for his volunteer work and they do not evaluate him in terms of his past. It is through these various friendships, communities, and cultural ties that these youths from government care begin to form their own families as they transition to adulthood. Many of the participants interviewed also had traditional family members living in Metro Vancouver, and while Kelsey and Taylor, continued to rebuild connections with their parents, many other youths, like Corey, remained hopeful that they would reconnect with relatives in the future.

It should be recognized as well that a ‘family’ can take a variety of shapes and forms, the members of which don’t even need to be human. As described by staff from these youth-serving organizations, there are many youths from government care, such as Dakota and Jordan, who rely upon pets and ‘therapy’ animals to help them cope with the trauma of their childhoods. Even if it means limiting their current housing options and straining their already tight monthly budgets, these youths will opt to have the pet as a form of comfort and family. For Jordan, who owns upwards of eight animals at a time, including cats, dogs, snails and snakes, he says that youths from government care
adopt these animals because, “we know what it's like to be not wanted by someone. We can relate to them.”

Finally, these youths highlighted the importance of public space and socially vibrant urban design which can stimulate networking and community building. The young people interviewed regularly used public spaces, like SkyTrain stations and central bus terminals, to connect with and meet new friends. They described these public urban places as hangout spaces, and while many of their parented peers use these spaces for similar functions, like the youth centres described above, these public transportation stations were described as sites of belonging and considered 'home-like' for young people from government care (Ahmet, 2013). The formation of youth communities in these public spaces is organic and spontaneous. There are no scheduled meet up times. Instead, as youths traverse the city, they will occasionally stop into these spaces to see if their friends are there or they will hang around them for hours waiting for other young people to show up. These youths' presence, adaptation, and usage of these urban

Figure 5   New Westminster Station
View of the New Westminster SkyTrain Station, with stores all around.

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spaces changes their meaning and provides a new frame to view them (Skelton, 2013; Amit and Knowles, 2017).

The stations most commonly occupied by these youths are hybrid stations that have developed along the entire Skytrain line, including Surrey Central, New Westminster, and Metrotown stations, which all have a mall like setting, with food and stores built around them. Having lived nearby one of these stations for over five years, I have observed these groups of youths as they hang out along the street near the entrance of the station, telling jokes, smoking cigarettes and eating food. Choosing these locations as sites to form community is logical given the transportation challenges described above, and because these are public spaces where youths can ‘hang out’ with minimal interference or persecution from weary adults.

The importance of community as a resource for every day survival cannot be overstated. Connecting with their peers and other networks of individuals provided these young people with tried and tested knowledge of their urban environment and opened opportunities for education, employment, recreation and housing. As described in the transportation section above, maintaining these relationships while being forced to move further away the from urban core is a struggle these youths will continue to contend with into the future (van Blerk, 2013). Redefining urban public spaces as sites of belonging will become even more important, as these youths attempt to maintain relationships that grow further away. These new spaces will add to their spatial-biographies threaded together over time (Amit and Knowles, 2017).

5.5. Summary

In this chapter, I explored the transitional experiences of seven youths from government care, discussing how the issues of housing, transportation, resources, and community influence their mobility and everyday survival. In each case, it was found that these four areas present challenges to their mobility. In response, these youths have engaged in tacking to navigate past obstacles and reclaim urban spaces for their purposes. The everyday experiences of these young people shed light on the holistic challenges that occur in the Metro Vancouver region, where one problem or success can lead to another.
I will now summarise and provide analysis on the findings in each of these sections, highlighting the key challenges and opportunities in each. I will also look at these challenges through a policy lens, pointing to areas where our cities can improve these youths’ lives. Finally, I will discuss the implications of this research and show some of the limitations to this study.
Chapter 6.

Conclusions

I definitely look up to all the staff at [...] because they are in the work that I want to do, it’s kinda like, I don’t know, a goal. Just seeing where they are and talking about their educational experiences, hearing [...] talk about their schooling experiences and how she used to work at a liquor store, which I’m applying for now, was nice to hear (Corey, youth participant).

After spending a number of years working with and advocating for youths in government care, I realized how strong, resourceful, intelligent, compassionate, and resilient these young people are. For reasons beyond their control, youths from government care suffer due to a lack of support and resources, in particular, missing out on the informal subsidy parents often continue to provide for their children even after these sons and daughters reach the age of majority. As an ardent believer in the strength and creativity of cities to tackle complex societal problems, I wondered how the region of Metro Vancouver might make an impact and help these youths, who ended up in government care rather than with their parents, succeed in becoming able to care for themselves. To determine this, I needed first to identify which specific urban challenges were impacting the lives of these youths. Moreover, as this is one of the first studies to consider the situations of youths from government care within the rubric of urban studies, the nature of the challenges to be encountered in adopting this kind of framework had not yet been fully addressed by scholars in this field.

Among the seven individual cases that were developed through interviews conducted with youths who had aged out of government care, I discovered four common challenges faced by these youths, namely, access to housing, transportation, resource procurement, and community. Each of these speaks to the urban dimensions of Metro Vancouver in their own way and in combination, ranging from an extremely expensive housing market to the region’s proud LGBTQ2S communities. They also pose unique challenges and opportunities for youth transitioning from government care. As the transitional period to adulthood in Canada continues to extend into one’s 20’s and even early 30’s, these cases shed light on how youths from government care are being left further behind their actively parented peers. I will now provide a summary and analysis of the findings from these cases.
6.1. Summary and Analysis of Findings

This section will review and highlight the key findings discussed by the youths, from the four areas highlighted in Chapter 5 — housing, transportation, resources, community. After examining these seven cases, the most important takeaway is the recognition of the interconnectedness between the four areas these youths called to attention and the influence these have on their mobilities. Starting with housing, these youths appear to experience a compounding domino effect in which one challenge leads to another. For example, youths with few financial resources move out to the suburbs to find affordable housing. In consequence, they are left with longer commute times and fewer public transportation options, resulting in more time spent doing routine tasks (e.g. grocery shopping), leaving them with less time and energy to pursue opportunities for employment, education, or mentorship. It is necessary to recognize this combined effect, as solutions or policies geared towards these young people need to be developed holistically, taking account of multiple aspects of their lives. Otherwise, like the employment programs described by Jordan, these “solutions” will remain underused and produce far less effective results.

Not surprisingly, these cases show that obtaining adequate housing is one of the most significant challenges for youths transitioning from care. Given their limited financial resources, most of these youths are being forced to move further and further away from the more densely populated centres of Metro Vancouver, into suburban sprawl. With each new move or eviction, the youths interviewed contended with the threat of homelessness, as they raced to compete for affordable housing, often against older, more financially secure applicants. In nearly every case, the youths had experienced homelessness at least once in their lives. The stress of being at recurring risk of homelessness, coupled with affordable rentals being increasingly located in sprawling suburban communities with limited public transportation, dramatically limits these youths’ financial security, movements, and opportunities for personal growth. These youths need stable forms of housing in areas that have immediate public transportation options. Yet, despite the myriad challenges they faced, these youths understood that many of these barriers, like the low vacancy rate and escalating housing costs, were out of their control. Despite this, only one youth, Sam, was sufficiently disgruntled by these challenges to express a strong desire to leave if the opportunity...
presented itself. Overall, the young people interviewed seemed to believe that the strengths and opportunities afforded by Metro Vancouver outweigh any housing challenges they faced.

The ability to move throughout the region was the daily challenge most discussed by these particular youths. Despite, the array of efficient transportation options available, these cases show that for youths from government care, the location of their housing causes their movements within Metro Vancouver to be constrained, leaving them in a state of relative immobility. As shown, this frustrated mobility is enhanced by their inability to acquire a driver’s license, a routine accomplishment that was missed during teenage years spent in foster care and then later hampered because of the tickets that they had accumulated while riding on the public transportation system without having paid the fare. By effectively removing the use of cars as a mode of transportation, these youths are forced to rely on the public transportation system and other forms of movement. This is not a major hurdle in and of itself, but in the majority of these cases, the location of their housing made these alternative means of getting about less than optimal, localizing them in neighbourhoods with no social supports. It was clear that those youths who lived closer to urban centres had less trouble travelling to access youth-serving NGOs and other resources.

The most immediate and widespread impact the Metro Vancouver region can make on improving the quality of these youths’ lives would be to provide free or greatly reduced transit fares and to eliminate the long-term punishments (i.e. blocking any future possibility of obtaining a driver’s license) meted out to youths from care who currently have unpaid fines on record. The ability to move around easily and without the threat of additional barriers is essential for these youths to take on opportunities and sustain activities, like postsecondary education, that are located beyond walking distance from their home. Notwithstanding the drawbacks associated with long commutes in these cases, the fact is these youths can and do travel nearly anywhere in the region using public transportation. But the ways in which they travel nonetheless impact their capacities to accomplish other things. There are a multitude of free opportunities ranging from food security to employment training to counselling and community building that are in principle available to them if they have a consistent and timely way to arrive at the locations where these resources are housed. From my observations and speaking with
frontline staff from a youth-serving NGO, I learned that these youths are more likely to attend events if they receive a transit fare voucher for their way home.

By not having an appropriate public transportation pricing system in place for youths transitioning from care, the overall system that is created to attend to their needs is designed to repeatedly fail. If it comes down to choosing between food or shelter, and transit fare, these youths choose the former two and run the risk of getting a transit ticket for fare dodging every time. The Mayor's Council, a collective body of representatives from the 21 municipalities within the service region (as well as Electoral Area 'A' and the Tsawwassen First Nation), has the ability to advocate for new policies which could positively impact this issue. Distribution of free or reduced-price transit fare cards does not need to be overly complicated either, as the NGOs who support these youths could manage this. One method would be to reimburse or waive fees incurred by organizations that provide fare passes to their participants. TransLink already has a system in place that recognizes the financial challenges of students and provides them with universal and affordable access to public transit, through its U-Pass program. TransLink needs to be prompted to take a similar approach to marginalized youths who have far less in the way of social support and financial means than do university students.

The next major challenge described by these youths revolved around the resources offered by various agencies and organizations in Metro Vancouver. While the youths all relied upon and felt positive about the support offered by the various youth-serving organizations, there were critiques about the effectiveness of their programs. The most common grievance was that the programs and their subsequent activities were designed to take place in and around the city in which these organizations were headquartered. This geographic proximity for organizational programming limited these young people who resided in the suburbs from reliably accessing employment, education, or training opportunities that were often located near the urban core of Vancouver. Moreover, the youths described themselves as being less likely to access a program or service if it is offered in conjunction with adult based services. Resources need to be located in clean, youth-friendly locations if these are to be effectively utilized. How these resources were marketed or communicated to the youths was identified as an even more significant barrier. In some cases, the youths regarded many resources as being effectively hidden or very difficult to locate. For the most part, these young people would rely on their friends to give them references and directions to support agencies.
This seemed to be the most accurate and beneficial way to find the particular resources they were looking for.

The final question I examined looked into the social supports and relationships these youths have assembled for themselves since ageing out of government care. I found that for these youths, it proved difficult to find friends and mentors outside of the youth-in-care community. This was due in large part to the trust issues these youths developed while in care, and because their lives are dramatically different from those of most young people their age. It was disheartening to learn that only three of the young people I interviewed were connected to communities and had formed relationships beyond those associated with youths in government care. Youths from government care should be encouraged to connect with established, thriving communities if they have an opportunity to do so. As has been highlighted by other academics in health and psychology fields, it is of the utmost importance for youths from government care with indigenous heritage to connect in meaningful ways back to their cultural community (Barker, Goodman, Debeck, 2017; Raman, et al, 2017; British Columbia Government and Services Employees’ Union, 2015). For Avery, the Coast Salish community found throughout Metro Vancouver, gave her a sense of connection and purpose and provided new opportunities ranging from employment to housing. Not all communities will be able to offer as much, but at minimum community groups, such as a religious organization or sports team, can broaden the circle of relationships these youths engage with, which could result in new opportunities to be seized, such as employment or support services.

Metro Vancouver must also persevere in finding ways to implement free community development opportunities and build public spaces where youth feel safe and can gather without harassment from authoritative figures. The youths in this project explained the importance of public space, particularly around public transportation hubs, as community spots for young people to meet and engage in social activity. Close accessibility to a SkyTrain or bus station makes these locations especially important as places where youths can meet up with friends and contacts from around the region, without spending a lengthy amount of time transiting. As discussed above, these seemingly utilitarian public spaces serve as essential ‘home-like’ spaces of belonging for youths to meet, build, and strengthen relationships.
For municipalities and regional governing bodies, these cases point to the need for the development or refinement of policies that either affect or are explicitly directed towards youths in and from government care. Many policy, design, and development decisions made at the municipal and regional levels might potentially have a profound impact on these youths’ everyday lives. Useful changes can come in all forms, so the key is to take the time to consider marginalized youths and when possible listen to their concerns before issuing a new policy or creating a city or regional vision, such as an official community plan. It is upsetting to see that the City of Vancouver’s (2011) “Housing and Homelessness Strategy: 2012-2021 a home for everyone” only includes the word ‘youth’ three times! And even these paltry three instances do not acknowledge youths transitioning from government care. When the City of Vancouver plans for 2022 and beyond, youths from government care need to be consulted regarding their specific circumstances and needs.

In Metro Vancouver, there have been two significant examples of how this kind of orientation might work at the city level. The first is the City of Vancouver’s and City of Surrey’s ‘Collective Impact’ projects, which encourage collaborations between youths from government care and local NGO and municipal staff members with the aim of identifying problems as well as possible solutions that can be presented to municipal and regional planners. This would involve a bottom-up approach that would elevate and take into account the voices of youths from government care, giving them a productive space within which to share their lived experiences. The tactics executed by youths in this paper are in response to some of the strategies laid out by these governing authorities. ‘Collective Impact’ projects help identify these hurdles and offer new strategies to help youth succeed.

A second example involved the City of New Westminster working with the non-profit sector to make a subtle change to a housing bylaw that will allow a higher number of youths from care and their dependents to live in a sponsored dwelling unit. This small change will give non-profit organizations an opportunity to develop a plot of land and densify it by dividing it in a variety of different ways, including multi-unit group housing, private basement suites, and private laneway or carriage homes. As a result, non-profit organizations will be able to grow and provide more youths with opportunities for secure housing. This particular amendment shows how cities can identify relatively small adjustments that have significant effects.
6.2. Implications and Directions for Future Research

In the journal ‘Urban Studies’, Skelton and Gough (2013) contend that young people deserve greater attention in the field of urban studies. They believe that the diverse circumstances of youths add richness and complexity to our comprehension of the city as a social system: “young people are not only in the city, but they are of the city; their lives are shaped by urban dynamics and they themselves are significant actors in, and creators of, the city” (p. 457). This thesis is a response to that call. By focusing on youths transitioning from government care, this work contributes to scholarly and policy understandings of their particular circumstances and provides a new perspective and vantage point from which to view some distinctive aspects of the inner workings of this global city.

The seven cases examined in this study are specific and based within a unique context that poses steep financial challenges to many youths transitioning to adulthood, but this research also carries broader implications for urban studies and policy planners. Within cities around the world, there are cohorts of young people who are in the process of transitioning to adulthood with minimal to no support. These youths, like those featured in the cases examined above, deal with daunting challenges that range from housing to education, matters that if not attended to can limit their success in caring for themselves and, in consequence, place unnecessary strain on the cities they live in. Setting up youths from government care for success is not only a Metro Vancouver problem, it is also a global issue.

My exploration of housing, transportation, resources, and community issues highlight some of the general types of challenges that exist for marginalized youth in cities. As a next step, I believe mixed methods research needs to occur in each of these four areas. By drilling down into them statistically with larger data sets, a more refined analysis, along with focused recommendations, can be presented to policymakers to develop better cities. Additionally, I believe there are two other studies, which could be conducted ethnographically to provide a more well-rounded story about these youths. First, since this study has focused upon youths connected to an organization or advocacy group, a future study might attempt to locate and speak with youths from care about their experiences without the use of these organizational supports. One possible
angle would be to track a group of these youth through transit diaries, which TransLink periodically conducts in the region.

Second, this study spoke predominantly about the challenges youths from care face and worked with young people who were struggling to make better lives for themselves in this region. The cases examined in this work share many of the same economic traits, as they are all on income assistance and do not have any postsecondary education. A follow-up study could usefully seek to examine the experiences of individuals from care who might be defined as having achieved success, based on a set of predefined parameters, such as having achieved full-time employment, stable housing, and/or postsecondary education or training. It would provide a useful comparison point to learn how these youths broke out of a daily struggle for survival and reached this level of success, and what factors enabled them to achieve these outcomes.

Finally, I believe there needs to be a large scale, 5-10-year longitudinal study that tracks these youths from their 18th birthday onwards. Such a study would look at the circumstances of these youths over time, including the relocation and precariousness of their housing, employment opportunities, modes of transportation, and engagement with various forms of social services. The results of such a long-term study would help us create a more livable region, by helping to define where to target services and for how long. Furthermore, the results might well point to ways of achieving greater efficiencies in the utilization of funding by federal, provincial, and municipal bodies.

6.3. Limitations

Identifying and recruiting youths from government care is a significant challenge and barrier to conducting ethnographic research with this category of youths. As described in the Methodology section, this study recruited exclusively from youth-serving organizations and advocacy groups, all of which have the mandate to support youths from the government care system. The strength of targeting these places is that it allowed me to identify potential recruits quickly. Its limitation is that each of these youths was, at the time, dependent on the services of these organizations. But as a consequence the stories of those youths who have never heard of or are reluctant to visit these organizations could not be addressed in this study.
The time constraints set out by the university for this master’s project, which allotted approximately six months for collection of data, along with funding constraints limited the number of interviews I could collect. I would have liked to have completed 10 interviews and to have expanded the range of ethnographic techniques that might have extended the scope and depth of this research. It helped that I started with the advantage of having spent several years observing youths from government care while working at a youth-serving organization. Yet with the right funding in place, pursuing a larger project, I would have liked to have spent a year or more working directly with these youths, riding along with them and observing their struggles and successes firsthand.

As with nearly all ethnographic research, there is always more that could be done, another stone that could be turned. These limitations I do not believe undermine the data presented, as the cases did reach an appropriate level of saturation and provided an in-depth look into these youths’ urban lives, which I set as the objective for this study.

6.4. Concluding Thoughts

Youths transitioning from government care deserve more of our attention and understanding. As a society, we might, in a sense, view ourselves as the collective parents of these children. And, like youths with supportive parents, they too deserve to be supported during their journey to independence and self-sufficient adulthood. It is to be hoped that my study, which examines in some detail the lives of seven such youths from government care who reside in Metro Vancouver, helps to provide insight into their struggles and how they are getting by day to day.
References


Oldenburg, R. (1997). The great good place: Cafés, coffee shops, community centers, beauty parlors, general stores, bars, hangouts, and how they get you through the day / Ray Oldenburg. (2nd ed.]. ed.).


Appendix A.

Recruitment Poster

Youth From Care Are Needed For Research Study

We are currently recruiting young adults (age 19-29) with experience in government care to share their thoughts on life in Metro Vancouver and how they have developed new social connections after aging out of the system.

The Study Will Involve:
1:00 hour interview on city life

All participants will receive a $25 honorarium

If interested, please contact Clete
(778) 232-9112 | cah14@sfu.ca

SFU SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY ENGAGING THE WORLD

Study Number #2016s0564
Appendix B.

Question Guide

1. City Life
   
a. Did you grow up in Metro Vancouver?
      i. If not, how long have you lived in Metro Vancouver?
   
b. Do you like living in Metro Vancouver?
      i. What is your favourite thing about Metro Vancouver?
      ii. What is your least favourite thing about Metro Vancouver?
   
c. What are the biggest challenges you face while living in Metro Vancouver?
   
d. Do you have places in the City (Region) where you go to access support with these challenges?
   
e. How would you describe the people who live in Metro Vancouver (i.e. friendly)?
   
f. Does it change depending on the area you live in?
   
g. What do you do for fun in Metro Vancouver?
   
h. What city do you live in?
      i. Which cities have you lived in?
   
i. How do you get around Metro Vancouver?
   
j. How difficult is it to find employment in this city? (Is it a city of opportunity?)
k. Do you see yourself staying in Metro Vancouver or do you think you will leave one day? Why?

2. Social Capital

a. Do you have any family that lives in Metro Vancouver?

b. Is it easy for you to make friends or people you trust in Metro Vancouver?
   
i. Where do you find you meet new friends (e.g. work, school, programming, a particular place - New West station)?

c. What activities do you do with your friends (i.e. hang-out)?
   
i. Are there barriers (like transit) that prevent you from doing them?

d. Are you employed or in school?

e. Do you have a mentor in your life?
   
i. Does your mentor live close to you? Are they easy to visit?
   
ii. Is anyone encouraging or helping you to achieve your goals?

f. How do you find new opportunities for work? Do you have supports (i.e. friends or support workers) that are able to help you?

g. How do you find new opportunities for housing? Do you have supports (i.e. friends or support workers) that are able to help you?

h. Where and how do you see yourself in 10 years? (are you living in this city, what job do you want)

3. Mapping Exercise

a. Please draw a circle around and label any important social connections and places of activities, like work, school, social services, and employment. Please do not use any specific names, like your friend's name, when drawing on the paper.
b. How do you travel between the locations you indicated on your map?

c. Do you have any help managing these different activities and connections in your life?

d. Do you have any other thoughts or comments you would like to make about today’s activities?

e. Did you find that while doing this activity you noticed anything about the way you interact with Metro Vancouver?

f. Has moving affected your education or work?
Appendix C.

Mapping Exercise